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Understanding Medjugorje

Heavenly Visions
or
Religious Illusion?

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Understanding Medjugorje

Heavenly Visions
or
Religious Illusion?

Donal Anthony Foley

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Foreword

Medjugorje has been with us now for nearly twenty-five years—but what are Catholics to make of it all? Donal Foley's book *Understanding Medjugorje* seeks to clear away the confusion surrounding this issue and give a balanced understanding of the alleged visions and their consequences.

Many sincere Catholics believe in Medjugorje, but it is questionable whether many have properly investigated or understood what has gone on in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 1981. How many Medjugorje supporters have any real idea of the historical background to the visions, or of what went on in the town during the civil war which tore Yugoslavia apart in the 1990s, or of the long-running dispute between the Franciscans and local Church authorities? Foley explores these points, and also looks at the intimate link between Medjugorje and the Charismatic Movement. He also shows how influential priests and theologians have played a large part in the worldwide promotion of Medjugorje, and have been a significant factor in its acceptance by many Catholics.

He also amasses evidence from diverse sources to show that the contents and origin of the messages of Medjugorje leave much to be desired. Ironically, even promoters of the messages have tampered with them in order to save their credibility. In particular, this book scrutinizes the transcripts of the original tapes of the visionaries' experiences. These were made shortly after they claimed to see the Blessed Virgin on 24 June 1981. A close analysis of the contents of these tapes shows that there are serious difficulties in believing that it really was the Mother of God who appeared to the visionaries.

In the same way, the subsequent activities of the visionaries are studied, with some disturbing results, especially when compared to

recognized seers such as St Bernadette or the three young shepherds of Fatima. Foley also compares the events of Medjugorje with what took place during Church-approved Marian apparitions such as Lourdes or Fatima, and shows that they have very little in common. Analyzing the authoritative statements given up to now, it is clear that the Church has not given any official support to Medjugorje; rather, in effect she has given a negative judgment, but has accompanied it with a pastoral concern to avoid scandal and disillusion, and to provide for the large numbers of pilgrims going there in good faith.

Moreover, this book looks at the Church's position on alleged visions in general and how this affects Medjugorje. The arguments put forward concerning the "good fruits" experienced by many at Medjugorje are also evaluated, and it is demonstrated that while undoubtedly many people have benefited from a visit there, such positive factors cannot override the overwhelming theological objections to Medjugorje. Foley particularly focuses on the fact that Medjugorje has had a serious impact on Fatima, with profound consequences for the Church, and he argues that it is only when this situation is rectified, that we can expect a genuine worldwide Catholic renewal.

In short, *Understanding Medjugorje* raises important questions about Medjugorje, questions which no sensible Catholic can ignore.

Fr Peter Joseph STD
Chancellor of the Maronite Diocese of Australia

Preface

Donal Foley's new book represents an important and courageous step in the direction of re-posing the question of the link between truth and religious experience. As with all courageous acts, it takes up considerable dangers—those of provoking hostility as well as the danger of being misunderstood. Medjugorje has become the most popular site of Marian pilgrimage since Fatima, and a questioning of its truth is bound to generate a debate. However, it isn't necessary to agree with every aspect of his judgment on Medjugorje to realize that he is raising important points about the visions which do need to be dealt with.

Foley gained the right to address this difficult question by an extremely important book he wrote just a few years ago—*Marian Apparitions, the Bible, and the Modern World*—in which he not only summarized the story of Marian apparitions in modern times, but also connected the main apparitions, with great precision and erudition, both to historical events and biblical passages, in a way which had a considerable, stunning, even frightening coherence.

I would like to make three major points. First, whatever caused the visions at Medjugorje—which began on 24 June 1981—this happened at a place and time that gained a significance later that no living human beings could have known in advance. At that moment, Medjugorje was a provincial backwater deep in the heartland of Communist Yugoslavia, and though a highly liminal point, literally at the border zone between Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, or Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity and Islam, this was hardly visible at that time. If anybody would have predicted then that exactly (to the day) ten years later the Yugoslavian state would have ceased to exist, this would have only provoked a combination of hilarious laughter and stunned consternation, and a

serious dilemma whether a mental hospital or a high security prison is the better place for such a blasphemous fool.

Second, part of Foley's argument is concerned with the character of the visionaries as a validation of truth claims. In their behavior he quite rightly perceives a basic contrast with Fatima. While the validity of this point cannot be denied, the reasons, I believe, might be even more complex. The seers of Fatima, and almost all the other recognized seers, were not only much younger than most of the visionaries of Medjugorje, but they also did not go through the experience of Communism. Central to such experiences was not simply the suffering and deprivation under a dictatorial regime, but the utter moral and intellectual degradation undergone in a regime that made confusion and self-abandonment into the central principles of its functioning; and in this precise sense, Yugoslavia went further than most of its neighbors. Short of a detailed exposition of this Communist "experience", I can only signal that much of the perplexity related to the conduct of the visionaries can be rendered intelligible through such confusion—with the proviso that, as it can explain everything, it of course does not explain anything in particular. No other place needed more of an eruption of transcendence than a former Communist country—but for exactly the same reasons, in no other place would it have been easier to imitate or abuse genuine spirituality.

The third point moves outside the realm of human experience but—or rather exactly because of this—might be the most important of all. The irruption of the transcendental into our world is awesome, indeed overwhelming, revealing not only the presence of the divine but at the same time our radical powerlessness. It is by no means accidental or irrational that humans everywhere developed various ways to minimize the impact of this dangerous force, ranging from ignoring its existence (characteristic of the Enlightenment attitude), to attempts to control it by magic, or by the more sophisticated trick through which the unconditional acceptance and adoration of past instances of transcendence is used to "exorcise" any further divine contact, by conjuring up the image of the "hidden god" or the "last prophecy"—something which, strangely, brings out the close ties between Judaism, Protestantism and Islam.

In this context, the resurgence, even outright domination, of Marian apparitions in modern times poses all kind of puzzles. Why is it that the direct presence of various saints, or of Christ himself, is no longer experienced today? What does it mean that the figure of the Virgin Mother seems to take up an exclusive mediatory role between the divine and the human realms in our days—exactly at the moment when, in social life, including politics and increasingly even in religion, issues of gender and sexuality take up an increasingly dominant role, and in directions exactly opposed to the figure and message of Mary?

Questions like these of course cannot be answered by means of science or even philosophy; but the social sciences like anthropology, history, or sociology, could bring in a number of facts and perspectives that can help us reflect on the significance of these phenomena. And, if we do not want to stick our head into the sand, in the legendary fashion of the ostrich, but are trying to make sense of the events that take place around us, communication with the realm of the divine can only be ignored at our peril.

Whether one agrees or not with the conclusions of Donal Foley, one thing cannot be doubted: this book is the product of a serious, genuine search for the truth. And hopefully in this we can all agree: that once truth is liberated from the prison where it was enclosed by a one-sided, “routinized” mechanization misconceived as science, then this is of primary importance for any work of human thought.

Professor Arpad Szakolczai
Sociology Department, University College Cork

Introduction

The basic facts about Medjugorje can be related quite quickly. Beginning on 24 June 1981, six young people from the locality, a small village in Bosnia-Herzegovina, five of them in their mid-teens, and one aged ten, began to claim that they were seeing the Blessed Virgin Mary on a bleak hillside near their homes. Four were girls, and two boys. Very rapidly, news of this spread—initially in the village itself and then throughout still-Communist Yugoslavia. Great crowds of pilgrims congregated as the days went on and the visionaries claimed that they were still seeing Our Lady, or the *Gospa*, as she is known in Croatian. Some of the local Franciscan priests supported these claims, and even the Bishop, Msgr Zanic, was open to this possibility initially, although over a period of time, he began to have serious doubts.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of pilgrims from further afield came to visit during the 1980s, as Medjugorje became well known throughout the Catholic Church. The civil war in Yugoslavia in the early nineties only temporarily affected its popularity, and for nearly twenty-five years now, some of the visionaries have been claiming to receive daily visitations from the Blessed Mother.

Great numbers still journey to Medjugorje, even though the present Bishop, Msgr Peric, has declared himself opposed to the visions, and despite the fact that in 1991 the Bishops' Conference of ex-Yugoslavia came to the conclusion that it could not be affirmed that "supernatural apparitions and revelations" had taken place there. In addition, the claims of the visionaries have received no official support from the Vatican. That, very briefly, is an outline of what has taken place regarding Medjugorje, but there are other aspects to these events which this work will seek to bring out.

In order to do this, it is necessary to look initially at the historical background to Medjugorje, including the local Franciscan

dispute with official Church authority which has affected Bosnia-Herzegovina in recent years. This forms a backdrop to the Medjugorje visions, and without an understanding of this discord, the reader will not grasp one of the main causative factors behind the growth of Medjugorje.

Another major contributory factor has been the conjunction between the Charismatic Movement and the visions. Again, without this factor of a Charismatic network already in place around the world—and able to support the visions and the visionaries—it is doubtful if Medjugorje would have had anything like the impact it has had on the Church.

A crucial point is that most of the early books about Medjugorje were based on quite late interviews with the visionaries, and the primary source material—tapes made during the first week or so of the visions—have been for the most part ignored. On examination, these reveal some hitherto largely unknown facts about Medjugorje, and this book is thus, amongst other things, concerned with assessing the importance of the evidence found on these tapes.

Prologue - Assault on a Bishop

An angry mob breaks into a bishop's official residence. They search for him, going from room to room until they find him. They drag him outside and pressure him to agree to their demands. He refuses and says that if necessary he will suffer just as Christ had to suffer. This type of language only makes them more infuriated, and some of them press forward, tearing off his pectoral cross, ripping his cape, and then assaulting him. He tells them that automatic excommunication is the penalty for attacking a bishop, but they pay no heed, dragging him off and imprisoning him. They hold him until late at night, their mood growing uglier with every moment, his life in imminent danger. The mob thinks he has insulted some of their deceased relatives; they shout that they have plenty of weapons. Finally, a local leader manages to persuade the crowd to disperse, and the Bishop narrowly escapes their clutches.¹

This didn't happen during the Middle Ages, or more recently, under a totalitarian regime. This incident happened in March 1995, in an at least nominally Catholic European area.

The Bishop in question was Bishop Ratko Peric, the Ordinary of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a region which was shrouded in obscurity until the 1980s, when the events at a small village called Medjugorje started to become famous in the Catholic Church and beyond. Bishop Peric's "crime" was that as part of the restructuring of his diocese, he had asked the local Franciscan friars to stop using the church hall which had functioned as their parochial centre, and to take up some new appointments. They refused, and along with a large group of parishioners decided to take their protests directly to the Bishop. The result was the incident outlined above,² in which the Franciscans in question chose not to interfere because they have been involved in a lengthy dispute with the local bishops, a tragic disagreement with deep historical roots, one which has seriously affected the Catholic Church in the region, and which has now become linked with the visions at Medjugorje.

The Medjugorje Tapes and the Visionaries

Questions about the Visionaries

If we look at the visionaries as individuals, and likewise at their general backgrounds, we can better understand the *milieu* in which the visions arose. It certainly seems fair to describe their family life as less than ideal: for example, Vicka Ivankovic's father was an overseas worker, while her mother suffered from depression; in addition, Ivanka Ivankovic's mother had just died, and according to Fr Sivric, another, Mirjana Dragicevic, may well have had psychological problems.³⁴

This general point is backed up in an interview, which took place on 27 February 1983, between Marinko Ivankovic, a "father figure" to the visionaries, and Fr Svetozar Kraljevic, the author of *The Apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje*. Marinko, the next-door neighbor of both Marija and Vicka in Bijakovici, was asked by the priest why he had involved himself with them, given that he was nearly forty, and a grown man with a family of his own. He responded to this by saying "the children have sometimes found themselves in difficult circumstances, especially Ivanka. She was the first in the group who saw the light and the Madonna. Her mother was dead and her father was in Germany. Practically, too, Jakov does not have a father; he lives in Bosnia but rarely visits here. Then Mirjana's family lives in Sarajevo. *In one way or another, the children did not have parental advice or the protection of parents.*"³⁵ Mary Craig described them as follows: "They

were very different in temperament, social background and mental capacity—their intelligence ranging from slightly above to way below average.”³⁶

These are indications that the visionaries were to a greater or lesser extent emotionally vulnerable in some way, and therefore susceptible to the risk of things going wrong in any encounter with the preternatural.

The French anthropologist Élisabeth Claverie points out another possible source of the visionaries’ experiences, that is, the prevalent societal interest in parapsychology, which she describes as being very widespread in Yugoslavia during Tito’s time.³⁷ Parapsychology is the belief in, and investigation of, allegedly extrasensory phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, ghosts, or poltergeists, and apparitions of the dead. It could be argued that this type of mentality might have predisposed the visionaries to “see” something on Podbrdo.

As noted above, it is also the case that the visionaries were apparently not part of Fr Zovko’s Charismatic prayer group, that is they were not particularly “religious,” and thus to some extent were outsiders.³⁸ Contrast the above deficiencies with the beautiful picture of family life which emerges from Sr Lucia’s second volume of her autobiography, *Fatima in Lucia’s own words II*.³⁹ This gives us the background to the apparitions, and shows how the three seers of Fatima, Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia, were very privileged in that they were brought up in a wonderful Catholic atmosphere, both in terms of their home life and the surrounding culture. Although they were relatively poor in physical terms, they were very rich in the blessings of the Faith, and in particular they did not come from families which were to some extent or other troubled.

The Medjugorje Tapes

Many of the standard accounts of the Medjugorje are based on interviews made by Frs Tomislav Vlastic and Svetozar Kraljevic about a year and a half after the original visions began in June 1981, or on the interviews with Vicka conducted by Fr Janko Bubalo. These were published later on, in 1985, as part of *A Thousand Encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary in Medjugorje*—the title being a reference to Vicka’s alleged claims of daily

visions since 1981. Obviously, eighteen months or more is a long time during which to retain detailed memories of the crowded first days of the alleged visits of the Blessed Virgin, and so it is legitimate to raise questions as to just how reliable those interviews really were. Fortunately, much earlier material is available: namely, the original seventeen interviews with the visionaries which were taped at Medjugorje by Fr Zovko, and Fr Cuvalo, the parochial vicar, from 27–30 June 1981.

The great value of these tapes lies in their spontaneity, in the fact that they are true-to-life dialogues between the two priests and the visionaries, in which all the essential details about what happened during the first week or so become apparent. They are a “warts and all” depiction of what really took place, and as such they are innately superior to the better-known but much later Medjugorje accounts. It is true that sections of the tapes are indistinct, but overall there is certainly enough clear information on them to justify regarding the tapes as the primary source material on Medjugorje; in any case, the quality of the tapes is understandable given the circumstances under which they were made. Clearly, these contemporary interviews are far more likely to give an accurate record of what actually took place during those crucial first days, than any interviews conducted later on, but they have been almost completely ignored by the principal Medjugorje chroniclers such as Fr Laurentin.

Mary Craig details a conversation between Fr Zovko and his housekeeper immediately on his return to Medjugorje, during the first week of the visions, in which he asked her if Fr Cuvalo had spoken to the visionaries. She responded: “Yes, and he’s recorded the conversations.” Craig then tells us that Fr Zovko found the cassette and listened to it, and that he “began tape-recording all his conversations with the children.” Further on, she even mentions the 30 June interview between Fr Zovko and visionaries, saying “the tape of this interview still exists.”

Similarly, Fr Michael O’Carroll, another pro-Medjugorje author, in speaking of the fifth day of the visions, Sunday 28 June, mentions that after Mass that morning “the children went through a wearying interrogation by the parish priest, Fr Jozo.”⁴⁰ Likewise, as we will see, Fr Janko Bubalo was certainly aware of these tapes, and

challenged Vicka about elements from them during his interviews with her. But apart from Daria Klanac, pro-Medjugorje writers do not give us any extended details of them, and thus in their accounts we are asked to rely largely on recollections which were recorded much later.

Regarding these original tape-recorded interviews, then, although the methodology used by the priests was far from perfect, they do give essential source material about the visions. It was believed that the Communist authorities had confiscated these tapes when Fr Zovko was arrested, but Fr Sivric relates that his friend, Grgo Kozina, had managed to copy them beforehand, and was then able to pass on duplicates to him. From the evidence provided by sources such as Fr Bubalo, it is clear that other copies of these tapes must also have been in circulation. Fr Sivric then painstakingly transcribed their contents and published them in full in the lengthy appendices to his book on Medjugorje.⁴¹ Daria Klanac, a Canadian citizen of Croatian origin, and a Medjugorje supporter—who by 2001 had organized more than sixty pilgrimages to the town, involving thousands of pilgrims—has also published transcripts of the original tapes in her book *Aux Sources de Medjugorje*. She tells us that she likewise obtained her tapes from Grgo Kozina.⁴²

Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that when these two versions of the transcripts are compared—one by a pro-Medjugorje writer, and the other by a critic—they are found to be substantially the same. However, it is rather curious that Klanac completely omits the first three tapes recorded by Fr Cuvalo, before the return of Fr Zovko. In any event, of the remaining tape transcripts, as regards the essential points, they are in agreement.

Reasons for Differences

Such variations as there are mainly involve differences in word order, which are understandable given that the transcriptions in Fr Sivric's *French* edition of his book were translated from the original language into English, and then into French, whereas Daria Klanac did her translation directly into French. Also, naturally enough, in the process of translation, since words can have more than one meaning, a particular word in the original language can be trans-

lated in more than one way—and this clearly also affects phrases and indeed whole sentences.

The remaining differences between the transcriptions can be categorized in a number of ways. These include short sections which Fr Sivric was presumably unable to satisfactorily translate, perhaps because of the poorer quality of the tapes he had to work with, or because he was older and thus his hearing was less acute than that of Daria Klanac—always bearing in mind, of course, that at times the material on the tapes was very confused, with interruptions or voices being mixed up indiscriminately. This also led Fr Sivric to occasionally mistake one speaker for another. But equally, Klanac acknowledges the difficulties involved in transcribing the tapes, and admits that some words and phrases escaped her.⁴³ Another category of differences involves sections of the tapes which Klanac includes, but which are missing in Fr Sivric's text—although, in one instance, involving the tape made of the interview between Fr Zovko and Ivan, on the evening of 28 June, Fr Sivric has more material than her.⁴⁴

The essential point to note is that the “missing” material is not crucial to the arguments presented in this book. This mainly comes from two of the interviews with Jakov, the youngest of the visionaries. In the interview carried out on the morning of 27 June 1981, Klanac has approximately 40% more material than Fr Sivric,⁴⁵ while in the interview on 28 June, there is a more serious discrepancy, since Klanac's has approximately 80% more material.⁴⁶ But as noted above, this material is not of crucial importance, and essentially involves Jakov elaborating on his experiences, including such aspects as reporting some of the purported words of the Gospa, indicating how the visionaries prayed on the hillside, and giving the reaction of his mother. Regarding the material on the tape of the interview with Mirjana on the morning of 28 June, Klanac has just under 50% more material, but again it is essentially a question of her describing her experiences in more detail, under questioning from Fr Zovko.⁴⁷ There are also a few other instances of this type amongst the other transcripts.

It is not clear why this material was missing on Fr Sivric's tapes, but it may well be that during the process of copying it was not thought worth preserving, or perhaps practical considerations such

as fitting the interviews onto tapes of differing lengths were involved. Or the person doing the copying, Grgo Kozina, may have mistakenly failed to copy some of the interviews in their entirety. Certainly, it does not seem that any sinister motive can be imputed for these particular differences because the material involved is really quite innocuous.

The last category of differences would appear to be easier to explain, as it involves statements which might well have proved embarrassing if not dangerous for those involved, had they been widely circulated during the early eighties, when Communism was still in place. An example of this is found in the interview with Mirjana of 27 June, in which Fr Zovko asked her if she had been persecuted at school in Sarajevo because she went to church, to which she replied in the affirmative.⁴⁸ There are further examples in the transcript of the last tape, which involved five of the visionaries. One section, which mentions the Communist militia, is missing in Fr Sivric's version, while another, which mentioned that one of the young women present with the visionaries that day, Ljubica Vasilj-Glucic, worked for the local Communist "executive committee," is also missing. There is also a missing section which speaks of the mother of Vicka—arguably the "principal" visionary—as being depressed, and which also gives personal details about her family. There is mention, too, of cassettes with Croatian hymns which were decorated with forbidden nationalist symbols. A section which refers to the chief of the militia, a certain Zdravko, has also been removed, as have two further references to the executive committee, including the name of a certain Marinko Sego, who is described as its president.⁴⁹

It is important to realize, however, that the majority of the tapes, as transcribed by the two authors, are virtually the same, once allowance is made for differences in word order, and the points noted above. This also includes other minor considerations, such as short unintelligible sections which Fr Sivric conscientiously noted. The material on seven of the twelve tapes dealt with by Daria Klanac is virtually the same as that found in Fr Sivric's transcripts, and overall, if we exclude the three tapes indicated above, those involving Jakov and Mirjana, then approximately 92% of the

material is common to both authors. If we include those tapes, then approximately 85% of the material is substantially the same.

The Tape Transcripts are Reliable

Clearly, these tapes are of primary importance in understanding Medjugorje, and that is why a study of their contents forms one of the central aspects of this book. The reality is that they are a severe embarrassment to the official position held by supporters of Medjugorje. The most important sections of the tapes are fully dealt with in the chapters which follow, and it is undoubtedly providential that they survived. No one of any credibility has challenged the fact of their existence and importance, but there have been attempts to question the validity of Fr Sivric's transcriptions by Fr Ljudevit Rupcic, a zealous Medjugorje supporter. He argued that because the transcriptions in Fr Sivric's *French* edition of his book have been translated from the original language into English, and then into French, that this somehow calls into question their content. But this is clearly not the case since all that matters is whether or not these translations have been accurate.⁵⁰

Anthropologist Élisabeth Claverie, who is the research director at the French organization, CNRS, spent a great deal of time in Medjugorje during the early nineties, and could be described as being "neutral" with regard to the reality or otherwise of the visions. In the section of her book detailing the sources she had used, she agrees with the position taken above in indicating that the differences between Fr Sivric's transcriptions of the tapes, and those of Daria Klanac, are minimal. But after discussing both transcriptions with various parishioners in numerous discussions, her preference was to base her own book on the work of Fr Sivric rather than that of Daria Klanac. Furthermore, Claverie writes that following her own research and crosschecking, she came to the conclusion that the tapes used by Fr Sivric were reliable copies of the original recordings.⁵¹

Prelude to the Visions

Fr Laurentin claims that Fr Jozo Zovko only arrived at St James's parish in Medjugorje shortly before the first vision, but this is incorrect. In fact, Fr Zovko had been appointed pastor nine months

before, in October 1980, but he was not present when the visions began, and only learned of them on 27 June, when he returned from a retreat he had been giving at a convent in northern Croatia. Just before the first vision, Medjugorje was struck by a particularly violent thunderstorm, which raged during the early hours of the morning of Wednesday 24 June. The post office was struck by lightning, caught fire, and was half burnt down. The lightning strike put the phones out of order and thus Fr Zovko was not fully aware of what was going on in Medjugorje; on his return he was confronted by a huge crowd outside his church.

To put all this in the context of the ongoing situation in Eastern Europe and further afield, the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II had taken place only the previous month, on 13 May 1981, and there was rising tension between the Solidarity movement in Poland and the Communist leadership. Thus, the visions began at a critical moment.⁵²

First Day – Wednesday 24 June 1981

The first vision allegedly took place later that afternoon as Ivanka Ivankovic and Mirjana Dragicevic were walking along the road near Bijakovici. Ivanka claimed that she could see the “Gospa,” although Mirjana was apparently uncertain. Later on, having left a message for Vicka Ivankovic, the pair climbed up to Podbrdo—to collect the sheep according to Ivan Dragicevic’s testimony—and saw a vision. Ivan was close to them, having been picking apples nearby with another Ivan, Ivan Ivankovic, a twenty-year-old local man who later dissociated himself from the visionaries because he disapproved of their behavior.

In his taped interview with Fr Cuvalo, which took place on the afternoon of 27 June, Ivan Dragicevic says that he heard somebody saying: “The light is appearing up there.” Then Vicka and Ivanka called to him inviting him to go up, since they said that something, “like the Gospa” had appeared to them. He then said that they went up and had a similar experience. Fr Cuvalo asked Ivan what he saw once he had reached the girls and looked up, to which he replied: “I saw the light.” However, he was not very articulate, and could hardly find the words to describe what he had seen, but it appears that he saw a vision of a “feminine” figure bathed in light,

wearing a veil, and a crown which “shone like silver,” hovering on a cloud above the stony ground.⁵³

The Blessed Virgin – or Something Diabolical?

One of the strangest aspects of Ivan Dragicevic’s testimony on this occasion is that he tells us that the hands of the Vision were “trembling.” This is clearly out of character with regard to the Blessed Virgin, who is obviously by nature calm and serene. So this raises the question as to whether it might indicate a diabolical involvement. This point is emphasized by Msgr Farges, author of the celebrated study entitled *Mystical Phenomena*:

The signs of diabolical intervention are well known. The devil’s deeds always carry with them at least some ridiculous, unseemly, or coarse details; or even something opposed to faith and morals. If his vices were too obvious his influence would soon be unmasked; they are therefore always disguised under more or less inoffensive appearances, even under deceitful traits of virtue and sanctity. He transforms himself at will into an angel of light. God occasionally allows him to assume the most majestic forms, such as those of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or the saints. Nevertheless—for God could not otherwise permit it—the disguise, no matter how bold, is never complete, and he always betrays himself in some particular which cannot escape an attentive and prudent observer. Furthermore, the work of the devil becomes very soon unmasked by evil results, for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.⁵⁴

According to Vicka’s *Diary*, as translated by Fr Sivric, which he tells us was actually written for her by one of her sisters, Ana, she returned to the apparition site at around 6:30 P.M., with Mirjana and Ivanka, and it was the latter who then first saw the Gospa, at which point the others also saw her. Vicka claims that the Vision was holding a baby-like object, while waving at them to come closer, but that she got frightened and ran back to the village. The visionaries told everyone that they had seen the Gospa, and some apparently responded that since that day was the feast of St John the Baptist, perhaps they could expect something miraculous. During the vision, Mirjana had apparently asked for a sign so that everyone would believe them, and, according to Vicka, the hour hand on a wristwatch turned right around, which she took as a sign. However, Bishop Zanic later took this particular watch to a watch-

maker who confirmed that it was broken, and because of this, the dial could rotate and thus, at the least touch, modify the position of the numbers. Vicka reports that: “We kept touching her and kissing her, and she kept laughing.”⁵⁵

The Smoking Visionaries

It seems that Fr Cuvalo had suspicions that Podbrdo was a place which some young people visited to smoke—this certainly seems to be the drift of some of the questions he put to Vicka, Ivanka and Marija during the first interview he tape recorded. Regarding the people who were with them during the first vision, he asked if they had smoked.⁵⁶ They denied this, but it would be a strange question to put unless he had suspicions on the matter. Certainly, according to René Laurentin and René Lejeune, the girls *had* been smoking—they describe Mirjana’s embarrassment at Ivanka saying she was seeing the Gospa, because “they had been out smoking secretly.”⁵⁷

Fr Laurentin later made the position even clearer when he wrote: “The first two visionaries, Ivanka and Mirjana, held back for some time the fact that they were not only going to listen to some tapes that day, but were actually planning to go and smoke some of the tobacco which they threaded all day long with their families.” He then says that “personal details” like this should remain private,⁵⁸ but this is ridiculous: the beginning of the visions is such a crucial moment that we are entitled to know as much about it as possible.

The evidence indicates, then, that the two visionaries did indeed smoke once they arrived at Podbrdo. In other words, just prior to their supposed meeting with the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the two visionaries had been smoking. This certainly puts the initial stages of the Medjugorje event in a new light, and makes it very difficult to accept that this was a genuine supernatural visitation.

Wayne Weible gives us even more of these “personal details,” telling us that on the first evening, “Ivanka and Mirjana, having finished evening chores, had slipped off to a secluded spot to listen to rock music while smoking cigarettes pilfered from their fathers.”

Sadly then, not only had the visionaries been smoking and listening to music, but they had also stolen the very cigarettes that

they smoked. It would be interesting to know exactly what music they had been listening to, given the way that some types of rock music clearly have evil, not to say diabolical, connotations. Weible argues that: "To millions who would later journey to Medjugorje on pilgrimage, this venial act of experimentation would serve as an example that God chooses ordinary people for extraordinary missions."⁵⁹

Or alternatively, and more accurately, one could argue that these further details make it even more unlikely that the visionaries did actually see the Blessed Virgin. There is a curious parallel here to what took place at Garabandal in Spain, in the 1960s. There, the four young visionaries involved had been stealing apples immediately prior to the first vision they saw, allegedly of an angel, on 18 June 1961.⁶⁰ Like Medjugorje, Garabandal has never received any official Church approval.

When Mirjana was interviewed by Fr Zovko on 28 June, she described what had happened at the local hospital at Citluk, where she had been offered a cigarette by one of the doctors, and had refused saying: "I don't smoke." He had responded by saying: "You don't smoke this kind?"—undoubtedly a reference to the possibility in his mind that she may have been smoking drugs—to which she even more emphatically responded: "No cigarettes at all!"⁶¹ Clearly, on this occasion she had not told the truth, which certainly calls her general credibility into question.

In fact, rumors that at least some of the girls were smoking drugs were circulating in the village within the first few days. Mary Craig reports what Fr Cuvalo said to Fr Zovko on his return: "One of the girls, Mirjana Dragicevic, comes from a grammar school in Sarajevo and they're saying she brought drugs with her, maybe in cigarettes. She's started giving drugs to the children, and now they're claiming to see visions." Following intervention by the increasingly concerned authorities, on the afternoon of Saturday 27 June the visionaries had been taken to a nearby town, Citluk, for medical tests. Fr Cuvalo, though, expressed his displeasure that no blood or urine tests for drugs had been taken: "Look, we've heard that the girl from Sarajevo brought in drugs. And another thing, they say that one of the children is an epileptic and a hysteric."⁶²

All of this indicates that the accounts of the first day's visions were unclear. Moreover, as we will see, these accounts are totally unlike those found in cases of authentic apparitions of Mary.

The Gospa and the Light

As regards the actual appearance of the Gospa, the tapes give us the basic details. The visionaries described her as being aged between nineteen and twenty, with a white veil and gray dress. Her veil covered her black hair, her eyes were blue, and her head was crowned with stars. She was said to float above the ground. Of particular note is the fact that the visionaries saw her gradually emerge from a "light"—the importance of this point will become apparent as we proceed—and that the Vision was prone to appear and disappear.⁶³ That the Vision had a "gray" dress has given rise to unfavorable comment, gray not being a color normally associated with the Blessed Virgin.

Jakov's remarks certainly seem to indicate that he really did see something. This is apparent in his taped interview with Fr Zovko, which took place on the afternoon of 27 June. In response to the priest's question as to the appearance of the Gospa, when she manifested herself, he said: "It lighted up three times when I saw her. Three times, it lighted up and all of a sudden, the Gospa appeared up there."⁶⁴ So once again, the theme of "light" is present, but the indications that the visionaries were able to touch and kiss the Vision, and that she was laughing, seem rather strange, and indicate that the Vision was not the Blessed Virgin. The last point in particular, that the Vision was laughing, is quite disturbing, and completely out of character with the deportment of Our Lady during her approved apparitions—she has been known to smile on occasion, but there is obviously a big difference between this and outright laughter.

More Questionable Evidence

Mirjana's testimony, available to us in an interview taped by Fr Zovko on the afternoon of 27 June, substantially supports what was said by the other visionaries. Her response to the Vision, however, did not follow the traditional pattern. She describes how she

became excited at seeing the Gospa, saying how the experience was “delightful” for her, and that she wasn’t afraid.⁶⁵

Msgr Farges, however, has this to say on the difference between divine and diabolical visions:

The divine vision produces at first a feeling of fear and astonishment in the soul that is conscious of its unworthiness, but it ends by bringing peacefulness and heavenly joy. The diabolical vision, on the contrary, begins by bringing joy, a sense of safety and sweetness, and ends in anxiety, sadness, fear, and disgust. The first develops the virtues, especially humility, in the soul of the seer, who will seek to hide such great favours in silence and secrecy. The second, on the contrary, develops feelings of vanity, vainglory, and a wish to parade the visions. The public effects should also be noticed. Divine visions never produce scandal, disorder, or trouble in the Church, while the others inevitably engender these evils.⁶⁶

Regarding Mirjana’s experiences, it is clear, in the light of the above evidence from Msgr Farges, that what she was describing does not seem to bear the characteristic of the divine. Ideally, Fr Zovko should have asked her about how she had felt later on, but he neglected to do this, and so all that can be said with certainty is that her initial reaction followed the negative pattern outlined above by Msgr Farges.

Regarding his second point, on the way the vision ends, that is with feelings of “anxiety, sadness, fear, and disgust,” the following testimony from Marija, as taped on 27 June, is very interesting. She told Fr Cuvalo that on returning home on the second evening, she had to repeatedly explain to her parents what had happened. They then prepared supper for her and placed it before her on the table, but she reacted as follows: “I was scared, I wasn’t able to eat, my hands were completely white; when I saw her for the first time my hands were cold like ice.”⁶⁷

In the interview with three of the visionaries taped by Fr Cuvalo on 27 June 1981, it emerges that the visionaries saw the Gospa holding something on the first evening. Ivanka testified that: “We saw something like a baby ... then she covered it up ...” They were apparently not close enough during this first vision to see any more, and it does not seem as though the Vision said anything on this

occasion, although she did nod her head when Vicka asked if she was going to come the next day.⁶⁸

It is hard to imagine why the Vision would have wanted to cover up the Baby Jesus, if it really was the Blessed Virgin, and this event contrasts strongly with the incident in 1925, when Lucia of Fatima, who was by then eighteen, had become a postulant with the Sisters of St Dorothy at Pontevedra in Spain. On Thursday 10 December 1925, the Blessed Virgin, accompanied by the Child Jesus on a little cloud, appeared to her in her cell. Lucia recounted that Mary rested one hand on her shoulder, while showing her a heart encircled by thorns in her other hand. Far from being covered up, the Child Jesus actually then spoke to her, saying: “Have pity on the Heart of your Most Holy Mother. It is covered with the thorns with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to remove them with an act of reparation.”⁶⁹

Second Day - Thursday 25 June 1981

Ivan Dragicevic was absent on this occasion, having decided to spend the evening picking tobacco. According to the interview taped by Fr Cuvalo on 27 June, Vicka said that other people could see something on the hill, and she tells us that a woman told them to go up since they were being invited. It is apparent, too, that the visionaries were receiving directions from onlookers, and that when they reached Podbrdo, they “spotted her,” and that “the light” was all around them.⁷⁰

The mention of other people seeing “something” is very interesting, and certainly goes a long way towards explaining why the visionaries’ stories were taken seriously by some villagers right from the beginning—although it seems that by the end of the first week the general mood had grown less supportive. Certainly, Vicka’s testimony here seems convincing, since, given that she was speaking only a few days after the event, it would have been very easy for Fr Cuvalo to have checked up on this point regarding other witnesses. It is hard to believe that he would not have already spoken to local people, and thus have instantly contradicted Vicka if he had thought she was not telling the truth. Ivanka also made similar claims of other people seeing “the light” on Podbrdo, including her sister, and some other women.

We also have this testimony from Marinko Ivankovic, who claimed that about three weeks into the visions, at about 11 P.M. he was on Podbrdo with a group of people, including the visionaries. He looked up and could see a very bright light coming towards them. Marinko was the local man, who, as has been noted above, initially acted as the unofficial “protector” of the visionaries.

Generally speaking, then, the information on their contact with the Gospa given in the taped interviews by the visionaries certainly does have the ring of truth about it. They speak of coming very close to her, and even touching her, although Vicka makes the quite extraordinary comment that, “when you touch her ... the fingers bounce off as if they were of steel.” Once again, though, the Gospa said nothing on this, the second day.⁷¹

In assessing these visions of the first couple of days, then, what surely strikes the impartial observer is firstly, the absence of factors that are normally observed in apparitions which have been subsequently accepted by the Church, and secondly the presence of other factors which raise serious doubts as to their authenticity. Whether it is the fact that some of the visionaries had a possible involvement with drugs, or that the Vision’s hands were trembling, or that at one moment the Vision was laughing—while in general she said nothing—all of this is very strange. None of this accords with the serene, calm presence of the Blessed Virgin, speaking words of reassurance to those who have been favored with her presence that one finds in her recent recognized apparitions. But conversely, it does seem that some people did see strange lights, and so we do not seem to be dealing with hallucinations. It appeared that something was happening up there on Podbrdo, but the exact nature of that “something” still had to be determined. However, the initial signs were hardly encouraging.

Medjugorje: An Ongoing Problem for the Church

Some Conclusions

We have looked, then, at the historical background to Medjugorje, and seen how the long-running dispute between the Franciscans and the local bishops in Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the keys to understanding why Medjugorje has become such a problem for the Church. In addition, we have seen how the link between the Charismatic Movement and the visions has facilitated their acceptance by many Catholics, despite the fact that there has been no Church approval for Medjugorje. Similarly, we have analyzed the crucial role that Fr René Laurentin played in the promotion of the visions, as well as the effect of the numerous books supportive of Medjugorje. This combination of factors has assured Medjugorje its present high profile, despite the serious problems involved in accepting it as genuine.

We have also seen that both the contents of the visions themselves, and the activities of the visionaries, have been far from satisfactory. The early accounts about Medjugorje were mostly based on late interviews, whereas the primary source material, the very revealing tapes made during the first week or so of the visions, has been largely ignored. These tapes indicate that whatever the visionaries saw during this period it was *not* the Blessed Mother. Moreover, they also reveal that there was no real message from the Gospa, and that the visions were supposed to end very quickly.

It has been demonstrated that the arguments often put forward in support of the visions are without serious foundation, and that the wordy and repetitive messages bear almost no relation to what the Blessed Virgin has previously said during her approved apparitions. Similarly, the evidence for miraculous healings and other allegedly supernatural events at Medjugorje has been assessed and found wanting. The activities of some of the Franciscans involved in Medjugorje have been sadly disedifying, while the horrific inter-clan violence which took place in Medjugorje in the early nineties—when pilgrims were mostly absent—surely could not have taken place if Our Lady had truly been appearing there.

While acknowledging that there have been some good fruits arising from Medjugorje, it has been shown that these cannot be used as the sole criteria for assessing the truth of the visions. Likewise, the fact that Medjugorje has been accepted by so many Catholics is not of itself an argument in favor of authenticity. We are still living through the upheavals which have been affecting the Church since the sixties, and it is against this confused and troubled background that the popularity of Medjugorje must be judged.

Mary Craig tells us that on 30 June 1981, a week after the visions began, Fr Zovko made the following admission to Frs Tomislav Pervan and Ivan Dugandzic, saying that it would be “awful” if in the future, “newspaper headlines proclaim that twenty, thirty, maybe even fifty thousand people have been the victims of a hoax on our bleak and barren hillside.”⁴⁴³

The reality is that, twenty-five years later, Fr Zovko’s warning has apparently been borne out—except that he greatly underestimated the numbers involved.

The Church in Crisis

This, then, is the situation which confronts the Church, and the papacy, twenty-five years after the beginning of the visions in 1981. As we have seen, nothing in the official pronouncements of the Church gives any suggestion of approval for Medjugorje, rather it has been regarded as an ongoing problem, one which has been reluctantly tolerated.

The Church in the West has still not recovered from the aftermath of the cultural revolution which, in the wake of Vatican II,

threatened to overwhelm it. Catechesis has largely collapsed, and the result has been large numbers of ill-formed Catholics, who have turned out to be easy prey for those involved in promoting suspect visions. Similarly, the loss of a sense of the sacred which followed the changes in the liturgy has left many Catholics looking for spiritual solace elsewhere. In addition, influential theologians have played a large part in giving questionable visions like Medjugorje a degree of respectability and mass appeal. These are probably the main reasons why Medjugorje has had such an impact on the Church, and they indicate the difficulties faced by the Holy See in formulating a policy to deal with it.

Pope John Paul II's Position

Indeed, Pope John Paul found himself in a situation very like that outlined by Christ in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. (Matt 13:24–30)

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?" He said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he said, "No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Pope John Paul II was the householder who had to tolerate the Medjugorje "weeds" which were sowed in the field of the Church. The point of the parable is that in the beginning, when both the weeds and the wheat sprout, they are very difficult to distinguish. In the same way, at the beginning, many of the signs associated with Medjugorje seemed good. Thus it had to be given time to develop. But, having been given that time, it is now quite clear that the weeds are largely just that, weeds. They have grown up and are threatening to overwhelm the good seed, that is, the message of Fatima. Unfortunately, Medjugorje is proving to be a long-lasting

plant, and it does not look as though it will wither away by itself; rather some sort of negative declaration coming from the highest levels of the Church will be necessary. But the “harvest” is surely approaching, the time when Medjugorje will have to be uprooted from the Church, regardless of the difficulties this will involve.

As Michael Davies puts it:

It would seem that the Vatican is delaying its announcement that nothing supernatural has occurred at Medjugorje, for fear of the reaction among its devotees, but the longer it delays the announcement, which must inevitably come, the greater will be the number of those devotees and the greater their disillusionment. When the announcement comes, many souls will be lost to the Church, as they will prefer the authority of spurious messages to the authority of the Magisterium.⁴⁴⁴

At the same time, the good seed must be protected and promoted, that is, the message of Fatima must be proclaimed much more strongly throughout the Church. While sites of alleged visions such as Medjugorje continue to attract large crowds, rank and file Catholics are neglecting Fatima, despite the fact that it has attracted unprecedented approval from the Church.

The Truth of Fatima: The Problems with Medjugorje

As we have seen above, the truth and power of the Fatima message have become quite clear over the years. But despite all this, and the complete lack of any official backing for Medjugorje, the latter has mysteriously maintained a very high level of support among Catholics.

If Medjugorje was nothing more than a series of false visions, then the Church is resilient enough to cope with that. There have been false visions and false visionaries throughout Church history, but sooner or later they become manifest and remedial action is taken. It is true that for a quarter of a century, millions of people have been misled into believing in Medjugorje in good faith, but in a pastoral sense, over time, that damage can be undone. But Medjugorje is much more than a passing difficulty which can be shrugged off with little in the way of ill effects. The truth is that it has played a very damaging role in diverting Catholics from Fatima. The reader might ask: is Fatima really that crucial? And the answer

most certainly is “Yes,” it is that vital. It represents an unprecedented intervention on the part of the Blessed Virgin in order to bring back to Christ a world which is increasingly denying and rejecting the Gospel of eternal salvation precisely as she warned us at Fatima. Its effects are still being worked out nearly a century after the original apparitions, and its message will be of great importance for many decades to come.

During the July 1917 apparition, Our Lady, as part of the secret, told the children that: “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. ... and a period of peace will be granted to the world.” This is an extremely complex subject,⁴⁴⁵ but suffice to say that the most realistic interpretation of these words involves seeing in them a prophecy of a great worldwide triumph for the Church, and a time of global peace. We only have to look around us to see how many conflicts are raging, conflicts which often have deep historical roots and which do not seem, humanly speaking, to be capable of resolution. The threat of further violence is ever present, and it is difficult to see how there can be genuine peace in the world unless there is a major change in the present way of thinking. Just as the growth of Christendom was an imperfect example of the way that a society based on Catholicism could be lived out, so also we need to look forward to a new Christendom, a new “civilization of love,” a worldwide civilization based on the teaching of the Church, as Pope John Paul II proclaimed throughout his pontificate.

Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

If the triumph of Mary’s Immaculate Heart is nothing more than a patching up of the present system so that it can creak along, then it will be a very poor triumph. We are talking here of a radical transformation of the world—otherwise the use of the word “triumph” is completely inappropriate. And it should be obvious, too, that such a triumph is not going to happen overnight. The deep-seated problems presently convulsing the world are not, it would seem, going to be solved in a decade or two.

This idea, that the triumph of Mary’s Immaculate Heart is going to be of worldwide importance, is clearly present in the writings of some well-known Marian saints.

St Louis de Montfort, author of the famous *True Devotion to Mary*, wrote, in the early eighteenth century, of the “great saints of the latter times,” who by their word and example, “shall draw the *whole world* to true devotion to Mary.” He also described how they would, “imbued with the spirit of Mary, ... work great wonders in the world, so as to destroy sin and to establish the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, her Son, upon the ruins of the kingdom of this corrupt world.”⁴⁴⁶

This prophecy, incidentally, only emphasizes the point made above about the conversion of Russia, that is, that this will not happen until there are sufficient apostolic workers on the ground to bring it about, perhaps even to the extent of their working miracles to this end—Russia will certainly not be converted in a religious vacuum. St Louis indeed said that the *whole world* would be drawn to Mary, but also that this would not happen without a great deal of heroic evangelizing work.

Before her death in 1876, St Catherine Labouré, the seer of the Rue du Bac in Paris, made the following fascinating prediction, one which certainly seems to equate with Mary’s words at Fatima: “Oh, how wonderful it will be to hear, ‘Mary is Queen of the Universe ...’ It will be a time of peace, joy and good fortune that will last long; she will be carried as a banner and she will make a tour of the world.”⁴⁴⁷

Similarly, one of St John Bosco’s most famous prophetic dreams apparently casts light on the triumph of Mary’s Immaculate Heart. This famous nineteenth-century educator, the founder of the Salesian Order, quite often told his pupils the details of his mysterious dreams, one of which apparently concerned the future of the papacy and the Church. He saw the Catholic Church as a great ship, with a future Pope as its captain in the midst of storms, being increasingly attacked by irreligious forces, as other boats, representing persecutions of all sorts, seemed about to destroy it. But at the last moment, the Pope managed to steer his ship towards two great columns, one representing the Eucharist and the other the Blessed Virgin, and a great period of peace then descended on the Church and the world. This prophecy ties in very well with the message of Fatima, that, following persecutions and the recognition of Mary’s

importance and her association with the Eucharist, the world will be given a period of peace.⁴⁴⁸

More recently, St Maximilian Kolbe, the great martyr of Auschwitz, summed up the situation succinctly when he said that mankind “will find true happiness only when Mary Immaculate reigns over the whole world.”⁴⁴⁹

And indeed, Pope John Paul II himself said in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*: “Christ will conquer through [Mary], because he wants the Church’s victories now and in the future to be linked to her.”⁴⁵⁰

Fatima is the Answer

Thus, genuine Marian devotion, as contained in the message of Fatima, in reality provides a blueprint for the whole Church for the foreseeable future, and particularly, as we have seen, in regard of the promotion of the Five First Saturdays devotion. For that reason alone it is of enormous importance. This is not to say, though, that Fatima is some sort of panacea for all the problems in the Church—rather its message is meant to be seen as part of a complete renewal of Catholicism, one involving evangelization, catechesis, and so on. But factors in this renewal, such as the importance of the Five First Saturdays devotion, have certainly been seriously underrated.

For the good of the Church, then, it is necessary that a genuine and properly regulated Marian piety and practice once more become part of normal Catholic life. This is precisely what the Second Vatican Council intended by means of the teaching about Our Lady in chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*, which clearly indicates the importance of her place in the Church. And the unprecedented Marian teachings of Pope John Paul II likewise indicate that the Church should be much more focused on the role of Mary.

Thus the genuine enthusiasm and any real achievements attached to Medjugorje, where these exist, should be integrated into mainstream Marian Catholicism. This means that the apparently genuine conversions and spiritual good points coming from Medjugorje—for example, the large numbers involved in receiving the Sacraments—somehow need to be harnessed to the ordinary

Marian “channels” which exist in the Church, particularly those involving Fatima.

For if this kind of integration does not happen, then the Medjugorje movement will continue to divert the faithful away from Fatima, and thus risk their becoming even more estranged from the true life of the Church. There are signs to indicate this is already happening, particularly in terms of disobedience to lawful Episcopal authority. Either the “good fruits” of Medjugorje are properly appropriated, or there is a danger that they will evaporate in an excess of enthusiasm, or worse lead to the formation of schismatic or even heretical groups. It has certainly been the case in the past that groups which have started out with the best of intentions have deviated from normality and ended up in opposition to the Church, so this is not a far-fetched scenario.

Heavenly Visions or Religious Illusion?

If you are a Medjugorje supporter, and you have stayed with the book this far, you may be feeling rather upset that you have not previously been informed about the questionable activities that have been described above, and which have gone on for so long and caused so many problems for the Church. It is painful to have to face the fact that someone or something has led us astray. We feel cheated. It is easy, once a person realizes that Medjugorje is not genuine, particularly if they have invested a lot of spiritual capital in the visions, to become somewhat bitter and resentful. But if you are inclined to feel that way, I would urge you rather to turn towards Our Lady as she has revealed herself at Fatima. There, contrary to the situation regarding Medjugorje, you can have complete moral certainty that the message of Fatima is good, truthful, and life-giving, and in total harmony with the Church and the Gospel.

As Mary herself told us in June 1917, her Immaculate Heart will be our refuge on our journey, and the secure and trustworthy way to lead us to God. If we truly live the message of Fatima, she will save us from being deceived. Given this, our task is to do all we can to help bring about the triumph of Mary’s Immaculate Heart, by complying unreservedly with her requests, following the sublime example of Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia.

Thus, all those genuinely devoted to the Blessed Virgin should examine their position, and look at the Church's approach to both Fatima and Medjugorje. It has given the fullest possible support to the former, whereas it has given no official support whatsoever to the latter. To continue to support Medjugorje means to continue on an empty quest for "signs and wonders," to continue on a doubtful path that will quite probably end in disappointment and possibly disaster. This book has sought to give readers a real understanding of Medjugorje, and while we can definitely affirm that Fatima is of heavenly origin, sadly, the only rational conclusion about Medjugorje is that it has turned out to be a vast, if captivating, religious illusion.

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