



*PROT. N. 226/1949*

*PRESUMED APPARITIONS OF THE BVM AT THE CARMELITE CONVENT IN LIPA, PHILIPPINES*

DECREE

The matter of the alleged apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Carmelite Convent in Lipa, Philippines, was first examined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1949. After a thorough study of the available evidence, including the testimony of the prioress of the Convent, on 28 March 1951, the Congregation (then known as the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office) declared the events in Lipa to have no sign of supernatural character or origin. This decision was confirmed by His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, on 29 March 1951.

In 2009, His Excellency, Ramón Argüelles, current Archbishop of Lipa, requested access to the archives of this Dicastery, a request which was denied in order to avoid scandal that might have arisen. Furthermore, Archbishop Argüelles was told to disband the commission he had established to continue to study the events of Lipa, as the determination given in 1951 was definitive; he disobeyed this order. Subsequently, on 15 September 2015, he decreed, "that the events and apparition of 1948 also known as the Marian phenomenon of Lipa and its aftermath even in recent times do exhibit supernatural character and is worthy of belief."

Moved by its obligation to safeguard the truth of faith and its responsibility in matters dealing with presumed apparitions, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issues the following decree.

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1. In 1948, Teresa Castillo left her family and joined the Carmelite Convent in Lipa. From the very beginning of her time in the convent, there was a special feeling between her and the prioress; the preferential attitude of the prioress toward Teresa was noted by other sisters in the convent, creating some conflict between the sisters, Teresa, and the prioress. Shortly after entering the convent, in August 1948, while walking in the garden, Teresa heard a voice call out to her, telling her to return to that same location on 15 September, at 3:00pm.

2. Beginning on 15 September 1948, Teresa continued to hear the same voice, which identified itself as that of "the Mother." Teresa obeyed the voice's command to share the content of the messages exclusively with the other sisters of the Carmel of Lipa. Rose petals were present at these encounters between Teresa and "the Mother"; the petals sometimes were scattered on the ground and other times were said to rain

down from above. The presence of rose petals was taken by Teresa, and some of the other sisters, as signs of supernatural nature of the messages given by the disembodied voice of "the Mother." The Prioress claimed also to have heard the voice and to have received messages orally from "the Mother."

3. At that time, Most Rev. Alfredo Obviar, Auxiliary Bishop of Lipa, served as the chaplain to the Carmelite convent. He became a firm supporter of the alleged phenomena and reported them to the Ordinary who, in turn, made the so-called apparitions known to the Apostolic Nuncio. The matter was brought to the attention of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (today, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) which undertook a detailed study of the events.

4. After nearly two years evaluating all of the relevant testimony and the opinions of theological experts, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office determined, categorically, that the events which took place in the Carmel in Lipa were of non-supernatural origin and character. This determination, *constat de non supernaturalitate*, is a definitive formulation in the applicable law, indicating that the events were unambiguously natural in their character and origin.

5. The main reason for this determination is the revelation the Prioress made in a series of letters, in which she confessed her own role in the "deception" of Lipa. The Prioress confessed to having lied about certain aspects of the events. Specifically, she mentioned that, while she had previously claimed to have heard the voice of "the Mother", she had, in fact, never heard any such voice. Rather, the messages she received were given to her in the form of written notes allegedly from the Blessed Virgin. One of these messages ordered her to re-write the notes she received and then to destroy the originals, and another told her to destroy the petal-less rose stems. The Prioress wrote, *"About the strange written notes allegedly from Our Lady herself, I have never made any of them. They were not always in the same penmanship, sometime (sic) like the one written on the picture I gave to the Very Reverend Father, the Apostolic Visitor; sometimes exactly like Sister Teresa's, sometimes like a little child's..."* She confessed to having manipulated rose petals so that they would appear to have sacred images imbedded in them. The Prioress also confessed that one of these messages encouraged the Sisters to tell the same story to the experts sent by the Vatican to investigate the phenomenon. In one of these letters, she sought the forgiveness of the Holy Father for the damage caused to the Church by the "apparitions." Other aspects were also considered by the Congregation in its determination: the fact that the messages regard exclusively relations between the prioress and Teresa, and among the prioress and the other sisters; the fact that some of the sisters testified that they had seen deliveries of roses to the convent and, subsequently, had received orders from the Prioress to burn rose stems without petals; the fact that there was evidence that Teresa was often under the influence of pain medication, which she took due to regular, intense physical pain.

6. The members of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office decided to allow the Apostolic Nuncio in the Philippines to choose what he believed to be the best means to communicate this definitive decision. While the decision of the Holy Office was clear, and, indeed, approved by the Holy Father, an error took place in the communication of this decision in the Philippines.

7. The Apostolic Nuncio, believing the decision would be better received by the people if it came from their own Bishops, convoked a commission of six Bishops and left to this commission the task of communicating the decision approved by the Holy Father. On 11 April 1951 the special commission issued a decree in which it declared that the signatory Archbishops and Bishops, "having attentively examined and reviewed the evidence and testimonies collected in the course of repeated, long and careful investigations, have reached the unanimous conclusion and hereby officially declare that the above mentioned evidence and testimonies exclude any supernatural intervention in the reported extraordinary happenings – including the showers of petals – at the Carmel of Lipa."

8. The formulation used in this decree, understandably, gave rise to some confusion as to whether this decree represented a final, definitive decision of the Holy See or, merely a decision made on the local level. This confusion was worsened by a decree issued on 12 April 1951 by Bishop Rufino Santos, the Ordinary of Lipa, who, while banning devotion to the Blessed Mother in the Carmel of Lipa under the title of Mediatrix of all Grace, concluded his decree with this phrase: "until a final decision on the matter will come from the Holy See." This phrase clearly led to a false interpretation regarding the definitive nature of the decree of the Episcopal Commission.

9. These two errors in communication led to more than 60 years of confusion regarding the status of the investigation into the phenomenon of Lipa.

10. On 16 July 1991, then Bishop of Lipa, Most Rev. Mariano Gaviola, effectively lifted the ban imposed in 1951 and allowed the veneration of the image of Mary, Mediatrix of all Grace. This decision was never communicated to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

11. Archbishop Ramón Argüelles, in a letter dated 7 October 2009, requested permission to examine the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, regarding the phenomenon of Lipa. Shortly thereafter, on 12 November 2009, Archbishop Argüelles issued a decree by which he ordered that "all bans written or unwritten intended to curtail or diminish the devotion to Mary Mediatrix of all Grace be lifted" and "that a new commission be formed to review the documents on the alleged apparitions of 1948 as well as to be able to compile additional documents from the period up to the present."

12. After examining its archives, and discovering the error in Archbishop Ramón Argüelles' assumption that the matter of the phenomenon of Lipa was still open to discussion, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a letter dated 20 March 2010, responded to Archbishop Argüelles, informing him that the decision communicated by the Episcopal Commission in 1951 was, in fact, a decision approved by the Holy Father and, therefore, the matter no longer rested under the authority of the Archbishop.

13. Subsequently, after further correspondence from the Archbishop, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a letter dated 27 September 2010, once again explained to Archbishop Argüelles the definitive character of the declaration of 11 April 1951 and authorized him to make this known. The letter also directed the

Archbishop to dissolve the newly established commission studying the phenomenon of Lipa "immediately", an order which the Archbishop did not heed. Finally, the same letter urged Archbishop Argüelles to promote authentic Marian devotion within his Archdiocese, adhering to the Czestochowa Statement, which clearly outlines a proper understanding of the usage of appropriate Marian titles.

14. After this final letter, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith heard nothing further regarding this issue until, in September 2015, it discovered that Archbishop Argüelles had issued a decree declaring the phenomenon of Lipa to be an authentic Marian apparition. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wrote to Archbishop Giuseppe Pinto, Apostolic Nuncio in the Philippines, asking him to address the issue with Archbishop Argüelles and to have the Ordinary provide an explanation for his actions directly to the Congregation. The response of Archbishop Argüelles arrived at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 1 December 2015.

15. In his letter, Archbishop Argüelles sought to explain his motives for the declaration, based on, among other things, his interpretation of the norms established in 1978 regarding "the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparition or Revelations." While the Archbishop correctly identified the norms governing such matters, he failed to take into consideration the information communicated in the Congregation's letters to him which clearly indicated that the declaration of 11 April 1951 was, and remains, the definitive response of the Church to the phenomenon which took place in Lipa in 1948. The evidence indicated above demonstrates the non-supernatural nature of these events and, given that the principal witness in the investigation into the events, the Prioress, is deceased, there is no means for rescinding what was, in effect, a confession on her part.

16. The entire matter was again taken up by the Congregation in a meeting of its *Congress* on 11 December 2015, where it was determined necessary to respond to the latest decree of Archbishop Argüelles with a decree of this Dicastery, elucidating the reasoning behind the decision approved by the Holy Father in 1951 and the confusion caused by errors of its communication, with the hope of preventing any further misunderstanding which might arise from the Archbishop's decree of 15 September 2015.

Therefore, having carefully examined the matter and having, in summary, put forth the reasons behind the definitive decision made in 1951, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith hereby

### **DECREES**

that, in light of the fact that the declaration of 1951 was a decision confirmed by the Supreme Pontiff and therefore definitive, consequently, the matter of the phenomena of Lipa is not subject to the authority of the local Diocesan Bishop (cf. CIC can. 333). Therefore, the decree of Archbishop Argüelles dated 15 September 2015 is null and void.

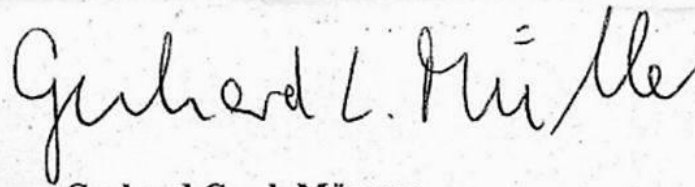
Furthermore, this Congregation confirms the definitive nature of the 11 April 1951 decree by which the phenomena of Lipa were declared to lack supernatural origin.

The authority on which this declaration was made was not that of the Bishop members of the Special Commission, but rather that of the Supreme Pontiff.

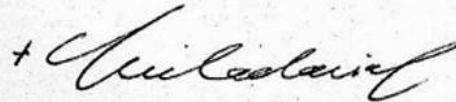
Furthermore, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith repeats its instruction that any and all commissions studying the question of the alleged supernatural phenomenon of the alleged apparitions in the Carmel of Lipa be immediately disbanded.

Given at the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Rome, December 11 2015



**Gerhard Card. MÜLLER**  
Prefect



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