

## THE BISHOP SPEAKS AGAINST THE ALLEGED APPARITIONS DURING A CONFIRMATION CEREMONY

In 1981, on June 24th, a strange report heralded the beginning of the Medjugorje industry. Six children reported seeing a shape standing up a hill. The next day four of these with a few others went back to the hill and they got a closer look at the figure who said she was the Virgin Mary. Soon the Lady began to appear to them in the parish Church of Medjugorje. The seers are: Vicka Ivankovic, Mirjana Dragicevic, Marija Pavlovic, Ivan Dragicevic, Ivanka Ivankovic and Jakov Colo. She gave them ten secrets which prophesy the future. Only some of the visionaries report seeing the Lady on a daily basis. The Lady stopped appearing to the rest except on special occasions.

The bishops responsible for deciding on the phenomenon are sceptics.

## THE BISHOP'S SERMON IN MEDJUGORJE

Brothers and Sisters,

Today in Medjugorje, on the occasion of administering the sacrament of confirmation, you are perhaps expecting me to say a few words concerning those events about which the whole world is talking. The Church must concern herself with them, and whatever is of concern to the Church, she refers to particular individuals and commissions. You know that at the moment this subject is being discussed by the commission which was convened by the conference of Bishops of Yugoslavia, because the Church cannot expose her credibility lightly before the 20th century world which seeks to discredit and criticise her, so that it can say: "There you are—there is Jesus Christ for you."

I can assure you that I prayed, studied, and kept silent for six years. Others have prayed too, and I thank them for it. In every Holy Mass that I have said Medjugorje was present in my intentions. In my daily rosary I prayed to Our Lord, and to the Holy Ghost, to give me light from God. This has helped me to form a firm and certain conviction concerning everything that I have heard, read or experienced. There is a great deal of praying and fasting going on here (in Medjugorje), but it is not the belief that all the events are truly supernatural. However, to preach falsehood to the faithful concerning God, Jesus, and Our Lady - that merits the depths of hell.

In all my work, prayers, and studies I had one aim before me—to discern the truth. With this aim, as early as 1982, I formed a four-member commission which later, with the help of some bishops and fathers provincial, I expanded to 15 members drawn from nine theological centres from seven dioceses and four provinces, and two leading psychiatrists who were enabled to consult their colleagues. They worked for three years. The Holy See was informed about their work, and the events. This commission of the Conference of Bishops of Yugoslavia continues to concern itself with the same problem.

However, there were impatient people who went ahead before the judgement of the Church, and declared that miracles and supernatural events were taking place. They preached on private revelations from the altar, something which is not permitted until the Church declares such revelations to be authentic. That is why the various authorities demanded that pilgrimages should not be organised, that the Church's judgement should be awaited. This was first done on 24 March 1984 when the commission on Medjugorje warned against it, but, unfortunately, without effect. Then, in October of the same year, the Conference of Bishops declared that there should be no more officially organised pilgrimages to Medjugorje. By "officially organised" is meant those who gather or come in a group. That had no effect either. Then the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, on 23 May 1985, sent a letter to the Conference of Italian Bishops asking them to try to reduce the number of organised pilgrimages, and likewise to minimise all forms of propaganda. That too bore no fruit. Finally, when the second commission was formed, Cardinal Franjo Kuharic and the Bishop of Mostar, in the name of the Conference of Bishops of Yugoslavia, declared publicly on 29 January 1987: "For this reason it is forbidden to organise pilgrimages or other manifestations motivated by the supernatural character attributed to the events in Medjugorje" This pronouncement came from the highest level in the Church and must not be ignored as if it were of no significance. Ever since the first news appeared concerning the unusual events in this diocese, the bishop's office followed the reports carefully, and collected everything that could serve in the search for truth. The bishop allowed the seers and religious involved full freedom, and even defended them from political and press attacks. We taped all the conversations, collected chronicles and diaries, letters and documents. The commission of our professors of theology and physicians studied all this for three years. The three year work of the commission concluded as follows: two members voted in favour of the truth and supernatural nature of the apparitions. One member abstained from voting. One accepted that something had happened at the beginning. Eleven voted that there had been no apparitions—non constat de supernaturalitate.

I am firmly convinced that all the members of the commission worked conscientiously and examined everything which could have aided their search for truth. The Church cannot risk her credibility, and often, in similar cases, she has studied events like these carefully and rebuked groups who gathered in places where it had been established that the events were

not supernatural. Let us remember Garabandal in Spain, San Damiano in Italy, and dozens of similar places in the past few years. The seers at Garabandal claimed that Our Lady promised a great sign for the whole world. Twenty-five years have passed since then, and still there is no sign. If Our Lady had left a sign it would be clear to all what this is about.

It was said that Our Lady started to appear at Podbrdo on Mount Crnica. When the police stopped people going there she appeared in people's homes, on fences, in fields, in vineyards, and tobacco fields. She appeared in the church, on the altar, in the sacristy, in the choir-loft, on the roof, in the bell-tower, on the roads, on the road to Cerno, in a car, on a bus, in schools, at several places in Mostar and Sarajevo, in monasteries in Zagreb, in Varazdin, in Switzerland, in Italy, then again at Podbrdo, in Krizevac, in the parish, on the presbytery and so on. This does not list even half the number of locations where apparitions were alleged to have taken place, so that a sober man who venerates Our Lady must ask: "My Lady, what are they making of you?"

[b]By divine law I am the pastor in this diocese, the teacher of the faith, and the judge in questions concerning the faith. Since the events in Medjugorje have caused strife and division in the Church—some people believing, others not believing—because there are those who have refused to submit themselves to the authority of the Church. Because the recommendations and decisions of the above mentioned authorities, commissions, congregations of the bishops' conference had no effect, I, the bishop of Mostar, answerable before God for the discipline in this diocese repeat and confirm earlier decisions of ecclesiastical bodies, and I forbid pilgrimages to come here and attribute a supernatural character to these events before the Commission of the Bishops' Conference completes its work.

I turn to you, O Immaculate Virgin and Mother, Mother of God, and Mother of the Church, Mother of the faithful who seek, pray to, and love you. I, your servant, the bishop of Mostar, turn to you, and before the whole world declare my deep and constant faith in all the privileges God bestowed upon you according to which you are the first and most excellent of His creatures. I express my profound and unswerving faith in your intercession before Almighty God for all the needs of your children in this vale of tears.

I declare my profound and constant faith in your love towards us sinners, that love to which you have testified by your apparitions and assistance. I myself have led pilgrimages to Lourdes. It is precisely with the strength of this faith that I, your servant the bishop of Mostar, before the great multitudes who have called upon you, discern and accept your great sign which after six years, has become clear and certain. No special sign is necessary for me, but it was necessary for those who believed in a falsehood. The sign you have given is that for six years you remained silent continually whenever they prophesied that there would be an apparition on the mountain which would be permanent and for all to see. "It will be soon, quite soon, just be patient a little longer" They were saying this as early as 1981. Then they claimed that it would be on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, then at Christmas, then for the New Year and so on.

Thank you, Blessed Lady, for manifesting by your six year silence whether or not you have spoken here, whether or not you had appeared or given messages, revealed secrets, or promised a special sign. Most holy Virgin, Mother of Christ and our Mother, intercede for peace in this restless region of the Church, the diocese of Mostar. Intercede especially for this village, this parish where your holy name has been mentioned countless times in messages. Accept, most holy Virgin, in reparation, the sincere prayers of those devout souls who are far from fanaticism and disobedience within the Church. Help us all to come to the real truth. Beloved, humble, and obedient Maiden of God, help Medjugorje to follow with a firm step the shepherd of the Church on earth, so that we all may glorify you and thank you in truth and love. Amen.

Pavao Zanic, Bishop of Mostar