

# Why hasn't Mary altered apparitions?

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

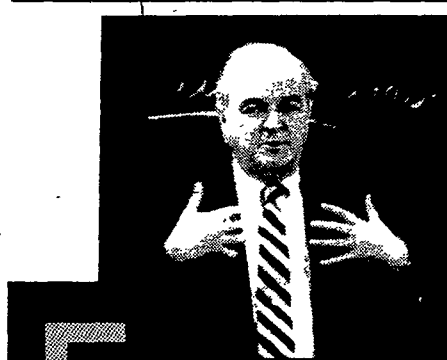
Those who believe that Mary has appeared at various times to six young people in Medjugorje — formerly part of Yugoslavia, now part of war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina — will be marking the 12th anniversary of her first apparition this coming June 24.

It is said that the young people have received from Mary several or all of 10 secret messages related to world events. The messages urged a quest for peace through prayer, penance, and personal conversion.

Ever since the first reported visions — but before the war — the resort town of Medjugorje has done a land-office business. Tourists have poured into the country by the thousands, bringing with them hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of dollars — or their equivalent — for air fares, local transportation, hotels, restaurants, shops, and souvenirs — not to mention the increased income to the local ecclesiastical institutions.

The bishop closest to the scene, however, has never been enamored of it all. Bishop Pavao Zanic, of the Mostar-Duvno diocese concluded in March 1984 — three years after the first apparition was reported — that the apparitions' authenticity had not been established and that cases of alleged healings had not been verified.

The bishop went farther than that. He called the apparitions a case of "collective hallucination" exploited



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

by the local Franciscan priests at odds with him over control of a parish.

Just more than two years ago, in January 1991, Yugoslavia's entire bishops' conference approved a statement by a 19-1 vote, declaring that, on the basis of research conducted thus far, "one cannot affirm that supernatural apparitions are involved" at Medjugorje.

It's enough to make Medjugorje devotees (almost all of whom have a pre-Vatican II understanding of Catholic theology and doctrine) think twice about their assumption that "good" Catholics must always give unquestioning obedience to the hierarchy.

In recent months, the Medjugorje phenomenon has just about disappeared from the ecclesiastical radar screen (except for a big conference

here at the University of Notre Dame). According to the 1993 *Catholic Almanac*, the war in the region has drastically reduced the number of pilgrims.

During the entire month of March 1992, for example, only about 100 visited the area. One assumes that no one is going over there now. It's too dangerous.

Just how dangerous is underscored by the still-breaking news as I write this week's column. The Croats have begun doing to the Muslims in Mostar what the Serbs have been doing to the Muslims throughout the rest of the region.

Unless I am mistaken, Medjugorje was not mentioned in connection with the conflict until May 12, both on national television and in the press.

A *New York Times* story on renewed peace efforts carried a Medjugorje dateline. I was struck by the fact that Medjugorje is just 12 miles south of Mostar.

It's literally a bloody mess over there. People of human decency are outraged by the raping and murdering of women and young girls, and by the random shelling and deliberate butchering of women, children, and the elderly. If it's not so terrible as the Holocaust, it's at least a close and dishonorable second.

What should shock and shame Christians everywhere is the fact that the infamous perpetrators in almost every instance are either Serbian Orthodox Christians or Catholic Croats.

Which brings us back to Medjugor-

je and the alleged apparitions of Mary there.

If the Blessed Mother really has been making appearances in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past 12 years and if she really is concerned about peace, doesn't anyone wonder why she hasn't radically altered her roster of visionaries by now?

Specifically, why has she been wasting her time on six young people with absolutely no political clout, connections, or credibility?

The evildoers, after all, are members of her Son's Church. In spite of their different approaches to the papacy, both the Orthodox Serbs and the Catholic Croats are one in their devotion to Mary.

Why, then, hasn't Mary made a real contribution to peace by paying a no-holds-barred visit to the head of the Bosnian Serbs? Why hasn't she scared the living daylight out of the Serbian military command? And why hasn't she taken the ruling clique in Belgrade to the spiritual woodshed? All of them are at least nominal Christians.

And when the Catholic Croats started acting in a barbarian manner just like the Serbs, why didn't she hit their key leaders between the eyes, warning them of the direst punishments from heaven? One would think that they certainly deserve it more than girls who wear their dresses too short, or boys who take the name of the Lord in vain.

But those are the kinds of apparitions we never hear about it. If we did, even a skeptic might begin to believe in them.

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