

How the Medjugorje Visions are not Really of a Resurrected Woman despite the "okay" evidence and why the Apostles' Visions of Jesus are therefore even less credible

Jesus' Resurrection and Marian Apparitions: Medjugorje as a Living Laboratory By Dr. Hector Avalos at 4/29/2013 Excerpts

The first reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Medjugorje began on June 24, 1981, when six Croatian-speaking children/teens claimed that the Virgin Mary had appeared to them on hill named Podbrdo near the town of Medugorje. The latter was located then in communist Yugoslavia, but is now within Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The six visionaries are:

1. Marija Pavlovic (April 1, 1965)
2. Jakov Colo (March 6, 1971)
3. Vicka Ivankovic (September 3, 1964)
4. Ivanka Ivankovic (July 21, 1966)
5. Mirjana Dragicevic (March 18, 1965)
6. Ivan Dragicevic (May 25, 1965)

I retain the numbering found in *Is the Virgin Mary Appearing at Medjugorje?* ([1984] p. 42) written by renowned Marian scholar, René Laurentin, and his co-author, Ljudevit Rupcic. These numbers will later be used to identify them in interviews that I will quote.

The birthdays of the visionaries are in parentheses as reported on this website: visionaries' bios.

Interviews with the visionaries about of the earliest appearances were tape recorded by Catholic clerics between June 27 and 30, 1981. Transcripts subsequently were published by Ivo Sivric (1917-2002), a Medjugorje-born opponent of the apparitions, and by Daria Klanac, a Canadian of Croatian ancestry that supports the authenticity of the visions (Foley, *Understanding Medjugorje*, pp. 38-39).

Most of the standard accounts are based only on later interviews, and so it is important that any critic or supporter of Medjugorje be familiar with this earliest material.

While many critics of these Marian apparitions mistakenly believe that the visionaries do not claim to see something objectively present, these children emphatically affirmed that they saw Mary as a fully physical and real person.

The young people were met with initial skepticism and harassment from some authorities, both from the Church and from the Communist atheistic government.

Surprisingly, one of the most vocal skeptics was Pavao Zanič (1918-2000), their own local bishop, who, according to one transcript of an interview, declared: "In my opinion Medjugorje is the greatest deceit and swindle in the history of the Church" (Michael O'Carroll, *Medjugorje: Facts, Documents, Theology* [Dublin: Veritas, 1986], p. 238). However, such a statement would be the equivalent of the skepticism expressed by Jewish authorities in the case of Jesus, and should not be used as an objection to the Marian vision experiences anymore than those of the traditional Jewish authorities in the case of Jesus.

Despite the political conflicts caused by the apparitions within the local diocese, and despite the fact that the Catholic Church has not officially affirmed the authenticity of the visions, these supposed "witnesses" have never recanted to the best of my knowledge.

In addition, five of the visionaries were subjected to an extensive battery of medical and psychiatric tests in 1984 by a team led by Dr. Henri Joyeux, an oncologist of the Faculty of Medicine at the University at Montpellier.

The team also included a cardiologist (Dr. Bernard Hoarau), and a neurophysiologist (Dr. Jean Cadhillac). The team published its findings in René Laurentin and Henri Joyeux, *Scientific and Medical Studies on the Apparitions at Medjugorje* (Dublin: Veritas, 1985).

The team concluded: “The apparitions are not sleep or dream or hallucination in the medical or pathological sense of the word. This is scientifically excluded by the electro-encephalogram and by clinical observation” (Scientific and Medical Studies, p. 44).

The report added: “The ecstasies are not pathological nor is there any element of deceit. No scientific discipline seems able to describe these phenomena” (Scientific and Medical Studies, p. 75). The medical team found no history of drug use or illness that could explain the experiences of these visionaries. Further tests, conducted in 1998 and 2005, seemed to reconfirm previous conclusions. See: Testing Chronology.

So, already these “witnesses” have been subjected to more scientific and psychological probing than any “witness” we can identify for the resurrection stories of the New Testament. We have more documentation for their personal histories and character than for anyone in the New Testament.

We should add, of course, that the common claim, accepted by Campbell, that the disciples were willing to die for their beliefs is simply historically unconfirmed. As Candida Moss argues (The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom [New York:HarperOne, 2013, p. 16), in the first 250 years of Christian history “only six martyrdom accounts can be treated as reliable.”

Moreover, the number of pilgrims who went to Medjugorje by 1988 was already placed by some at over fifteen million, which far surpasses the rate of growth of the Jesus apparition stories.

CAMPBELL’S BASIC APPROACH FLAWED

When it comes to the particular historicity of the Marian apparitions at Medjugorje, Campbell affirms: “We have little if any reason to accept the veridicality of the Marian apparitions at Medjugorje” (ACC, p. 297). The fact is that we have even MORE and BETTER DOCUMENTED evidence than what Campbell concedes.

Campbell’s refutation of the veridicality of the Marian apparitions largely rests on quoting a book titled, The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary, which was first published in 1992 by Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples. Miller and Samples are Protestant evangelical apologists, and their book has a foreword by the well-known evangelical apologist, Norman L. Geisler.

Miller and Samples conclude: “But could Satan (and/or demons) really be behind such seemingly benign miraculous occurrences? There seems to be clear scriptural evidence that the answer is yes” (The Cult of the Virgin, p. 129). Of course, Miller and Samples forget that a demonic explanation is also used by traditional Jewish authorities against Jesus in Mark 3:22: “He is possessed by Be-el'zebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”

So, Campbell’s procedure is akin to quoting opposing Jewish sources to give us unbiased information about stories of Jesus’ miracles and resurrection. Charges of demonic deception can go both ways, and there are no historical or scientific means to adjudicate who is really being deceived by any demonic agents, if they exist at all.

Campbell lists no Catholic apologists for the Medjugorje apparitions in his bibliography. Campbell does not demonstrate any direct familiarity with the apologies for Marian apparitions at Medjugorje by René Laurentin, Henri Joyeux, Michael O’Carroll, and many others.

The main Catholic source (Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma) from which he draws his information about Marian theology was written in 1960, and so decades before the Medjugorje apparitions. Nor does Campbell seem familiar with Catholic critics of the visions (e.g., Donal Anthony Foley, Ivo Sivric).

In any case, Campbell lists what he believes are crucial differences between the Marian apparition stories and the Jesus resurrection stories.

I will show that all of such supposed differences are predicated on theological assumptions or on criteria that are not applied consistently. Campbell, therefore, is engaging in theological argumentation, and not in historical reasoning.

QUESTIONS FOR CAMPBELL

1. Can people use the most objective language (e.g., “see,” “hear,” “touch”) available to describe encounters with non-existent beings?

2. If so, then why can’t the storytellers in the New Testament use the most objective language available to describe encounters with non-existent beings?

3. Do you admit that it is historically false to claim that Marian apparition stories must depend on belief in the dogma of the

Assumption of Mary?

4. Do you agree that Epiphanius did, in fact, suggest that the continued existence of Mary was one of the options that was probably current by the fourth century?
5. Where is an actual document from around 35-36 CE that shows the existence of a creed in the resurrection of Jesus?
6. Why don't you see as historically significant the establishment of a creed in the appearance of Mary within 5-6 years at Medjugorje?
7. What precedent or prior tradition did Herod use to conclude that John the Baptist resurrected or returned shortly after being killed in Mark 6:16?
8. If Herod had none, then why can't a Jesus resurrection tradition arise without a prior tradition even if the resurrection did not occur?
9. What do you really KNOW about the so-called witnesses for Jesus' resurrection (when compared to those at Medjugorje) that does not come from pro-resurrection sources?
10. What sorts of medical tests or follow-up interrogations were performed on Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and other supposed witnesses of the resurrection by scientists and psychiatrists?
11. What specific historical or scientific tests were performed by Luke to evaluate the reports that he says that he received from witnesses in Luke 1:1-4?
12. What sorts of medical or scientific tests were performed to determine whether stories of miracles in the NT might also have a natural explanation, as you allege for those at Medjugorje?
13. Why are radical personal claims relevant to establishing historicity, and why do you think claiming to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit does not count as a "radical personal claim" on the part of Mary?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Protestant apologists for the historical Jesus cannot continue to ignore the challenges posed by Marian apparitions. No longer should a thorough discussion of the historicity of Jesus be seen as complete without some serious discussion of modern Marian apparition reports.

Even if we agree with Campbell that the Medjugorje stories do not represent a reality that we can objectively establish as historical, he fails to see how that fact itself undermines his pleas for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus.

Indeed, perhaps the MOST IMPORTANT LESSON from Medjugorje is that people CAN report seeing non-existing people with as physical and objective a terminology as the language has available (e.g., "see," "hear," "touch"). The interviews by Samples confirm that Ivan Dragicevic could use the most objective language available.

Yet, such descriptions do not necessarily correspond to reality by Campbell's own reckoning. To paraphrase Campbell himself: "We have no reason to think that Ivan's or anyone else's experiences, including those of the Jesus visionaries, have been any different than Marija's."

Both Marian and Jesus apparition reports may be part of the same broader socio-psychological phenomenon where people report non-occurring and imagined events with objective language. Simple as that.

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NOTES: Unless noted otherwise, all biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version. Some spelling of the visionaries' names may differ in English transcription.

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<http://www.truthinmydays.com/do-apparitions-of-mary-undermine-the-case-for-jesus-resurrection/>

