

**Dictionnaire Des “Apparitions”
De La Vierge Marie**

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Excerpt from the Fr. Rene' Laurentin's life work,

The Dictionary of the Virgin Mary

TALONE. Gianna, (Scottsdale, Arizona, USA) Gianna Talone, born 12 March 1957, began her university studies in 1975, followed by graduate studies which were crowned by a doctorate in clinical pharmacy. In 1989 she joined the pharmacy service at the large St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona.

Married on 24 November 1985 to a man who did not wish to have children, she later obtained an annulment of this marriage. During this difficult period she began receiving in September, 1987, “apparitions” in the setting of a charismatic movement in the parish of St. Maria Goretti in Scottsdale in the diocese of Phoenix. She was then guided by a Carmelite priest and was discerning a religious vocation. But while she was making a retreat at a Carmelite monastery in 1992, the convent dog bit her on the face; and her retreat was interrupted by the need for medical care which contributed to a change of direction for her. Gianna received messages from Our Lady and Our Lord which were published in over 500,000 copies (the *I am your Jesus of Mercy* series of books). This made of her parish a place of pilgrimage. On 8 January 1990, the local bishop, recognizing that the messages did not contain any theological errors, declared that there was nothing that proved the visions to be supernatural. He gave orders that discretion should be observed.

On January 31, 1993, while at the Lourdes Grotto (in Emmitsburg, Maryland) during the course of a pilgrimage and her pre-Cana marriage preparation, Gianna received from the Blessed Virgin an invitation to leave Scottsdale, Arizona, and her employment there and move to Emmitsburg, Maryland, with her future new husband, for the purpose of “consecrating herself to the work of the Lord and of Our Lady in the service of the poor who were sick.”

On 19 June 1993, Gianna married Michael Sullivan, MD, who took part in her project of Mission of Mercy (MOM), a humanitarian and Christian project for which they sacrificed their respective medical and pharmaceutical careers and which under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin, allowed the poor without medical insurance to receive medical care. In March 1994, she and her

husband, who had also benefited from an annulment, consecrated themselves to this project, acquiring a large van to serve as a medical clinic where they could give consultation and immediate care.

In November, 1993, they joined a weekly prayer group that met in their local parish rectory (St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Emmitsburg, MD). The group soon became too large, and the parish pastor opened the doors of the church. The church was soon filled every week. Gianna did not in any way make a spectacle of herself. She was seated in the front pew of the church, on the side. She had the apparition on her knees among 500-750 people who had gathered there on their knees as was she.

Gianna had at the time (1993-1999) as her spiritual director, Dominican Father Fred Jelly, O.P., a Professor of Theology at the University of Dayton and at the Mt. St. Mary's Major Seminary in Emmitsburg, who was highly reputed for his doctrinal knowledge and spiritual life. But while the gatherings that filled the church every week lasted for several years (1993-2000), there was a group of parishioners or of participants who became disturbed about these apparitions and complained to the Archbishop of Baltimore, Cardinal William Keeler, then the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

On 13 September 2000, the Archdiocese published a press release expressing reservations about the prayer meetings gathered around the visionary in St. Joseph's Church. After an initial evaluation, this press release declared: "the Archdiocese of Baltimore is unable to support the message of the video *Unbridled Mercy*, and has asked that sales of the video be discontinued

immediately,” . . . “that the prayer group meetings held at St. Joseph Church in Emmitsburg in Emmitsburg, Maryland, be discontinued at this time.” At that time there had been taking place there each week and attended by “several hundreds” of the faithful a public prayer group, as well as many other private prayer groups which had arisen from these gatherings and which encouraged the faithful to prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

In May, 2001, the Archdiocese of Baltimore named a Commission of Enquiry of three members. Gianna Sullivan gave them all the documents she possessed including a video of her ecstasy and copies of the medical studies. She had only one encounter with the commission, 12 June 2001.

In a follow-up letter from the Archdiocese to Gianna on September 24, 2002, some 16 months after the Commission of Enquiry, it was stated “the Commission goes on further to assert that there are negative elements present alerting us to warn the faithful not to be led astray by your apocalyptic prophecies.” In a pastoral letter to the local parishes and in newspaper releases and interviews, the Archdiocese noted that in the alleged apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Mrs. Sullivan, the messages contained elements that cannot be reconciled with the teaching of the Church and that include predictions of things to come and visions of an apocalyptic nature. The Archdiocese concluded by inviting the faithful to personal prayer, the frequenting of the Sacraments, devotion toward the Blessed Mother, and participation in the life of the parish.

On 7 July 2003, the chancellor of the Archbishop of Baltimore, Msgr. Richard W. Woy, published a brief press release that included Cardinal Keeler’s Decree: Having received the information on the alleged locutions and visions that are said to have taken place in the Church

of St. Joseph in Emmitsburg . . . and studied the report of the commission formed of experts in theology and canon law Having shared with the Holy See the report of the commission and received from the Congregation of the Faith the appropriate authorization, “I declare as a consequence that in this case : *constat non supernaturalitate* [that is to say that the non supernatural is established or proved; or otherwise stated the supernatural is excluded] As a consequence there must be no public activity in the church, or oratories and other property of the archdiocese of Baltimore in relation to the alleged apparitions and locutions.”

The judgment did not employ the usual formula: “the supernatural is not established (non constat supernaturalitate) which expresses only that a doubt because of insufficient proof remains, but employed the exclusive formula that denies the supernatural, **One time more**, the word “supernatural” was employed in the very particular sense that has become the usage in the commissions established for judging apparitions. Theologically, the term supernatural refers to the elevation of the faithful to Divine life, that is to say to Divine Love, that reconverts the egoist desire which is currently called “love,” into the image of God where Love is a gift. This reconversion operates fundamentally through Baptism, and its indelible character moves every Christian to a true life in God. The exclusion of the “supernatural” in reference to a Christian would then be like denying that they were elevated to the supernatural through the infallible sacrament of Baptism.

Without a doubt, one can understand that the diocesan authority does not want to go so far, but it remains paradoxical enough to exclude the supernatural in referring to a Christian person who throughout their life, and who in their faith and charity are dedicated in the most disinterested

and devout way to the service of the poor for whom the Gospels are essentially destined according to the central ord of the Christian faith. If the life of deep personal and familial prayer shining forth in Gianna Talone Sullivan is not supernatural, if the renunciation of her career in the hospital of Scottsdale and then in Maryland are not supernatural, what is “supernatural” in the Church? The supernatural could then also be excluded from Mother Teresa, in the measure that one gives to the word “supernatural” the sense of miracle, and of whom no miracle is officially recognized.

The Decree quickly became the center of the news that was widely spread in the press, on the radio and television and on the internet. With the context of the document being entirely negative, the defamation proliferated. One spoke of lies, of comedies, of pantomime, etc.

Gianna’s telephone was besieged by the press and supporters. Worried about creating a scandal or division in the Church, she responded simply: “I thank the commission for their work.” But she was surprised and morally wounded – even though she accepted it with the perfect joy recommended by St. Francis of Assisi – and shocked in her Christian sense that the official Church proceeded at so efficacious and serious a defamation. One can ask the question that if this action doesn’t illustrate, in fact, a failure in its juridical procedures in the way they are employed in these matters that touch on what is most intimate in the Christian life. For one asks what it would have cost the authorities to say what was said in Scottsdale, that there was no heresy (even if one regretted the cult of the Infant Jesus in the Eucharist as an unaccustomed novelty, but it was sustainable since the Eucharist gives the integral Presence of Christ, not only . . . but also Incarnate and Risen in the totality of His Mystery.)

It was also during this period of time that a well-known lay Catholic theologian and another well-known Catholic author and communicator, on a nationally syndicated Catholic radio program, both labeled the apparitions of Our Lady to Gianna in Emmitsburg as “condemned” by the Church (which has never been the case). The calumny had reached an extreme!

In September, 2002, Gianna had been surprised at not personally receiving the results of the commission’s findings before she learned of it through the telephone calls by the press and in reading the newspapers. (She never to this day has received a copy of the Commission report from diocesan officials.) Then nearly 9 months later (June 24, 2003), and only after her husband (Michael) had publicly demanded it of the Archdiocese, a copy of the Cardinal’s decree was issued and sent to her. Then in 2004, following a public prayer group on February 25 attended by Gianna in Phoenix, Arizona (not prohibited by the Keeler decree), a copy of a letter was sent to Gianna by the Diocese of Phoenix. The letter began: “At the request of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Critchfield (Gianna’s sister and brother-in-law) I am providing you with a copy of the letter which is being sent by Bishop Thomas Olmstead to the priests of the Diocese of Phoenix, Friday 9 July 2004.” In it Bishop Olmstead extended the restrictions on Gianna’s activity that had been imposed in Baltimore to the Phoenix Diocese. This letter was never sent to Gianna before it was sent to the priests in the Diocese of Phoenix, so that no one would ignore the fact that Gianna, honorably known in the Diocese of Phoenix for her pharmaceutical work both at the local hospital and in Mission of Mercy, and as a previous parishioner at St. Maria Goretti, was being declared “not supernatural” in her gifts. The press gave this news a wide diffusion.

All of this was accomplished according to the administrative and juridical norms of the Church; but this case illustrates a problem that poses itself to one's conscience: How can the Church that presides over the practice of charity objectively and regularly lack it, notably in matters pertaining to apparitions, but also in some other matters that the modern conscience and every human conscience is very sensitive to—that of *defamation?*

[This article written by the world-renowned Marian theologian, René Laurentin, appeared in his recent *Dictionnaire Des "Apparitions" De La Vierge Marie*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2007, pp 1426.]

(Translated and edited for factual accuracy in conjunction with original documents or copies thereof, by Fr. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, Washington, DC, February, 2009)

***Most recently, October 8, 2008, Gianna received from the Archdiocese of Baltimore a copy of the Pastoral Advisory cautioning her not to communicate in any manner, on Church-owned or even private property in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, information related to or containing messages or locutions allegedly received from the Virgin Mother of God. Gianna had already voluntarily and willingly submitted herself to this desire of Archbishop Edwin O'Brien some 9 months earlier (February, 2008) before this Pastoral Advisory was released, and she intends to remain obedient to Mother Church. However, his notification was received by Gianna 3 days after it had been read at the Masses in the local and regional parishes and spread widely throughout the Catholic and secular, the national and international media. Gianna's response to Archbishop O'Brien's Pastoral Advisory has been totally suppressed by all media outlets except for the Foundation of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary and Private Revelations 12:1 publications.

(www.prourladyofemmitsburg.org and www.centeroftheimmaculateheart.org)