



OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

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September 27, 2000

Rev. William O'Brien, C.M.
St. Joseph Church
P.O. Box 376
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Dear Father O'Brien,

Over the past years a number of concerns have been expressed to me regarding Mrs. Gianna Talone-Sullivan and the messages she states she received from Our Blessed Lady and Our Lord.

To clarify issues regarding the authenticity of the messages and the theological content, I convened a commission of experts in keeping with procedure set forth by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These were Father Francis Morrissey, O.M.I., J.C.D., Professor of Canon Law at St. Paul University Ottawa, Father James Gill, S.J., M.D., Chicago, Illinois, and Father Dominic Maruca, S.J., S.T.D., now of Baltimore and until recently in Rome, where he served as a Consultor to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. These priests, highly qualified in Canon Law, human behavior, theology, and spirituality, interviewed a number of people, including Mrs. Talone-Sullivan and others whom she named as witnesses.

The members of the Commission devoted a significant amount of time to studying the some 600 pages of testimony and other documentation. I am deeply grateful to them for these efforts in service to the needs of God's people.

10/7/2002

- 2 -

Father O'Brien

September 27, 2002

The Commission stated:

"Passing on to the specific content of the lessons and messages, we must point out certain questionable elements. First, let us consider how we think about the person of our Lord, our Savior. There are many references in the written and filmed documentation to the return of Jesus as a child (with pictures of the Infant of Prague in the background, etc.). There are references to a Eucharistic spiritual reign where the Child Jesus will usher in a kingdom of peace" (May 5, 2001). Yet, for Catholics, in celebrating the Eucharist it is the paschal mystery, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ that is salvific. It is our crucified and risen Lord who leads us in thanksgiving to His Father. An authentic theology of this sacramental mystery does not foster a sentimentalized image of Jesus. He was indeed born of the Virgin Mary, a child as dependent as any human child. During his earthly pilgrimage he passed through the various stages of life culminating in his death. But the Church does not look forward to the return of this child, lovable though He was. Jesus Christ will return in glory as the crucified, risen Lord, not as a child. To say the least, such a spirituality is not the traditional Church teaching about the Eucharistic mystery. It may well be a comforting devotion for the visionary, but it cannot claim to be a private revelation of divine inspiration, to be presented as a divine message for the public.

"To try and shift the focus from a 'child' to 'littleness', as was done in Gianna Talone-Sullivan's public address of May 5, 2001, is to displace the issue.

". . . the Church discourages excessive concern about the future. In one of our Lady's "messages" there is a warning against futuristic thinking: "Too much emphasis is placed on what the future holds for humanity, which is creating lack of peace and anxiety, worry and even fear" (January 29, 1998). Yet, some of the "messages" derived from presumed apparitions seem to be apocalyptic forebodings, the prediction of forthcoming catastrophic events, such as the death of all the fish in the world. We find this discrepancy disconcerting.

"To speak of the 'bitterness of chastisement' (November 24, 1991), 'humiliations and persecution' (summer, 2000), desire for 'some extravagant sign from God' (May 5, 2001), 'purging the world from its crimes' (April 16, 1998), and similar expressions is not the way for Christ's message of peace and love to be transmitted."

- 3 -

Father O'Brien

September 27, 2002

"Finally, there is the matter of conversion. It is traditionally acknowledged that an enduring conversion of heart is a gradual process that takes time. Repentance that is to have a lasting effect does not ordinarily occur instantaneously. What are we to make of apparitions alleging that there will be a universal revelation of everyone's state of soul (November 24, 1991) and subsequent conversion? Such a teaching is not consistent with traditional Church doctrine. Moreover, when He was on earth, Jesus rejected Satan's temptation to coerce faith among the masses by resorting to a spectacular entrance into the Temple. Is He now reversing his approach, resorting to sensational means to dazzle crowds (July 13, 2000)? We think not.

"To conclude this section: given the present circumstances throughout the world of what may be called a growing addiction to the spectacular, we think that the Church should not promote or encourage persons claiming to have extraordinary channels to God. It would be pastorally more advisable to ensure Scripture-based preaching that can rekindle and deepen faith in the efficacy of the sacraments to give and sustain life in the Spirit of Christ."

In the light of the Commission's recommendations, I wish to confirm that the prohibition of the Thursday evening prayer meetings at Emmitsburg remains in effect. Also, I shall publish another letter that will draw on the observations of the Commission in reviewing other aspects of this issue from a pastoral perspective.

The Commission recognizes the positive benefits associated with the prayer meetings and at the same time offers an appropriate counsel in evaluating them:

"What were the facts presented to the Commission? Many impressive results were reported to have occurred in connection with the Thursday evening prayer sessions at St. Joseph Parish. Among these should be mentioned: conversions of heart, increased celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, physical and spiritual healings. These were reported by persons who approached God with faith in His mercy and power, asking for help in their spiritual or physical distress. Some of these reports were accompanied by medical documentation; others were related only anecdotally. There were clear signs of pastoral benefits to many persons.

"While the Commission gladly recognizes the workings of God's grace, even in somewhat strange circumstances, it must note, however, that no necessary connection has been demonstrated between Gianna Talone-Sullivan's alleged apparitions and the reported benefits. Down through the centuries, the Church has taught that the communication of divine grace is independent of

- 4 -

Father O'Brien

September 27, 2002

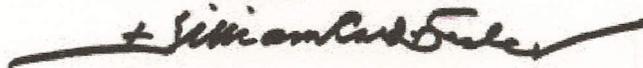
an instrument's state of soul. A preacher or minister may be far from holy or even morally unworthy, yet God's grace can effect marvels in persons who worship with faith. All the positive benefits reported do not in themselves constitute an argument demonstrating the supernatural character of the alleged apparitions; nor do they prove the divine origin of any messages directed to the public at large or to private individuals. Religious gatherings and activities need not be authentic in order to occasion deep faith and devotion in hearers."

The blessings of the Emmitsburg community can assure a continuation of the positive benefits. At the Basilica of the National Shrine honoring St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and at the Grotto and at the Seminary of Mt. St. Mary's devotion to Our Lady is fostered publicly. Also, at the Seminary there is daily adoration and quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Those seminarians at the Mount and their visitors join so many of our own people around the Archdiocese who spend time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We have had the great joy to see the practice of perpetual adoration continue to grow in our Archdiocese and we now have perpetual adoration in these parishes: Saint Mary's Annapolis; Immaculate Conception, Towson; Saint Anne, Hagerstown; and Saint Joseph, Sykesville. Two other parishes are actively considering this powerful pastoral option. We have had the great joy of seeing the practice of perpetual adoration of the Eucharist continue to grow in the Archdiocese, with four parishes now offering it on a regional basis.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus and the prayers of His Holy Mother assist you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Cardinal Burke", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Archbishop of Baltimore

cc Father Kevin Rhoades
Father Ray Harris
Father Jack Lombardi
Father James Hannon

10/7/2002