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Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández comments on changes in the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he serves as prefect, as meets a CNS reporter in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican after Pope Francis made him a cardinal Sept. 30, 2023. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Vatican rulings on allegedly supernatural phenomena, such as Marian apparitions, will continue to be released publicly, but official validation of an event's supernatural status — as has happened at Lourdes, Fatima and Guadalupe — would be "exceptional," the Vatican's doctrine chief said.

Speaking to Alfa y Omega, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Madrid, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, said that a Vatican ruling of whether an event was truly supernatural "does not seem necessary, because it has long been clear that not even a declaration of supernaturality obliges believers to accept such phenomena as of divine origin."

Still, the dicastery will continue to publish its rulings on permitting devotion associated with allegedly supernatural phenomena, he said in the interview published July 17, noting that "one will come out in the next days" while others "will need to wait two or three months because they require greater study."

Since the dicastery issued new norms for discerning alleged supernatural phenomena in May, two rulings have been issued on Marian apparitions by the dicastery and two previously made judgments have been made public.

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Rather than seek a validation of an event's supernaturality, the norms make a "nihil obstat" the most positive ruling issued by the dicastery, effectively ruling that devotion associated to an allegedly supernatural event is licit without making a judgment on its authenticity.

Fernández said that official validation of an event's supernaturality "would only occur if the pope, due to special interest, were to solicit it and personally decide it."

He added that the dicastery is now able to publish the rulings quickly since previous cases would be held up in the discernment process because of the need to declare whether events and phenomena were supernatural or of divine origin, but "with the new method that burden does not exist anymore and the analysis becomes easier."

The cardinal said that the criteria for an allegedly supernatural event to receive a "nihil obstat" include the "spiritual and pastoral fruits" resulting from the event together with "the absence of critical elements that can negatively affect the people of God."

If messages are associated with a phenomenon, "their content is carefully analyzed in order to highlight what is beautiful, positive and a reflection of the Gospel," he added. "If some of them, even if they are not contrary to faith and morality, can cause confusion, clarifications are offered to be published together with the messages."