

Reference Guide on Church Teaching Regarding the Discernment of Private Revelations

By Fr. Matthew MacDonald, STB, MDiv, MA Theol.

Parochial Vicar, St. Mary's Church, Washingtonville, New York

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1) Scriptural Foundations of Discernment of Private Revelations from the New Testament:

Matthew 7:15-20: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 24:4-5: Jesus said to them in reply, "See that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many.

Matthew 24:11-13: Many false prophets will arise and deceive many; and because of the increase of evil-doing, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.

Matthew 24:23-25: If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told it to you beforehand.

Mk 13:5-6: Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he,' and they will deceive many.

Mk 13:21-23: If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah! Look, there he is!' do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will arise and will perform signs and wonders in order to mislead, if that were possible, the elect. Be watchful! I have told it all to you beforehand.

Lk 17: 20-21: Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus said in reply, "The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is,' or, 'There it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you."

Lk 17:23-24: There will be those who will say to you, ‘Look, there he is,’ [or] ‘Look, here he is.’ Do not go off, do not run in pursuit. For just as lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be [in his day].

Lk 17:37b: “Where the body is, there also the vultures will gather.”

Lk 21:8” Jesus answered, “See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time has come.’ Do not follow them!

Acts 2:14-21: Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, “You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘It will come to pass in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.’

1 Thess 5:19-22: Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.

2 Thess 2:1-12: We ask you, brothers, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a “spirit,” or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no one deceive you in any way. For unless the apostasy comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one doomed to perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so as to seat himself in the temple of God, claiming that he is a god— do you not recall that while I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. But the one who restrains is to do so only for the present, until he is removed from the scene. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord [Jesus] will kill with the breath of his mouth and render powerless by the manifestation of his coming, the one whose coming springs from the power of Satan in every mighty deed and in signs and wonders that lie, and in every wicked deceit for those who are perishing because they have not accepted the love of truth so that they may be saved. Therefore, God is sending them a deceiving power so that they may believe the lie, that all who have not believed the truth but have approved wrongdoing may be condemned.

1 Cor 12:3: Therefore, I tell you that nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, “Jesus be accursed.” And no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the holy Spirit.

1 Cor 13:1-13: If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Cor 14:29: Two or three prophets should speak, and the others discern.

1 Cor 14:37-38: If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual person, he should recognize that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord. If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged.

2 Cor 11:12-15: And what I do I will continue to do, in order to end this pretext of those who seek a pretext for being regarded as we are in the mission of which they boast. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, who masquerade as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. So it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds

Gal 1:8: But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach [to you] a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed!

1 Jn 4:1-3: Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world.

2 Peter 2:1-3: There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive heresies and even deny the Master who

ransomed them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their licentious ways, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. In their greed they will exploit you with fabrications, but from of old their condemnation has not been idle and their destruction does not sleep.

Rev 2:14-16: Letter to the Church in Pergmanum: Yet I have a few things against you. You have some people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to put a stumbling block before the Israelites: to eat food sacrificed to idols and to play the harlot. Likewise, you also have some people who hold to the teaching of [the] Nicolaitans. Therefore, repent. Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Rev 2:20-29: Letter to the church in Thyatira: Yet I hold this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who teaches and misleads my servants to play the harlot and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her harlotry. So I will cast her on a sickbed and plunge those who commit adultery with her into intense suffering unless they repent of her works. I will also put her children to death. Thus shall all the churches come to know that I am the searcher of hearts and minds and that I will give each of you what your works deserve. But I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not uphold this teaching and know nothing of the so-called deep secrets of Satan: on you I will place no further burden, except that you must hold fast to what you have until I come. “To the victor, who keeps to my ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. Like clay vessels will they be smashed, just as I received authority from my Father. And to him I will give the morning star. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Rev 13:11-18: Then I saw another beast come up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb’s but spoke like a dragon. It wielded all the authority of the first beast in its sight and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performed great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. It deceived the inhabitants of the earth with the signs it was allowed to perform in the sight of the first beast, telling them to make an image for the beast who had been wounded by the sword and revived. It was then permitted to breathe life into the beast’s image, so that the beast’s image could speak and [could] have anyone who did not worship it put to death. It forced all the people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to be given a stamped image on their right hands or their foreheads, so that no one could buy or sell except one who had the stamped image of the beast’s name or the number that stood for its name. Wisdom is needed here; one who understands can calculate the number of the beast, for it is a number that stands for a person. His number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Rev. 22:18-19: I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words in this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the

words in this prophetic book, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city described in this book.

2) Magisterial Teaching on the Discernment of Private Revelations:

Council of Trent, Decree on the Reception of the Sacred Books and Traditions, Session IV (April 8, 1546): Denz., n. 1501-1505:

- Official Codification of the sacred canon of Scripture for both the Old Testament (45 books total, including the Deuterocanonical books) and New Testament (26 books total) as contained in the Latin Vulgate.
- This clarified what consisted in “the formal principle of revelation, that is, the normative criteria of revelation’s doctrinal content, contained in Scripture (*libris scriptis*) and in unwritten traditions (*sine scripto traditionibus*).”
- These truths “have come down to us, having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself or from the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit,” which were being preserved by the orthodox Fathers, who handed them down and preserved in continuous succession

Council of Trent: Decree on Justification, Session VI (January 13, 1547), Chapter 12, Denz. n. 1540 & n. 1566:

- Teaches that without special revelation it is impossible to know whom God has chosen for himself (*nisi ex speciali revelatione, sciri non potest, quos Deus sibi elegerit*).”
- **Canon 16:** If anyone says that he has absolute and infallible certitude that he will surely have the great perseverance to the end [cf. Mt 10:22; 24:13], unless he has learned this by a special revelation, let him be anathema. (*Si quis magnum illud usque in finem perseverantiae donum [cf. Mt 10:22; 24:13], se certo habiturum absoluta et infallibili certitudine dixerit, nisi hoc ex speciali revelatione didicerit: anathema sit.*)

First Vatican Council, Dei Filius (1870), Chapter III, Denz., n. 3008-3009:

- It was written to fight against a prevailing rationalism and positivism, which questioned the idea that revelation was necessary for the full cognition of truth as well as the transcendent nature of faith.
- The First Vatican Council would respond to this critique by defining faith as “the beginning of man’s salvation” and “a supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that what he has revealed is true...because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither err nor deceive.”
- On the compatibility of faith and reason with exterior proofs for faith:
 - Chapter III: However, in order that the obedience of our faith be nevertheless in harmony with reason [cf. Rm 12:1], God willed that exterior proofs of his revelation, viz, divine facts, especially miracles and prophecies, should be joined to the interior helps of the Holy Spirit; as they manifestly display the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, they are the most certain signs of the divine revelation, adapted to the intelligence of men.

- **Canon 3- against fideism:** If anyone says that divine revelation cannot be made credible by outward signs and that, therefore, men ought to be moved to faith solely by each one's inner experience or by personal inspiration, let him be anathema. (*Si quis dixerit, revelationem divinam externis signis credibilem fieri non posse, ideoque sola interna cuiusque experientia aut inspiratione privata homines ad fidem moveri debere, anathema sit.*)
- **Canon 4 - Against agnosticism and mythologism:** If anyone says that no miracles are possible and that, therefore, all accounts of them, even those contained in Holy Scripture, are to be dismissed as fables and myths; or that miracles can never be recognized with certainty and that the divine origin of the Christian religion cannot be legitimately proved by them, let him be anathema. (*Si quis dixerit, miracula nulla fieri posse, proindeque omnes de iis narrationes, etiam in sacra scriptura contentas, inter fabulas vel mythos ablegandas esse; aut miracula certo cognosci numquam posse nec iis divinam religionis christianae originem rite probari: anathema sit.*)

Second Vatican Council – Dei Verbum – Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965):

- This document presented the Church's understanding of revelation in both a comprehensive and personalistic light, in which "the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends and lives among them so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself." (n. 2, Denz., n. 4202.)
- Revelation shows the words, deeds, and saving wonders of God within salvation history, especially through the fullness of God's self-revelation manifested in the person of Jesus Christ (n. 2 & 4 - Denz. n. 4202 & 4204.)
- Through divine revelation, "God chose to show forth and communicate himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men...those divine treasures that totally transcend the understanding of the human mind." (n. 6, Denz., n. 4206.)
- The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of Our Lord Jesus Christ [cf. 1 Tim 6:14; Tit 2:13] (*Oeconomia ergo Christiana, uptote foedus novum et definitivum, numquam praeteribit, et nulla iam nova revelatio publica expectanda est ante gloriosam manifestationem Domini nostril Iesu Christi*). (n. n. 4, Denz., n. 4204.)
- Christ the Lord is the one "in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion" (*in quo summi Dei tota revelation consummatur*). (n. 7, Denz. n. 4207.)
- Divine revelation was then subsequently passed on from Christ to the Apostles and from the Apostles to their successors "by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances," which would later be known as tradition. (n. 7, Denz. n. 4207.)
- It was also passed on through the composition of sacred scripture, which occurred when the apostles or some of their collaborators committing the message of salvation to writing by the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (n. 7, Denz. n. 4207.)
- Divine revelation includes "everything that contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the people of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." (n. 8, Denz. n. 4209)

- Both scripture and tradition, “forming one sacred deposit of the word of God [later referred to as the *depositum fidei*]” are “like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face” (*vetuli speculum sunt in quo Ecclesia in terris peregrinans contemplatur Deum, a quo omnia accipit, usquedum ad Eum videndum facie ad faciem sicuti est perducatur*) (n. 7 & 9, Denz. n. 4207 & 4212.)
- Thus sacred scripture and sacred tradition are substantiated to be part of the same deposit of faith, given by Christ to the Church in which consists the fullness of divine revelation, and are thus “to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” (*Quapropter utraque pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia suscipienda et veneranda est*). (n. 9, Denz., n. 4212.)
- There can be development of this deposit of faith in the life of the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit, which consists not in a direct change of the contents of the deposit, but rather “a growth in understanding of the realities and the words that have been handed down (*crescit enim tam rerum quam verborum traditorum perceptio*).” This can happen through “the contemplation and study of believers (*tum ex contemplatione et studio credentium*)” as well as through “a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities they experience (*tum ex intima spiritualium rerum quam experiuntur intelligentia*).” (n. 8, Denz. n. 4210.)
- This growth in the means of understanding of the contents of the deposit of faith leaves open the possibility of private revelations helping the Church to understand more deeply what she has already received from Christ.
- This process of development in the realm of understanding, interpreting, and applying divine revelation is not up to mere charismatic inspiration alone. This task has been entrusted to the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium, which acts in the name and authority of Christ in this regard. (n. 10, Denz. n. 4214.)
- She does this task not by imposing her own will but by serving the Word of God through “teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit” (*docens nonnisi quod traditum est, quatenus illud, ex divino mandato et Spiritu Sancto assistente, pie audit, sancte custodit, et fideliter exponit*). (n. 10, Denz. n. 4214)

Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 66-67:

"The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.

Christian faith cannot accept "revelations" that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such "revelations".

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations (1978):

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html

Introductory Note to Public Release of Document, William Cardinal Levada (2011):

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20111214_prefazione-levada_en.html

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger – Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Theological Commentary on the Third Secret of Fatima (2000):

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

Pope Benedict XVI – Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 14: In all of this, the Church gives voice to her awareness that with Jesus Christ she stands before the definitive word of God: he is “the first and the last” (*Rev* 1:17). He has given creation and history their definitive meaning; and hence we are called to live in time and in God’s creation within this eschatological rhythm of the word; “thus the Christian dispensation, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Tim* 6:14 and *Tit* 2:13)”. Indeed, as the Fathers noted during the Synod, the “uniqueness of Christianity is manifested in the event which is Jesus Christ, the culmination of revelation, the fulfilment of God’s promises and the mediator of the encounter between man and God. He who ‘has made God known’ (*Jn* 1:18) is the one, definitive word given to mankind”. Saint John of the Cross expresses this truth magnificently: “Since he has given us his Son, his only word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything at once in this sole word – and he has no more to say... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has spoken all at once by giving us this All who is his Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty”.

Consequently the Synod pointed to the need to “help the faithful to distinguish the word of God from private revelations” whose role “is not to ‘complete’ Christ’s definitive revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history”. The value of private revelations is essentially different from that of the one public revelation: the latter demands faith; in it God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church. The criterion for judging the truth of a private revelation is its orientation to Christ himself. If it leads us away from him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel, and not away from it. Private revelation is an aid to this faith, and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation. Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message

contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their prudent adhesion. A private revelation can introduce new emphases, give rise to new forms of piety, or deepen older ones. It can have a certain prophetic character (cf. *1 Th* 5:19-21) and can be a valuable aid for better understanding and living the Gospel at a certain time; consequently it should not be treated lightly. It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory. In any event, it must be a matter of nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation.

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