

QUOTES FROM:

**Pastoral Instruction on the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in Finca Betania**

My preface: If the following which has been virtually ignored by the Church and the professional sceptics is true and if they are right to act as if it is not then it is clear that a very convincing supernatural report may still be false. Any miracle report that is less good cannot be true if this is true. Or it cannot be believable which is as good as making it untrue. We are not told enough about the claims to be able to discern them.

This year we are celebrating as a Marian year due to the happy initiative of Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II, is an appropriate occasion to emit the present Pastoral Instruction on the apparition of Our Blessed Virgin Mary in Finca Betania.

+Pio Bello Ricardo Bishop of Los Teques Los Teques, November 21st of 1987

The first apparition took place on March 25th of 1976. This apparition was seen only by one person, Mrs. Maria Esperanza Medrano de Bianchini; though others, approximately eighty, present that same day saw something like a cloud coming out of the hill, light phenomena and movement of the sun. This same person, Mrs. Bianchini, continued having apparitions in the same place during 1976 and the next two years. Besides her, very few people have declared to have seen the apparition during that period; yet, I received testimonies from people who had witnessed phenomena as: fog that comes away from the hill, brilliant light, intense fragrance of flowers, songs of an invisible choir, playing of lights and movements of the sun, etc.

On Sunday, March 25th of 1984, approximately 150 people got together in Finca Betania in order to attend a field mass at noon. After this liturgical act took place in the old sugar mill, the attendants moved to the porch of the farm house in order to have lunch and rest. Meanwhile some children were playing in the leveled area by the cascade. Suddenly, they saw Our Lady over the cascade. It was a very short apparition. They ran immediately to tell the others who were 150 meters away.

They all hurried to the place of the apparition. They were talking about what had happened when the Virgin appeared again and all the people who were present were able to see Her. During that same afternoon She appeared seven times, each time for 5 to 10 minutes, except for the last time, at dusk, when She appeared for approximately half an hour. Naturally, the news was spread among relatives and friends of the people that were present that day. The number of people coming to Finca Betania has been increasing especially on weekends. There has been no predictable chronology of the continuing apparitions though they have more frequently occurred on Saturdays, Sundays, and on Our Blessed Lady's holidays. The apparitions were numerous during the years of 1984, 1985. During the years of 1986 and 1987, less apparitions occurred.

**ECCLESIASTICAL INVESTIGATION**

That same week which began Sunday, March 25th of 1984 the first witnesses spontaneously came to the Diocesan Curia in order to present to me their written testimonies and an oral account of the events. I received them and questioned them with kindness and broadmindedness, though I had an interior attitude of doubt and skepticism as it is normal for anyone who has had a theological and psychological formation and knowledge of the history of the Church. Even though, due to the quality of the informants and the information they were presenting, I judged the case had to be seriously investigated. To this end I convoked all the witnesses and protagonists; not an easy task, as many of them lived in different cities and out of the jurisdiction of the Diocese.

Due to the circumstances of number and dispersion of the witnesses and the continuing of the phenomena, I decided to undertake the investigation personally. This made it easier to make appointments with the possible informants. Something that would have been very difficult to do if I had given this task to a commission. This option, obviously obliged me to dedicate a lot of time to this business, around four hundred to five hundred hours; but I could calmly question approximately two hundred protagonists and collect, study and file 381 declarations. Some were collective declarations. The total number of people that signed these declarations was 490.

In order to examine this kind of phenomena I followed the classical criteria of the Church. I was interested in determining the credibility of the witnesses, their conditions as human beings, as christians, their sincerity, their common sense, their capacity to reason, their sense of criticism, and their emotional balance. Once the credibility of the witness was established, I tried to decide how much the witness could be influenced by collective or personal suggestion.

I examined the spiritual and/or psychological effects on the people, as well as the behavior of the people attending the site of the apparitions and especially the characteristics of the group that since the first apparition began developing into a

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spiritual movement. During my "ad lumina" visit in September of 1984 I was received at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I left there a provisional report of the events and was given a document for my private use which was elaborated by the Sacred Congregation in 1978, with the rules and procedures I needed to follow in order to judge the supposed apparitions or revelations. With satisfaction I could verify that the investigation I had done up to that moment fitted with the criteria and procedures pointed out in that document. Since then, I certainly took them as my working guide.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APPARITIONS IDENTIFICATION

In other apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Her figure could be easily identified for She always presented Herself in the same way, same features, same clothing; whose replica was copied on statues and paintings. In the present case, Our Lady has presented Herself in different ways, therefore the descriptions vary but are always related to the different Marian devotions; She is most commonly seen as "Our Lady of Lourdes", (because she is seen with a white dress and blue waistband, some say that she extends her arms out as welcoming or saluting, and with a veil through which you can see Her hair) or as "Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal" (probably for the position of Her arms and the rays of light coming out of Her hands).

Though these descriptions are the most common, there are other descriptions of the way She has presented Herself that are similar to the way She has appeared in other places. People have interpreted this circumstance as a teaching from Our Lady, as if She wanted to point out that even though She has different titles for Her different apparitions, She is only one and unique. Here, since Her first apparition She presented Herself as RECONCILER OF NATIONS and this is the title or devotion through which She is known and venerated in Betania.

## NUMBER OF VISIONARIES

In other cases the apparitions have been seen by very few privileged people. In this case the number of visionaries since the 25th of March of 1984 is very numerous. That day in particular more than 100 people saw the seven apparitions: at least 108 testified that same day with their written signatures. From that day on the visionaries multiplied. It has been common that in a group of people, only some can see the apparition. The 25th of March of 1984 was an exception to this. It has also been common for some people who on some occasions saw the apparition, present during others, didn't have this privilege. Considering the oral and written testimonies, the information received, the fact that people present in the apparitions are dispersed in different cities and that it is very difficult to summon them all; I estimate that this moment five hundred to one thousand people have seen the apparitions. (1987)

## QUALITY OF PEOPLE

What has been usual in the apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin is that those privileged with the apparition besides being very few, were poor, not educated and generally children or very young people. In this case, there are of course; poor, not educated, but there are also many middle class professional people as: Doctors, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Engineers and Lawyers. There are also numerous college students from the different Universities in Caracas. There are children and adults, teenagers and elderly people, nuns, although the great majority are lay people.

## CHRONOLOGY

As I pointed out before, the apparitions have not had a predictable or announced chronology, nor an established frequency. Though generally they have taken place on Saturdays, Sundays or on liturgical Marian Holidays, they have also taken place unexpectedly during the other days of the week.

## EXPECTANCY

In relation to the chronology; on numerous occasions, the expectations of the people who came to the place on the belief that because it was a day of Marian Holiday they would see the apparition, were frustrated. On the other hand apparitions have taken place unexpectedly as on 1984, day in which the main purpose was to celebrate a field mass on the farm, and to enjoy a nice day on the margins of a beautiful river and a nice rural landscape. In numerous declarations, many people have mentioned as a relevant fact that their experience was a totally unexpected surprise. The cases of people who have seen the apparition against all expectancy have not been few, nor the number of people who have gone to Betania for simple curiosity, on a weekend picnic, or with great skepticism or scorn, and have seen the apparition. I have also seen the cases of people who attended the place because they had to take a relative or accompany a friend or a member of his family but with no religious faith and have see the apparition which transformed them.

## SENSE OF REALITY

It is classical in other apparitions for the visionaries to fall in the psychological state of mystical trance or ecstasy. During

the interviews and the examination of the written declarations, I tried to determine if there was any loss of the sense of reality during the apparitions. I didn't find this phenomenon. Of course, the visionaries get very excited; but with the exception of very few that faint as a consequence of the emotion, most of them keep their sense of reality during the apparition: they make comments and compare their appreciations of what they are seeing, they even try to find natural explanations (as reflections of light, tricks, suggestion, etc), until they are convinced that these arguments do not explain the realism of their vision. At the most, some indicate they have become absorbed in thought during the apparition. This characteristic made my investigation easier because I could do without the technical examination of the supernatural character or purely psychological of the state of ecstasy, limiting my survey to the determination of the credibility of the witness and the value of the testimony.

## CONCOMITANT PHENOMENA

Along the course of the apparitions, phenomena that were present during the first three years of the apparitions are: fog that seems to come out from the trees at the hill; intense luminosity that brightens the hill; profusion of flowers that cover it, especially roses; invisible choirs; the water of the cascade acquiring the perfume of roses; movements of light and movement of the sun, etc. These phenomena have taken place before and after the apparitions, and sometimes without them. A great number of witnesses have seen these phenomena without seeing the apparition.

## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

I could verify that the reunions in Finca Betania are acceptable from the religious point of view. They are serious gatherings, centered in the prayer of the Rosary, the Stages of the Cross and other prayers and sacred songs. The public is respectful and orderly except for the normal playfulness of children. There have been cases of exaggerated emotionality and hysteric reactions, but in general the environment has been moderately balanced. There has been no commercialization. No sales of religious objects. No stands for refreshments nor food, therefore people that come have to bring the necessary equipment for the day.

## EFFECTS

The effects have been good and some excellent. Those who assist receive a strong injection of faith and spirituality. People who never prayed are getting used to praying the Rosary. People who didn't attend the Church now do so regularly, go to Confession and Communion. There have been remarkable conversions. It has been comforting to hear confessions at the place. I have noticed that all the people interviewed had a good disposition to what the Church should decide officially and accept that the Church would have the last word on the matter. All of them have experienced an interior change towards God and towards living a more christian life.

## DECLARATION AND JUDGEMENT

Since the beginning of my investigation I realized this was not another case of craftiness, collective suggestion or a promotion on the interests of a person or of a group of people, but that I was dealing with something serious that had to be investigated carefully. Relatively soon in the course of my investigation I acquired the certainty that the character of the phenomenon was supernatural. Still, I decided to delay any explicit declaration, following the prudent praxis of the Church in these matters, until I could enlighten my appreciation with the following declarations, measure the spiritual effects achieved and finish the critical following of the religious movement produced by the events. I judge the appropriate time has come to make my judgement on the events public.

IN CONSEQUENCE, AFTER STUDYING WITH DETERMINATION THE APPARITIONS OF OUR BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN FINCA BETANIA AND AFTER ASSIDUOUSLY ASKING OUR LORD FOR SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: I DECLARE THAT TO MY JUDGEMENT THESE APPARITIONS ARE AUTHENTIC AND OF A SUPERNATURAL CHARACTER. Therefore, I approve officially that the place where the apparitions have taken place should be considered as sacred, as a site for pilgrimages, as a place for prayer, meditation and worship; where all liturgical acts can be celebrated especially the Mass and the administration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, always according to the laws of the Church and the rules of the Diocese for a Conjoint Pastoral guidance.

## SENSE AND EVALUATION OF THIS DECLARATION COMPETENCE

It is the competence of the Diocesan Bishop to watch and intervene in order to judge, especially in the cases of supposed apparitions or revelations that take place in his Diocese. This competence is derived from the hierarchical institution of the Church and it has been expressly declared by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when naming the rules that must be observed in such cases.

## REACH

With these statements I do not intend to affirm that all and each one of the apparitions that have taken place in Finca Betania are authentic. As happens in similar circumstances, here there also have been cases of simple hallucinations incited by expectation, suggestion, emotionality and even psychological unbalance. Worthwhile mentioning at this point is the fact that during the investigation of the apparition of Our Blessed Virgin in Lourdes, apparition repeatedly studied and acknowledged, pseudo- visionaries were detected and discharged. In my investigation in the case of Finca Betania, I have also found a few cases in which I was inclined to believe and interpret as fantasies and discharge them as not valid testimonies. I have judged therefore, that the presence of these cases, on one side expected, didn't lessen the validity of the appreciable volume of the numerous testimonies to which I do grant credibility.

Los Teques, November 21st of 1987.

+ Pio Bello Ricardo, Bishop of Los Teques