

Question: Can someone in good faith believe in a Marian apparition before the Church approves it?

Answer: In answer to your fourth question of whether or not *someone in good faith may believe in a Marian apparition before the Church approves it*, there is nothing *a priori* to exclude one from adhering in good faith to a given Marian apparition or private revelation before the Church has considered the matter, but such adherence requires a certain *type of faith*.¹

I here recall the angelic apparition of the angels to shepherds announcing Jesus' birth (Lk. 2:9-11) where God did not elicit official ecclesiastical approbation from the Sanhedrin in

¹ The *typology of faith* affirms that believers adhere to objects of faith that form of the **Deposit of Faith** (the one Public Revelation of Christ) with *fides divina* ("divine faith"), as its objects are the fundamental divine truths contained in Scripture and Tradition. Because the Deposit of Faith is authoritative and universal it elicits from all Catholic believers *fides divina*, and when the Church definitively proposes that which God has revealed as an object of faith, it also elicits from its members *fides catholica* ("catholic faith"). Hence the expression "*divine and catholic faith*" (CCC, 2089) – the former are objects of faith formally revealed by God and the latter are also definitively proposed by the Church.

Related to *fides divina* and *fides catholica*, is *fides humana* ("human faith") concerning those objects of faith that are neither part of the Deposit of Faith (e.g., **approved post-biblical apparitions and private revelations**) nor are proposed by the Church as *fides catholica* (e.g., **unapproved post-biblical apparitions and private revelations**). I here recall article 67 of the Catholic Catechism: "*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.*"

Now regarding the type of faith with which the believer ought to adhere to **a given apparition or private revelation**, several theologians (e.g., Yves Congar, Pierre Adnés, Frantz Diekamp, Karl Rahner, Eugenio Valentini, etc.) maintain that inasmuch as the Church-approved prophetic revelations that follow the period of the Deposit of Faith are linked to God's work of salvation and sanctification, one ought to adhere to them with more than simply *a fides humana*. In point of fact, there are no official Church documents that impede the Christian faithful from believing in private revelations with more than *fides humana*.

While theologians propose different types of faith with which the believer may adhere to a given revelation (e.g., *divine, catholic, human, theological and dogmatic*), what is certain is that before the Church has made any official pronouncement on a private revelation, the believer ought to inform his or her conscience by consulting with Magisterial teachings and the criteria of the Church on this matter (e.g., in 1978, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, headed by Cardinal Seper, issued a set of guidelines for bishops to use in investigating reports of revelations). The believer is to then apply said teachings and criteria to his or her discernment process. Having adopted this approach, the believer may then more perfectly adhere to an approved or unapproved private revelation with the type of faith that upholds the primacy of the unchanging Deposit of Faith that is indispensable to *salvation*, without neglecting the singular role of private revelations within the Church's spiritual traditions that are indispensable to the pursuit of *holiness*.

As for the seer, the common position among theologians is that the immediate recipient of private revelations may adhere to the private revelations from God with *divine faith* (*fides divina*) and even ought to if there is sufficient certitude about the authenticity of the recipient's experience. The same may be said for others who have acquired the same certitude about the reality of the revelation – a certitude that in principle is not impossible to acquire.

order for the shepherds to faithfully adhere to the event of Jesus' birth. Admittedly, the Church requires of its members *divine and catholic faith*² in matters pertaining to the Deposit of Faith, but there are no official Church documents that impede the Christian faithful from believing in private revelations with more than *human faith*. And although one is free to adhere to an unapproved private revelation with more than a *human faith*, such adherence is perfected when accompanied by one's knowledge of Magisterial teachings and the Church's criteria on the matter³. In closing, I wish to share a personal testimony. My vocation to the priesthood was revealed to me in 1988 when I was in Medjugorje in a very personal and intimate manner by Our Blessed Mother. While I am aware the Church has not officially approved such apparitions, I nonetheless believe in them with not only a *human and theological faith*, but, I dare say, with a *divine faith*.

² CCC, 2089.

³ Cf. 4th paragraph of footnote 24.