

Bishop issues booklet denouncing visions

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

ROME — A Yugoslavian bishop, in a pamphlet intended for international distribution, has denounced the alleged Marian apparitions at Medjugorje as a fraud that will bring "disgrace and scandal upon the church."

Bishop Pavao Zanic of Mostar-Duvno, whose diocese includes Medjugorje, said he was going on the offensive to counter what he called "disproportionate propaganda" and misinformation spread by supporters of the alleged visions.

Bishop Zanic spoke in an interview in Rome April 19 after meeting with Vatican doctrinal officials and presenting them with copies of his 16-page tract, titled "The Truth About Medjugorje." He sent a copy of the booklet to Pope John Paul II at the beginning of April, the bishop said.

"After this publication is read, no one — and especially no church official — will be able to sustain that these events are supernatural," Bishop Zanic said.

The church has not given a ruling on the authenticity of the apparitions, which began in 1981 and are said to continue today. A Yugoslavian church commission is investigating the events, and meanwhile the country's bishops have asked that no official pilgrimages be made to the site.



File photo
A cross on Mount Krizevac marks the site of alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje.

Medjugorje, however, continues to draw many pilgrims from around the world.

Bishop Zanic is a longtime critic of the purported events at Medjugorje and of the Franciscans who run the parish there. His booklet, which has been translated into several languages — including English — presents a detailed case against the apparitions.

The bishop states that after six local children first reported that Mary appeared to them and spoke with them, he and other church officials caught them in lies or contradictions on several occasions.

He describes episodes to back up his accusation that the seers have been manipulated by Medjugorje Franciscans in "their battle against the bishop." The bishop's account focuses on Mary's supposed defense of two local Franciscans who were expelled from their order and suspended from their ministry.

The bishop said "disobedience prevails" among the Franciscans in the region, so much so that in 1989 the Franciscan headquarters in Rome threatened to close down the Yugoslavian province. A Franciscan official in Rome confirmed that such a letter had been sent to the province.

Bishop Zanic dismissed claimed healings at Medjugorje, saying not one has been verified by competent experts. He also cited examples of "promises that have ended tragically." He said the leaders of the Medjugorje movement have "fabricated miracles regarding the sun," resulting in eye damage to many pilgrims, and fabricated messages said to be from Mary. He ridiculed the belief that ordinary rosary links have turned to gold in Medjugorje, as some pilgrims have claimed.

"That which is positive in these events

cannot justify the falsehoods and lies that have been spread in order to win the world over for God," the bishop said. "The church would easily be able to attract the masses if it dropped the sixth commandment ... but Jesus went on the cross for truth." Bishop Zanic is critical of some bishops who, he said, have shown "lack of collegiality" by supporting the apparitions without seeking him out or studying all the evidence.

He said not one of his 100 diocesan priests supports the apparitions, and that only one of the 42 Yugoslavian bishops has publicly defended the events. Bishop Zanic noted that an overwhelming majority of an initial diocesan investigating commission concluded that there was nothing supernatural about the events.

The bishop said that he hopes the second commission finishes its work soon and issues a judgment. He said, however, that there is great pressure for the investigation to continue, especially since the alleged apparitions are still occurring.

Bishop Zanic said he learned recently that the Medjugorje Franciscans might be planning to build a major shrine at the site, even before the church issues a judgment.

"I'm afraid they want to present the church with a fait accompli," he said. Bishop Zanic said he expressed his concern to Vatican officials.

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