

Church has Taken Tougher Stance on Medjugorje Waiting Final Pronouncement

[New Era World News](#)

IN THE FALL OF 2015 [Pope Francis](#), during a return flight from Sarajevo, told reporters that the Church was “close to coming to a decision” regarding its investigation of Medjugorje. The two bishops who have been the only Ordinaries in the Diocese of Mostar where the apparitions began have both made an unfavorable judgement about the supernatural events purported to have occurred there. Bishop Ratko Perić, the current bishop of Mostar-Duvno, holds the same negative position toward Medjugorje as his predecessor Bishop Žanić, who was bishop when Mary allegedly began appearing in 1981. Bishop Peric has not only evaluated the supposed apparitions as false, he has also denigrated them as a “religious show” and “*spectaculum mundo*” ([Belaj, Marijana](#) (2012)). Bishop Perić also composed a personal letter in which he stated that nothing supernatural was occurring in Medjugorje.

However, **The Bishop of Mostar has *not* been in charge of issue since 1986.** In that year, **Cardinal Ratzinger**, acting as **Prefect for the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF)**, relieved Bishop Zanic of the burden and **placed it in the hands of the Yugoslavian Bishops Conference.** which, since the break-up of Yugoslavia, has become the **Episcopal Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina.**

Thereafter, **Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of the Congregation for the CDF**, issued a clarification in which he stated that although both Bishops Zanic and Peric have ruled against the supernatural nature of the events, the issue had been handed off to the Yugoslavian Bishop’s Conference and therefore “what Bishop Perić said in his

letter ... is and remains his personal opinion.” [Archbishop Bertone](#) stated:

*“The main thing I would like to point out is that the Holy See does not ordinarily take a position of its own regarding supposed supernatural phenomena as a court of first instance. As for the credibility of the “apparitions” in question, **this Dicastery respects what was decided by the bishops of the former Yugoslavia** in the Declaration of Zadar, April 10, 1991: “On the basis of the investigation so far, it can not be affirmed that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations.” Since the division of Yugoslavia into different independent nations it would now pertain to the members of the Episcopal Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina to perhaps reopen the examination of this case, and to make any new pronouncements that might be called for.*

Therefore,

*“What Bishop Peric said in his letter to the Secretary General of Famille Chretienne, declaring: “My conviction and my position is not only ‘non constat de supernaturalitate’, but likewise, ‘constat de non supernaturalitate’ of the apparitions or revelations in Medjugorje,” should be considered the **expression of the personal conviction of the Bishop of Mostar** which he has the right to express as Ordinary of the place, but **which is and remains his personal opinion.**”*

In 1991 the Yugoslavian Bishop’s Conference issued binding guidelines including a statement that:

“It cannot be affirmed that these matters concern supernatural apparitions or revelations.”

Among its guidelines was one that forbids “official diocesan” and “parish pilgrimages” to Medjugorje; however, it does

permit priests to accompany groups of Catholics to provide the sacraments and spiritual direction.

Likewise, [Archbishop Bertone](#) made it clear the pilgrims could go to Medjugorje but NOT if the trip was promoted as a pilgrimage or journey to a place of authentic Marina apparitions.

“Official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, understood as a place of authentic Marian apparitions, are not permitted to be organized either on the parish or on the diocesan level, because that would be in contradiction to what the Bishops of former Yugoslavia affirmed in their fore mentioned Declaration.”

Thus, although pilgrimages are permitted, Medjugorje cannot be promoted as “a place of authentic Marian apparitions.”

Then on October 21, 2013 at the request of Cardinal Muller (current Prefect of the CDF under Pope Francis), Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States forwarded a [letter](#) regarding Medjugorje and Medjugorjian seer Ivan Dragicevic, to Msgr. Ron Jenkins, Secretary of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The letter conveyed the Nuncio’s “wishes to:

“...inform the (US) Bishops that one of the so-called visionaries of Medjugorje [sic], Mr. Ivan Dragicevic, is scheduled to appear at certain parishes around the country, during which time he will make presentations regarding the phenomenon of Medjugorje.”

“It is anticipated, moreover, that Mr. Dragicevic will be receiving ‘apparitions’ during these scheduled appearances.”

The expectation of Marian visitations at the

prompting/scheduling of Ivan Dragicevic was problematic: The entire issue is still undergoing scrutiny by the the Bosnian Bishop's Conference in cooperation with the CDF.

Nevertheless, devotees continue to gather around the seers who undertake international journeys to promote the message while continuing to receive new messages. Many, as those preparing to attend Ivan's appearances, presume that the Virgin Mary is going to appear (on schedule). This is an issue in itself: The Fatima children did not know when Our Lady would appear, they knew the date but *not* the time – the August, 19 appearance was unannounced. It is an issue for the CDF for other reasons as well, primarily its acceptance of the 1991 Yugoslavian Bishop's pronouncement that stated:

*“On the basis of the research that has been done, it is not possible to state that there were apparitions or supernatural revelations....It follows, therefore, that **clerics and the faithful are not permitted to participate in meetings, conferences or public celebrations during which the credibility of such ‘apparitions’ are taken for granted.**”*

In other words, the issue is still under scrutiny but both the seers and the public often accept the credibility of the apparitions as taken for granted, when they are not. To be so, Ivan (*et al*) would have to preface his engagements with statements such as the following: The Virgin Mary might be appearing at Medjugorje and if she appears here tonight, the whole thing might be a fabrication, or a ruse, or due to my own mental incapacity or for a profit motive; these things cannot be discounted nor can anything I say or experience be taken for granted as true; I might be a fraud – we will *not* know until the Church has finalized its investigation.

Specifically, the [Nuncio's letter states](#):

“The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is in the process of investigating certain doctrinal and disciplinary

aspects of the phenomenon of Medjugorje...With regard to the credibility of the "apparitions" in question, all should accept the declaration, dated 10 April 1991, from the Bishops of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, which asserts:

"On the basis of the research that has been done, it is not possible to state that there were apparitions or supernatural revelations. It follows, therefore, that clerics and the faithful are not permitted to participate in meetings, conferences or public celebrations during which the credibility of such "apparitions" would be taken for granted."

In other words, until the CDF decides on the matter, in the absence of a statement by the Bosnian bishop's, the Church is defaulting to the Yugoslavian bishops. Consequently, to avoid confusion and scandal, Archbishop Muller requested the nuncio to inform the US bishops about the seers visit in light of the 1991 Yugoslavian bishop's pronouncement, which clearly states that it is *not* possible (currently) to state that there are/were apparitions or supernatural messages.

Cardinal Muller's approach represents an increasingly active intervention on the part of the CDF; it "represent(s) a change of pastoral attitude on the part of the Holy See". It is clear that the CDF is insisting that ecclesiastical decisions be adhered to while we await the final decision of the Church.

Regarding Medjugorje, Catholics are duty-bound to obey directives from the local bishop and Yugoslavian/Bosnian Bishops' Conference, esp. directives regarding pastoral responsibilities, authentic Marian spirituality, liturgical celebrations and regulations regarding use of the church's property. Nor (according to [Colin B. Donovan, STL](#)), is it clear if Catholics are even any longer permitted to go to Medjugorje

“While the earlier statements permitted Catholics to go to Medjugorje, and even include priests acting as chaplains, the 2013 statements raise serious questions about the possibility of doing so. It was already inherent in the earlier statements that the valid basis for a pilgrimage must be a balanced Marian devotion. Catholics may not participate in any Medjugorje event that takes for granted the authenticity of the apparitions. Prior to 2013 the prohibition was placed on bishops and clergymen directing them not to conduct any formal pilgrimages to Medjugorje so as to give the appearance of official approbation when none actually existed; this extends to conferences, talks, retreats etc. hosted outside of Medjugorje as well.”

“Practically speaking, how does one go on a pilgrimage to a destination whose fame depends on an alleged apparition and not presume it to be authentic? It seems unlikely that such pilgrimages are simply a matter of tourism and not organized with encounters, conferences and other activities to satisfy a presumption of authenticity.”

Nor is *public* veneration of the Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Medjugorje permitted; such a “*cultus*” amounts to a “presumption of authenticity”.

When looking at both sides Medjugorje spectrum, from “Convinced Devotees” to “Unconvinced Skeptics”, it becomes easier to understand why the latter group seems to have the stronger argument, why the Church has arrived at its current more strict approach, and why Pope Francis recently warned the faithful to be on guard for those “who always need novelty of Christian identity...They’ve forgotten that they were chosen, anointed, that they have the guarantee of the Spirit.”

He said this prior to taking a papal jab at the visionaries”,

“But where are the seers who tell us today, ‘the letter that the Madonna will send us at four in the afternoon.’”

Our Lady, he emphasized,

“...is the Mother of everyone! And she loves all of us. She is not a postmaster, sending messages every day.”

Continued Tomorrow – Why the Church has Taken a Tougher Stance on Medjugorje while Waiting for Final Pronouncement