

Catholic Courier

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Bishop: Leary visions not divine

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Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has declared that John Leary — a Catholic layman who has claimed to receive interior visions of Jesus, Mary and some saints — has misjudged ordinary mental prayer for supernatural communication.

Bishop Clark also said Leary's messages contain doctrinal errors that run counter to the Catholic faith. Leary was informed of the bishop's decision through a meeting with diocesan officials and a June 25 letter from the bishop.

However, Bishop Clark stressed that the diocese considers Leary "a faithful Roman Catholic." The bishop said he will not forbid Leary to publish or teach about the messages he claims to receive during the visions, so long as he points out in his published works that the diocese considers the messages to be of human origin.

Over the past six years — Leary, a retired Kodak chemist who resides in the Rochester suburb of Greece, has detailed the messages in public talks and in 13 published volumes. Titled *Prepare for the Great Tribulation and the Coming Era of Peace*, the volumes have sold in the tens of thousands, and have appeared on Catholic best-seller lists.

Each volume is a diary of the messages — known as "locutions" — Leary claims to have received daily since July 1993.

Bishop Clark has asked Leary to place a preface in each newly printed work or reprinted volume. The preface is to warn readers against various doctrinal errors in Leary's works. The

diocese announced Bishop Clark's decision in a July 7 press statement.

Leary has claimed that his locutions warn of the coming of the anti-Christ, a political leader who will forge an alliance with the next pope. According to Leary's diaries, this pope — whom Leary calls a false pope — will replace Pope John Paul II after the current pontiff is exiled. Leary writes that the false pope will undermine church teachings and support persecution of religious and political opponents of the anti-Christ's regime.

The preface required by the bishop outlines two errors, in particular, that concerned him and a five-member commission he appointed to study Leary's writings over the past year. In addition to Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general and Pastoral Center moderator, the commission comprised three theologians and a psychiatrist.

"The first (error) is called by the Church 'millenarianism,'" the preface reads. "This erroneous teaching, contained in the first 6 volumes of *Prepare for the Great Tribulation and the Coming Era of Peace*, holds that Christ will return to reign on the earth for a thousand years at the end of time." The preface goes on to quote the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which rejects a literal interpretation of the thousand-year reign of Christ referred to in the Book of Revelation.

"The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name millenarianism ...," the catechism states.

Interestingly, Volume VI of Leary's locutions, published in 1997, actually

contains a passage in which he claims Jesus told him on March 27, 1997, "The leaders of My Church have made binding interpretations of 'millenarianism' which I wish you to acknowledge under obedience to My Magisterium. They have not interpreted one thousand years to be taken literally. I will not reign then in My Body. Only spiritually will I be present."

The preface also points out that Leary's books counter church doctrine on the office of the pope.

"The second error is 'anti-papalism'...", the preface continues. "Mr. Leary's locutions select Pope John Paul II to be obeyed but his successor to be ignored as an 'imposter (sic) pope.' This erroneous teaching is found in all the volumes."

The bishop's June 25 letter stated: "The Commission is convinced that you are sincere in your affirmation that these are supernatural (locutions), that you are psychologically healthy and that you have not perpetrated a fraud on the community," the bishop wrote. "Nevertheless, they are persuaded that you have mistaken the normal workings of the mind in the processes of mental prayer for supernatural locutions."

The Catholic Courier attempted to contact Leary both at his Greece home and in Ireland where he is reportedly speaking, but was unable to reach him. However, Father Hart said that Leary had told the diocese he would cooperate with the bishop's request. Father Hart also said Leary has agreed to use a theological adviser to work with him on future volumes.

Father Hart said the diocese decided to examine Leary's volumes after a

number of people asked diocesan officials about them. Commission members met with Leary and found him to be “sincere, open, straightforward, honest, spiritual, but mistaken,” Father Hart said.

Father Hart said the commission unanimously found that Leary’s writings were riddled with doctrinal errors and that they were of human origin. He said the messages themselves were the basis for this finding.

In addition, Father Hart said he believes Leary does not fit the pattern of a true visionary. He noted that Leary’s own beliefs correspond too closely to those reported from the locutions whereas genuine visionaries often learn something that either contradicts or goes beyond what they believed before the vision.

For example, he cited St. Bernadette, to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in 1858, at the French grotto of Massabielle, saying “I am the Immaculate Conception.” That was a term with which the saint — then a 14-year-old girl — was completely unfamiliar.

Another difference Father Hart noted between Leary and genuine visionaries is the fact that he did not express any reluctance about having such visions. Genuine prophets and visionaries often resist God’s call, Father Hart said, pointing to Jeremiah and other biblical figures as examples. Yet Leary seemed to have a great desire to be such a prophet, Father Hart said, a quality that predisposed him to have locutions of the kind he has had.

“There is no prophet who really wants to be a prophet,” Father Hart concluded.

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