

Vatican dismisses English woman's Marian claims

LONDON – The Vatican has dismissed the claims of a woman in England who says Mary has visited her outside her home for more than 20 years.

Ruling that her claims are “highly questionable,” the Vatican also has refused to approve the statutes of the community she founded.

Patricia De Menezes said the apparition has been appearing to her beneath a pine tree at her home in Surbiton, a London suburb, since 1984. She claimed she has received a divine message that the Catholic Church must proclaim aborted babies to be martyrs.

She also founded the Community of Divine Innocence, which has about 3,000 members in 43 countries, many coming from the pro-life movement. Community members “strive for holiness and innocence within God’s own family,” according to the community’s Web site.

Archbishop Angelo Amato, secretary of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, announced the decision in a letter to Archbishop Kevin McDonald of Southwark, the archdiocese in which De Menezes lives. The letter from Archbishop Amato was dated July 16; it was released by the Southwark Archdiocese Sept. 21.

Archbishop Amato said the doctrinal congregation found De Menezes’ claims to be exaggerated and hysterical. He said inappropriate words and phrases were attributed to Jesus, problematic demands were made over the status of aborted children, and “unusually violent and threatening language” was used in attacks on church authorities.

“Given the supposed revelations which ground the spirituality of the Community of Divine Innocence are highly questionable, it follows that the community’s spirituality is flawed at its root,” said Archbishop Amato.

“Because this spirituality thoroughly animates the community’s proposed

constitution, it cannot be approved," he said.

The archbishop specifically took issue with the message that De Menezes claims to have received about the "martyrdom of all the innocent children deliberately killed before birth."

"A martyr is someone who bears witness to Christ," he said. "If the victims of abortion were to qualify for martyrdom, it would then seem that all victims of any moral evil should be likewise deemed martyrs."

Archbishop McDonald said in a Sept. 21 statement that the ruling meant there is "no ecclesiastical approbation for Catholics to meet as the group known as Divine Innocence."

"I am aware that many devout people, deeply committed to the pro-life movement, have become involved with the Divine Innocence," he said. "I wish to encourage them in their work and prayer, but in view of the observations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, this must no longer be in the context of the organization or spirituality of the Divine Innocence."

De Menezes, 67, a freelance jewelry designer, declined to comment on the Vatican ruling.

She has said that her supernatural experiences began when she heard the words "I am the bread of life" while cycling near her home. She said she later saw visions of Mary, Jesus and St. Joseph in her garden and was catechized by them.

She claims that Mary continues to appear to her on a daily basis.

Following the Archdiocese of Southwark's examination and rejection of her claims in 2001, De Menezes sought Vatican approval of the community's statutes.