

Croatian women displayed hypocrisy

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

During these terrible months of brutal fighting and appalling atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the resort town of Medjugorje has only rarely been mentioned in the news. Medjugorje is — as many readers know — the alleged site of numerous Marian apparitions and a favored place of pilgrimage.

Four months ago, Medjugorje popped up briefly on our television screens and in our newspapers because the largely Catholic Croats began doing to the Muslims in Mostar what the largely Orthodox Serbs had been doing to the Muslims throughout the rest of the country. Mostar is located only 12 miles from Medjugorje.

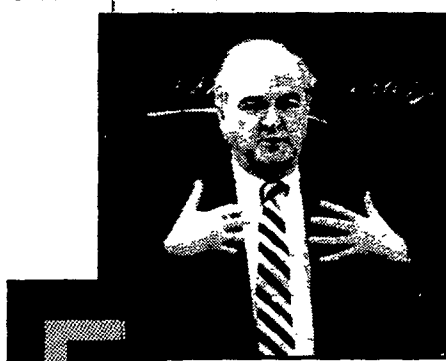
The little town with the Marian connection resurfaced in the media later last month.

A U.N. convoy of trucks, piled high with food and medical supplies for 50,000 sick and starving Muslims trapped in Mostar, was delayed for days in Medjugorje.

Bosnian Croatian women, determined not to let the convoy pass, formed a human blockade against it on the outskirts of Medjugorje and again in the village of Citluk, four miles away.

"You are helping murderers, and Mostar is Croatian!" shouted the crowd in Medjugorje.

According to an Associated Press report dated Aug. 25, "The women



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

sat in the road singing religious hymns, and demanded that the trucks be searched to see if they were smuggling weapons to the Muslims." There were none.

Because of the Catholic Croatian women's intransigence, the desperate needs of the Muslims in Mostar were left unmet for days. How many more died as a result we don't know.

In early June I did a column on Medjugorje and the war in Bosnia, and raised a question about the Blessed Mother's apparent priorities in the face of its horrors and terrible human toll.

I wondered why, if Mary has indeed been making appearances there for more than 12 years, she hasn't taken a special interest in the situation and begun to deal directly

with the parties that are responsible for it all.

I asked why Mary seems to have wasted so much time on the six young people who have absolutely no political or military clout, while applying no heavenly pressure at all on the real evildoers, the leaders of the Serbs and Croats — all at least nominally members of her Son's Church.

Some read that earlier column as an irreverent attack on the Blessed Mother herself. They may have been trying to deflect the criticism from where I was directing it — at them, not at Mary.

A more predictable reaction came from those who reminded me that God chooses the foolish things of this world in order to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong.

But that, too, seemed diversionary. There is no evidence whatsoever that the brutal (but not so wise) Serbian and Croatian strongmen of Yugoslavia and Bosnia have been in any way "confounded" by Mary's alleged appearances to the six young people.

If Mary really wished to "confound" the likes of them, wouldn't the way to do it be for Mary to make a very slight course correction the next time she visits the region and let these murderous leaders have it between the eyes, literally to scare the hell out of them?

But let's even assume for the moment that the critics have correctly

applied the biblical text about God's using the foolish to confound the wise and the weak to confound the strong.

Would the critics, in turn, concede that the Croatian women mentioned in the news reports and shown on television qualify as other than "wise" and "strong," that they're just ordinary, simple folks, much like the six young people to whom Mary has allegedly appeared?

If this is the case, why wouldn't Mary search these women out? They certainly could use such a visit, for their own spiritual welfare if for no grander reason.

Keep in mind: those Catholic Croatian women were actually singing religious hymns as they blocked the U.N. mercy convoys on their way to aid 50,000 Muslims dying of sickness and starvation in nearby Mostar.

One could begin to imagine the Blessed Mother's script for such a special, unscheduled appearance.

It might contain a few words taken directly from her Son's teaching about love for one another, even for one's enemies, about forgiveness, not seven times, but 70 times seven, about doing unto others not as they do unto you, but as you would have them do unto you.

She might also throw in a jab or two about hypocrisy and scandal.

That sort of apparition might not sell so many plane tickets, T-shirts, rosaries and holy pictures, but at least it would dramatize a point made repeatedly by the late Pope Paul VI: that peace is the work of justice.

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