

road near Bijakovici. Ivanka claimed that she could see the “Gospa,” although Mirjana was apparently uncertain.

Later on, having left a message for Vicka Ivankovic, the pair climbed up to Podbrdo—to collect the sheep according to Ivan Dragicevic’s testimony—and saw a vision. Ivan was close to them, having been picking apples nearby with another Ivan, Ivan Ivankovic, a twenty-year-old local man who later dissociated himself from the visionaries because he disapproved of their behavior.

In his taped interview with Fr Cuvalo, which took place on the afternoon of 27 June, Ivan Dragicevic says that he heard somebody saying: “The light is appearing up there.” Then Vicka and Ivanka called to him inviting him to go up, since they said that something, “like the Gospa” had appeared to them. He then said that they went up and had a similar experience. Fr Cuvalo asked Ivan what he saw once he had reached the girls and looked up, to which he replied: “I saw the light.” However, he was not very articulate, and could hardly find the words to describe what he had seen, but it appears that he saw a vision of a “feminine” figure bathed in light, wearing a veil, and a crown which “shone like silver,” hovering on a cloud above the stony ground.⁷¹

The Blessed Virgin – or Something Diabolical?

One of the strangest aspects of Ivan Dragicevic’s testimony on this occasion is that he tells us that the hands of the Vision were “trembling.” This is out of character with regard to the Blessed Virgin, who is by nature calm and serene. So this raises the question as to whether it might indicate a diabolical involvement. This point is emphasized by Msgr Farges, author of the celebrated study entitled *Mystical Phenomena*:

The signs of diabolical intervention are well known. The devil’s deeds always carry with them at least some ridiculous, unseemly, or coarse details; or even something opposed to faith and morals. If his vices were too obvious his influence would soon be unmasked; they are therefore always disguised under more or less inoffensive appearances, even under deceitful traits of virtue and sanctity. He transforms himself at will into an angel of light. God occasionally allows him to assume the most majestic forms, such as those of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or the saints. Nevertheless—for God could not otherwise permit it—the disguise, no matter how bold, is never complete, and he always

betrays himself in some particular which cannot escape an attentive and prudent observer. Furthermore, the work of the devil becomes very soon unmasked by evil results, for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.⁷²

Fr Manfred Hauke, the theologian and mariologist, also comments on this point, saying: “The form of the apparition must correspond to the work of God, which is always perfect. Any physical or moral defects in appearance, attitude, or movements of the Mother of God are to be excluded.”⁷³

According to Vicka’s first *Diary*, as translated by Fr Sivric, which he tells us was actually written for her by one of her sisters, Ana, she returned to the apparition site at around 6:30 p.m., with Mirjana and Ivanka, and it was the latter who then first saw the “Gospa,” at which point the others also saw her. In fact, Vicka was responsible for three “diaries,” which were three notebooks covering the time from the start of the visions until 25 March 1982, but not in a continuous manner. She wrote the third herself, with her sisters being responsible for writing the others, based on information supplied by Vicka.

Vicka claims that the Vision was holding a baby-like object, while waving at them to come closer, but that she got frightened and ran back to the village. The visionaries told everyone that they had seen the *Gospa*, and some apparently responded that since that day was the feast of St John the Baptist, perhaps they could expect something miraculous. During the vision, Mirjana had apparently asked for a sign so that everyone would believe them, and, according to Vicka, the hour hand on a wristwatch turned right around, which she took as a sign. However, Bishop Zanic later took this particular watch to a watchmaker who confirmed that it was broken, and because of this, the dial could rotate and thus, at the least touch, modify the position of the numbers. Vicka reports that: “We kept touching her and kissing her, and she kept laughing.”⁷⁴

The Smoking Visionaries

It seems that Fr Cuvalo had suspicions that Podbrdo was a place which some young people visited to smoke—this certainly seems to be the drift of some of the questions he put to Vicka, Ivanka and Marija during the first interview he tape recorded. Regarding the

4

True and False Visions of Light

Third day - Friday 26 June 1981

The information from Fr Cuvalo's first taped interview of 27 June has Marija testifying that she saw the "Gospa" on the third evening, but the impression we get from her words is that the Vision only gradually appeared: "At first, I saw a little cloud below, then her [*the Gospa*], her body and head."⁹⁰ Ivanka then testified that they asked her why she had come there, to which the reply was given: "Because there were a lot of faithful, that we must be together." Ivanka also asked about her recently deceased mother, and was told that she was with the "Gospa," and that she should obey her grandmother. Mirjana asked about her grandfather, and was apparently reassured in a similar manner. They also asked if she was going to come again, to which the reply came: "Tomorrow at the same place," although no reply was made to their request for a sign.

Vicka tells us that she took along blessed salt and water, as a way of testing the Vision to see if it really was the "Gospa," on the assumption that the devil would be driven away by such sacramentals. After invoking the Trinity, she sprinkled the Vision while saying: "If you are the Gospa, remain with us. If you are not, get lost." There is some confusion in the ordering of events on the tape, but according to Jakov's interview with Fr Zovko, on the afternoon of 27 June, the sprinkling of the "Gospa" coincided with the moment when, according to Ivanka, she herself, Marija, and Mirjana, lost consciousness, at least to a degree.⁹¹

According to Fr Bubalo's interview with Vicka of December 1983, this "holy water" consisted of blessed salt and ordinary water, and had been made up by her mother, who merely mixed the two together.⁹² This certainly calls into question whether this really was holy water, although the blessed salt on its own should have provoked some sort of reaction.

Ivan Dragicevic was also present on this occasion, and says in his interview with Fr Cuvalo that he, too, once again saw and heard the "Gospa," substantially confirming what the girls had told the priest in their interview with him. He was quite insistent that he was not lying when pressed by Fr Cuvalo. He said that on this occasion, he didn't see the "Gospa" straight away, rather Vicka saw her first; he didn't hear her say anything. When asked how his family had reacted to this news of visions, he remarked that they had said that they believed that the visions were true because so many other people had seen something.⁹³

Fourth day – Saturday 27 June 1981

Fr Cuvalo interviewed Marija on the evening of 28 June in the Rectory at St James's Parish Church. He began by saying that the previous evening he had been with the crowd which had gathered, and had seen her looking upwards and heard her exclaim: "There she is!" She confirmed this, and then he asked her exactly what she had seen. She responded: "The light". From the conversation which follows it is unclear whether Marija actually said, "there *she* is," or "there *it* is," but from her later responses it seems that she just saw a light initially, rather than a figure, since further on she says that the first things that she saw were the "light and the stars." Fr Cuvalo then asked her what kind of light she saw, and where it was situated, on the ground or in the sky. Marija said that it was in the sky, and that she saw "the Gospa, her body", and that she wanted to see how close to the ground she would lower herself.

Fr Cuvalo then established exactly where the other visionaries were positioned in relation to Marija, and got her to confirm that she had indeed seen the light first before seeing any figure. It is noteworthy that she did not see a rosary on the hand of the "Gospa," and that in particular the Vision made no attempt to initiate a conversation.⁹⁴ According to Marija, the Vision disappeared

and reappeared, ascending and descending, while Vicka “loudly asked her questions.”⁹⁵

Mirjana’s taped interview with Fr Zovko, gives us more information about exactly how the “Gospa” disappeared. She told him that: “She goes slowly. She is disappearing slowly. She is climbing up there and then, the sky lights up. ... She goes straight and disappears, little by little. There is more and more mist. ... Mist appears all around her and she goes towards the sky.”⁹⁶

At this stage, on the fourth day, Fr Zovko was clearly concerned that the “Gospa” was not saying anything of particular importance to the visionaries, and he insistently questioned Mirjana about this, and about what they were all expected to do.⁹⁷

Fifth and Sixth days of the Visions

By the fifth day, June 28, it appears that the initial light phenomena, which were certainly seen by some of those on the hillside, were no longer present.⁹⁸ But Mirjana was still speaking about the “light” that the visionaries could see as the “Gospa” appeared to them, since in an interview on that same evening she testified that: “I first spotted the light. Then I poked the others: ‘Do you see the light?’ They responded that they did. Then I saw how she is gradually descending and it is becoming clearer and clearer as she descends lower and the little stars all around her. It is so beautiful.” A little further on Mirjana clarified this point: “As soon as I spot her, it becomes clearer and clearer. When she descends down, then it becomes completely clear that I see her.”⁹⁹

Mirjana, at least according to the taped interviews we have, was the first one to mention that the visionaries asked the “Gospa,” on the fifth evening, to appear in the church, “so that everybody can see her.” It may well be, though, that they were prompted to ask this question by someone else. Certainly, a little later in this interview, Fr Zovko made his concerns plain, asking why there was no message, and why the “Gospa” wasn’t appearing in the church. Apparently, Mirjana had absolutely nothing to say to either of these questions.¹⁰⁰

Apart from Fr Sivric’s transcriptions, and those of Daria Klanac, both of whom obtained their copies of the tapes from Grgo Kozina, the latter also tape recorded the visionaries while they were on

Podbrdo on 29 June. Fr Janko Bubalo had a copy of this tape and played it for Vicka during one of his interviews with her:

Fr Janko: "If you aren't too tired, would you listen to a live tape taken at one of the apparitions? To help you recall how it was."

Vicka: "Why, of course. Where did you get it?"

Fr Janko: "That is not important at this point, but, let's listen. The tape isn't the best. You know how it was to record in the midst of all the thorns, but, nevertheless... listen..."

"The wind is blowing...the thornbushes sway...there they are, the six of them... They stand... They pray the Hail Mary ..."

[Commentary by Grgo Kozina—the following sentences record what Vicka said, and include her repetitions of the "Gospa's" words in italics]

"My Lady, what do you wish of us?"

"My Lady, what do you wish of our priests?"

"She said they should be firm of faith."

"Lady, why don't you appear in the church, so that all can see you?"

"Blessed are they who do not see, but believe."

"My Lady, will you come to us again?"

"I will, at the same place."

"Lady, do you prefer that we sing or that we pray?"

"She said both."

"My Lady, what do you wish of the people gathered here?"

"She did not respond."

"The Virgin appears again, and the visionaries in one voice: 'Here she is!' ..." [Commentary by Grgo Kozina]

"My Lady, what do you wish of the people here?" [Vicka, three times]

"She said that she gave the response, that the people here who do not see her should believe just as we six who see her do."

[Vicka]

"My Lady, will you leave us some sign here on earth so that we can convince the people that we are not ... lying, that we are not using you? [Vicka, but no apparent response]

“The Virgin disappears ... Will she come again? Little room for passage ... the road is full ... cars lined up to Beljina’s store ... All full ...” [Commentary by Grgo Kozina]¹⁰¹

Thus the contents of this tape give us a verbal snapshot of what actually happened on Podbrdo during that vision, and provide valuable additional information to supplement the transcripts from Fr Sivric and Daria Klanac.¹⁰²

Fr Zovko is Skeptical ... and Concerned

Fr Zovko’s interview with Ivanka, made that same evening, also brought out the point that there was no definite message emerging from the visions, and his unease at this: “Why did she appear to you when there is no message? ... That looks like clowning to me. She came in vain and she doesn’t have anything to say.” In his interview with Ivan, too, it is clear that Fr Zovko was concerned about this lack of a message, pressing him on this point. By this stage, Fr Zovko was getting worried about the size of the crowds gathering on the hillside, and also by the lack of any sign to show that the visionaries were telling the truth.¹⁰³

Fr Sivric describes the atmosphere at the time as being explosive, since with each day the crowds thronging Podbrdo were growing ever larger. This ultimately led to the Communist authorities blocking all access roads.¹⁰⁴

After raising the possibility with Mirjana that she could be seeing Satan, an idea which she rejected, Fr Zovko went on to ask her what else she saw in her vision apart from the “Gospa.” She responded:

When I look at her, the images come to me from the birth of Jesus when the angel approached her while saying to her: “Hail Mary,” that she was going to conceive the Lord and become his mother. All that turns and comes into my head. Then, I saw it, how she was poor ... I see all that in front of my eyes as in a film. ... I look at her and all that appears in my head.

This mention of images turning over in her head certainly sounds much more like an hallucination than a genuine divine apparition. And surely, the fact that Fr Zovko could ask Mirjana if she wasn’t afraid that Satan could pretend and say he was the Blessed Virgin

Mary during this interview, is a clear indication of the way his thoughts were running, at this stage of the visions.¹⁰⁵

The Move from Podbrdo to the Church

By the time Fr Zovko came to interview Ivanka, that same evening, 28 June, it is apparent that he wanted to try and arrange for the visions to take place in the parish church from that point onwards. He queried if they had asked the “Gospa” about that—but she could not remember.¹⁰⁶

The only comment to be made about this idea, is that in none of the authentic apparitions of the Blessed Virgin has there been any suggestion that their location is in any way subject to human considerations or desires.

In fact, one of the most curious aspects of the whole Medjugorje affair, is that during this crucial early period, the “Gospa” didn’t ask for a chapel to be built at Podbrdo, although in her major approved apparitions, she has usually done that. Certainly, this was the case at Guadalupe, and also at Lourdes, while Rue du Bac was itself a church, so there was no need for this there. She didn’t ask for a chapel at La Salette, but that was probably because the apparition site was located at the top of a mountain. Despite this, because of the enthusiasm of the local people, a church was eventually built at the site. At Fatima, too, she requested a chapel, and the same was true of Banneux and Beauraing in Belgium.

But at Medjugorje, which, as we will see, according to Mirjana, is to be the “last apparition on earth,” and thus presumably at least as important, if not more important than Fatima, there was no request for a chapel to be built at Podbrdo.

And in fact, Vicka specifically asked the “Gospa” what she wanted to happen, “right here in this place,” that is at Podbrdo—but she had to confess, during her interview on 30 June, that the Vision, “didn’t know,” to which Fr Zovko responded: “What kind of Gospa is it who doesn’t know? Then she is smaller than a child.”¹⁰⁷

On Monday 29 June, the feast of St Peter and St Paul, Fr Zovko wrote out a declaration on the visions, which was read out after Mass. In this, as reported by Mary Craig, he stated that he had talked to the children and recorded the conversations, but, having “listened again to the cassettes, I must insist that there is no public

revelation here. If anything is being revealed, it is of a private nature, for the children's benefit alone. Whether this will change I do not know. So far, Our Lady has said nothing that is meant for anyone else."

So, on the sixth day of the visions, Fr Zovko was openly acknowledging that there was no substantial public message being given to the visionaries.

That same evening, according to Mary Craig, the people of Bjakovici were summoned to an emergency meeting of the local Socialist Alliance, and were given explicit instructions by the local Communist leaders that the gatherings on Podbrdo were to be obstructed by all necessary means, and were also informed that: "If you must do these things, do them in church." The same message was given to Fr Zovko the next day, when both he and Fr Cuvalo were summoned by the Communist authorities to a further meeting at the regional centre of Citluk, and informed that it was necessary that the crowds be moved into the church where the situation could be controlled. This helps to explain why Fr Zovko became so insistent on the tapes that the visionaries should move into the church and away from Podbrdo.¹⁰⁸

The Light and the Mist

Fr René Laurentin comments on the "light" associated with the "Gospa," and its influence on the visionaries, as follows: "The Gospa ... attracted them by her sweet tonic and therapeutic light. Just like at Lourdes, this light preceded her. She came in this light, which illuminated like an interior sun."¹⁰⁹

However, there are important differences between the "light" surrounding the "Gospa," and the light which preceded the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes. One of the early chroniclers of the apparitions there was J. B. Estrade, and he recorded Bernadette's recollections on this point as follows. She told him that there "came out of the interior of the grotto a golden-colored cloud, and soon after a Lady, young and beautiful, exceedingly beautiful, ... came and placed herself at the entrance of the opening above the rose bush."¹¹⁰ In this instance, we get the impression that rather than the Vision coalescing from the light which preceded her, as appears to have happened at Medjugorje, for Bernadette rather, the apparition of the Lady was

distinct from the golden-colored cloud, and was not a part of it. This is an extremely important point, as is clear from these other examples.

At Rue du Bac, Catherine Labouré initially heard a sound like the rustling of a silk dress, before seeing the Blessed Virgin descend the altar steps of the convent chapel, and seat herself on the director's chair. Catherine then threw herself at Mary's feet, put her hands on her lap and looked up into her eyes, later describing that moment as the sweetest of her life.¹¹¹ Here, once again, there is no suggestion of the apparition of Mary gradually appearing, rather she was fully formed from the first moment that Catherine was aware of her presence, to the extent that she heard the noise of her dress, and could even physically touch her.

The same is true of the apparition seen by the children at La Salette. Mélanie was the first to see a dazzling globe of light at the top of the mountain, and called to Maximin. Both children shaded their eyes from the glare of the globe as it grew bigger and began to open, revealing a seated woman with her head in her hands. She then stood up and spoke to them: "Come, my children. Do not be afraid. I am here to tell you great news."¹¹² Thus, although the children saw the Blessed Virgin emerge from the globe of light, she was not part of that light, but quite distinct from it.

The situation was similar at Fatima, where we read that while the three little children were at the Cova da Iria with their flocks, on 13 May 1917, suddenly there was a bright flash of something like lightning. They looked up, thinking a thunderstorm was coming: but to their surprise the sky was clear and there was no wind. They had just agreed to go home in case it was a storm when there was another flash, and they looked up to their right to see, in Lucia's words, "a lady, clothed in white, brighter than the sun, radiating a light more clear and intense than a crystal cup filled with sparkling water, lit by burning sunlight."¹¹³

Here, too, it is clear that the children saw the apparition immediately and distinctly, and so we can see that there is a definite pattern to the way that Mary has been seen by the seers of her recognized apparitions. Although an aura of light usually accompanied her, it was distinct from her person. There was no question of her gradually appearing out of this light in an indistinct way, as at Med-

jugorje, but rather the apparition was fully formed and recognizable right from the beginning.

The Angel of Portugal

Incidentally, this is also the case with the apparition of the Angel of Portugal seen by the Fatima shepherds on three occasions in 1916. In her *Second Memoir*, Lucia tells us that previously, in 1915, along with some other young companions, she had seen a mysterious being which she described as follows: “we saw a figure poised in the air above the trees; it looked like a statue made of snow, rendered almost transparent by the rays of the sun.” The indications are that because of its brilliance she couldn’t discern its features. Then, in the spring of the following year, while she was with Francisco and Jacinta looking after the sheep, following their lunch and the rosary, they began to play a game; but they were interrupted by a strong wind which shook the trees. She continues:

Then we saw coming towards us, above the olive trees, the figure I have already spoken about. Jacinta and Francisco had never seen it before, nor had I ever mentioned it to them. As it drew closer, we were able to distinguish its features. It was a young man, about fourteen or fifteen years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it, and of great beauty.¹¹⁴

Here, too, it isn’t the case that the figure gradually emerged out of a light; rather it was as if made of light and the very intensity of this light made it difficult to distinguish its features.

Msgr Farges has some very interesting observations about the process of a false vision gradually appearing. He is speaking particularly about hallucinations, but from what he says, it is clear that in certain cases such phenomena may be diabolically induced. He describes the way certain visions only become “gradually visible, with increasing clearness”, beginning as a “vague light.” As an example, he speaks of crystal-gazing as related to fortune-telling: “The visionary who gazes into the mysterious crystal begins by seeing nothing at all, then he sees there vague clouds, then in these clouds personages are traced; finally these become clearly defined, move, and often they speak.”¹¹⁵ While this analysis can be applied to subjects who are hallucinating, it is also a classic description of the activities

of fortune tellers, some of whose powers, historically, can undoubtedly be related to diabolical activities.

Some Examples of Suspect Visions

Certainly, this idea of Mary gradually appearing out of a cloud or mist, or being obscured in some way, or as associated with unusual types of light, is present in false or suspect visions. For example, this is what happened during some of the false visions which followed Lourdes. The first great chronicler of the apparitions, Fr Cros, interviewed some of these false visionaries as adults in 1878, including one Laurent Lacaze, who said that he remembered going “to the Grotto with other children: [and] that I saw a *kind of shadow*, but I have no idea whether *it* had any outline, or whether it was a man or a woman.” Another, Jean-Pierre Pomiès, went into more detail:

I used to go often to the Grotto, attracted by all the stories of what was going on there. During these visits I twice had a vision, the first time I saw a *dazzling light* in the hollow of the rock, and in the middle of it, a *rather thick shadow*. The light was neither red nor white, and stood about three feet high. I could not distinguish any face. This lasted about a quarter of an hour.¹¹⁶

The theme of “light” was certainly present during the first alleged apparition to Ida Peerdeman, the visionary from Amsterdam, Holland, associated with the “Lady of All Nations,” who claimed that she saw Mary on 25 March 1945. She described her experience as follows: “I suddenly saw a light and said to myself: ‘Where is this light coming from? What a curious light?’ The wall then disappeared before my eyes. There was instead one sea of light in an empty space, and out of it I suddenly saw a figure moving forward, a female figure.”¹¹⁷

The idea of the apparition Peerdeman saw appearing out of a very bright light is a recurring theme in her later experiences. An instance of this is the beginning of the twenty-seventh vision about which she says: “A bright, a dazzling light preceded the Lady.” The twenty-eighth vision is even more explicit in this respect: “There was a bright light. From the centre of the light the Voice was heard. ‘Here I am once more.’ And I saw the Lady standing in the light.” Similarly, the same pattern is found in the twenty-ninth vision, (28 March 1951), which begins: “A brilliant light. From the depths of

the light a voice makes itself heard: 'Here I am once more: the Lady of All Peoples.' And suddenly I see her there in front of me."

All of this is suspicious, and this view is definitely confirmed by the following further examples, which provide evidence of a gradual appearance of the Vision, with the first from the thirty-first vision, (15 April 1951): "A great light. And the Lady, *slowly, very slowly*, emerges from this light and comes forward," while the thirty-second vision, (29 April 1951), has, "The light; and the Lady, *little by little*, emerges from the light."¹¹⁸

Another example comes from the experiences of Mary Ann Van Hoof, the visionary associated with Necedah, Wisconsin, in the United States, who described how the Blessed Virgin emerged from a "blue mist" in her backyard on 28 May 1950. On another occasion, she described how she went out into the yard about midday, to the "Sacred Spot" where she "did not see Our Lady, only a sort of haze." She did however feel her "Heavenly Presence."¹¹⁹

A more recent example comes from Falmouth, Kentucky, where a woman called Sandy claimed visions and locutions during the 1990s which have not been approved. She described one of these events as follows: "I heard a sound. I've heard this before. It's like a musical, heralding-type sound from off in space. Then I looked up, and I saw a brightness ... and she [Mary] started to appear through this brightness."¹²⁰

This idea of visions of Mary gradually appearing out of cloud or mist, or an unusual type of light, or in an indistinct form, then, certainly raises suspicions as to authenticity. We do not find this type of detail in the approved Marian apparitions, but it is one of the main characteristics of false or suspect visions. Thus, the fact that this is precisely how the "Gospa" appeared to the visionaries at Medjugorje is not a good sign, and points to the extremely doubtful origin of these visions.

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Medjugorje: God or the Devil?

Medjugorje: A Diabolical Origin?

In the light of the evidence cited above it is legitimate then to ask whether or not the original visions, of the first week or so, were not in fact diabolical in origin, as Fr Zovko himself suggested on more than one occasion. If we look at the whole phenomenon from the perspective of the devil then some very interesting points emerge. He has a great deal of experience in this area. He knows all about human weakness, foolishness, and sinfulness—and how to exploit these to the maximum. And we always need to bear in mind St Paul’s warning that Satan can disguise himself as an “angel of light.” (2 Cor 11:14)

This discussion, though, needs to be put in context, to see if there are any indications of diabolical activity in Medjugorje prior to the alleged visions. As already noted, in the early hours of the morning of 24 June 1981, the first day of the visions, the village was struck by a terrifying thunderstorm. We have also seen how, in the past, Medjugorje was a center of Bogomil religion, and that part of this belief involved primitive rituals designed to appease the local nature spirits, including Gromovnik, the “spirit of thunder.” He was believed to inhabit Mount Krizevac, which had been known for centuries as Grmljavinac, or “Mountain of Thunder”. After the Franciscans arrived in the area remnants of this old religion lived on, and rituals in honor of Gromovnik continued. And even into the twentieth century, clan rituals, involving ancestor veneration,

were still a feature of local life, as a fully Catholic worship struggled to make its presence felt.

In more recent times, too, in the eyes of Medjugorje's inhabitants, it seemed that Gromovnik still wielded considerable power, a power which was particularly expressed in the devastating storms which plagued the area nearly every summer, and which could mean large hailstones destroying crops in seconds. In short, the villagers still believed in, and feared, Gromovnik. But all that changed following the construction of the large cross at the top of the mountain, in 1933, when its name was changed to Krizevac, or "Mountain of the Cross." From that point on, villagers claimed that the fiercely destructive storms virtually ceased, and hail was very much less of a problem.¹⁹¹

Such a scenario is not inherently unlikely: under the right circumstances the devil can wield considerable power over nature, but if a more obvious devotion to Christ is expressed in a particular area, then naturally his power can be expected to diminish. St Paul warned the Corinthian church to shun the worship of idols, which was so prevalent in his day, and particularly not to make sacrifices to them, which was actually sacrificing to demons. (1 Cor 10 14–20) And what else, ultimately, were the sacrifices made to Gromovnik in the past, if not sacrifices to demons?

The Great Medjugorje Storm

This brings us back to the storm which struck Medjugorje overnight, just before the visions began. Some older inhabitants of the village said that they could remember nothing like it since the erection of the Cross on Krizevac, over half a century earlier. Repeated streaks of lightning flashed across the sky to the sound of deafening thunder, and as fires were started by lightning strikes, a hall, which had been turned into a disco, was burned down, and the post office badly damaged. One terrified inhabitant compared it to the "Day of Judgement."¹⁹²

We have to ask why this significantly destructive storm happened just as the visions were beginning? Since the damaging power of the storms abated when the Cross was erected, what can the fact of such a storm indicate? It is surely hard to avoid the conclusion that it was a sign of some sort of diabolical manifestation, that

Gromovnik had returned to the area, and was seeking to cause more trouble. And what is “Gromovnik” except just another name for the demonic, if not the devil himself?

We should remember, too, the terrible storm which struck Fatima on the eve of 13 October, 1917, the day when the tremendous miracle of the sun took place. This had been predicted three months in advance, thus drawing tens of thousands of people to the Cova da Iria, despite the awful weather. Can we not see, in this storm, an attempt by the devil to dissuade as many people as possible from being at the Cova on that day?

And what about the fact that the “official” anniversary date for the first Medjugorje vision is now, in Medjugorje circles, 25 June, rather than 24 June, when the first vision actually took place? As we have seen, according to Vicka, the “Gospa” decided on this change of date, but we have to ask why. Could it be a further sign of the diabolical, in that the devil didn’t want to have the beginnings of Medjugorje too closely associated with 24 June, the Solemnity of the Birthday of St John the Baptist?

Another point to note is that in 1977, four years before the Medjugorje visions began, Bishop Zanic’s predecessor, Bishop Cule, set up a Marian shrine dedicated to Our Lady as “Queen of Peace.” This was done at Hrasno, which is situated about 25 miles away from Medjugorje, in the neighboring diocese of Trebinje e Mrkanin, a diocese which is administered by the bishops of Mostar-Duvno. Bishop Cule, by this act, specifically wanted the Blessed Virgin to heal the divisions within the area which were essentially caused by the disobedience of the Franciscans.¹⁹⁹ Why, then, would Our Lady want to begin to appear so close to this genuine shrine and create a rival to it in Medjugorje? It doesn’t make sense, except as, again, a sign of the diabolical. Who else but the devil would want to initiate such a thing?

In any event, if it is the case that the devil—or some sort of diabolic vision—was in fact appearing during the first week at Medjugorje, it can be said that his main concern, initially, would be to avoid frightening the visionaries away by acting in a precipitate way. Therefore, he would, of necessity, adopt a non-threatening attitude towards them. The devil does not know the future with precision—the fact of human free will and the power of God’s grace

make that too difficult—and therefore each case like this has to be treated on its own merits.

So, following the above scenario, on the first day, the Vision said nothing, but just allowed the visionaries to get used to their new experience. Similarly, the Vision did not say anything on the second day, but did allow the visionaries to touch its form. Fr Cuvalo questioned them on this point, asking if the Vision said anything as they were doing this. Marija replied: “Nothing at all, she kept looking ... She told us, she laughed, what else ...”¹⁹⁴

Thus, if the Vision was in fact diabolical, that would explain why Satan first of all ingratiated himself with them, by allowing them to touch the visionary form he had assumed, and also by laughing, thus putting them more at ease.

Garabandal and Medjugorje

This parallels what happened at Garabandal, a Spanish village, where in the early 1960s, four young girls claimed to have had visions of the Blessed Virgin, although not one of the successive bishops of Santander has accepted these visions as authentic. On Sunday, 2 July 1961, they alleged that she had appeared to them as Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and that they spoke to her for a long time. One of them, Conchita, later recorded in her diary that they told her mundane details about the village hay-making, and that “Mary’s” response was to laugh at the things they told her.¹⁹⁵

It is hard to believe that the real Blessed Virgin would have engaged in such trivial chit-chat with the girls. But as a diabolical method of drawing the children more closely into visions which were not supernatural, as also seems to have happened during the first week at Medjugorje, it makes perfect sense. We only have to recall the way the Serpent beguiled Eve to realize that this is exactly the way we should expect the devil to behave in such situations.

On 3 August 1961, the Garabandal visionaries made the first of their “ecstatic walks,” which involved their walking either forward or backwards, without apparently looking where they were going. These walks were often conducted at tremendous speed, to the astonishment of onlookers who could barely keep up.¹⁹⁶ There are interesting parallels here to some of the accounts of the Medjugorje

visionaries during the first week, including those recorded on the tapes transcribed by Fr Sivric. For example, Marija spoke of following people down the hill, and moving to another location after one of the visions, and of feeling “as if somebody got hold of me and kept dragging me. . . . Something kept attracting me.”

In Fr Sivric’s translation of her first *Diary*, Vicka makes a similar claim, speaking of how on the second day, 25 June 1981, she ran up the hill with the other visionaries who were present, because the “Gospa” was calling them: “We felt as if some force were drawing us up there.” Speaking of this occasion, Mirjana related that they had quickly climbed up the hill, “but . . . did not become tired,” despite the fact that it was a long way up.¹⁹⁷ Vicka also had this to say about that day’s events:

The Madonna called to us to go up on the hill, and we went. When you look up there from the bottom of the hill, it looks close, but it is not. We ran quickly up the hill. It was not like walking on the ground. Nor did we look for the path. We simply ran toward her. In five minutes we were on the hill—as if something had pulled us through the air. I was afraid. I also was barefoot, but no thorns had scratched me. When we were about two meters away from the Madonna, we felt as if we were thrown to our knees. Jakov was thrown kneeling into a thorny bush, and I thought he would be injured. But he came out of it without a scratch.

The interesting thing is that these experiences were not just the subjective feelings of the visionaries, but were also witnessed by onlookers, as Fr Kraljevic indicates: “Those who watched the children run up the hill testify to the truthfulness of Vicka’s words. They were amazed by the speed with which the children ran, and were not able to follow them to the top of the hill.”¹⁹⁸

We do not find anything like this “ecstatic” running in the approved apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, whereas it is disturbing to note this clear parallel with the activities of the Garabandal visionaries.

There is No Message

As we have seen, on the third day, Ivanka asked the Vision why she had come there, and was told: “Because there were a lot of faithful, that we must be together.” She asked, too, about her recently de-

ceased mother and was told that she was with the “Gospa”. Mirjana, too, was reassured about her grandfather. The visionaries then asked if she was going to come again, and were told: “Tomorrow at the same place”: but their request for a sign was ignored.¹⁹⁹

Here, too, we can see how this “small talk” was conducive to this process of ingratiating with the visionaries, while the “message” itself—“that we must be together”—is completely trite and unnecessary.

And as Louis Bélanger points out, too, the fact that Ivanka’s mother had died, alone, quite recently, at the early age of 39, is an important factor which has to be taken into account when assessing what really happened. Naturally she would still have been grieving for her mother, and so could be expected to interpret her experiences that day in the light of her bereavement.²⁰⁰ She may have had a desire to see her mother, and as we will see further on, the desire to see something “supernatural,” is dangerous because it gives the devil an opportunity to satisfy such a desire. So Ivanka’s fragile emotional state at the time of the first apparition, so soon after her mother’s death, and her possible *desire* for some sort of contact with her mother, may help us to better understand her frame of mind at the time.

In the light of what has taken place during genuine apparitions, it is astonishing to note that up to this point, the Vision had made no serious attempt to initiate any conversation, or pass on any message of substance, and in this regard, it was exactly the same on the fourth day. Rather, the Vision allowed the visionaries to take the initiative, and become used to its presence. Indeed, as already indicated, by this stage, Fr Zovko was becoming somewhat exasperated at the lack of any clear message from the Vision, and he pressed Mirjana on this point.²⁰¹

His perplexity continued following the events of the fifth day, when he was not able to get a straight answer on this point of a lack of a specific message, neither from Mirjana, nor Ivanka, nor Ivan. Finally, as already noted, on the sixth day, Fr Zovko publicly acknowledged that no official message was being given and that, “Our Lady has said nothing that is meant for anyone else.”²⁰²

This virtual non-communication to the visionaries from the “Gospa,” during the crucial first week or so of visions, contrasts very

strongly with the way that the approved apparitions of the Blessed Virgin have developed. In most such cases, a week has been quite sufficient for her to say everything she wanted to say, but at Medjugorje during this period the “Gospa” did not pass on anything of significance.

This does not mean, though, that everything about Medjugorje is necessarily diabolically inspired. As we have seen, Medjugorje arose in part because of the weakness of fallen human nature, especially on the part of the visionaries and their immediate associates. These elements facilitate the work of the devil, but as this work is invisible, it is therefore difficult to identify. Satan achieves his objectives by a kind of counterfeit “grace” in the heart and mind, by which people are drawn into believing in false visions almost without being aware of what is happening. For, clearly, the vast majority of those who have been to Medjugorje have gone there in good faith.

The Pattern of the Approved Apparitions

Whether it is the Blessed Virgin speaking to Juan Diego at Guadalupe, in 1531, when she imparted a series of messages to him, or Rue du Bac, where Mary spoke in detail about the mission she was giving Catherine Labouré, or Fatima, where the message contained a specific request to the Pope, the pattern of the approved apparitions of the past has been consistent: the Blessed Virgin has something definite and of vital supernatural importance to say regarding mankind’s salvation, and she wastes no time in conveying her message.

This is also true of her apparitions at Lourdes, La Salette, Beauregard, and Banneux. She always leads the conversation, and is the one who initiates important elements. This does not mean, however, that she unthinkingly brushes aside unimportant questions; rather, as a true mother, she shows that she understands the mentality of her children, and where their questions can be answered, she does so. But her intention is very definitely to convey a specific spiritual message in a relatively short space of time. In most cases, she did this with very few words, and this aspect seems to coincide with her reticence in the Gospels, where likewise, she said very little. In addition, her words are concerned with her mission as the

The counterpart to believing in Medjugorje is neglecting to profit from the genuine apparitions of Mary, and in particular Fatima. Unless one has moral certainty that a series of apparitions is genuine, then one is on very dangerous ground in believing in them.

As indicated above, the picture which emerges if we analyze the good fruits that are claimed for Medjugorje, is that these were certainly present to some extent in the early years. But as time has gone on, they have been noteworthy largely because of their absence. While there is much misunderstanding regarding exactly what Christ meant by this term, a correct analysis of his teaching indicates that we are meant to look mainly at the activities of those claiming visions, or those closely supporting them, rather than at any general religious enthusiasm which might be generated. In this sense, the evidence which we have been considering in earlier chapters of this work demonstrates that the fruits at Medjugorje cannot be said to have been good.

Furthermore, it is clear that within the general Catholic community, there is a widespread failure to realize that the fabrication of visions is a distinct possibility, or that the devil might well be involved in originating or sustaining them. This is what St John of the Cross says on this general point:

among locutions and visions there are usually many that come from the devil. For he commonly deals with the soul in the same manner as God does, imparting communications so similar to God's that, disguised among the flock like the wolf in sheep's clothing, his meddling may be hardly discernible. Since he says many things that are true and reasonable and turn out as predicted, people can be easily misled, thinking that the revelation must be from God since what was predicted truly comes about.⁵⁶⁵

In the past, Catholics were warned about the wiles of Satan, and of the need to remain wary about apparently miraculous events, but in recent years, the Church's traditional caution in this area has been sadly neglected.

A Diabolical Atmosphere

Given, then, all of the evidence discussed previously, how is one to explain the origin of the Medjugorje visions? Regrettably, an impartial assessment of the facts clearly suggests the possibility, if not the

probability, of a diabolical intervention. The Bible tells us that we should be sober and watchful, because, our “adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Pet 5:8). Satan is perpetually on the lookout to ensnare the unsuspecting or unwary. Most of the time, he can do little damage to us, providing we are in a state of grace and endeavor to resist his temptations. But if particular circumstances arise then problems may well begin.

As regards Medjugorje, these include the unstable family backgrounds and temperaments of some of the visionaries, which indicate that such persons would not be likely to receive communications from heaven. In addition, as already indicated, the fact that Ivanka’s mother was recently deceased would have put her in a vulnerable emotional state, which might have predisposed her to see something. Moreover, we have noted, too, the possible influence of the evil atmosphere resulting from the vengeance killings that were so much a part of the local “culture,” in addition to the previous worship of spirits in the area, and in particular the *location* of the visions, that is in a place associated with the wartime massacres at Surmanci near Medjugorje.

On this last point, Moira Noonan recounts a revealing incident. While still embroiled in New Age practices, she visited a spiritual “retreat center” in the northeast United States, which included a lake on the property. One hot summer’s day while sitting on the lake shore she tells us that she “had the sensation that something was wrong. I felt that there was something very strange and forbidding about this lake.” She attempted to shrug off this feeling by going for a swim out to a platform in the lake, but by the time she reached this, “the dark emotion I felt had completely overwhelmed me. ...It was as if I had been literally swimming through spirits. It was just eerie and it was sickening. It felt like I was swimming through blood, it was just so thick. I couldn’t stand it.”

When she got back she discovered that the white settlers of the area had massacred the native people who lived there—killing men and women and children—and then thrown their bodies into the lake.⁵⁶⁶ The parallel with the massacre at Surmanci is clear and disturbing.

Putting all this together, we can see that when Ivanka and Mirjana went up Podbrdo, to smoke and listen to rock music, the strong possibility of a diabolical intervention cannot be ruled out.

Some Diabolical Incidents

That some of the visionaries were involved in occurrences which strongly suggest this is clear from the following examples. A strange incident involving Mirjana took place about a year after the initial visions, in mid-1982, and she recounted it to Fr Vlasic in January 1983. She tells us that as she was waiting in her room for her usual rendezvous with the “Gospa”:

I knelt down, and had not yet made the sign of the cross, when suddenly a bright light flashed and a devil appeared. It was as if something *told* me it was a devil. I looked at him and was very surprised, for I was expecting the Madonna to appear. He was horrible—he was like black all over ... He was terrifying, dreadful, and I did not know what he wanted. I realized I was growing weak, and then I fainted. When I revived, he was still standing there, laughing. It seemed that he gave me a strange kind of strength, so that I could almost accept him. He told me that I would be very beautiful, and very happy, and so on. However, I would have no need of the Madonna, he said, and no need for faith. “She has brought you nothing but suffering and difficulties,” he said; but he would give me everything beautiful—whatever I want. Then something in me—I don’t know what, if it was something conscious or something in my soul—told me: *No! No! No!* Then I began to shake and feel just awful. Then he disappeared, and the Madonna appeared, and when she appeared my strength returned—as if she restored it to me. I felt normal again. Then the Madonna told me: “That was a trial, but it will not happen to you again.”⁵⁶⁷

This was clearly a frightening incident, but the biggest problem with this particular vision is that, unlike genuine Marian apparitions, where there is a clear distinction between the divine and the diabolical, here they are intertwined. Thus, in an overall sense, this type of manifestation is far more characteristic of the diabolical.⁵⁶⁸

This is evident from an incident which happened to Francisco of Fatima. In her memoirs, Sr Lucia does not tell us exactly when this happened, but it is clear that it was quite separate from one of the Blessed Virgin’s apparitions. She tells us how one day the three of

them went to a rocky place called Pedreira, and while the girls played and looked after the sheep, Francisco withdrew to pray nearby. After a while, Lucia and Jacinta heard him shouting and crying out to Our Lady, and they ran to find him, “trembling with fright, ...and so upset that he was unable to rise to his feet.” They asked him what had happened, and in a very frightened voice he told them that: “It was one of those huge beasts that we saw in hell. He was right here breathing out flames!”⁵⁶⁹

Marinko Ivankovic, speaking in February 1983, testifies to a strange event which took place, “on the Feast of the Madonna of the Angels,” 2 August 1981, in a field near Medjugorje, one evening after Mass. This was apparently a well-known meeting place for prayer. The visionaries were present, and claimed that the “Gospa” had appeared to them, and would allow all those who wished to do so, to touch her. The people duly came forward and “touched” the “Gospa”, being told by the visionaries that they were touching her veil, her head, her hand, and so on. This apparently went on for ten or fifteen minutes, until Marija cried out to Marinko: “The Madonna is blackened all over! ...[t]here were sinners here who touched her, and as they touched her [,] her robe got darker and darker, until it was black.” Marija then told him that they should all go to confession as soon as possible.⁵⁷⁰

Fr Laurentin mentions this incident,⁵⁷¹ but surprisingly makes no comment. It hardly needs stating that the above scenario—the idea that the Blessed Virgin could somehow be contaminated by contact with human beings—is quite absurd. It is absolutely contrary to authentic communications with the Blessed Virgin, as experienced by true mystics and saints, such as St Catherine Labouré, who, as we have seen, was able to put her hands on Our Lady’s lap.

The Real Power behind Medjugorje?

As for the continuing “power” and influence of Medjugorje, one also has to ask if there isn’t also a diabolical element present here too. Specifically, has the effect of the long-running rebellion by the Franciscans of the Herzegovina Province given the devil the power to ensure that Medjugorje continues to thrive? This might seem like an improbable claim, but it’s worth investigation.

The first thing to note is that, as discussed previously, the special decree issued in 1975 by the Holy See, *Romanis Pontificibus*, demanded Franciscan obedience concerning the distribution of parishes between the Franciscans of the Herzegovina Province, and the diocesan clergy of Mostar-Duvno diocese. The crucial point about this is that it was a *Vatican* decree, and thus this dispute was essentially between the Papacy and the rebellious Franciscans. So the Franciscans of the Herzegovina Province were in an active state of rebellion against the Vicars of Christ, even *before* the Medjugorje visions began. Just think of the power that must have given the devil to cause trouble. It was only in 1999, nearly twenty-four years after its promulgation, that *Romanis Pontificibus* was complied with, and even then a number of Franciscans refused to sign the declaration of obedience, resulting in nine being dismissed from the Order, and a further twenty-three suffering other penalties.

Disobedience resulting from pride was, of course, the hallmark of the devil's primordial revolt against God. And the *non serviam*—"I will not serve"—of Satan, has found a very powerful echo in the attitude of the Herzegovina Franciscans in their rebellion against official Church authority for so many years. And furthermore, this disobedience and pride have been compounded by the actions and attitudes of those Franciscans most involved with the Medjugorje visionaries, that is Frs Vlastic, Zovko and Barbaric.

In addition to pride and disobedience, there is also the question of dishonesty. At the beginning it doesn't seem that there was outright dishonesty—the evidence from the tapes does suggest that the visionaries really saw something. So it is probable that the claims of the visionaries—that they saw what they believed was the "Gospa"—were genuine for most of what happened until about the tenth day. The argument which has been presented in this book, of course, is that this wasn't the real *Gospa*, the Blessed Virgin, but a diabolical imposture.

From that point on, though, things for the most part, it would seem, changed, and this passage from the Catechism holds good:

Since it violates the virtue of truthfulness, a lie does real violence to another. It affects ... [a person's] ability to know, which is a condition of every judgment and decision. It contains the seed of discord and all

consequent evils. Lying is destructive of society; it undermines trust among men and tears apart the fabric of social relationships. (2486)

As we have seen, there is no question but that the visions were supposed to end on Friday 3 July 1981, the end of the three day period stipulated by both the visionaries and the two young women who were present during the vision on 30 June. But equally, the visions didn't end on that day, and it is claimed that they have continued for the last thirty years. Clearly, if that is the case, someone isn't telling the truth, and in a very big way.

It could be argued that if what the visionaries were seeing during this earlier period was actually diabolical in origin, then the evidence from the "three more days" dialogue suggest that they were being giving a chance to exit their role as visionaries. Maybe the devil had only been given a certain amount of time to tempt them, the ten day period from 24 June to 3 July—but they didn't take that chance. Whatever the exact reason for the continuance of the visions, such a pretence involves an extremely grave violation of the truth, and this too plays into the hands of Satan, who, according to Christ is "a liar and the father of lies." (Jn 8:44)

Thus, the whole Medjugorje edifice is built on pride, disobedience and, on the basis of the "three more days" dialogue, dishonesty, and this must, to some extent, account for the "spiritual power" which emanates from it. But the problem is that this power is not the grace which comes from God through Christ, but a sort of counterfeit "grace" which ultimately is a sign of the devil. Of course, there was, and is, "real" grace available at Medjugorje through sincere prayer and the sacraments, but it would be foolish to discount the presence of this diabolical "grace"—in the sense of deliberate serious sin putting a person under the power of the devil—as one of the "motors" for the Medjugorje phenomenon. This last point, of course, doesn't apply to the visionaries during the period up to 3 July, but rather to the disobedience of the local Franciscans. Even though the devil, unlike God, doesn't have the power to act directly on the human intellect and will, but only on the imagination and sensibility, he can still wield a powerful influence over individuals who freely commit sin. As Christ also noted, "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (Jn 8:34). And ultimately, being a slave of sin means being a slave of the devil.

On that pleasant late June afternoon in 1981, when Ivanka and Mirjana went out to smoke on Podbrdo, the devil was waiting, prowling around “like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,” (1 Pet 5:8), emboldened by the proximity of Surmanci, with its evil atmosphere, and no doubt strengthened by the long running rebellion of the Herzegovina Franciscans. For whatever reason, it seems that the visionaries took the devil’s bait, and the rest is history.

This chapter, then, clearly indicates the further problems involved with believing in Medjugorje, including the “apocalyptic” character of some of the messages, which puts them into conflict with the genuine message of Fatima, and other approved apparitions. Similarly, the necessity of being on guard against false prophets does not seem to have been fully realized by many Medjugorje devotees, nor the problems associated with aspects of the spirituality which has developed out of it. In particular, many have been largely oblivious of the potentially very dangerous results of having an excessive desire to see a vision. To a great extent, all of this has happened because of the crisis affecting the Church since the 1960s, which has resulted in many well-meaning Catholics becoming involved with Medjugorje—but tragically, they have not been aware of some of its darker aspects.