

Closed minds hide truth about apparitions

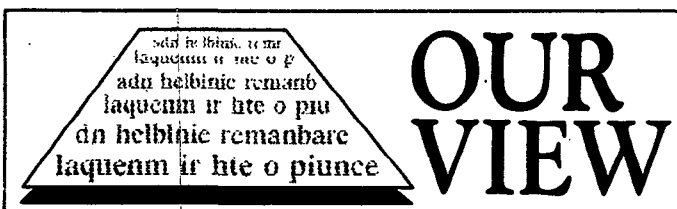
Those of us who are mothers and all of us who have mothers must accept at least the theoretical possibility that the Blessed Mother sometimes speaks to her wandering children.

What mother, after all, can resist offering advice?

On the other hand, many of us squirm and waver in the face of reports on specific Marian apparitions. It's difficult to form an opinion on what is happening in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, or Lubbock, Texas, based on pamphlets proclaiming an apparition's purported pronouncements or the arm-twisting discourse of true believers brought to you by Phil Donahue and Oprah Winfrey.

Our dilemma is not eased by tabloid-style reports of incredible religious experiences: statues and paintings that weep and blink, dubious and undocumentable healings, and people who claim to be "microphones" for Jesus and Mary.

Of the increasing numbers of such reported private revelations, three-fourths are illusory, according to an estimate cited by Father Giandomenico Mucci, a Jesuit spirituality expert who wrote a series of articles on apparitions for *La Civiltà Cattolica*.



Truth is further obscured when politics and economics are factored into the brew. We have learned, for instance, that Yugoslavian Bishop Pavao Zanic, in whose diocese Medjugorje is located, never liked the Franciscans who have been spiritual guides for the purported visionaries since 1981.

And what influence is exerted by the flocks of pilgrims who alight at the scene of each new manifestation and scatter in their wake thousands — perhaps even millions — of tourist dollars?

The counsel to "judge an apparition or a message by its fruits" seems wise, and events at Medjugorje have undeniably renewed many people's faith. Such supposed miracles as rosary links turning gold or the sun spinning are minor in comparison to that renewal.

Yet Medjugorje has a down side as well. Could the Blessed Mother approve of angry divisions between

those who do and don't believe she speaks to six Yugoslavian men and women? Would she take sides and instruct a seer to threaten Bishop Zanic with divine judgment, as he has claimed?

Would Mary be likely to claim credit for saving humanity from destruction time and again? And would she countenance her own apparitions becoming an article of faith to some people?

However the short-term fruits of Medjugorje ripen with time, we ought not to place such little value on truth as to uncritically accept the claims put forth by either skeptics or proponents. Valuing truth means remaining open to positive and negative representations of events in Yugoslavia and elsewhere — listening both to Bishop Zanic and the "Blue Letter."

We must also resist confusing faith in particular apparitions with faith in what we know to be true expressions of our beliefs — the Gospels, the Eucharist, church teaching.

What's at stake in our willingness to seek the truth is not only the faith of individuals, but our credibility as a church as well.

— The Editors

Why did Bishop Zanic change his tune?

To the editor:

I read with interest the article, "Bishop issues booklet denouncing visions" in this week's *Courier* (April 26). Considering the thousands of pages written in awe of the events in Medjugorje, I would expect that Bishop Zanic's 16-page booklet would have to contain some pretty power-packed arguments to support his claim that, "After this publication is read, no one — especially no church official — will be able to sustain that these events are supernatural."

According to the article, the Bishop and other church officials had caught the children in various lies and contradictions on several occasions. In the book "Is the Virgin Mary appearing at Medjugorje?" Father Rene Laurentin tells how he interviewed each of the six visionaries separately in an effort to test out their stories. He devotes 20 pages of his book to listing the questions he asked the children and their separate responses. He, and anyone who reads his book, can see the very close similarity of their responses. He also describes other physical and psychological tests that were done on the children to test the authenticity of their claims. These were all passed with flying colors as well.

Bishop Zanic's other arguments do not focus on the children or the messages that they relay from the Blessed Mother. Instead, he turns to the tourists. He notes that people claim "their ordinary rosary links have turned to gold in Medjugorje." He doesn't believe this. I don't believe this either. That is, I don't believe that a jeweler would be able to testify that links of one metal had turned to gold. I KNOW the links of my rosary have turned from a silver color to a gold color. One beautiful explanation for this is that, like gold that is melted in fire, we become more perfect followers of Christ when offering all of our

crosses to Him.

Bishop Zanic also focuses on the fact that tourists have caused damage to their eyes by staring at the sun. The stories of the spinning sun are again told by the tourists, not by the children or the Franciscans at Medjugorje. ...

What the visionaries do and say about Our Lady's visits to this small village is ignored by Bishop Zanic. The visionaries say that Our Lady wants us to be reconciled to God through frequent confession, and hundreds of confessions are heard in Medjugorje each week — each day.

The visionaries say she wants us to pray, especially the rosary. The rosary, all 15 mysteries, is recited by hundreds of people at the church each day. ...

In his book, Father Laurentin also quotes Bishop Zanic. On August 16, 1981, the Bishop responded to government ridicule

Catholic schools do make a difference in long range

To the editor:

I guess I was brought up to believe what I read in newspapers, and to take an interest in the editorial opinion of newspapers. I was shocked and dismayed, however, to read the editor's note in your April 26, 1990, issue concerning the alleged racially-motivated confrontation that took place at an East High-McQuaid basketball game.

In particular, your last paragraph was most offensive. Catholic schools, like public schools, try to educate young people and take them as they come — having had 13 or 14 years' formation before they even get to high school. Yes, we would like to think that Catholic school students' behavior would be exemplary; yes, they should "know better." The fact of the matter is, they're youngsters — all of them — and as young people are prone to do —

of the apparitions in Medjugorje with a seven-point declaration, published in the local newspaper. It stated in part, "When the Jews tried to silence the apostles, a teacher of the law, one highly esteemed by all the people, Gamaliel, said to the whole assembly: 'If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But, if it is from God, you will not be able to stop it. (Acts: 38-39)."

Why, after almost nine years, does the Bishop ignore the words of Scripture he quoted then, to adopt the views of those he criticized? Considering all that has happened in other Communist countries around Yugoslavia, one has to wonder.

Pray for Our Lady's intentions. I agree with Gamaliel.

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they can't focus on long-range consequences, but only on the here and now.

The Apostles should have "known better" too, but in the short-run, they denied Jesus. It was the long-run, the bigger picture that counted and so it is with Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are fighting so many battles. Why can't the Catholic newspaper eliminate one of them? Just consider that many of McQuaid's students did not attend Catholic elementary school, that they are "children of this age," too, and that, in the

long range, if all the statistics are true, the difference will be evident.

To imply that a parents' tuition was misspent because McQuaid's "moral formation" isn't up to your expectation is an affront. McQuaid, perhaps, is not producing Aloysius Gonzagas; more likely the school is producing Ignatius of Loyolas!

Sister Mary Anne Brawley, DC

Sister Brawley is executive director of the Catholic School Administrators Association of New York State.

Human beings aren't the only species worthy of our moral consideration and compassion

To the editor:

Not long ago, I asked a Rochester supermarket supervisor to observe how live lobsters were packed like sardines in one tank while the adjacent tank was nearly empty. He offered all kinds of reasons why some of the lobsters could not be shifted around. ...

The chicken you plan to have for supper was probably "de-beaked," jammed with other chickens into a wire cage where movement is impossible, crated, shipped to the slaughterhouse under revolting conditions and hung upside down on a conveyor belt before it was finally killed.

Veal cutlet anyone? The calves spend their lives in pens so small that they cannot turn around or lie down comfortably. ... Meat producers say they cannot allow more adequate living space for the calves. Production costs would increase. Besides, exercise toughens the muscles which

reduces the meat's tenderness.

The owners say that the tiny stalls prevent the calves from licking at their own urine. However, the only reason why a calf would exhibit such behavior is because calves are fed a liquid diet lacking in iron and roughage. ... The purpose of the deficient diet is to enhance your veal cutlet's paleness and tastiness.

I'm not a vegetarian but I'd like to see more compassion shown toward the creatures that provide us nourishment. They too feel pain. Why can't we respect them and treat them kindly, and if we must butcher them, do it mercifully?

Human beings are not the only species on this planet that are worthy of moral consideration.

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