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Marian Apparitions in Our Time: the Meaning and Criteria for Discernment in Theology

Expression "apparitions" in Christian theology is usually thought of as a visible manifestation of the supernatural in the space-time categories of a subject (man) who receives it. One should distinguish three different forms of apparitions: Theophany, Christophany and Mariophany. Theology places supernatural visions and revelations in the broader context of the history of salvation, and devotes considerable attention to them. Specificity of Christianity is manifested in the event of Jesus Christ, the peak of his revelation, the fulfillment of God's promises and the mediator of the encounter between man and God. From the moment he gave us his Son, who is his only and final word, God told us all in this very word, and there is no way to say any more. Keeping this in mind, theology discerns the Word of God from private revelations, which role is not to "improve" or "complement" the final revelation of Christ, but to help, in a certain historical period, to live more complete life. The church issued the *Norms of the Congregation for Proceeding in Judging Alleged Apparitions and Revelations*, which should be useful to theologians and experts in this field of the living experience of the Church, which sensitivity requires increasingly deep reflection. "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", indicates the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (chapter 67). The whole history of Christianity witnesses in a special way the presence of Marian apparitions (Fatima, Međugorje...). They usually occur in minor, small rural communities that become the most visited Marian shrines. These apparitions continuously alternate our image of God. They bring about familiar/affectionate God and show that the earth remains open to the sky and the sky remains open to man. In this sense, Marian apparitions are great signs of hope for man: in spite of all the hardships of this life a man is not alone, he should not despair, since with Mary, the Mother of God, he can already live heaven. In the words of Pascal: "Man infinitely surpasses himself." So, nothing can satisfied a man except infinity, that is, God. Incessant pilgrimages to Marian shrines testify that simple, and yet so realistic a fact.