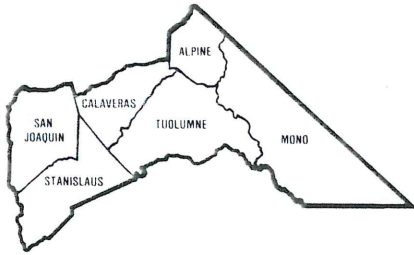


DIOCESE OF STOCKTON



The Chancery
1105 N. Lincoln Street
P.O. Box 4237
Stockton, California 95204-0237
209/466-0636

OFFICIAL REPORT

"Mater Ecclesiae" Mission Church

Thornton, California

June 8, 1983

COPY

I. BACKGROUND

For approximately one year various reports and stories have emanated from "Mater Ecclesiae" Mission Church, Thornton, California, located within the Diocese of Stockton.

Various allegations have been made that events have taken place there that cannot be explained by strictly natural or human causes. These events have focused upon the statue of Our Lady of Fatima located in that Mission Church.

II. CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

It is the principal responsibility of the Church to instruct and to guide Catholics in their lives and journeys of faith, ever faithful to the tradition of the Church and to changing historical needs.

The Church reads the signs of the times and reflects the Gospel of Jesus Christ in harmony with those times.

The principal life of worship in the Catholic Church is centered in the Eucharist and the Sacraments, but strengthened through various devotional practices.

All of the Church's official worship and personal devotion must be in harmony with the teachings and guidelines of the Church as enunciated by our Holy Father, the Pope, and the Bishops of the Local Churches.

In the case of "Mater Ecclesiae" Mission, I have appointed a special Commission of priests (Rev. Msgr. Manuel Alvernaz, chairman, Rev. Robert Pereira, secretary, Rev. Valentim Freitas, and Rev. William Smith, O. Carm.) to examine the allegations and the pertinent proofs which have been offered to allege some supernatural intervention or phenomena, and to report their findings and recommendations to me. This Commission has now completed its work and has reported to me.

III. DEVOTIONAL CRITERIA

In seeking to verify authentic Marian devotion in this case, I have relied principally upon three sources:

- 1) The Constitution on the Church, Chapter VIII, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church," Second Vatican Council;
- 2) The Apostolic Exhortation, Marialis Cultus, "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary," of Pope Paul VI, February 2, 1974; and
- 3) The Pastoral Letter of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Behold Your Mother," November 21, 1973.

These documents highlight the characteristics of authentic Marian devotion, and place that devotion within the framework of historical and traditional devotion in the Church.

Pope Paul VI told us:

"Such devotion to the Blessed Virgin is firmly rooted in the revealed Word and has solid dogmatic foundations.....

COPY

This devotion takes into account the part she played at decisive moments in the history of the salvation which her Son accomplished, and her holiness, already full at her Immaculate Conception yet increasing all the time as she obeyed the will of the Father and Temple of the Holy Spirit--Mary, who, because of this extraordinary grace, is far greater than any other creature on earth or in heaven." (no. 56)

The U.S. Catholic Bishops told us in their Pastoral Letter:

"These providential happenings (authenticated appearances of our Lady) serve as reminders to us of basic Christian themes: prayer, penance, and the necessity of the Sacraments. After due investigation the Church has approved the pilgrimages and other devotions associated with certain private revelations...Catholics are encouraged to practice such devotions when they are in conformity with authentic devotion of Mary...with the Vatican Council we remind true lovers of our Lady of the danger of superficial sentiment and vain credulity." (no. 100)

IV. THE ALLEGED EVENTS AT "MATER ECCLESIAE" MISSION CHURCH

Public attention has been directed to "Mater Ecclesiae" Mission Church, in general, and to the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, in particular.

It has been alleged that three different phenomena have occurred at one time or another:

- a) that the statue has moved of its own accord from one fixed location to another;
- b) that "tears" and "teardrops" have appeared on or about the face of the statue; and
- c) that when the statue has been photographed, the figure of the head of Christ has been captured on film either on the statue itself or upon the wall behind the statue.

Although all three of these phenomena are significant, the most startling and most difficult to explain is the spontaneous appearance of the head of Christ in two "Kodak Instamatic" photographs.

The appearance of the statue in various locations within the Mission Church could occur by someone physically picking up the statue and moving it. No report has ever been made of anyone actually observing the statue move from one location to another. Rather, it was reported that on a given day the statue happened to be in another location.

The appearance of "tears" could be explained by condensation, or by someone applying a fluid to the statue. No one has ever reported actually seeing the "tears" flow from the eyes of the statue. Rather, it was reported that at a given time a liquid was on the face of the statue which appeared to be "tears" or at least some liquid.

A witness testified that she actually touched the alleged "tears," and described the liquid as "oily and sticky," certainly not the texture or consistency of human tears.

The Commission requested that a sample of the "tears" be provided for scientific analysis using a standard laboratory sterile sample kit. No such liquid sample has ever been made available.

COPY

Because of the lack of any physical evidence or qualified witnesses with respect to the alleged movement of the statue or the appearance of "tears," the Commission decided to focus its attention upon the alleged appearance of Christ's image upon the photographs.

V. SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

At my direction, the Commission was able to obtain physical evidence of the alleged appearance of the head of Christ upon the statue and upon the wall behind the statue.

That evidence was reviewed extensively by the Institute of Forensic Science Criminalistics Laboratory at my request. A full copy of that report is attached. The conclusion of their report states:

"Although it certainly can be argued that Christ could return in any form of His choosing, the conclusion I (Criminalist/Forensic Scientist) must reach based on the appearance of the bearded male figures shown in the "Kodak Instamatic" photographs presented is that they are images cut out of commercially available sources."

Although no scientific investigation has been made with respect to the movement of the statue or to the alleged appearance of "tears," I am certain beyond any reasonable doubt that such an investigation would uncover a similar natural explanation.

VI. LACK OF MESSAGE

It is important to note that supernatural apparitions authenticated by the Church have always been accompanied by a clear and important message. The appearances of Mary at Fatima, Mexico, and

Lourdes are good examples of this pattern. In the case of the alleged happenings at Thornton, there is no report of any clear and important message in the context of Christ's work of salvation.

One could rightfully question, therefore, the reason for the divine or supernatural phenomena alleged to have taken place at Thornton. The absence of such a message makes it even more difficult to accept these events as miraculous.

VII. SPECIFIC CONCLUSION

As the Bishop of the Diocese of Stockton, I hereby determine and declare that the alleged extraordinary events and reported supernatural activities at "Mater Ecclesiae" Mission Church in Thornton, California, do not meet the criteria for an authenticated appearance of Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ.

As a result of this finding, I am hereby ordering the Pastor of St. Anne's Parish, Lodi, who has the responsibility for the pastoral care of "Mater Ecclesiae" Mission Church, to treat this Mission Church as any other regular Mission Church. The Mission Church is to maintain its regular hours of service in effect prior to these alleged events. The Pastor is to take all necessary steps in accordance with Church law, liturgical norms, and Diocesan regulations with respect to the celebration of the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and other personal devotions.

VIII. GENERAL CONCLUSION

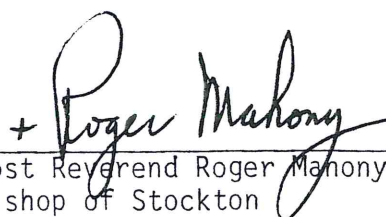
While this report and declaration touch principally upon the alleged supernatural happenings regarding the statue of Our Lady of

Fatima, I must note with appreciation the genuine outpouring of faith and the sincere devotion to Mary which has marked the lives of so many who have come to pray through her intercession.

I do not seek to diminish their personal faith or devotion. Rather, I seek to base that devotion upon the truth--the truth of God's revelation through Christ, and the truth of His redeeming presence through the Church. I am hopeful that those essential elements of authentic Marian devotion will continue to develop and to be fostered throughout our Diocese: prayer, penance, and the primacy of the Eucharist and the Sacraments.

A loyal and loving devotion to Mary has been, from the very beginning, an important part of American Catholicism.

I pray that our Catholics of today will cherish and pass on to succeeding generations of Catholics this rich heritage of devotion to Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church.



Most Reverend Roger Mahony
Bishop of Stockton

June 8, 1983