

# Apparitions

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that apparitions are simply figments of the seers' imaginations and have no supernatural basis. In his 1986 book, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Michael Carroll, a sociologist at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, stated that apparitions are due to hallucination or illusion — seeing some phenomena such as a cloud, a shadow, a reflected light, and believing that it is a manifestation of Mary.

After examining hundreds of cases of Marian apparitions, Carroll concluded in his book that these cases were produced by a variety of factors. One factor is a belief that the Virgin Mary makes earthly visits, which he said is one reason the apparitions generally take place in heavily Catholic areas. He also noted a tendency for apparitions to imitate previous apparitions. In addition, he determined that in the cases he studied 80 percent of those experiencing the apparitions were unmarried or vowed celibates, and thus had no sexual outlets.

## Healing service planned for Sacred Heart Oct. 7

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark will conduct a second-annual healing service for all people who have been affected by abortion on Sunday, Oct. 7, at 2:30 p.m. The service will take place at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park.

The service, which is open to the public, will include prayer, healing and reconciliation. Counselors will also be available.

Call 716/546-4894 for information.

Carroll's book also pointed out that in a number of cases, a reassuring mother figure is somehow missing in the seer's life. While he did not study Medjugorje in any detail, he did note, for example, that Ivanka Ivankovic, the first of the visionaries to see the Blessed Mother, reported the apparition just two months after her mother's death. Carroll further noted that Ivanovich was the first of the visionaries to talk to Mary, and that the first question she asked was about her mother.

Father Gill said he had not read Carroll's book, but he did acknowledge that some of the explanations offered in it appear to be valid.

Nevertheless, Father Gill asserted that accepting psychological explanations does not necessarily mean rejecting the belief that God sometimes contacts people through apparitions.

"In the event of a real apparition, most psychiatrists and psychologists would say that God somehow has to communicate to the person through imagery in the person's brain," Father Gill noted. "Whether this (apparition) is in fact someone outside the person, or God acts directly on the brain of that (seer), is not clear."

Father Gill pointed out that the Bible contains numerous stories of apparitions, and specifically cited the case of John the Baptist when he baptized Jesus. According to the Gospel accounts, John then saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and heard a voice say to Jesus, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

"Did it have to be a dove outside himself?" Father Gill asked. "The Holy Spirit is not a dove. The Holy Spirit, God, is pure spirit. But we don't say that John the Baptist is not well because he happened to see the Holy Spirit."

In apparitions, God may be manifested through images that have meaning to the

individual, Father Gill acknowledged. Thus he said, God could simultaneously communicate to several people in the same location, with each person seeing a different apparition. "People often meet their own needs by creating an image or a fantasy that will serve to meet their needs," he said.

"Some people feeling a lack of personal worth, or feeling that their lives are insignificant, yearn for such an event as the Blessed Mother appearing to them" Father Gill observed. "So they are predisposed to look at a cloud or a sunset with an expectation that they will see her there."

However, an individual's predisposition to see a particular apparition would not necessarily negate the possibility that God is communicating with him or her in some way, Father Gill asserted. "I don't think it's unusual for God to seize what opportunity he can to convey grace and love to people who expend the time and effort trying to get closer to the Blessed Mother or whatever is appearing," he said. In addition, Father Gill observed that God could be communicating with the seers in the form of the Blessed Mother, or one of the saints — either in the visionaries' minds or outside their bodies.

Ultimately, Father Gill observed, however God contacts people, "it certainly is a graced event."

Yet the question still arises: What purpose would God have in communicating through apparitions?

Father Albert Shamon, who has visited Medjugorje five times and written several pamphlets about Mary's reported messages, suggested several possible reasons.

Apparitions come to remind people of forgotten truths such as the need for prayer or frequent confession, Father Shamon said.

In addition, he observed, apparitions "show us the proximity of the other world, the invisible world," and that "those in the invisible world care about us."

Finally, the Auburn priest said, apparitions point to the fact that "victory will be with God and the side of God."

At Medjugorje, Father Shamon said, the ultimate "message is the recalling of the message of John the Baptist: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'"

He pointed out that Mary has reportedly said at Medjugorje that this will be her last apparition. That message was likewise reported by Don Fiorentino, founder and former director of the Queen of Peace Apostolate, which is dedicated to spreading the message of Medjugorje.

Fiorentino said Mary is appearing now because this is a time of great need for both the world and the church. Indeed, he asserted, Mary appears during such times of stress in the world.

"She came to tell people that things are still not right," Fiorentino said. "If you look around today, at the country, at New York state, you can see the things are not right. We have the drug problems. We have abortion. We have large numbers of people who have left the practice of their Christianity."

"There's something seriously wrong," Fiorentino continued. "I don't say that we ought to be dwelling on that all the time, but we need to pray continuously."

As for approval of the apparitions at Medjugorje, Father Shamon is certain that the church eventually will give its acceptance.

"I'm convinced that when the apparitions end and the church makes its pronouncement, it will be for the authenticity of Medjugorje," Father Shamon concluded.

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