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What is the Official position of the Catholic Church on apparitions?

The Catholic Church makes a distinction between public and private revelation. In the case of public revelation, the Church definitely teaches that the entire deposit of faith (all that is necessary for salvation) is to be found in the twin pillars of revelation, Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which comes from the same source, the Word of God, Jesus Christ. There can be no further revelation that can add to or alter the above.

Any other 'revelation' if determined authentic is to be regarded as private. According to St Thomas Aquinas, God continues to reveal Himself to individuals "not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith, but for the direction of human acts" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II q174 a6 reply 3). Private revelation cannot improve upon, correct or entirely supplant Public Revelation. Apparitions are to be regarded under the category of private rather than public revelation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

66 "The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.

67 Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. 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.

How do we determine whether an apparition is authentic?

On February 25, 1978, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued "*Norms of the Congregation for Proceeding in Judging Alleged Apparitions and Revelations.*"

According to the norms, investigation can be done by the following

1. The diocesan bishop on his own initiative or at the request of the faithful.
2. The national conference of bishops.
3. The Apostolic See (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

The process will involve 3 steps

1. Initially, to judge the facts according to positive (moral certainty, qualities of the subject, conformity with doctrines, healthy devotion) and negative criteria (glaring error as to facts, doctrinal error, pursuit of monetary gain, gravely immoral acts, psychological disorders) .
2. Then, if this examination appears favourable, to allow certain public demonstrations of devotion, while continuing to investigate the facts with extreme prudence (which is equivalent to the formula: "for the moment, nothing is opposed to it").
3. Finally, after a certain time, and in the light of experience, (starting from a particular study of the spiritual fruits generated by the new devotion), to give a judgment on the authenticity of the supernatural character, if the case requires this.

What is the status of the alleged image of the Blessed Virgin Mary which has appeared on a glass panel of the Sime Darby Medical Centre (formerly Subang Jaya Medical Centre)?

This alleged appearance does not have official approval from the local ordinary, the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, or from the Apostolic See.

The Archbishop has instructed that the glass panel be respectfully placed in a place conducive for prayer in the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Klang, pending further investigation to determine its authenticity.

This is not to be interpreted as a tacit approval or recommendation by the church authorities that the image is worthy of private or public veneration.

What is the responsibility of the faithful?

The first responsibility of the faithful is to remain firmly established in the faith, in the sacraments and in communion with the Pope and bishops. Any Catholic who gives their primary attention to alleged private revelation at the expense of Sacred Scripture, the teaching of the Church (especially the *Catechism*), sacramental practice, prayer and fidelity to Church authority is *off course*.

The second responsibility is to have regard, in the first place, for those private revelations and apparitions approved by the Church (e.g. Lourdes, Fatima). Within a balanced practice of the faith the edifying content of approved private revelations can be a motive for deeper piety and fidelity to the Gospel.

Finally, there are many other private revelations that have not received Church approval. The Second Vatican Council urges us to discern the Spirit in the case of such extraordinary graces [*Lumen gentium* 12], which means being neither gullible or incredulous, but subjecting them to all relevant theological and human tests of credibility. (Adapted from an online article by Colin B. Donovan, STL)