



...ing the village of Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, line up for confessions to Franciscan priests outside St. James ... in a choir balcony.

A tale of two bishops: a skeptic and a believer

By John Thavis

Medjugorje, Yugoslavia (NC) — The story of Medjugorje can be told as the story of two Yugoslavian bishops: one who rejoiced and one who saw deception and disobedience.

The bishops have become spokesmen for opposite sides of a bitter controversy over the reported Marian apparitions, which began in the small Yugoslavian village in 1981.

Archbishop Frane Franic of Split-Makarska says that until the Church makes a final judgment, the bottom line at Medjugorje is spiritual renewal among local Catholics and thousands of foreign visitors.

"One snowy weekday evening, I went there myself and found the church overflowing with people. Everyone was confessing, praying on their knees and receiving Communion. I was amazed," said Archbishop Franic, whose archdiocese is less than an hour's drive from Medjugorje.

"The fasting, the confessing, the conversion: I thought, this can only be the fruit of supernatural events," he said.

But Bishop Pavao Zanic of Mostar-Duvno, the diocese that includes Medjugorje, sees deception and division in the Church locally, and possible embarrassment for the universal Church.

"It is a trick. There is a lot of slyness and a lot of exploitation of people going on," said Bishop Zanic. He said that "not one" of his diocesan priests believes in the Medjugorje events. The bishop has unsuccessfully tried to stop pilgrimages to the site.

Archbishop Franic said he had seen spiritual conversion and physical healings at Medjugorje.

"The effect is one of conversion, in Yugoslavia, Germany, France, the United States and elsewhere," the archbishop said.

But he added that most of his own priests "don't even want to hear of Medjugorje."

Bishop Zanic said he at first defended the young visionaries and the possibility that Mary was appearing daily to them.

But that changed after the Virgin was said to have sided against him in favor of two local Franciscans who had been suspended from their ministry.

The suspensions were tied to a longstanding feud in which Franciscan friars have refused to transfer control of several parishes in the region to diocesan clergy.

Later, Bishop Zanic said, he received a letter from one of the visionaries warning he would be judged by Mary and Christ unless he accepted the apparitions.

"I mailed the letter to the Vatican the same

day. For me, the question was decided," he said. He noted that Catholics are never required to believe in Marian apparitions.

The Franciscans at Medjugorje say the jurisdictional dispute is irrelevant to the apparitions.

But they add that the idea of Mary criticizing a bishop is not unrealistic.

"After all, bishops have made many, many mistakes," said Father Philip Pavich, a U.S. Franciscan at Medjugorje.

Bishop Zanic, in a sermon last June in Medjugorje, announced he was forbidding priests to celebrate Mass there if they led pilgrimages or attributed a supernatural character to the events.

The policy at Medjugorje is to consider the bishop's order unenforceable. Based on interviews there in mid-February, it was clear that most priests accompany rather than organize the pilgrimages. But most, especially the Medjugorje Franciscans, also describe the apparitions as authentic. The word "if" is rarely used.

"Why shouldn't we be free to believe or not?" said Father Slavko Barbaric. He tells pilgrims that the Vatican took the issue out of Bishop Zanic's hands last year by calling for a national Catholic commission study of the apparition reports. Most members of a previous commission appointed by Bishop Zanic concluded that the events were not supernatural. Their report was never published.

In the meantime, visiting priests celebrate regularly in St. James Church, where the apparitions are said to occur in a choir balcony.

Bishop Zanic blames the Franciscans for the situation. "This is the most disobedient province in the whole world," he said.

"The bishop accuses us of disobedience, but in these (visitors), we are trying to instill a wider sense of obedience," says Father Barbaric. Pilgrims are asked to pray that Rome will approve the apparitions.

Father Pavich laughed at the idea of a hoax.

"If we've seduced millions of people from five continents, (Bishop Zanic) should at least attribute supernaturalness to us, the Franciscans. We don't have the power to manufacture this," said Father Pavich.

Bishop Zanic does not dispute that pilgrims experience renewed piety, but scoffs at the "scheduled" nature of Mary's alleged appearances.

"Who can say Mary will appear every day, for years, at such and such an hour? They act like people lining up in front of a box office," he said.

...ted to sharing 'Mary's message'

...g off a ...y such ...are not ...g is to

"Before I went, Mass was boring; praying was boring," Lewis explained. "I went over and came back, and (prayer is) the most important thing in my life."

As they spoke of miracles, signs and conversions, the three did so with quiet conviction — although they frequently glanced at one another as if for reassurance. They came across as normal adolescents who were somewhat uncomfortable talking about personal experiences and beliefs.

Speaking openly of those experiences and beliefs, the trio acknowledged, has drawn disbelief and even ridicule from some of their peers. "People will bump up against you in the hall and say things like, 'I'm sorry to do that; it might make you less holy,'" Hauer said. "When we try to spread the message, they either think you're crazy, or they believe it."

Nevertheless, they share a commitment to speak about their experiences.

As teenagers, Hauer explained, they have a special calling to speak to their peers since adolescents are more likely to listen to them than to adults.

"I think we're setting an example," she said. "We're not afraid to tell others to go to church or to pray. (We show them) it's OK, nothing to be ashamed of."

All three believe that this message is important now because many young people are giving in to the devil. "So many people don't realize that he is there — that he (exists)," Chilbert said.

"Mary is trying to get to the teenagers, but so is the devil," Lewis added. "He's losing the battle."

They also said that Mary's call for conversion is especially relevant in the United States.

"People talk about the conversion of Russia," Chilbert said. "I'd rather be in Medjugorje

— and that's communist — than in (the United States). Around Medjugorje, (the people's) faith is a lot stronger than (that of) most Americans."

The renewed faith of Medjugorje's residents was evident to Hauer in the atmosphere of the village. "When the appearances started, some people there had faith and some didn't," she said. "Now it's very calm. Nothing's really rushed; people have time to get things done. People pray every day and go to Mass."

Chilbert believes the same kind of conversion is possible for those who can't travel to Yugoslavia.

"People can have their own Medjugorje here," he said. "(They can) have a very prayerful life and experience the same peaceful life over here."

To find this peace, however, Chilbert said "people have to start praying"

Yugoslav authorities mine tourist gold at Marian site

Medjugorje, Yugoslavia (NC) — The Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia has discovered that Marian apparitions, real or not, can mean big business.

That goes a long way in explaining the many ironies encountered by the visitor to Medjugorje, the tiny village where Mary has reportedly been appearing since 1981.

The government at first tried to smother the events, viewing them as Croatian nationalism in disguise. After a few years, authorities came to consider the apparitions "mere religion" and ignored them.

Today, they are trying to cash in.

Medjugorje is now the biggest name on many Yugoslavian tourist brochure maps. The state tourist agency, Yugotours, advertises Medjugorje trips in Catholic newspapers worldwide — touting "sights and lights both

spectacular and mysterious" and the "hundreds" who report cures of serious ailments.

The effect on the village has been alarming to some. "It's unrecognizable," Archbishop Frane Franic of Split-Makarska, a strong defender of the apparitions, said of the village.

"The (local) people are leaving the fields and a new kind of tourism is taking over. There are fewer people in church, because they can't leave their hotel-homes."

But many residents have taken the changes in stride.

"It could be good or bad. Pilgrims have to be fed and have a place to stay. Some do it honestly, some not," said Father Svetozar Kraljevic. But he complained that state-licensed souvenir stands, many run by Gypsies and Serbs from outside the town, had cheap-

ened Medjugorje's image.

Few visitors spring for the tiny "Medjugorje" wine kegs or the Madonna shot glasses. Instead, they buy medals, crosses and rosaries at the parish-run shop next to the church, where prices are lower and dollars are accepted.

The question of money is a delicate one among the Franciscans who run the Medjugorje parish. The local bishop has said he thinks financial gain is one of the motives for the events there, but the priests deny it.

The parish does not publicize how much money it takes in and might not be aware of all the gifts. A bell tower leading to the church's apparition room is stacked with plastic trash bags holding tens of thousands of accumulated petitions to Mary, many unopened. Those marked "offering" hold cash gifts.

...er Journal ...inks in ...orje.

SHARED LIVING for older persons

The Daisy Marquis Jones Shared Residence

1059 Winton Road South

- Affordable Housing
- Security • Companionship
- One Room Available

For information on eligibility contact:

THE HOUSING COUNCIL
242 Andrews Street
• 546-3700 •

CRANDALL HEARING INSTRUMENTS

Professional Hearing Aid Services
"We service all your hearing aid needs"

Over 30 makes and 300 models to choose from

- Canal Aids (As seen on TV)
- "Presidential Aid" As worn by Pres. Reagan
- Noise Reduction Aids-Reduces background noise up to 60%
- Repairs & Batteries for all makes
- Fully Automatic Aids-No tubes, no wires, no cord, no batteries to change, no volume control
- 5 Year Warranty-Loss & Damage Insurance Available

WE MAKE HOUSE CALLS — CALL TODAY!

CRANDALL HEARING INSTRUMENTS

Greece: 1577 Ridge Rd. West
(716) 865-4311
Batavia: 215 Summit St.
(716) 344-0186
Hornell: 20 Elm St.
(607) 324-2410
Newark: 165 E. Union St.
(315) 331-6161

HOURS BY APPOINTMENT



FROM \$325⁰⁰

Free Hearing Aid Tests
"See us before you buy"