

PRIVATE REVELATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CHURCH

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The teaching of the Church distinguishes between “public Revelation” and “private revelations”. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, now the Holy Father Benedict XVI, explained the theological status of “public Revelation” and “private revelations” in his interpretation of the so-called “third secret of Fatima”, disclosed by Pope John Paul II at the beatification ceremony of Jacinta and Francisco Marto.

PUBLIC REVELATION

“The term “public Revelation” refers to the revealing action of God directed to humanity as a whole and which finds its literary expression in the two parts of the Bible: the Old and New Testaments...God gradually made himself known to men, to the point of becoming man himself, in order to draw to himself the whole world and unite it with himself through his Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.” Cardinal Ratzinger focus that “public Revelation” is much more than intellectual communication. “It is a life-giving process in which God comes to meet man.”

“Because God is one, history, which he shares with humanity, is also one. It is valid for all time, and it has

reached its fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has said everything, that is, he has revealed himself completely, and therefore Revelation came to an end with the fulfillment of the mystery of Christ as enunciated in the New Testament.”

“The Church is tied to this unique event of sacred history and to the word of the Bible, which guarantees and interprets it. But this does not mean that the Church can now only look to the past and that she is condemned to sterile repetition. ”

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church says in this regard: ‘...even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made fully explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries’ (No. 66).” The Holy Spirit guides the Church into all the truth, a knowledge previously unreachable, a progress in understanding Revelation, “this is the boundless breadth and depth of Christian faith” (Jn 16:12-14).

“The Second Vatican Council notes three essential ways in which the Spirit guides in the Church, and therefore three ways in which ‘the word grows’: (1)through the meditation and study of the faithful, (2) through the deep understanding which comes from spiritual experience, and (3)through the preaching of ‘those who, in the succession of the episcopate, have received the sure charisma of truth’ (Dei Verbum, 8).”

PRIVATE REVELATIONS

“The concept of «private revelation» refers to all the visions and revelations which have taken place since the completion of the New Testament.” Of them, the Catechism of the Church says: “It is not their role to complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history” (NO. 67). To this category we must assign Marian Apparitions.

Two things must be clarified:

1. Public Revelation demands faith. “God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church. Faith in God and in his word is different from any other human faith, trust or opinion. It gives me a certitude which is beyond verification by any human way of knowing. It is the certitude upon which I build my life and to which I entrust myself in dying.”
2. “Private revelation is a help to this faith, and shows its credibility precisely by leading me back to the definite public Revelation.

Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation has three elements, according to the Flemish theologian E. Dhanis:

- a. “the message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals;
- b. it is lawful to make it public;
- c. and the faithful are authorized to accept it with prudence.”

Cardinal Ratzinger states: “Such a message can be a genuine help in understanding the Gospel and living it better at a particular moment in time; therefore it should not be disregarded. It is a help which is offered, but which one is not obliged to use. THE CRITERION FOR THE TRUTH AND VALUE OF A PRIVATE REVELATION IS THEREFORE ITS ORIENTATION TO CHRIST HIMSELF.”

“The charisma of prophesy... does not refer to predicting the future but to explain the will of God for the present, and therefore show the right path to take for the future. The prophetic voice is a warning or a consolation, or both together. Prediction of the future is of secondary importance. What is essential is the actualization of the definitive Revelation, which concerns me at the deepest level.”

Marian Apparitions are both, warnings and consolations. They bring us the Gospel of Jesus Christ actualized to the

specific needs of a certain historical time; as it was with Guadalupe and the evangelization of Latin America; or Lourdes and the need to respond to the Rationalism that degraded faith and tried to substitute God; or Fatima, who is the most profound mariophany in history, portraying the primacy of God in an atheistic world, bringing the real warning of the consequences of sin and the opportunity of conversion and ‘metanoia’.

Our beloved spiritual Mother, the Virgin Mary, serves as God’s messenger to bring her children the same plan of salvation brought by her Son, Jesus Christ, in an actual way reachable to all mankind, no matter how difficult are the present times. For God, all is possible.