

Declaration Of The Ex-Yugoslavia Bishops' Conference On Medjugorje

At the ordinary session of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia in Zadar from April 9 - 11, 1991 the following was adopted:

DECLARATION

The bishops, from the very beginning, have been following the events of Medjugorje through the Bishop of the diocese (Mostar), the Bishop's Commission and the Commission of the Bishops Conference of Yugoslavia on Medjugorje.

On the basis of the investigations, so far it cannot be affirmed that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations.

However, the numerous gatherings of the faithful from different parts of the world, who come to Medjugorje, prompted both by motives of belief and various other motives, require the attention and pastoral care in the first place of the diocesan bishop and with him of the other bishops also, so that in Medjugorje and in everything connected with it a healthy devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary may be promoted in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

For this purpose, the bishops will issue especially suitable liturgical-pastoral directives. Likewise, through their Commission they will continue to keep up with and investigate the entire event in Medjugorje.

In Zadar April 10, 1991
The Bishops of Yugoslavia

ON MEDJUGORJE - SOMETHING MORE DEFINITE

Editorial Commentary in "Glas Koncila", official national Croatian catholic newspaper, Zagreb May 5, 1991, p. 2

The latest declaration on Medjugorje from the Catholic Bishops of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is a classic example of the centuries old practice of authentic ecclesiastical prudence. It demonstrates that the Church respects facts above all, that it carefully measures its competence and that in all matters it is mostly concerned for the spiritual welfare of the faithful.

It is a fact known to the whole world that, because of news about Our Lady's apparitions already for a full ten years, both believing and inquisitive people have been gathering in Medjugorje. Is it a fact that the Mother of God is really appearing there and giving messages? The Bishops, carefully holding to their competency, declare, "On the basis of investigations so far it can not be affirmed."

The content and the sense of that declaration have to be considered on two levels. In this case, the first and the essential level is that the contents of such possible so-called private revelations cannot be added to the revealed and obligatory contents of the faith. Therefore, neither the Bishops nor the Pope himself have the authority either to conclude infallibly that Our Lady has really appeared somewhere or the authority to impose on the faithful to believe that she has appeared. The Magisterium of the Church is infallible under well-known conditions only when it affirms that something is contained or not contained in that Revelation which the Church received up to the end of the apostolic age and which is preserved in Scripture and Tradition. Whatever is not included, neither in Scripture nor in Tradition the Magisterium cannot proclaim as a doctrine of the faith nor as content to be believed under obligation. Accordingly, only the uninstructed could expect the Bishops to

resolve the question of the Medjugorje apparitions for us so as then to know exactly what we are allowed or not allowed to believe about them.

But on the other hand then why are they so carefully investigating that report? Because they do have the obligation to establish whether that which is taking place there and is being proclaimed from there is in accordance with the entirety of the revealed truth of the faith and of moral doctrine. If it is established that there is nothing contrary, that the revelations and messages are in accordance with Catholic faith and morals, they, as the most responsible in the Church, could proclaim that there is neither any objection to gatherings of the faithful in that place nor to the development of the spiritual life according to the sense of those messages. On the contrary, it would be their obligation to expose errors and prevent abuses. The pertinent expressions in the new Declaration show that the investigations are also continuing in that sense.

But the main force of the Declaration shows that our bishops are above all taking notice of the factual gathering of a large number of the faithful and of the inquisitive in Medjugorje and they consider it their duty to insure that such a large number of gatherings there receive a correct proclamation of the faith, an orthodox and up-to-date catechesis, so that the holy sacraments are correctly and worthily administered there and especially that the Medjugorje Marian devotion develops in accord with Christian orthodoxy. That position is the real news of this document.

Surely, as the document itself states, one should expect suitable liturgical-pastoral directives for the solemn celebrations in Medjugorje. A proposal made long ago, which was also emphasized in "Glas Koncila", would also thereby be realized, namely, that the bishops' care for Medjugorje be divided between two commissions, One would continue investigating whether there are or are not supernatural apparitions or revelations, and the other would take care of the proper and healthy ecclesiastical conduct of the Medjugorje gatherings. This is because it is really possible that the first of these commissions would still be investigating for a long time and maybe even decide not to publish its final opinion, whereas care for the gatherings cannot be postponed because they are continuously taking place.

For many devout people around the whole world this Declaration will serve as a valuable relief in the area of conscience. Those, namely, who come to Medjugorje motivated by belief, will from now on know that those gatherings are covered by the ordinary and responsible care of the successors of the apostles.

ABOUT MEDJUGORJE ON THE 6TH ORDINARY MEETING OF THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Vrhbosna, VII (CX), 3, Sarajevo 1996., p. 171.

Preparing

A FRENCH BISHOP AND VATICAN CONGREGATION ON MEDJUGORJE

The Bishop of Langres in France, Msgr. Leon Taverdet, took recourse to the Apostolic See February 14, 1996 to ask what the position of the Church is regarding the apparitions in Medjugorje and whether it is permitted to go there for pilgrimage. The Holy See's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith answered March 23, 1996 through its Secretary Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone. We present his response in its entirety.

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Vatican City, March 23, 1996

Prot. No. 154/81-01985

Your Excellency,

In your letter of February 14, 1996, you inquired what is the present position of the Church regarding the alleged "apparitions in Medjugorje" and whether it is permitted to the Catholic faith to go there for pilgrimage.

In reference to that, it is my honour to make known to you that, regarding the authenticity of the apparitions in question, the Bishops of the former Yugoslavia confirmed in their Declaration of April 10, 1991 published in Zadar:

"... On the basis of investigation up till now it cannot be established that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations.

However, the numerous gatherings of the faithful from different parts of the world, who are coming to Medjugorje prompted both by motives of belief and certain other motives, require the attention and pastoral care in the first place of the bishop of the diocese and of the other bishops with him so that in Medjugorje and everything related to it a healthy devotion toward the Blessed Virgin Mary would be promoted in conformity with the teaching of the Church.

For that purpose, the bishops shall issue separate appropriate liturgical-pastoral directives. Likewise by means of their Commission they shall further follow and investigate the total event in Medjugorje."

The result from this in what is precisely said is that 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.

Kindly accept, your Excellency, an expression of my profoundly devoted affection!

+ Tarcisio Bertone

THE LATEST VATICAN STATEMENT ABOUT MEDJUGORJE

From the beginning of June 1996, many of the public means of communication reported that the Vatican had prohibited pilgrimages to Medjugorje. Spokesman for the Holy See, Joaquin Navarro-Valls immediately refuted this. However, in case there would remain any doubt regarding the stance of the Vatican towards Medjugorje, the spokesman for the Holy See clarified their position once again. Here we treat of the subject in full:

INDIVIDUALS PERMITTED TO VISIT MEDJUGORJE

By Catholic News Service

While the Vatican has never said that Catholics may not go to Medjugorje, it has told bishops that their parishes and dioceses may not organise official pilgrimages to the site of the alleged Marian apparitions, the Vatican spokesman said.

"You cannot say people cannot go there until it has been proven false. This has not been said, so anyone can go if they want," the spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, told Catholic News Service Aug. 21.

In addition, he said, when Catholic faithful go anywhere, they are entitled to spiritual care, so the church does not forbid priests to accompany lay-organized trips to Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, just as it would not forbid them accompanying a group of Catholics visiting South Africa.

Navarro-Valls insisted, "nothing has changed" regarding the Vatican's position on Medjugorje.

In early June, a French newspaper published excerpts from a letter about Medjugorje pilgrimages written by the secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in response to a question from a French bishop.

The letter from Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone of the doctrinal congregation quoted from a 1991 statement by the bishops of former Yugoslavia, which said that after much study, "it cannot be confirmed that supernatural apparitions or revelations are occurring here."

"However", the bishops said - and Archbishop Bertone repeated - "the number of the faithful travelling to Medjugorje requires for the church to arrange for their pastoral care."

After quoting the 1991 statement, Archbishop Bertone wrote, "From what was said, it follows that official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, understood as a place of authentic Marian apparitions, should not be organised either on a parish or diocesan level because it would be in contradiction with what the bishops of ex-Yugoslavia said in their declaration cited above."

Navarro-Valls said, "When one reads what Archbishop Bertone wrote, one could get the impression that from now on everything is forbidden, no possibility" for Catholics to travel to Medjugorje.

But, in fact, "nothing has changed, nothing new has been said", the spokesman told CNS.

"The problem is if you systematically organize pilgrimages, organize them with the bishop and the church, you are giving a canonical sanction to the facts of Medjugorje," which the church is still in the process of studying.

"This is different from people going in a group who bring a priest with them in order to go to confession," the spokesman said.

Navarro-Valls said he commented because "I was worried that what Archbishop Bertone said could be interpreted in too restricted a way. Has the church or the Vatican said "no" to Medjugorje? No."

STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE, DR. JOAQUIN NAVARRO-VALLS, ON PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE

"No new fact has been undertaken regarding this.

As has been already stated on previous occasions, in these cases respect of the immediate competence of the local episcopate is required.

In regard to that, on April 10, 1991 the Bishops of ex-Yugoslavia declared: "... On the basis of the investigations, so far it cannot be affirmed that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations. However, the numerous gatherings of the faithful from different parts of the world, who come to Medjugorje prompted both by motives of belief and various other motives, require attention and pastoral care in the first place of the bishop of the diocese and with him of the other bishops also, so that in Medjugorje and in everything connected with it a healthy devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary may be promoted in accordance with the teaching of the Church..."

One must still repeatedly emphasize the indispensable necessity of continuing the search and the reflection, besides the prayer, in the face of any presumed supernatural phenomenon, as long as there be no definitive pronouncement."

Bolletino No. 233 - June 19, 1996

CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI ON MEDJUGORJE

CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI
CITTA DEL VATICANO, PALAZZO DEL S. UFFIZIO

Pr. No 154/81-06419

May 26, 1998

To His Excellency Mons. Gilbert Aubry,
Bishop of Saint-Denis de la Reunion

Excellency,

In your letter of January 1, 1998, you submitted to this Dicastery several questions about the position of the Holy See and of the Bishop of Mostar in regard to the so-called apparitions of Medjugorje, private pilgrimages and the pastoral care of the faithful who go there.

In regard to this matter, I think it is impossible to reply to each of the questions posed by Your Excellency. 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 investigations 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 eventually reopen the examination of this case, and to make any new pronouncements that might be called for.

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.

Finally, as regards pilgrimages to Medjugorje, which are conducted privately, this Congregation points out that they are permitted on condition that they are not regarded as an authentication of events still taking place and which still call for an examination by the Church.

I hope that I have replied satisfactorily at least to the principal questions that you have presented to this Dicastery and I beg Your Excellency to accept the expression of my devoted sentiments.

Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone

(Secretary to the "Congregation for the Doctrine", presided over by Cardinal Ratzinger)

This is the summary of the letter:

- 1. The declarations of the Bishop of Mostar only reflect his personal opinion. Consequently, they are not an official and definitive judgement from the Church.*
 - 2. One is directed to the declaration of Zadar, which leaves the door open to future investigations. In the meanwhile, private pilgrimages with pastoral accompaniment for the faithful are permitted.*
 - 3. A new commission could eventually be named.*
 - 4. In the meanwhile, all Catholics may go as pilgrims to Medjugorje.*
- We can't but be thankful for this long awaited explanation.*

p. Daniel-Ange