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# Italian pilgrims to Medjugorje

A study of Marian devotion

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AVH5080: Thesis for Master in History of Religion (60 ECTS), Spring 2020

Word count: 38 086





## **Acknowledgements**

These years in Oslo have been the happiest of my life and I could not be more thankful for the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people - professors, friends, and work colleagues. These people were never forgotten during the writing of my thesis. I want to thank the Mamma Pizza restaurant team for the endless food supply and unconditional support.

I would like to thank my family, my friends, strangers, and everyone who gave me a chance to talk about my master's thesis. My cousin was a rare gem during this time. Thank you!

I thank my Italian pilgrims, for being my source of inspiration. Without them, this thesis would not exist.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor Kristin Blikrud Aavitsland, for her constant support and kindness during difficult times. I also want to thank my second advisor, Solvor Mjøberg Lauritzen, for helping me with the interviews of my Italian pilgrims.

Last but not least, to my boyfriend, for believing in me even when I found no reasons to do so.

## Abstract

The main topic of my thesis is the study of Italian pilgrims to Medjugorje. The thesis is divided into two main parts. In the first part there are three main sections. The first is the theoretical landscape of my research, mostly focusing on the books *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor and Edith Turner and *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans.

The second focuses on the analysis of two previous Marian pilgrimages, Lourdes in 1858 and Fatima in 1917. The description of the two Marian pilgrimages will mainly refer to the book *Encountering Mary. From La Salette to Medjugorje* by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz. Medjugorje is compared to the two sites. The last section describes the apparitions of Medjugorje and the history of the small village during communism and the war in the former Yugoslavia. Present controversies of Medjugorje are discussed: the rivalry between the Franciscans and the Bishop of Mostar, the position of the Roman Catholic Church and the wealth of the seers. These three sections (the theories, Lourdes and Fatima and the History of Medjugorje), define the first part of my thesis. The first part is therefore theoretical.

The second part of my thesis is empirical because it focuses on the interviews of Italian pilgrims who have gone to Medjugorje and field notes based on my observations during the journey at the shrine. The main research questions are: Why do Italian pilgrims go to Medjugorje? What does Mary mean to them? How does this specific pilgrimage affect their lives? The interviews are analyzed and categorized according to the theories studied in the theoretical section. According to my research, all the Italian pilgrims I interviewed had some sort of problem in their lives, therefore the pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Marian devotion reassures and comforts pilgrims who feel lonely and depressed. Whether walking to the hill of the apparitions, or while praying the rosary, Italian pilgrims strengthen their relationship and connection to Mary, whom they call “autostrada,” the highway to God. Mary is perceived as the celestial mother of all humanity. The Virgin is seen as the medium through which one can reach the Sacred.



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context

Medjugorje is a small village close to Mostar, in the Herzegovinian region of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There, in 1981, six children claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin. At that time Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged to the communist state of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> The state did not allow any kind of religious manifestation and tried to stop the gathering of people who had come to witness the apparitions. When the government could no longer ignore that Medjugorje was a pilgrimage destination and was welcoming hundreds of pilgrims, it decided to benefit from it economically; hotels and restaurants were built.<sup>2</sup>

The rivalry between the Bishops of Mostar and the Franciscan priests over the area of Mostar is well known and started long ago, even before the apparitions. The Bishops of Mostar<sup>3</sup> claimed that the apparitions were a Franciscan strategy to win over the control of the territory of the diocese of Medjugorje. The Bishops never believed in the apparitions and called them fraudulent.<sup>4</sup>

When the Civil War in the former Yugoslavia started in 1991, Medjugorje was still a pilgrimage center with great affluence because of the pilgrims. In the villages close by though, there were prison camps.<sup>5</sup> The apparitions of the Virgin did not stop during the war. Medjugorje today is one of the most famous and popular Marian sites and welcomes many thousands of pilgrims per year.<sup>6</sup> The messages of the Virgin can be read in multiple books, on the internet and newspapers; thanks to modern media, anyone from anywhere can know what is happening in Medjugorje. There is a worldwide radio called “Radio Maria” where everyday people can connect and pray the rosary.<sup>7</sup> Through the media, believers can also listen to the messages of Mary and the comments of the seers. The apparitions which the children claim to

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Jurkovich, and Wilbert M. Gesler, “Medjugorje: Finding Peace at the Heart of Conflict,” *American Geographical Society* 87, no. 4 (1997): 453.

<sup>2</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 454.

<sup>3</sup> I do not specify the name here because there were three Bishops that have changed since the beginning of the apparitions. They are all against the apparitions of Medjugorje. Later in the section *History of Medjugorje*, I will talk about the three bishops.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Sells, “Crosses of Blood: Sacred Space, Religion, and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 3 (2003): 319, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3712487>.

<sup>5</sup> Sells, “Crosses of Blood,” 320.

<sup>6</sup> “Statistics, celebrating priests,” Medjugorje Phenomenon, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.medjugorje.hr/en/medjugorje-phenomenon/statistics/>.

<sup>7</sup> “Medjugorje,” Radio Maria, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://radiomaria.it/medjugorje/>.

have seen in 1981 continue today; every month there are new messages from Mary. The seers stated that Mary revealed to some of them ten secrets about the destiny of the world. When all of the six seers receive these revelations, the world as we know it will change and there will be many conversions.

The position of the Roman Catholic Church on the recognition of Medjugorje as an official pilgrim destination is ambivalent and has changed over time. The Roudinì Commission investigated the visions from 2010 until 2014, and some partial results were published in 2017. The Church recognizes the first apparitions of Medjugorje, but has more doubts about those of the most recent years. The site it is not officially approved yet, but pilgrims are allowed to go on pilgrimage.<sup>8</sup>

## **1.2 Personal Motivation**

The first time I heard about Medjugorje was from my mother: she came home with a brochure about a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. I was very concerned about her when she decided to go because, she had been anything but religious and I wondered about her true reasons for going. She explained to me that she needed a change and that it was the right time. Interestingly enough, after she came back from Medjugorje, her life changed. It was not a sudden transformation but she was facing life differently. She started to pray the rosary every day and to go to services when possible. Some other things changed in her too: she became more aware of her Catholic identity and what was and was not part of it. The experience of Medjugorje changed all aspects of her life. After that first experience in Medjugorje, she went back multiple times.

Because I studied History of Religions, I often questioned the reasons for her pilgrimage and I wanted to know what Mary meant to her. There are multiple histories of conversion and healing of pilgrims in Medjugorje. Pilgrims seem to find in the Herzegovinian village comfort and peace.

I decided to go to Medjugorje and to embrace its atmosphere. I wanted to see first-hand what pilgrims seemed to find so special about Medjugorje. When I was at the Herzegovinian shrine, the majority of people I talked to and listened to were Italian. Since this visit and because

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<sup>8</sup> Andrea Tornielli, "Medjugorje, ecco le conclusioni della relazione Ruini," *La Stampa*, May 17, 2017, <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/it/2017/05/17/news/medjugorje-ecco-le-conclusioni-della-relazione-ruini-1.34600944>.

my mother is, as well, an Italian pilgrim, I decided to study Italian pilgrims going on pilgrimage to Medjugorje and what the Virgin means to them. Mary has a unique place in the heart of the pilgrims and Italians are the largest national group, right after the locals to visit.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 Research Questions

My research questions are simple then:

*Why do Italians go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje? What does the place mean to them? Does Medjugorje have similar characteristics to other pilgrimages? Why is Mary such a relevant figure in the lives of Italian pilgrims?*

The purpose of my thesis is to answer my research questions in two different ways:

1. To study Medjugorje from a theoretical and comparative perspective: I focus on the reasons of how and why the shrine has become what it is today and why it holds similarities with Lourdes and Fatima. The two pilgrimages have important analogies to Medjugorje.
2. To examine Medjugorje also from an empirical research perspective through the interviews of Italian pilgrims. My intention is to evaluate popular devotion to Mary by pilgrims to Medjugorje.

### 1.4 Methodology

I found the book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor and Edith Turner<sup>10</sup> inspiring for their theory of pilgrimage. They introduce the concepts of *communitas*, ellipse pilgrimage system and pilgrimage as a liminoid experience. In this thesis, the Turners' approach is relevant in the study of pilgrims to Medjugorje. Since the book was published in 1978, I decided to also explore more recent theories about pilgrimages from other scholars. The literature is rich with different authors. I chose research papers, newspaper and magazine articles and books which were relatively new. The newspapers are mostly Italian: *La Stampa*, *Panorama*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Messaggero*. For the paragraphs regarding the Roman

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<sup>9</sup> "Statistics, celebrating priests," Medjugorje Phenomenon, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.medjugorje.hr/en/medjugorje-phenomenon/statistics/>.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978).

Catholic Church, I looked up the official documents from the Roman Curia. The Roman Curia takes care of the administrative apparatus of the Holy See and makes available the archives of the Vatican online.

The second leading book is *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in The Modern World*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, 2009.<sup>11</sup> The research in the book focuses primarily on modern Marian pilgrimages and their power on popular devotion. Marian pilgrimages work both against and toward modernity: they take advantage of modern technology and media, but they still pursue conservative and traditional Catholic values.<sup>12</sup> Marian pilgrimages are popular and known worldwide; millions of people visit them.<sup>13</sup> The book *Moved by Mary* divides Marian pilgrimages in four directions: physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and healings, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement.<sup>14</sup> These different directions shape my method of analyzing the interviews of Italian pilgrims.

Another important book is *Encountering Mary. From La Salette to Medjugorje* by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, 1991.<sup>15</sup> This book is the main source for the comparative description of pilgrimages at Lourdes and Fatima.

For the empirical part of my thesis I use as a guideline the book *Social Research Methods* by Alan Bryman,<sup>16</sup> to proceed on my qualitative research. I apply a purposive sampling,<sup>17</sup> which implies the choosing of participants for my study according to my research questions. The research questions selected the subjects: the common characteristic is to have been on pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

I interviewed five people. All five pilgrims had similar attributes: they were Italian, they went to Medjugorje several times and their ages ranged from 40 to 60 years old. Three of the pilgrims were women and two were men. The men were both Catholic priests: one of them converted after his experience in Medjugorje. Every interview lasted the same amount of time, around one and a half hours. The Italian pilgrims only spoke in Italian and they had to answer

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<sup>11</sup> Anna-Karina Hermkens, Catrien Notermans and Willy Jansen, *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in The Modern World*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 407-408.

an open-ended question format for the interview. I used semi-structured interviews:<sup>18</sup> Italian pilgrims had five questions and they could answer freely: they often followed their stream of thoughts and many times they were answering questions before I asked them. Pilgrims could answer how they wanted. My purpose was to never judge or influence in any way their replies. The location of the survey was always at the pilgrim's home: one of my aims was indeed to make them feel comfortable enough to talk with a stranger of their feelings and veneration towards Mary. All the interviews focused on the rosary, their first and subsequent pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the people they travelled with, and those who they met on pilgrimage, and their experiences once they returned home. The worship of the Virgin by the pilgrims was one of the central topics of the interview. All the surveys were recorded with my phone and later transcribed. To evaluate the collected data, I used the method of thematic analysis,<sup>19</sup> which researches the frequent and prevalent themes in the interviews.

The interviews of the Italian pilgrims are anonymized.<sup>20</sup> In the analysis of the surveys, I decided to not call them simply "pilgrim I and pilgrim II" etc., because it is hard not to be touched by their stories on an emotional level. I chose to call my pilgrims with names from the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. The names are Dante, Virgilio, Beatrice, Lucrezia and Francesca. The reasons are two: first of all, I spent as much time reading the Divine Comedy as I did with the interviews of my pilgrims. Second, because I see Dante's peregrination as a pilgrimage: he starts a journey that is both spiritual and physical through the realms of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. It is physical because in the narrative, he walks with his own body; and it is spiritual because Dante often stated that he was at a point in his life where he did not like what he had become. He needed a change, and this occurs at the end of the poem: he is a better believer. Italian pilgrims stated that they decided to go to Medjugorje because they were unhappy, unsatisfied and far away from God. The pilgrimage, as I describe later, changed their lives and faith.

In this empirical part, there are next to the interviews field notes of my observations<sup>21</sup> when I went to Medjugorje. The journey to the shrine happened before I started to study the apparitions from a disciplinary perspective. The reasons for this choice were two: to develop a

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix 3 for the Interview guide.

<sup>19</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 407-420 and 584-585.

<sup>20</sup> See appendix 1 for the approval from NSD, appendix 2 for the Information letter to potential research participants.

<sup>21</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 440-441.

personal opinion of the Marian pilgrimage without any previous research and to observe the popular devotion to Mary. The field notes were mainly used to describe the places of Medjugorje and the traditional rituals connected to the shrine. The pictures to be seen in the analysis were all taken from this experience of a few days in Medjugorje. The journey to Medjugorje was fundamental to understand the reports, testimonies and feelings of the pilgrims.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

There are many theories of pilgrimage; still, the one presented by Victor and Edith Turner in their book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* from 1978, is one of the most popular and referenced. Researchers have been criticizing the Turners' pilgrimage theory, but no new analytical approach has been as successful. This explains why Victor and Edith Turner's research is still considered one of the leading works.<sup>22</sup> One of the reasons that the study is still so popular is because it remains the most comprehensive work to date. This paper, though, also considers the longevity of the Turners' theory a potential problem. The Turners' book was published over forty years ago and so it is time to have another look at their theories. The two scholars might have conceived a system of concepts that do not entirely suit Modern Marian pilgrimages. This explains my decision of applying a supplementary model for the study of pilgrimage, from the book *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in The Modern World*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, from 2009. While the text by the Turners concerns pilgrimage in general and its development through time, the latter book focuses more specifically on the power of Marian pilgrimages. *Moved by Mary* suggests that a Marian pilgrimage moves in four different ways: physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and healings, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement.<sup>23</sup> The four categories are used in this thesis to analyze Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje. The analysis uses interviews from Italian pilgrims and field notes from first-hand observations at the shrine. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* still holds importance,

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<sup>22</sup> See: René Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 15 (1993): 101, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67208>; Zlatko Skirbiš, "From Migrants to Pilgrim Tourists: Diasporic Imagining and Visits to Medjugorje," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 316, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830601154294>; Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 3 and 53; Kathryn Rountree, "Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body through Sacred Travel," *Sociology of Religion* 63 (2002): 477, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3712303>; and Benice Lamb-Sénechal, "Pilgrimage: A Collective Journey to a Personal Space," *Word in the World, Concordia University Graduate Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (2015): 13.

<sup>23</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.

especially in three significant concepts: *communitas*, the ellipse pilgrimage system, as well as the liminoid aspect of pilgrimage. Furthermore, the Turners' book is essential also because of its focus on Mary and modern Marian apparitions. Another reason for using the Turners' book for this study is its emphasis on Roman Catholic pilgrimage,<sup>24</sup> which is relevant for a study of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje.

The following pages first describe the Turners' theoretical model on pilgrimage and later the study of Marian shrines from the book *Moved by Mary*. The paper also takes some theories from different authors to support the two leading theories used here.

## 2.1 The Turners' definition of pilgrimage

Victor and Edith Turner's definition of pilgrimage consists of two main points: the first is that pilgrimage is a moving phenomenon that starts with a pilgrim leaving their social structure to begin a journey and then going back. The concept "social structure" describes a set of roles, statutes and sequences generally applied within the political and economic ties of society. The structure is what characterizes the daily life in the social structure.<sup>25</sup> The second statement is that during this travel, people develop a feeling of fellowship and connection towards one another, which the Turners call "*communitas*."<sup>26</sup>

I begin by explaining some essential aspects of their theories. The two scholars state that pilgrimage has similar features with rites of transition described by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep.<sup>27</sup> The scholar studied the passages that tribal men had to face to change their status or role in their society. He describes three phases: separation, liminality and aggregation. Separation involves the distancing of the individual or group from their community. People in this early stage detach themselves from their social structure. The second offers a state of transition in which people are in a position of margin from their initial status. The French scholar coined the term "liminal" to characterize this stage. The last phase puts the individual or group back into their previous life, and the transition is complete. In the transition described by Arnold van Gennep, the final stage of the development changed the individuals.<sup>28</sup> People are different at the end of the process. Victor and Edith Turner specify that "liminality"

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<sup>24</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," 102.

<sup>26</sup> Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," 102.

<sup>27</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 2.



in their connotations does not only mean what is going to be. The word can also express the potential.<sup>29</sup>

From this definition they assert that Christian pilgrimage is similar and shows detachment from the social structure; people start their journey from their home and society to move somewhere else. The mission, in most cases, changes the pilgrims. After the end of the liminal experience, people are back to their routines. Pilgrims seek to go beyond the boundaries of their social structure and to encounter something more profound and meaningful. Pilgrims finally find a deeper level of spirituality that the vision of the shrine offers. The ties of society in pilgrimage do not affect pilgrims, and a feeling of liberation often accompanies them.<sup>30</sup> The journey is not just a physical trip to a sacred place, but it can refer to a spiritual one too. People, indeed, often go on pilgrimages to encounter the holy, to grow spiritually and become closer to God. Going on a pilgrimage then becomes an opportunity to merge with a divine power that seems to be stronger in one geographical area than another. This location is meaningful because of the manifestation of the sacred.<sup>31</sup> Christian pilgrimage differs mainly from every other because Christ is its central figure. Christian pilgrimages have a Christo - centric character;<sup>32</sup> through the example of the life of Jesus, his disciples and all Christians can follow a righteous life. The lives of saints show other models to imitate the divine. Pilgrimage then becomes an imitation of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

The passages of van Gennep can be applied to pilgrimage then because they show the same sequence: separation from the structure, state of liminality and profound change and then a return to the initial state, although in a different way. In a pilgrimage, the religious images, statues and icons have a different meaning than the ones at home; the shrine empowers them. The people at the sanctuary feel empathy for the life of the holy person and a new spirituality arises. The Turners understand that going on a pilgrimage does not change the social status of a person as in the transitional passage of van Gennep, but it affects the pilgrims' spirituality. The passages described by van Gennep are not voluntary, whereas pilgrimage is. The phases of rites of passages, moreover, follow a pattern that is inside the structure of traditional societies.

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<sup>29</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> John Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today: Why? Where? How?* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 2.

Since pilgrimage today is not a necessary part of society, but an optional break from the social structure, it is better to use the term liminoid than liminal.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.1.1 Liminoid phenomenon and Communitas

Victor and Edith Turner address a critical aspect of modern pilgrimage. The two scholars state that it is a liminoid phenomenon, rather than a liminal one:<sup>35</sup> especially in modern societies, religion has become an option, something voluntary. People can decide how to spend their free time choosing passions such as, hobbies, sports activities and lately, religion. The division between work and leisure is also a part of the pilgrimage experience; people can decide to visit sanctuaries in their leisure time. In the holy journey, they experience a feeling of fellowship with other travelers. Pilgrims meet one another in sacred shrines and pray together. Going on pilgrimage has become a form of “protest” against the mundane world.<sup>36</sup> The critic in the pilgrim addresses society and its values or, in most cases, the absence of them. The pilgrims then search for a deeper meaning of life and spirituality, which seems possible to find in sanctuaries. Solidarity spreads among people in shrines, and the Turners coined it with the term “communitas.”<sup>37</sup> Pilgrims feel like members of the same “spiritual community.”<sup>38</sup> In sacred places they experience a different environment where everyone is in the same place for the same reasons; their status is different from their place of origin, their relationships evolve. People share the same values and all the status differences from the social structure dissolve. Pilgrims express simplicity in their actions and behaviors.<sup>39</sup> All these experiences relate to the state of liminality previously described in passages of rites.

Pilgrims can decide to go on a pilgrimage individually or in a group. Personal pilgrimages<sup>40</sup> refer to pilgrims who go from their familiar comfortable environment, work and family, to start a meaningful journey towards sacred places or shrines. This trip usually takes an extended amount of time, effort and energy, and concludes with a remarkable spiritual evolution. Pilgrims who commit themselves to this journey want to encounter the holy, and the relationship with the sacred is deep and personal. The reasons for the pilgrimage are usually

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<sup>34</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 35-38.

<sup>36</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 36.

related to personal problems such as family conflicts, health issues and social challenges. Pilgrims usually take this journey by themselves and then share it with family and friends. Communal pilgrimages<sup>41</sup> define several individuals who together decide to go to a sacred place of worship. The pilgrims move together to local and nearby shrines. For this group the pilgrimage is a social journey, which involves the interests of the community. The composition and size of the group can vary. They may come from a congregation, diocese, other pilgrimages, and so on. This form of pilgrimage can also take long-distance trips. The number of pilgrims determines the form of tour groups,<sup>42</sup> where many travelers often do not know one another. What brings them together is their common interest in a specific sanctuary. By travelling in groups the costs are reduced, and pilgrims have the opportunity to meet new people with different life experiences. Religious tourism<sup>43</sup> is a more modern kind of pilgrimage where people, believers and non-believers, travel together. Tourists are interested in the history, landscape and art that they encounter in sacred places. The experiences lead many people to think about their spirituality and their relationship with the Divine.

### **2.1.2 Pilgrimage as an ellipse**

Another important point of the Turners' theory is that pilgrimage is like an ellipse. As mentioned before, pilgrimage has three different phases. The motion or movement that the pilgrim experiences is not a circle but an ellipse.<sup>44</sup> In a pilgrimage system, different ellipses overlap each other and collide in their common center, the shrine. The metaphor works because the pilgrim does not, as mentioned earlier, return the same way as they had left. The return road moves in a different pattern; the person is now redeemed and can enjoy the trip home. The pilgrim is psychologically changed. At the beginning of the journey there are intense emotions ready to explode at the sanctuary.<sup>45</sup> Most scholars accept the explanation of pilgrimage as an ellipse system.<sup>46</sup>

To conclude, this thesis embraces the Turners' theory, especially in three points:

1. Pilgrimage is a liminoid phenomenon where people escape from their social structure.

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<sup>41</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," 102.

2. “Communitas” expresses the feeling of membership and fellowship of individuals on pilgrimages.
3. Pilgrimage is an ellipse system because pilgrims are psychologically different on their return from a sacred shrine.

### **2.1.3 The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary**

The Turners’ book aims to study pilgrimage in its totality and development through time, from the first moments to its routinization.<sup>47</sup> The two scholars cannot deny, however, the importance and increase of Marian shrines in the last centuries. Marian sanctuaries had always been famous, but they evolved through the centuries.<sup>48</sup> The Turners’ work is also important for their study of Mary’s nature related to her Assumption.

The Turners claim that the doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in 1950 influences some aspects of Marian shrines. The human visions of Mary appeared to several people.<sup>49</sup> From the study of the history of Christianity, the two scholars explain the nature of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. Mary is as human as everyone else, and God created her. Mary’s unique role is called “Theotokos”, in Greek “God-bearer.”<sup>50</sup> The most extraordinary characteristic of Mary in the Catholic tradition is that she, as a human, gave birth to God. She is a unique human among the multitude, and she is a woman. Mary is part of the Christian teachings that provide power to the weak. The success of the figure of Mary is because people can identify with her life. Mary has a crucial role in the redemption of humanity; as the Devil corrupted Eve and her descendants started the history of humankind, the mother of Jesus is the feminine figure that redeems the world from their sins. Jesus is the antithesis of Adam; the Virgin started the spiritual progeny of the heavenly Church. She is the “spiritual mother” to the whole world.<sup>51</sup> Mary’s veneration is always connected to her function as “Theotokos”.

The doctrine of the Assumption from Pope Pius XII in 1950 reinforces her particular state; the body and soul of Mary are in heaven. She is the only person who does not have to wait for the Universal Judgment to reunite in one.<sup>52</sup> That latter statement leads to another: Mary

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<sup>47</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, XIV.

<sup>50</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 156.

<sup>52</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 155.

can be seen and felt by ordinary people, by everyone.<sup>53</sup> Since her body is already in heaven, she can appear with her body.<sup>54</sup> Believers perceive that because of her human like presence they can encounter the Virgin.<sup>55</sup> She is the figure who intercedes between God and humanity.<sup>56</sup>

## 2.2 Modern Marian pilgrimages – The Power of Mary

The “Age of Mary” is a term coined for the last two centuries.<sup>57</sup> The name alludes to the growing worship of the Virgin, often after her apparitions to humankind. Among the most recent and famous are Lourdes in 1858 and Fatima in 1917. The two apparitions are among the most popular in the Catholic tradition. The Catholic Church has approved the apparitions of Lourdes and Fatima, and both shrines attract millions of pilgrims per year.<sup>58</sup>

The Modern Marian pilgrimages show a specific pattern: Mary appears to people several times and leaves messages. Large crowds often accompany the seers, the people who have visions and apparitions of Mary. According to the book by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary. From La Salette to Medjugorje*, the public side of the visions are a common characteristic of modern Marian visions. The author addresses, in fact, two features of modern Marian apparitions: public and serial. The first applies when a large number of people gather to assist a vision. The second, when a seer expects to see Mary again at other times.<sup>59</sup> The publicity of this phenomenon is mainly from the last two centuries.<sup>60</sup> The author explains, that in Medieval times, the reports were either about having a vision when being alone or, if in public, no one else was witnessing the vision. Mary, Jesus and holy persons, appeared, moreover, to religious and pious women. In a few appearances, Mary asked for a particular task to redeem the community. Her reappearance to the seers, though, was not expected and there are no records of crowds waiting for her coming.<sup>61</sup> Mary’s role as a savior of a community has a historical background and often happened in history. In Medieval documents, the Virgin

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<sup>53</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> The latter statement explains why it is more common to have a vision from the Virgin Mary than a common saint. Her body is united with her soul and it is easier for human senses to feel her presence.

<sup>55</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 155.

<sup>56</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 159.

<sup>57</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 208.

<sup>58</sup> For the numbers see: Catrien Notermans, “Local and Global Icons of Mary: An Ethnographic Study of a Powerful Symbol,” *Anthropos* 103, no. 2 (2008): 471; and Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 5-6.

<sup>60</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 6.

intervenes in situations where people are suffering or are in danger. In most cases, the risk arises from people's sins.<sup>62</sup>

The history of apparitions is long, but the reactions of the Roman Catholic Church are more recent. It was only with Pope Benedict XIV and the release of *De serverum Dei beatificatione* in 1750 that clarified the role of visions. The church authorities can approve the apparitions only after serious investigations.<sup>63</sup> After the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Catholic Church released in 1974 the document *Normae S. Congregationis pro-Doctrina Fidei de modo procedendi in diudicandis praesumptis apparitionibus ac revelationibus*.<sup>64</sup> This paper set out the specific way in which church committees are to handle visions and supernatural phenomena.

The Catholic Church, indeed, cannot deny the idea of supernatural apparitions because, in the Bible, there is the notion of such miracles. Since they happened in the past, there is no reason why they could not take place today. The Catholic Church is a "living body"<sup>65</sup> that has flourished for over two thousand years. The doctrine is the "communion of Saints,"<sup>66</sup> where the members of a Church are omnipresent; Jesus, Mary and the saints are in some aspects still "present" in the world. Their presence leads to the possibility that supernatural beings can appear to human beings.<sup>67</sup>

The Age of Mary presents other innovative characteristics; Mary gives messages and secrets to her seers. Many of the messages reported are similar to those in the past: penance for sins and prayers. The fact that Mary leaves a secret is, though, particular to present times, and the theme is often apocalyptic.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.2.1 The four Movements of Marian pilgrimage

The book *Moved by Mary* develops an analysis of modern Marian pilgrimage. The study started after the proliferation of Marian visions in the last centuries. Sanctuaries of Mary spread,

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<sup>62</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 6-8.

<sup>63</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> "Norms regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations," Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed January 18, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19780225\\_norme-apparizioni\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html).

<sup>65</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 205.

<sup>66</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 206.

<sup>67</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 205-206.

<sup>68</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 221; and Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 18-19.

evidence of her enduring popularity. According to the authors of the book, Mary provides comfort to the people experiencing problems and inequalities in current societies.<sup>69</sup> Devotees pray to and worship Mary, and their devotion helps them. New and old symbols of worships merge. It seems that Marian apparitions are a moving experience both against and towards modernity; although their nature alludes to ancient beliefs that trust in miracles, they adjust to contemporary societies in surprising ways.<sup>70</sup> The book mainly investigates the dimensional power of Marian pilgrimages, focusing on differences of gender, class, ethnicity, health, and age.<sup>71</sup> The scholars aim to study the way people experience their religion through their practices, actions and feelings. They categorize modern Marian pilgrimages in four different directions:<sup>72</sup> physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and healings, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement.<sup>73</sup>

These categories are essential to the present work, because they represent the method of study of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje. This method is relevant because it was especially developed for the study of Marian pilgrimage.<sup>74</sup> The survey of Medjugorje takes from this theory even as the study of the Turners is always present. My research on Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje focuses on their practices, motives and beliefs. The thesis presents a history of Medjugorje and its apparitions to understand the environment of the place. The explanation of Medjugorje as a pilgrimage place and its comparison to Lourdes and Fatima strengthen the description of the beliefs of Italian pilgrims.

The following pages describe Marian pilgrimages in four different ways and strategies of pilgrims to connect and communicate through Mary.

#### 2.2.1.1 The Physical movements of pilgrims going to and at sacred places

One of the main characteristics of pilgrimage is the willingness of pilgrims to make arduous journeys; the pilgrims move from their home and country to a sacred place. During the medieval epoch, this journey was most dangerous and expensive. The pilgrim often travelled for long

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<sup>69</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Also if the scholars of the book *Moved by Mary* recognize the importance of the study of pilgrimage by the Turners, the authors take up and develop these directions after the definition of pilgrimage as a moving experience by the edited book of Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.) Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 3-6.

<sup>73</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.

periods of time. The believers often went to ask forgiveness for their sins or to be healed. During the whole pilgrimage, pilgrims were praying through manuals specifically written for it. There were processions and rituals made to understand the experience of Jesus better. In Jerusalem, for example, one pilgrim could walk in the same paths as Jesus or carry a cross through the Via Dolorosa.<sup>75</sup> These processions were not only made to imitate what Jesus had gone through; they were exercises of faith through which one could feel the Holy.<sup>76</sup> The movements taken from the history of pilgrimage are two: on the road to and once at the sanctuary. The same thing still happens today; the pilgrim never stops in his journey to the sacred. People once at the shrine follow specific patterns, the ones that guarantee closeness to God. The mobility at the memorial creates a connection with the divine.<sup>77</sup>

#### 2.2.1.2 The Emotional transformations and experiences of healing and relief of pilgrims

The journey of a pilgrim is not only physical; indeed, an essential part concerns the spiritual transformation that a pilgrim encounters.<sup>78</sup> As stated before, people often go on pilgrimages to meet the sacred, to grow spiritually and become closer to God. The location is meaningful because of the manifestation of the holy.<sup>79</sup> Pilgrims release their anxiety and fears to Mary; prayers mitigate their sufferance.<sup>80</sup> René Gothóni, a Finnish professor in the study of religions, observed pilgrimage more like a “transformation journey,”<sup>81</sup> where the primary characteristic of pilgrimage is the spiritual transformation that a pilgrim encounters. The Finnish scholar also showed that multiple scholars elaborated on the emotional transformation of individuals in pilgrimages. As the Turners stated, movement during a pilgrimage is an ellipse; the return is always different from the departure and changes the lifestyle of its participants. Pilgrims see Mary as a loving mother, who helps them through and protects them from difficult periods of loss, grief, pain and feeling of injustice. The Blessed Virgin helps people deal with the sorrows and problems in their lives, and in exchange, they pray and worship her.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 191.

<sup>76</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 192.

<sup>77</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Gothóni, “Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey,” 107.

<sup>82</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6.



### 2.2.1.3 Mary's movement

This section studies the mobility of Mary's icons, such as statues, images, rosaries, candles, and so on. The power of Mary is not only to attract people to her sanctuaries; pilgrims, in fact, take her home and carry her around the globe.<sup>83</sup> People bring home images and rosaries of Mary to the people who could not take part in the pilgrimage, and often they buy as many presents with sacred images of the Virgin for as many relatives as they have. Mary, in this view, travels around the world, in small villages and big cities; people put her next to their beds and in their kitchens.<sup>84</sup> The practices and rituals of worship unite and connect people from all around the world. Italian pilgrims pray the rosary every day at least once or twice, a custom that makes them feel the presence and love of Mary.

### 2.2.1.4 Marian devotion as a form of social movement

The last type of action concerns social developments, such as social inequalities, discrimination, use of violence and abuse of political power. Not every Marian pilgrimage shows these patterns, but many have social battles to fight. Conservative forces play an essential role in this classification because they try to fight against secularization, homosexuality, modern values, sexual freedom, abortion and divorce.<sup>85</sup>

The cult of Mary seems usually to reinforce a conservative Catholic agenda. Through Marian devotion, devotees criticize their society: the traditional family is in danger; the unit of a man and woman with children is threatened by divorce, adultery, abortion and homosexual families. What was once the core of a society, the traditional family now has almost disappeared. Families with same gender parents, for these conservative Catholics, are considered to be against nature.<sup>86</sup> These people, who are now condemning their society and those in it, at the beginning were like those they are judging. What changed them is their conversion to God, through a pilgrimage or some supernatural manifestation. This is the reason why the experience of transformation is fundamental in the interviews of pilgrims who have gone to Medjugorje. The experience in the village changed their lives, and now they are othering the rest of society. There is a dualism between the forces of God and Mary and the Devil, and

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<sup>83</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Notermans, "Local and Global Icons of Mary," 478.

<sup>85</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Amy Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful: A Case Study of Contemporary Apocalyptic Catholicism," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 2 (2001): 226, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3712457>.

society reflects this.<sup>87</sup> The narratives concerning the end of time, then, become an opportunity for a new era where Catholic values will shape everyday life.

### 2.2.2 Strategies to gain power

Pilgrims need to have a connection with the Divine; although Mary is human, she is special. As stated before, she gave birth to Jesus, and through her, God could become flesh. Her bodily Assumption to heaven, reinforces even more her hybrid position between human and divine. The relationship that they built with Mary takes different forms. The term “cogent connections”<sup>88</sup> alludes to the communication between humans and supernatural beings, such as Mary. This communication takes multiple forms like praying the rosary, carrying images and statues around. The latter behaviors show a willingness to feel the presence of Mary; people invest their time and effort in her. Through showing reverence for her, pilgrims hope to empower themselves.

In the book *Moved by Mary*, the authors state that there are three different kinds of ways in which people connect to Mary: reciprocity, conflating categories and appropriating identities.<sup>89</sup>

Reciprocity concerns the idea that in return for people’s offerings and gifts, Mary will grant them some favors. The believers do not only pray, of course, for an exchange of benefits, but their hope is always present. The gifts of pilgrims can be different objects like coins, flowers, candles, rosaries and pictures, or acts of penance such as walking barefoot or on their knees. By praying and showing loyalty to Mary, they ask for better conditions in their lives. Reciprocity is a form of interaction and connection with the sacred, with Mary.<sup>90</sup>

Conflation means the cooperation of different categories in the same sacred place, such as time, place and substance. Time concerns different moments in the history of the site. Medjugorje, indeed, has two different times: past and present. The two times allude to the start of the apparitions and their continuity through time. The same happens with the category of place; in a sanctuary, there are both local and global images. Medjugorje, for example, has a different connotation for local Croatian pilgrims than for the pilgrims from all around the

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<sup>87</sup> Luebbbers, “The Remnant Faithful,” 229.

<sup>88</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9-10.

world.<sup>91</sup> Substance, in the end, points to the fact that Mary's icons are more than objects; they embody Mary's presence.<sup>92</sup>

Appropriation involves the strategies of fortifying the identity of national, ethnic, gender or religious groups. By showing devotion to Mary, people fight their battles but this poses risks. It leads to othering and polarizing of others during and after the pilgrimage.<sup>93</sup>

### **3 Lourdes and Fatima, two famous Marian apparitions**

This section describes two previous Marian apparitions that took place at Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal. These two very famous places offer some crucial knowledge in understanding the messages and secrets as revealed in Medjugorje. Their stories are essential for different reasons: Lourdes because it was the place of the first serial and public apparitions of Mary in modern times. Bernadette, the girl who saw Mary, had her first vision in 1858. Bernadette's claim of calling Mary the Immaculate Conception is also relevant. Fatima in 1917 is a starting point for understanding the secrets and their connected revelations. The following pages discuss how the Catholic Church addressed the growing phenomena of the apparitions and the consequences of the Church's actions. Both Lourdes and Fatima are accepted apparitions by the Catholic Church, and its seers are canonized or soon meant to be. Both visions were public and attracted large groups of people. Their connections with Medjugorje are many and are discussed in the next sections. As Mircea Eliade believed, the scholar who has to study a religious phenomenon must compare it with others, otherwise, there is no science.<sup>94</sup>

The main book used as a reference to write this chapter is *Encountering Mary. From La Salette to Medjugorje* by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz. The book was helpful in acquiring a detailed account of the apparitions and how the seers acted after them. Although written in 1991, it still holds disciplinary relevance. The declaration of the third secret of Fatima was after the publication of this book, in 2000 by Pope John Paul II. The transcriptions of the secrets are from the archives of the Vatican Curia, which does not affect the validity in using Zimdars-Swartz's book. As scholars state, the academic study of Marian apparitions is a neglected area,

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<sup>91</sup> Skirbiš, "From Migrants to Pilgrim Tourists," 313.

<sup>92</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 10-12.

<sup>93</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 12-13.

<sup>94</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religions*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 231.

even though reports of visions have increased in the last centuries.<sup>95</sup> Marian shrines attract thousands of people every year to their sanctuaries in Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje. The need to feel the holy generates complicated phenomena that are worthy of study and of being analyzed.<sup>96</sup> The increase in reports of miraculous events from groups of people at sanctuaries is widespread. Many pilgrims go to famous shrines such as Lourdes and Fatima to have a chance to encounter Mary, to feel her presence and help.<sup>97</sup>



Figure 1: Map of Europe with the location of Lourdes, Fatima and Medjugorje<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> See the references: Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 278; E. Ann Matter, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalyptic, Representation, Politics, Religion,” *Religion* 31, no. 2 (2001): 126, <https://doi.org/10.1006/rel.2000.0296>; and Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Maurice Ryan, “Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje: A Challenge for Religious Educators,” *Religious Education* 88, no. 4 (1993): 564.

<sup>97</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Modified version of: “Large detailed political map of Europe with all capitals and major cities,” vividiani, accessed: April 3, 2020, <http://www.vidiani.com/large-detailed-political-map-of-europe-with-all-capitals-and-major-cities/>.

### 3.1 Lourdes

Lourdes is one of the most famous modern Marian pilgrimages; almost six million people come per year.<sup>99</sup> The decision to describe this Marian apparition is for its recent beginning in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and for its importance ever since. For a historian of modern Marian apparitions, it is a “must-do” to study Lourdes. Lourdes is a starting point of modern Marian apparitions. The seer, the young Bernadette, was canonized by the Catholic Church, which also approved her visions. These two last points make of Lourdes a focal point of the study, because of all the modern apparitions in the last centuries, only seven were approved by the Catholic Church, and Lourdes is among them. The approval of the Catholic Church makes Lourdes a popular apparition site.<sup>100</sup> The last but not less important point is that Lourdes presents serial and public apparitions. Again, serial visions are when a seer is with a superior being that comes more than once. A public one happens when, with the seer, many people came to assist. As explained before, these are the two characteristic features of modern Marian apparitions.<sup>101</sup>

#### 3.1.1 A brief history of the apparitions of Lourdes

Lourdes is a small village at the foothills of the Pyrenees, in France. Here, in 1858 the fourteen-year old Bernadette Soubirous announced some visions of a woman, young and beautiful. The young woman was wearing a white dress that had a long blue strip of fabric. Her eyes were gazing down and her hands were united in prayer while holding a golden rosary.<sup>102</sup> After a few questions, Bernadette recognized the young woman as the Virgin Mary.<sup>103</sup>

The first documentation of Bernadette’s visions is from her interrogation with the police commissioner that happened on February 21, 1858. The visions happened ten days before, so on February 11.<sup>104</sup> The young Bernadette was near to the channel close to Madame Lafitte’s mill when she heard something coming from the Grotto called Massabielle. When she approached the Grotto, Bernadette saw a white figure standing next to her. She was astonished. The fourteen-year old knelt and started to pray. The Lady smiled at Bernadette and afterwards disappeared. Bernadette at the time of the first apparition was with two children, and right after

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<sup>99</sup> Notermans, “Local and Global Icons of Mary,” 471.

<sup>100</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 5-6.

<sup>102</sup> Notermans, “Local and Global Icons of Mary,” 471.

<sup>103</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 43.

<sup>104</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 47.

the Lady vanished, she asked them if they saw anything. The negative answer did not discourage her. She later told her sister and a close friend what had happened. Bernadette also told her family about the young Lady at the Grotto, but everyone concluded it was only an illusion and not to focus on it.<sup>105</sup>

The importance of Lourdes is that Bernadette did not see the Virgin Mary only once, but many times; in fact, the second apparition was on February 14. It was a Sunday and Bernadette and some friends, including her sister, went after the High Mass to the Grotto. The group of girls knelt and started to pray the rosary when the *aquerò*<sup>106</sup> appeared again to Bernadette. The girl wanted to ask if she was good or evil, but the group was interrupted. During the third apparition, on February 16, Bernadette and the figure spoke for the first time, and the Lady said she would appear more times, for the following fifteen days. In the beginning, it was not clear that the woman was the Virgin Mary. Bernadette described her as young, dressed in white and holding a rosary. By the time of the next visions, more people started to join, and it became soon known that many identified the young woman as the Virgin Mary.

The encounter at the Grotto was following the same procedure; she would leave in the direction of the Grotto with a candle, followed by more people. When she arrived at Massabielle, she knelt to pray the rosary. As she was kneeling, everyone who accompanied her to the Grotto did also. Everyone was praying the rosary. When the Virgin Mary appeared, Bernadette was rigid and immobile, staring with fixed eyes in a particular part above the Grotto. She was moving her lips as she was speaking to someone, sometimes showing different reactions like smiling, leaning forward. Her eyes often were moist. The apparitions put Bernadette in a state of ecstasy. There were many reports of her condition during the visions. The people coming to the Grotto were more than seven-eight hundred.<sup>107</sup> The crowds often treated her as a living Saint with superior power. When the apparition was over, many were trying to kiss her, hug her or touch her. People started to think of her as a person who could do miracles or that she could intervene on their behalf with Mary. Bernadette, in fact, during one of the apparitions at the Grotto, started to dig into the mud and after a few tries found some water and drank it. After being asked to explain her actions, the girl said that the Virgin Mary

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<sup>105</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 47.

<sup>106</sup> means “that one,” in Bernadette’s French dialect.

<sup>107</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 50.

told her to do so. From this moment, pilgrims take some water from the spring that appeared where Bernadette was digging.<sup>108</sup>

On March 2, Bernadette explained that Mary gave her the mission to report that a chapel had to be built in Lourdes, next to the Grotto. People had to come in procession. It is not surprising in the history of Roman Catholic apparitions that, during a vision, Mary asks to build a shrine.<sup>109</sup>

The last apparition was on March 4, 1858: people reported that she acted as in the previous meetings; she arrived with a candle, knelt, prayed the rosary, whispered while looking at a fixed spot and then left. Nothing extraordinary happened, and there were no testimonies of heavenly signs. This scene often occurred in later modern Marian apparitions, where people who are testing the visions and the seers look for external proof, like the spinning of the sun, mysterious clouds and messages within the sun. There are many reports, though, of healed people, which is also a pattern of modern Marian visions.<sup>110</sup> Lourdes from the very beginning was associated with many healing miracles and events that seem to comfort the pilgrims who go there. It seems that people need to feel that Lourdes is a sacred place, where they can feel the holy.

### 3.1.2 Immaculate Conception

In all these serial apparitions, Bernadette never reported that the person who she was talking with was the Virgin Mary, though people already had assumed she was. Bernadette often stated that she was asking the beautiful Lady to identify herself, but never got an answer. On March 25, 1858, during the Feast of the Annunciation, Bernadette once more questioned the Lady as to who she was, and finally, she answered that she was the “*Immaculate Conception*.”<sup>111</sup> It is vital to note here that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was established only in 1854<sup>112</sup> from Pope Pius IX, four years before the apparitions of Lourdes. It is unlikely that a child, coming from a rural area, could know about the dogma from the Pope.<sup>113</sup> When questioned, however, Bernadette answered that after hearing those words, she had to keep repeating them

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<sup>108</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 8.

<sup>110</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 53.

<sup>111</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries. Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 199.

<sup>112</sup> Maaïke de Haardt, “The Marian Paradox: Marian Practices as a Road to a New Mariology?,” *Feminist Theology* 19, no. 2 (2011): 171.

<sup>113</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 58.

to remember. The doctrine just stated, is highly essential in understanding how Catholic believers and theologians see the role of Mary. In the Catholic Church, every person is born with original sin, and it starts from the conception. Mary is immune to original sin. The dogma also alludes to something more: the protection of human life from the first moment, that is when humans are still embryos.<sup>114</sup> Lourdes is connected with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>115</sup>

Bernadette received from the Virgin a secret, but she never told it to anyone.<sup>116</sup> Bernadette became a nun, and her apparitions were accepted after a few years by the Roman Catholic Church. She was beatified on June 14, 1925, and canonized on December 8, 1933.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.2 Fatima

Fatima is one of the most famous Marian apparitions, and it was approved by the Roman Catholic Church in 1930 by José Correia da Silva, Bishop of Leiria.<sup>118</sup> The apparitions of Fatima profoundly influenced the model in which modern apparitions were perceived and understood, even if, for more than two decades, they were not known outside Portugal. The apparitions, as happened already in Lourdes, were serial. And again, they were children who witnessed the visions. What they received were not only messages from the Virgin Mary, but something almost new<sup>119</sup> in the history of apparitions: they had secrets.

The secrets of Fatima are essential because they shape the model of secrets and messages for future Marian apparitions. The apocalyptic scheme and narratives will be found in many other reports of different visions<sup>120</sup> and are an essential starting point to study the messages and secrets of Medjugorje. The Virgin Mary, in fact, only started to send secrets to the seers in the last two centuries, beginning with La Salette<sup>121</sup> and Fatima. A large number of the later

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<sup>114</sup> Elzbieta Adamiak, "Developments in Mariology," in *The Many Faces of Mary*, ed. Diego Irarrázaval, Susan A. Ross and Marie-Theres Wacker (London: SCM Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>115</sup> Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 199.

<sup>116</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 229.

<sup>117</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 66.

<sup>118</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 90.

<sup>119</sup> La Salette was the first apparitions in which the two children received secrets from the Virgin Mary.

<sup>120</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 90.

<sup>121</sup> La Salette is a recognized Marian apparition shrine happened in 1846, in France. It is important because for the first time Mary gave to the seers some secrets, which were important for the world. In this paper, however, I decided to only treat two major Marian apparitions, Lourdes and Fatima, because more pertinent to Medjugorje.



apparitions claim that Mary has come back because people did not follow her teachings or warnings.<sup>122</sup>

### **3.2.1 A brief history of the apparitions at Fatima**

Fatima is a small village in Portugal where in 1917 three children claimed to have seen more than one time the Virgin Mary. The three young ones were Lucia dos Santos and her two cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto. Most of what scholars know about the apparitions is from Lucia, the oldest of the three seers. She wrote, many years after the visions, a memoir of what she and her cousins experienced. She was also the leading figure who was also able, at the same time as she was seeing the apparition, to converse with the crowd of people gathered around the seers. As earlier with Lourdes, when people started to know about Fatima, huge groups were soon coming. Lucia was also “in charge” of her cousins’ impressions because she affirmed that she suggested the two cousins to be careful of sharing their experiences. There is also another testimony of the apparitions from Lucia herself, but from earlier years, precisely on January 5, 1922. The priest who oversaw her spiritual sphere asked her to write about when she had the visions.<sup>123</sup>

From Lucia’s memoir, there is a famous episode that happened at the age of about six, during the time Lucia was making her first confession. The priest told Lucia that her soul was pure and that she needed to keep it like that so God and His grace could work within it. Her heart had to be taken care of by the Virgin. Lucia then prayed in front of the statue of Mary. The Virgin statue smiled back at her.<sup>124</sup> It is known that the girl went to catechism and was used to being in a Catholic environment. She was, moreover, loyal in what the priest told her to do. This episode happened in her early childhood, and she still remembered it after many years, meaning that something in her thought it was worth remembering, that something in her changed, that something could work within her soul. Her first confession and communion made a vital impression on her as a child, which she would later explain brought her closer to her relationship with God.<sup>125</sup>

After this early experience, some other extraordinary events happened to Lucia, but the real apparitions with her two cousins only started on May 13, 1917. It was a Sunday, and the

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<sup>122</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 91.

<sup>123</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 68-69.

<sup>124</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 71.

<sup>125</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 73.

three cousins were taking care of the sheep, when they met for the first time what they called “Our Lady”. Although they declared not to talk about it with anyone,<sup>126</sup> Jacinta told her mother. The little girl told her mother that a beautiful lady encircled by light told them to recite the rosary every day and that she would take the three cousins to heaven.<sup>127</sup>

The children had more apparitions: on June 13, on July 13, on August 13 and on September 13. The last happened on October 13;<sup>128</sup> during each of them, more people were gathering to witness the event. Large groups of people were asking the seers to intervene for requests. As in Lourdes, people were touching, trying to kiss and hug the seers. The demands went to Lucia: as an answer the Lady said that some of them would be granted within a year and some would not. People’s focus must be, she claimed, about praying and reciting the rosary. As previously in Lourdes, the power of the rosary emerges.

The most well known matter about Fatima is the secret. Lucia, in her memoirs, stated that she could make public the first two parts of the mystery that she and her cousins had from the Virgin. In the beginning, there was no part of the secret that could be universally known. Later, with Mary’s permissions, two of the three sections were made available.<sup>129</sup> At the beginning of the apparitions, Mary asked only that people pray the rosary every day. Every time people asked the children for more answers, they said it was a secret. As people learned more about Fatima and its seers, more public interest became centered around the secret and its content.

At the time of the apparition on July 13, something happened which is worth describing; Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco were at the base of the oak tree where the apparitions usually took place. During the vision, people reported that Lucia “cried out in terror”<sup>130</sup> after becoming pale. Afterwards, when asked what the scream was about, she did not answer, stating that it was a secret. When people questioned if it was a beautiful secret, she replied that for some, it was not. Many people, local and church authorities tried to deduce, figure out or extrapolate the content of the secret. Many were the attempts but none succeeded. The only things that Lucia said about it were that it was a secret that she had to tell no one and that it concerned not only her but also her two cousins.<sup>131</sup> Jacinta and Francisco knew about the secret too; the girl received it from

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<sup>126</sup> Because Lucia suggested it.

<sup>127</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 77.

<sup>128</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 81.

<sup>129</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 190.

<sup>130</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 192.

<sup>131</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 193.

Mary herself, Lucia told it to Francisco. The boy could not often see the Heavenly Mother, but he could listen to her. They both agree with Lucia that they could tell the secret to no one, as it was best for the seers and that if people knew what the secret were about, they would be sad. The two cousins died young after an epidemic flu in 1919 and 1920.

### **3.2.2 Immaculate Heart**

After the death of Jacinta and Francisco, Lucia had other apparitions of the Virgin. She joined the Institute of St. Dorothy in 1925, and it was during this time in the Order that she changed her mind about keeping her conversations with Mary to herself. Lucia later wrote that Mary appeared to her on December 25, 1925;<sup>132</sup> it was different than the precious visions because Mary was not alone, but with a child. The child was on a shining cloud. Thorns surrounded the Virgin's heart. The child that Mary was with told Lucia that he was the son of the Most Holy Mother and unthankful people made her ill. There was not one person who was trying to heal her. Then Mary started to speak, saying that Lucia could help her health, by praying and letting other people know about what to do. What Mary and Jesus needed will later be called the five mysteries. Lucia will then understand it as a select type of worship to the Virgin. The consolations for Mary's heart had to be done every first Saturday for the five consecutive months and were the following; confession, Holy Communion, praying the rosary, meditating on the fifteen mysteries<sup>133</sup> of the rosary every day for a considerable period.<sup>134</sup>

In the beginning, Lucia did not share the vision with the public mainly because her spiritual father, Dom Lino Garcia, supposedly told her not to. It was after another apparition from Jesus, who reaffirmed the idea that Lucia needed to spread Mary's message, because also if priests thought believers were praying the rosaries and starting the five consecutive Saturdays, many were not finishing them. Mary's heart needed salvation with people praying to make her feel better. The successor of Garcia, Fr. P. Aparicio, asked Lucia to write everything about her apparitions. Lucia stated that she decided at that moment that every conversation she had with Mary had to be of public knowledge. The only private part concerned the secret. Lucia's role was now clear: she must spread Mary's devotion. Through this devotion she would become closer to God. Lucia had another vision, on June 13, 1929, where she saw the three persons of the Trinity and Mary all together; the Virgin was holding in her hands her Immaculate Heart.

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<sup>132</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 194.

<sup>133</sup> The fifteen mysteries are the five decades of how the Rosary is prayed.

<sup>134</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 195.

Mary announced that it was time to consecrate Russia to the Catholic faith. Many, the Virgin said, were condemned to suffer because of their sins and it was Lucia's role to sacrifice for them.<sup>135</sup>

### 3.2.3 The first and second part of the secret

On August 1941, Lucia finally had a sign from God<sup>136</sup> that she could reveal the first two parts of the secret received from the Virgin on July 13, 1917.<sup>137</sup> The first section of the secret was a vision of hell. The Virgin that day took them to a sea of fire, where demons and horrible and mysterious animals were persecuting human souls for eternity. That was the destiny of sinners. Lucia and her cousins were shaking after that vision.<sup>138</sup>

From Lucia's testimony:

Our Lady' showed us a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear.<sup>139</sup>

The group of people who gathered to assist the vision claimed, as mentioned before, that Lucia during that apparition cried out in terror and became pale.<sup>140</sup>

The subsequent part of the secret was the faithfulness to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin.<sup>141</sup> It was God's wish, according to Mary's speech, to save as many sinners as they can. To save sinners, people had to show devotion to her Heart by consecrating Russia. From Lucia's letter:

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<sup>135</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 198.

<sup>136</sup> When, in 1941, Lucia was asked to say everything she knew about her cousin, Jacinta, she understood that God wanted her to share part of the secret.

<sup>137</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 199.

<sup>138</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 199.

<sup>139</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed February 18, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>140</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 192.

<sup>141</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 199.

you have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI.<sup>142</sup>

And another part:

to prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world.<sup>143</sup>

Lucia did not reveal the last part of the secret, but the situation changed when she got ill. After many years, she wrote the last part of the mystery in January 1944. It was conserved from His Eminence Cardinal Dom Manuel till 1957 when he sent the last part of the secret to the bishop of Leira along with all documents and writing of Lucia. The material was sent from the Bishop to Rome in 1957.<sup>144</sup>

### **3.2.4 The third part of the secret**

The third part of the secret was kept in the archives of the Vatican<sup>145</sup> and released by Pope John Paul II. One of the reasons for the release might be because of the attempt on his life on May

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<sup>142</sup> “The Message of Fatima,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed February 18, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>143</sup> “The Message of Fatima,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed February 18, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>144</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 206.

<sup>145</sup> Lucia said that the secret could be released only after 1960. In later interviews she explains that before that date people would have not understood the content of the message.

13, 1981.<sup>146</sup> Afterwards, the Pope decided to read the content of the third secret<sup>147</sup> and one of his first acts was, on June 7, 1981, to consecrate the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>148</sup> During the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Council of Constantinople and the 1550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Ephesus he pronounced an act of Entrustment:

Mother of all individuals and peoples, you know all their sufferings and hopes. In your motherly heart you feel all the struggles between good and evil, between light and darkness, that convulse the world: accept the plea which we make in the Holy Spirit directly to your heart, and embrace with the love of the Mother and Handmaid of the Lord those who most await this embrace, and also those whose act of Entrustment you too await in a particular way. Take under your motherly protection the whole human family, which with affectionate love we entrust to you, O Mother. May there dawn for everyone the time of peace and freedom, the time of truth, of justice and of hope.<sup>149</sup>

At the anniversary of the attempt on his life, on May 13, 1982, the Pope visited Fatima.<sup>150</sup> It seems clear, then, that Pope John Paul II read the third message and believed in it. He was the one, indeed, who made the third part of Fatima's message public at the beginning of the new millennium.

The last part of the secret concerned a vision of an Angel holding a sword of fire that would seem to set the world on fire. The sword full of flames was touched by the Virgin's hand and The Angel stopped its radiation. The Angel then transformed himself to God. The vision kept going showing pain, sorrow and death of people of the Church:

and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his

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<sup>146</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 131.

<sup>147</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 130.

<sup>148</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 132.

<sup>149</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed March 25, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>150</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 217.

hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.<sup>151</sup>

The message is essential for two main reasons: the first is that Mary is seen as the savior of the world, trying to calm God's fury because people drifted away from faith and grace. The world's salvation is in her hands. The battle between the devil and the forces of God is evident; everything seems to lead towards an apocalyptic end. The Virgin now was in charge of the final battle with the devil.<sup>152</sup> The second reason is that there could be a connection with the suffering reported by Church priests and bishops with the attack on Pope John Paul II. During the beatification of Jacinta and Francisco, on April 27, 2000, Lucia had a meeting with the Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone. When asked if the person suffering in the third part of the secret was the Pope, she confirmed that it was the Holy Father, but that neither she or her cousins knew the name of the Pope suffering nor when the attack would happen.<sup>153</sup>

Pope John Paul II was deeply devoted to Mary of Fatima, and the bullet that struck him in 1981 was set in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima and preserved in its sanctuary. The Pope believed that Mary saved his life because her hand changed the direction of the bullet away from the center of his heart. According to this theory, thanks to Mary's intervention, Pope John Paul's life was spared.<sup>154</sup> When he visited the shrine in 1982, he stated that there are some places where people can feel closer to God, and this happens especially at sites where Marian apparitions have taken place. The consecration of the church in Fatima was in 1984; during the anniversary of the apparition that, same year, the USSR was having serious political setbacks.<sup>155</sup> It does not come as a surprise that Pope John Paul II has been addressed as a "Marian pope."<sup>156</sup> Lucia died in 2005, and her canonization is under process.

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<sup>151</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed March 21, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>152</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 210.

<sup>153</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed March 26, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>154</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed March 26, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>155</sup> Mirjana Soldo, *Il Mio Cuore Trionferà* (Čitluk: Matica hrvatska, 2016), 160.

<sup>156</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 139.

## 4 The apparitions of Medjugorje

Medjugorje is a small village in the Herzegovinian region in Bosnia-Herzegovina, about 20km from Mostar. The majority of its population is Croatian and they are Catholics.<sup>157</sup> The village was little known until the visions of the Blessed Virgin began to appear. Medjugorje means between the mountains or between the woods: the name comes from its position between the mountains of Križevac and Podbrdo.<sup>158</sup> The parish of Medjugorje was founded in 1892, and it is now under the administration of the diocese of Mostar. The patron saint of the new church is Saint Jacob, the pilgrims' patron.<sup>159</sup> The first church was ruined after a few years of its inauguration, so the diocese built a newer and bigger one. The entire area of Medjugorje is under the control of the Franciscan order. The Medjugorje Franciscans played a crucial role after the first apparitions and in the growth of a pilgrimage centre.<sup>160</sup>

The first apparition was on June 24, 1981. According to Mirjana Dragičević,<sup>161</sup> one of the seers, it was she and Ivanka Ivanković who were the first two to see Mary.<sup>162</sup> They were walking in the fields of Medjugorje, right at the beginning of the hill of Podbrdo. Ivanka's mother had died a few months earlier after a long illness. It was around five or six in the afternoon that Ivanka told Mirjana that she had seen the Virgin Mary, or in Croatian "Gospa".<sup>163</sup> Mirjana made fun of the girl and did not even take notice of where her friend was looking. It was not respectful to make fun of such things; God was a serious matter in their lives. When Mirjana was back in the village she felt in her heart that she had to go back to Podbrdo. Later that day she approached Ivanka at the hill; the girl was kneeling and smiling in a certain specific direction, and Mirjana saw the Virgin Mary for herself. They described the woman they saw wearing a blue and gray dress and was holding a child in her arms. There were other children in the area who were arriving at the hill and many of them ran away.<sup>164</sup> Among these children were Ivan Dragičević and Vicka Ivanković; later they will see the Gospa as well. When the

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<sup>157</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 455.

<sup>158</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 455.

<sup>159</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 456.

<sup>160</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 319.

<sup>161</sup> Now Mirjana Soldo, after her husband's surname.

<sup>162</sup> Craig R. Lundahl, "A Comparison of Other World Perceptions by Near-Death Experiencers and by the Marian Visionaries of Medjugorje," *Journal of Near Death Studies* 19, no. 1 (2000): 48, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc799320/>.

<sup>163</sup> Mart Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje: Religious Rivalry and the Formation of a Devotional Movement in Yugoslavia," *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1990): 66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3318115>.

<sup>164</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 18.



girls went home they quickly reported what they had seen and that they thought it was the Virgin Mary. It is interesting to note that they never questioned from the beginning the origin of that woman but only guessed that she must be from another dimension. Mirjana Dragičević often prayed before the apparitions and came from a Catholic family, as did all the other seers. Medjugorje was a town with many Catholic devotees. It was highly typical to pray the rosary. The families of the children at the beginning did not believe in the apparitions but soon changed their minds. The locals defended and supported almost immediately the seers — the majority of people from Medjugorje were and still are Catholic.<sup>165</sup> The seers later stated that when they questioned the Lady on her presence in Medjugorje, she answered that it was because of the strong faith of the people in that village.<sup>166</sup>

The second apparition was on June 25, 1981, the day after the first. Half of the village was already waiting for the seers at the foot of Podbrdo. The news about the visions of the Virgin Mary had spread very quickly in a small town like Medjugorje.<sup>167</sup> The six seers were all present:<sup>168</sup> Mirjana Dragičević, Vicka Ivanković, Marija Pavlović, Ivan Dragičević, Ivanka Ivanković and Jakov Colo. Their ages varied from ten to eighteen. Everyone was going to Podbrdo where the day before the girls claimed to have seen Mary. All of a sudden, the six children started to run towards the hill. It took them, as people reported, only a few minutes to reach the top of the mountain. What usually takes fifteen to twenty minutes to walk took them only two minutes.<sup>169</sup> Afterwards, all the children together knelt and prayed the “Our Father.” The woman, as the seers testified, prayed with them. The only time the Virgin Mary stopped praying was with the “Hail Mary”. The description of Mary was similar to the day before; she was beautiful and surrounded by blue light. Her skin had an olive color and was radiating light. Her eyes were blue, like the sea. The woman had a white veil covering her head and they could see a dark curl on her forehead. Her presence gave peace and calm as if it was coming from a loving mother.<sup>170</sup> Mary told the children not to be afraid; she could speak perfect Croatian. Ivanka, the girl who lost her mother some months before, asked where her mom was; Mary said she was with her. After affirming that she would come back the next day, she disappeared.

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<sup>165</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 34-39.

<sup>166</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 448.

<sup>167</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 66.

<sup>168</sup> Lundahl, “A Comparison of Other World Perceptions,” 48.

<sup>169</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 34.

<sup>170</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 35.

During the meeting with Mary, the children seemed not to realize the world around them as if they were in a trance state or in ecstasy.<sup>171</sup>

The third day, on June 26, 1981, the woman appeared again. She identified herself as the Virgin Mary. Vicka sprinkled holy water on the apparitional site to test if the vision was good or evil. Vicka's grandmother had told her that if there was reaction with smoke, it meant that it was from the devil. The test was positive because nothing happened and it meant that it was a benign phenomenon. The apparitions continued for many days,<sup>172</sup> and the children answered many questions from the police and local priests. The police followed and questioned the children. The communist regime was not tolerant of religions or anything that could threaten the state. The local priest, Father Jozo, was at first skeptical of the claims of the seers but he later came to believe them. When the police occupied the Podbrdo hill in order to stop people from coming to witness the apparitions, Father Jozo offered the children one room next to the church. It was in this room that the children for some time were meeting with the Virgin Mary. Her messages were especially focused on peace,<sup>173</sup> "mir" in Croatian.<sup>174</sup>

As mentioned before, the Communist regime tried to stop people from gathering at the place of the apparitions. As soon as the authorities realized that the phenomenon was becoming so popular, they decided to take economic advantage. The government promoted tourism in Medjugorje, and many hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops flourished. Medjugorje became one of the most visited places in Yugoslavia, a communist country.<sup>175</sup>

There are already some common traits with Lourdes and Fatima. Although I will describe them later, it is worth mentioning some similarities like the young age of the visionaries, the description of Mary or the state of indifference of the seers towards the world around them during the visions.<sup>176</sup>

#### **4.1 The ten secrets**

Mary has a specific plan for Medjugorje which she explained to the seers through ten secrets. The seers have different tasks for humanity: Marija prays for the souls in Purgatory, Mirjana

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<sup>171</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 35-36.

<sup>172</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 233.

<sup>173</sup> Many Christians affirm that Mary appeared in Medjugorje also to try to prevent the Civil War that was about to happen.

<sup>174</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 66.

<sup>175</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 454.

<sup>176</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 566.

takes care of unbelievers, Ivan for the young and the priests, Ivanka for the families, Jakov for the sick and Vicka is the one who learns of Mary's life. Not all the seers received all the ten secrets; to those who know them, Mary appears only once per year or month. Mary appeared and revealed all the ten secrets to Mirjana, who had her last secret on December 25, 1982. The same happened for other seers on different days: Ivanka on May 6, 1985 and Jakov on the September 12, 1998. Medjugorje's apparitions, as mentioned before, are still occurring to this day and every month the Virgin appears and reveals messages. Of the visionaries, only Vicka Ivanković, Marija Pavlović, and Ivan Dragičević meet Mary every day. Mirjana Dragičević receives the apparition of Mary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of every month and for her birthday; Jakov Colo only for Christmas and Ivanka Ivanković on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. The seers all got married and have children. The majority of them still live in Medjugorje, except for Ivan who lives in Boston, USA, and Marija in Monza, Italy.

There is no information about the content of the secrets, except for some small fragments. The first two secrets are warnings for non-believers; Mary is calling for conversion. The third secret is about the permanent sign that will appear on Mount Podbrdo, the hill where the apparitions took place. It will be a mark that will last, that everyone will see and, that will convert many unbelievers. None will question that it is otherworldly. Mary told the seers that the sign is for the atheists, to save them. There are other parts of the ten secrets which are known; the seventh and eighth secrets are the most negative and obscure; that history repeats itself and God will punish humanity as He did in Sodom and Gomorrah, or the Flood. The fear of the apocalypse specifically intended to convert as many people as possible to choose the right path that leads to God. The Devil is tempting people to follow him, and Mary is the answer that humanity needs.<sup>177</sup> When people pray to Mary, they pray to God. As this paper will show later, Mary, in Medjugorje's messages and teachings, is the "highway" that leads to Jesus, and consequently, to God. There are many ways and Mary is not the only one, but certainly the fastest. In the memoir of one of the seers, Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo, she reveals a little about the secrets. The focus is not about the future but the present; people need to pray the rosary, to read the Bible and to fast. Mirjana also said that she asked if the seventh secret could be at least partly revealed; Mary answered that it could if people prayed. Many months later during a vision, Mary told Mirjana that the seventh mystery was softer than in the beginning, but that

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<sup>177</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 568-569.

was it. People needed to pray and focus on their present because if they did so, nothing bad would happen to them. The seventh secret will occur in the future anyway because it is the will of God.<sup>178</sup> The Virgin Mary showed the secrets to the seers and took many of them to visit Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. These last visions are connected somehow with the ten secrets. When the seers get the 10<sup>th</sup> and final secret, Mary will not appear in Medjugorje anymore. The secrets will be of public knowledge. The seer who will announce the secrets is Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo. Mirjana will tell them to Father Ljubicic.<sup>179</sup> Mary chose Mirjana and gave her a “magic” paper, where all the secrets are written. Only Mirjana can read the document;<sup>180</sup> when the time comes, she will give it to her chosen priest three days before they will happen.<sup>181</sup>

## 4.2 The spiritual journeys to Hell, Purgatory and Paradise

The six seers of Medjugorje saw Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. They watched images of the different realms as though from a TV screen. Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo and Ivanka Ivanković refused to see Hell because they did not want to. Two of the seers, Vicka Ivanković and Jakov Colo, were transported there with their own bodies.<sup>182</sup>

Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo described Paradise as a place full of bodies with an average age of thirty years. The people in this realm are clothed as in the time of Jesus and shine with their own light. The light reflected people’s happiness, which was beyond compare to the real world. Heaven, according to the seer, was a beautiful park with trees. Ivanka Ivanković agreed with Mirjana’s description of Heaven. Open fields and trees surrounded the place, and people had bodies covered with long clothes; joy was everywhere. Vicka Ivanković stated that Heaven was a realm full of light and joy; she and Jakov Colo, saw people dancing, singing and talking in peace to one another. Ivan Dragičević affirmed that the place is full of happiness.<sup>183</sup>

If all the visionaries have been to and talk about their experience in Paradise, the situation changes with Hell: two seers did not want to go to this realm; two do not want to talk about it. Vicka Ivanković is one of the only ones who openly speaks about it and describes it as a realm full of fire. The place is crowded by figures who are no longer human; once entered in the kingdom people face the fire and their skin is burnt-color. The bodies in Hell are all

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<sup>178</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 127.

<sup>179</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 236.

<sup>180</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 146.

<sup>181</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 233.

<sup>182</sup> Lundahl, “A Comparison of Other World Perceptions,” 48.

<sup>183</sup> Lundahl, “A Comparison of Other World Perceptions,” 48-49.

extremely angry, unhappy and full of exasperation.<sup>184</sup> Marija Pavlović, the other seer who defines Hell, affirms Vicka's description.

The last realm is Purgatory; Ivanka Ivanković addressed it as only darkness. Vicka Ivanković added that the territory is surrounded by fog and that she could hear people's moaning and loneliness. Marija Pavlović stated that people can only overhear each other due to the mist. The major characteristics of Purgatory are loneliness and despair.<sup>185</sup>

### **4.3 The importance of Lourdes for Medjugorje**

Lourdes is vital as a starting point of modern Marian apparitions; its main characteristics are similar to those of Medjugorje. The following pages analyze some of these similarities: the visions are public and serial, the procession and prayers before the apparitions, the saying of the rosary, the description of Mary, the messages. The comparisons with the religiosity of Lourdes help the scholar to understand better Medjugorje. In this paper there is much space given to the comparison, as Mircea Eliade did in his work; one way to understand and study a religious form is by comparing it to others.<sup>186</sup>

Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo testified to the significance of Lourdes today. She read about the seer Bernadette and her eighteen visions; she started to question if their meeting with Mary would have an end, as happened with the French girl. As she describes later, Mary had different plans for the seers of Medjugorje. At Lourdes, the Heavenly Mother left a miracle: water coming from a spring where Bernadette dug one day.<sup>187</sup> One of the crucial aspects of Lourdes, as just mentioned, is that it was public and serial; the young seer Bernadette had her meeting with Mary in front of a large crowd of people several times. Medjugorje has the same pattern, with the difference that the visions have lasted for years and are still happening. In the first vision of Bernadette, the Virgin Mary was holding a golden rosary, and her hands were holding it as if praying.<sup>188</sup> In revelations at Lourdes, the people who came to assist had to start praying the rosary. The girl Bernadette was kneeling with a candle and praying the rosary before her visions. The people who came to assist Bernadette did the same and treated the girl as a living saint.<sup>189</sup> This practice is a "procedure," that also occurs in Medjugorje. Before the sight of a

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<sup>184</sup> Lundahl, "A Comparison of Other World Perceptions," 49.

<sup>185</sup> Lundahl, "A Comparison of Other World Perceptions," 49.

<sup>186</sup> Pals, *Nine Theories of Religions*, 231.

<sup>187</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 58.

<sup>188</sup> Notermans, "Local and Global Icons of Mary," 471.

<sup>189</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 50.

seer, many people walk in procession to Podbrdo. While they walk they usually pray the rosary with the seer; as they walk by, the crowd touches them. It is essential for the pilgrims to be in contact with the sacred, to feel first hand the holy. One of the most impressive records of Medjugorje is that it has many videos of the seers while they have apparitions of the Virgin Mary.<sup>190</sup>

The description of Bernadette's state during her meetings with Mary is described in the same way for the seers of Medjugorje. Both in Lourdes<sup>191</sup> and Medjugorje,<sup>192</sup> the seers have moist eyes while looking at a fixed spot. Their mouths are moving as if speaking and they often pray with their hands folded. Their faces show emotions of joy and commotion. The description of the Virgin is also similar to the beautiful woman whom Bernadette saw. The seers of Medjugorje say that Mary is dressed in white and has dark hair covered by a white veil. Every part of her face expresses beauty and harmony.<sup>193</sup> Bernadette in Lourdes was often praying the rosary before and during the meeting with Mary. In Medjugorje, the rosary is rediscovered and strengthened; Mary often says that one tool against the Devil is praying the rosary every day. On September 27, 1984: "Dear children! You have helped me along by your prayers to realize my plans. Keep on praying that my plans complete. I request the families of the parish to pray the family rosary. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>194</sup>

Bernadette in one of her most famous visions said that Mary addressed herself as the Immaculate Conception. It was the first time in the history of Marian Apparitions. This may be because the dogma of the Catholic Church was released only four years earlier, in 1854.<sup>195</sup> Lourdes is an especially important connection with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which had been established only four years earlier in 1854. The visions of Bernadette strengthened the dogma,<sup>196</sup> since the Lady announced herself as the "Immaculate Conception". There can be an interesting connection to Medjugorje: the dogma of the Assumption to Heaven of Mary was announced by Pope Pius XII in 1950,<sup>197</sup> only thirty years earlier than the visions

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<sup>190</sup> "An apparition of Our Lady for Mirjana, 2 January 2009," Video Medjugorje Apparition for Mirjana, January 2009, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/videos/apparition-mirjana-january-2009/>.

<sup>191</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 50.

<sup>192</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 35-36.

<sup>193</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 53.

<sup>194</sup> "Medjugorje Message, September 27, 1984," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1984, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1984/#m9>.

<sup>195</sup> Haardt, "The Marian Paradox," 171.

<sup>196</sup> Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 199.

<sup>197</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, XIV.

in the Herzegovinian village. As the Turners state, the increase of Marian apparitions relates to the last dogma: since Mary's body is in Heaven with her soul, this could justify the many reports of visions of the Virgin.<sup>198</sup> Catholic believers indeed can connect to the Virgin because of this duality. She is the only human who was granted this special state.<sup>199</sup> The dogma of the Assumption is connected and made possible thanks to the one of the Immaculate Conception: since Mary was born without sin, and was a virgin throughout her whole life and did not commit sin, than she does not have "to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body."<sup>200</sup> The visions of Medjugorje can be connected to the dogma of the Assumption, as much as Lourdes has been related to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

From one message of Medjugorje, on August 25, 1997:

Dear children! God gives me this time as a gift to you, so that I may instruct and lead you on the path of salvation. Dear children, now you do not comprehend this grace, but soon a time will come when you will lament for these messages. That is why, little children, live all of the words which I have given you through this time of grace and renew prayer, until prayer becomes a joy for you. Especially, I call all those who have consecrated themselves to my Immaculate Heart to become an example to others. I call all priests and religious brothers and sisters to pray the rosary and to teach others to pray. The rosary, little children, is especially dear to me. Through the rosary open your heart to me and I am able to help you. Thank you for having responded to my call.<sup>201</sup>

#### **4.4 The importance of Fatima for Medjugorje**

The term "secret" alludes to a knowledge of some type that must remain private. According to the book *From La Salette to Medjugorje*, by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, there are three different kinds of private information: personal, for the public but not of vital interest, and essential collective secrets.<sup>202</sup> Medjugorje covers them all. The seers received from the Virgin Mary the

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<sup>198</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, XIV.

<sup>199</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 155; and Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 10.

<sup>200</sup> "Defining the Dogma of the Assumption, 4.-5.," Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII, accessed March 22, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_apc\\_19501101\\_munificentissimus-deus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html).

<sup>201</sup> "Medjugorje Message, August 25, 1997," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1997, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1997/#m8>.

<sup>202</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 234.

three kinds of secret knowledge. They had discussions of personal interest and that is not new in the history of the apparitions. In La Salette and Fatima, Mary often talked about private matters with the seers. When we talk about personal topics, they usually concern the life of the visionaries. But what is the most interesting are the essential public secrets that are necessary for humanity. In the history of the Catholic Church, the secrets of Fatima are the most famous and they still provide a crucial understanding of Medjugorje's secrets. The secrets of Fatima affected the world; they were inviting as many people as possible to convert, to embrace faith towards God. The apparitions in Fatima allegedly predicted the Second World War and the dominance of communism in Russia.<sup>203</sup> Mary's immaculate heart had to triumph over Russia, and therefore the nation had to be converted.

Fatima's apparitions started in 1917, after the First World War when the government released a series of laws against religion.<sup>204</sup> The difficulties faced by Christian communities in Portugal are similar to those of Medjugorje in a communist state like Yugoslavia; all beliefs at the time of the apparitions in 1981 were not tolerated. The initial struggle faced from by the seers of Fatima and Medjugorje draws a connection between the two in which Mary embodies the battle against communism and modernism.<sup>205</sup> In the messages revealed at Medjugorje, Mary said that her mission began with Fatima and that it will come to an end with Medjugorje.<sup>206</sup> Medjugorje represents, in fact, the end of the plan started by Mary in Fatima. Although it is known almost nothing about the ten secrets of Medjugorje, many have interpreted them in an apocalyptic sense. Their interpretation is also partly due, in fact, to Fatima. The description of Hell from Medjugorje's seers, moreover, is particularly similar to the one from the seers of Fatima. The fire and the human-shape tortured bodies are present in both visions. Mary, through her messages to the seers, is trying to save as many people as possible from this apocalyptic future; conversion is the only solution. The Virgin Mary is working, according to the seers' messages, to bring people closer to faith.

In the article "A Case Study of Contemporary Apocalyptic Catholicism," the scholar Amy Luebbers interviewed a group of "apocalyptic Catholics." This group of people believed in the apparitions of the Virgin as described by John Leary. John Leary started to have visions

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<sup>203</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 567.

<sup>204</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 567.

<sup>205</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 565.

<sup>206</sup> "What I started in Fatima, I will finish in Medjugorje," Mystic Post, (Blog) accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/mysticpost/2016/01/24/what-i-started-in-fatima-i-will-finish-in-medjugorje/>.



after his pilgrimage to Medjugorje.<sup>207</sup> The people from the article present some analogies with the pilgrims of Medjugorje, and some of them even went on pilgrimage to the little Herzegovinian village.<sup>208</sup> This Catholic group was attracted to Medjugorje's messages. One of the main topics of the paper is Catholic fundamentalism, expressed with the term "Millennialism." Millennialism<sup>209</sup> emerges during a time of social and political crisis: the term focuses on the desire of transformation from the current to a new era. Millennialism can be secular or religious and in both cases there is a criticism of society in the modern reality. In Luebbers' study, it has a religious meaning.<sup>210</sup> Most of the times Millennialism tendencies adopt Catholic teachings and turn them in a fundamentalist direction, standing against alcohol, homosexuality, pornography and divorce.<sup>211</sup> Luebbers lists seven criteria to classify the subjects of the study; of these, four correspond to the values of Medjugorje.

The similar criteria are: Conservative-Catholicism in Crisis, Traditional Society in Crisis, Conversion Experience, Duality of Good and Evil.<sup>212</sup> The "Conservative-Catholicism in Crisis" refers to the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. The modernization of the Catholic Church acted against its core values and many Catholic believers disagree with the results, especially regarding the neglect of Mary and her subordination to Jesus.<sup>213</sup> The role of Mary was now closely linked to Christ and her importance more dependent on him.<sup>214</sup> The institution tried to modernize the cult of Mary, which collided with Marian apparitions and their devotees.<sup>215</sup> The increase of Marian apparitions has also been explained as a conservative reaction to the Second Vatican Council.<sup>216</sup> The Marian messages and visions of Medjugorje have a specific plan of how this new era will occur, and it is Mary who will lead the way. In this belief system, there is a dualist idea: evil and corrupted forces surround the present reality. With the help of a superior being, the era full of sins will come to an end and be replaced by a new one. The new reality concerns a fresh start for humanity, where

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<sup>207</sup> Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 223.

<sup>208</sup> Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 228.

<sup>209</sup> Luebbers uses the term to define an era of peace prior to the final judgment. The term must not be confused with "Millenarianism" which describes a radical transformation of a society by religious or political purposes.

<sup>210</sup> Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 221.

<sup>211</sup> Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 222.

<sup>212</sup> Luebbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 223.

<sup>213</sup> See: Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 140; and Haardt, "The Marian Paradox," 172.

<sup>214</sup> Haardt, "The Marian Paradox," 172.

<sup>215</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 574.

<sup>216</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 141.

pain and suffering will cease to exist.<sup>217</sup> Mary has two different profiles: the first describes her as a loving mother who wants to save her children; the other shows Mary as a vengeful figure who will punish humanity for their sins.<sup>218</sup> Mary calls herself “Queen of Peace”<sup>219</sup> and assures that God will give peace to the heart of people. At the same time, Mary requires discipline in her devotion,<sup>220</sup> which is reflected in the five pillars of Medjugorje:<sup>221</sup> confession, fasting, praying the rosary, attending church services and reading the Bible. The pillars of the faith correspond as well to specific times: people must confess once every month, go to church at least once per week, pray the rosary and read the Bible every day. The fast happens twice per week, on Wednesday and Friday; Thursday is the day dedicated to the Eucharist. Fasting the day before purifies the body while fasting the day after receiving the Eucharist accepts the grace of the body of Jesus.

From her message on January 25, 1997:

Dear children! I invite you to reflect about your future. You are creating a new world without God, only with your own strength and that is why you are unsatisfied and without joy in the heart. This time is my time and that is why, little children, I invite you again to pray. When you find unity with God, you will feel hunger for the word of God and your heart, little children, will overflow with joy. You will witness God’s love wherever you are. I bless you and I repeat to you that I am with you to help you. Thank you for having responded to my call.<sup>222</sup>

The pillars of Medjugorje do not introduce any new Catholic ideas, beliefs or values. The pillars of faith correspond to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and its long tradition. This analogy to the Roman creed might be the reason why the Holy See did not deny the visions of Medjugorje.

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<sup>217</sup> Ryan, “Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje,” 572.

<sup>218</sup> Luebbbers, “The Remnant Faithful,” 222.

<sup>219</sup> Matter, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century,” 129.

<sup>220</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 463.

<sup>221</sup> The five pillars of Medjugorje are a common concept, that I encountered with all the pilgrims of Medjugorje.

<sup>222</sup> “Medjugorje Message, January 25, 1997,” Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1997, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1997/>.

## 4.5 The history of Medjugorje

Millions of people from all different parts of the world have gone on pilgrimage to Medjugorje.<sup>223</sup> What was Medjugorje before the visions of the children? It is essential to mention that this is only a brief explanation of the environment in which the apparitions started. The political and historical aspects of the visions are not crucial in this study. The focus is on the Italian pilgrims going to the sanctuary, their practices once there and Mary's importance.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Medjugorje was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that conquered the region in 1878 from the Ottoman rulers.<sup>224</sup> Medjugorje was a little town surrounded by a challenging regional environment; three different ethnicities represented three different religions: Croatian, Serbian, and Muslim respectively for Catholicism, Serb Orthodoxy, and Islam. After the First World War, the countries once belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire converged to form the new kingdom of Yugoslavia. That is how Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, and Montenegro came to merge. Different languages and religions were spoken and practiced. Six were the recognized nationalities and four the official languages, but ten were spoken. Three different religions made up the complicated new state; it was an unstable situation. Balkanization is a term first coined to explain the conflict in the Balkans; the name alludes to the hostility between one or more regions in the same territory. These differences come from different ethnicity and religious and political issues<sup>225</sup> which deepened with the Second World War when the Nazis arrived. Thanks to the army under Josip Broz, known as Tito, the Nazi forces lost. When Tito built the new Yugoslavia, there was pretty much nothing of the old kingdom. The communist state abolished all religions. When Tito died in 1980, the country collapsed. The war in Bosnia started in 1992 and ended in 1995.<sup>226</sup> The apparitions of Medjugorje began in 1981 between the time periods of communism under Tito and the war in Bosnia.

There have been many studies on the political role of the Gospa<sup>227</sup> in Medjugorje, during such a critical time.<sup>228</sup> The thesis describes three significant polemics of Medjugorje's

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<sup>223</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 319.

<sup>224</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 64.

<sup>225</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 450.

<sup>226</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 452.

<sup>227</sup> As already mentioned, "Gospa" means Mary in Croatian.

<sup>228</sup> See the studies: Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje"; Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje"; Jurkovich and Gesler "Medjugorje"; Sells, "Crosses of Blood"; and Mart Bax, "Mass Graves, Stagnating Identification and Violence: A Case Study in the Local Sources of the War in Bosnia Herzegovina," *Anthropological Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (1997), <https://jstor.org/stable/3317798>.

apparitions. The first involves the antagonism between the Bishop of Mostar and the Franciscan priests; the second concerns the status of Medjugorje during the war in Yugoslavia, and the third one involves the wealth of the seers.

#### **4.5.1 The Bishop of Mostar and the Franciscan priests**

One of the most controversial aspects of Medjugorje is the antagonism between the diocese of Mostar and the Franciscan priests, which started before the apparitions in 1981 and persists today. The bishop of Mostar<sup>229</sup> controls the administration of the diocese of Medjugorje but the diocese is actually managed by Franciscan priests. The Bishop is a fierce opponent of the apparitions of Medjugorje, while the Franciscans support them.<sup>230</sup> The contraposition emerges from the history of the two institutions.

The Franciscan priests had the jurisdiction of the diocese of Mostar till 1960. Their authority started after they arrived in the land around 1370.<sup>231</sup> The priests defied the Bogomil heretics and managed to control the region. When the Ottomans took control of the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1463, the power of the priests did not vanish. The Franciscans made a deal with the Turks; in exchange for large sums of money, the rulers would protect the priests and let them manage the Catholic presence in the region. The priests also obtained independence from Rome. The long dominance of the Turks lasted till 1878 when the Austro-Hungarian Empire conquered the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>232</sup> The Church of Rome and the new Empire reorganized the dioceses and parishes of the land, which also included Mostar, with the coming of new priests and bishops. The importance and long-lasting authority of the Franciscans entailed a new deal in 1923 with Rome: the priests maintained the control of the area and their parishes if they recognized the authority of a new bishop in Mostar. The Franciscans also controlled the new churches which they were able to convert from Islam and the Orthodox Church.<sup>233</sup> The Franciscans also had to enroll new seminarians in order to sustain their power. The Franciscans obtained power from the deal because they controlled not only churches and monasteries but also schools and hospitals; their influence also converged in the public sphere. The jurisdiction of the diocese of Mostar did not prevail over their long-

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<sup>229</sup> In this matter, there is not a specific name of one Bishop, but it concerns the position of the bishop of Mostar.

<sup>230</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 63.

<sup>231</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 63.

<sup>232</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 64.

<sup>233</sup> Bax, "The Madonna of Medjugorje," 64.

established dominance. The situation, however, changed after the Second World War. The creation of the communist state revolutionized the dynamic between the two factions.<sup>234</sup> The state of Yugoslavia nationalized all the public institutions controlled by the priests and left only their parishes. Atheization was one of the first steps of the new government. The Bishop of Mostar, Petar Čule, was arrested for his opposition to the new regime in 1948.<sup>235</sup> The new state killed many priests and devotees from all religions.<sup>236</sup>

After the first years of a united Yugoslavia, though, the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church evolved in a different direction. The state signed a treaty with Rome in 1966, where they each defined mutual benefits. After these events, the new bishop of Mostar, Janco Vladec, was able to expand his dominion due to two factors: the bishop supported the state and thought that Christianity and Marxism could exist in parallel.<sup>237</sup> He joined the state association of priests and invited others to do the same. The bishop attained the majority of the dioceses of Mostar, after his suggestion to change the deal that was stipulated in 1923. The bishop of Mostar, Janco Vladec, is quoted in “The Madonna of Medjugorje: Religious Rivalry and the Formation of a Devotional Movement in Yugoslavia” by Bax in 1990, in *Religious Regimes and State Formation: Perspectives from European Ethnology* by Wolf in 1991 and in *Power of Popular Piety: A Critical Examination* by Mong in 2019.<sup>238</sup> The scholars all reference Bax, whose reference is from the scholar Ramet Sabrina. The same bishop, though, is not quoted or mentioned in any lists or official documents of Bishops of Mostar.<sup>239</sup> The bishop’s “invisibility” suggests ambiguous evidence on the problematic history of Catholicism and its relationship with a Communist regime such as Yugoslavia’s.

With the decree *Romanis Pontificibus* in 1975, many parishes passed to the secular clergy. The new diocesan priests often had difficulties in starting their new jobs; the old parishes, supported by Franciscan priests, did not want to leave their churches. Rome suspended The Father Superior in 1975, and the authority of the Franciscans was damaged.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 64.

<sup>235</sup> “Petar Čule,” Biskupije Mostar-Duvno i Trebinje-Mrkan, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://www.md-tm.ba/biskupije/petar-čule>.

<sup>236</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 451.

<sup>237</sup> Ambrose Mong, *Power of Popular Piety: A Critical Examination*, (Oregon, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 104.

<sup>238</sup> See: Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 64-65, Ambrose Mong, *Power of Popular Piety*, 104; and Eric Wolf, *Religious Regimes and State Formation: Perspectives from European Ethnology*, (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 1991), 33.

<sup>239</sup> “Bishop (s),” Diocese of Mostar-Duvno (-Trebinje e Mrkan), accessed April 1, 2020, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmost.html#details>.

<sup>240</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 65.

The claims from the beginning of the apparitions in June 1981 were supported by Franciscan priests who were strengthening their influence in the territory. By 1984, the number of Franciscan priests grew from 80 to 120.<sup>241</sup> The support of the visions by the Franciscans allowed the emergence of the pilgrimage centre. In other cases, where friars did not encourage the seers, their publicity faded away.<sup>242</sup> The Bishop of Mostar at that time was Pavao Žanić, who after some investigations declared that the visions were false.<sup>243</sup> In one of the first messages of the Virgin, she spoke about the rivalry between the diocesan bishop and the Franciscans; Mary supported reconciliation between the two factions. The Virgin approved of the Franciscan priests and was against the actions of the Bishop of Mostar.<sup>244</sup> The opposition of Monsignor Žanić was due to all the “deceptions” behind the visions.<sup>245</sup> His famous statement was written in 1990. In this paper, there are records of his initial interviews with the seers.<sup>246</sup> Pavao Žanić also claimed that the visions of Medjugorje were a strategic move by the Franciscans to win the long antagonism with the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Mostar.<sup>247</sup> The Bishop who followed, Monsignor Ratko Perić, shared the same opinion as his predecessor. The apparitions were false from their beginning in 1981 and the seers do not have to be trusted.<sup>248</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Medjugorje and the war in Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia was a Socialist Federal Republic state formed by Tito in 1945; it lasted till 1991. The former Yugoslavia included Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Medjugorje belonged to the southern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The primary identities in Yugoslavia were the Croats, Serbs and Muslim-Bosnians. The ethnicities referred to different religions, even if many of them did not reflect it. An atheist and non-observant Bosnian would still belong to the category of Muslim. The various

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<sup>241</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 68.

<sup>242</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 72.

<sup>243</sup> Sells, “Crosses of Blood,” 319.

<sup>244</sup> Bax, “The Madonna of Medjugorje,” 69.

<sup>245</sup> “Documento storico – il vescovo: Dietro ai messaggi di Medjugorje credo ci sia padre Vlašić, (1984),” posted by “L’illusione di Medjugorje,” January 4, 2009, <https://youtu.be/OmeG9ftUmeg>.

<sup>246</sup> “The Truth about Medjugorje,” Pavao Žanić, accessed 28 February, 2020, [https://web.archive.org/web/20160306143755/http://www.cbismo.com/files/file/ZanicMedj\\_May1990.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20160306143755/http://www.cbismo.com/files/file/ZanicMedj_May1990.pdf).

<sup>247</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 460.

<sup>248</sup> Andrea Tornielli, “Il vescovo di Mostar: “Non autentiche le apparizioni di Medjugorje,”” *La Stampa*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/it/2017/03/01/news/il-vescovo-di-mostar-non-autentiche-le-apparizioni-di-medjugorje-1.34661617>.

populations spoke the same language, even if they called it different names; they shared the same medieval ancestor and had common cultural traditions and habits.<sup>249</sup>

After the death of Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia slowly collapsed, with the initial separation of Slovenia in 1991. The war in the former Yugoslavia started in 1991-2<sup>250</sup> and lasted till 1995 for Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>251</sup> The war officially ended with the Dayton Agreement in 1995.<sup>252</sup> The numbers of the casualties reached 140 000 people.<sup>253</sup>

The fight between Slovenia and the army of the former Yugoslavia lasted ten days, with Slovenia's victory. The Republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia followed Slovenia's secession. The army of the former Yugoslavia soon become a Serbian militia and was guided by the nationalist Slobodan Milošević. He appealed to the myth of Greater Serbia; religious identity was now enough to have you killed, imprisoned or raped.<sup>254</sup> Ancient mosques got destroyed, and most often the population was taken to prison camps. Christianity was one of the main excuses of othering, and its roots came from medieval times so that killing became a matter of revenge for a remote past. By this logic, the atrocities began during the Ottoman Empire by Muslim rulers.<sup>255</sup> The "ethnic cleansing" portrayed by the Serb nationalists under the rule of Slobodan Milošević is by far the most aggressive in the wars of the former Yugoslavia. The Croat nationalism led by Franjo Tuđman, though, also committed crimes based on ethnicity. The Croat nationalists were led by fanaticism, including extreme Catholicism.<sup>256</sup> The two different nationalist forces made a deal of non-aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Their mission was to each continue the cleansing in the territory without attacking one another. The major enemy here was the Muslim population.<sup>257</sup> The

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<sup>249</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 310-311.

<sup>250</sup> The war started in different times in the states. In Slovenia and Croatia started in 1991, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992.

<sup>251</sup> It ended in 2001, if we count Kosovo and Macedonia. These wars still belong to the fights after the former Yugoslavia, but started and finished later than in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>252</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 452.

<sup>253</sup> "Transitional Justice in the Former Yugoslavia," International Center for Transitional Justice, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-FormerYugoslavia-Justice-Facts-2009-English.pdf>.

<sup>254</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 314.

<sup>255</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 313.

<sup>256</sup> The Roman Catholic Church condemned the atrocities and violence of the war. In 1993 Pope John Paul II appealed for peace. The pope stated that Catholics had to show compassion also to people from other religions. From "Appello di Giovanni Paolo II per la pace nelle terre della Bosnia e Erzegovina," Papa Paolo Giovanni II Discorsi Ottobre 1993, accessed January 2, 2020, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1993/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19931002\\_appello-bosnia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1993/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19931002_appello-bosnia.html).

<sup>257</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 315-16.

cultural and artistic heritage from the Ottoman period was destroyed. The HVO, Croatian Defense Union, killed, imprisoned and tortured Muslims in concentration camps.

The history of Medjugorje during the war is controversial; no bombs or any shootings touched the town. Many pilgrims testified that Medjugorje was a place of peace even during the war because of Mary's presence.<sup>258</sup> The seers left messages from Mary, who addressed Satan as the only enemy people needed to fight. The majority of her messages focused on peace for all the populations, no matter their religions.<sup>259</sup> Medjugorje, during the war, became a helping center to distribute supplies and provisions from Europe.<sup>260</sup> According to some testimonies, the people and pilgrims of Medjugorje freed the city by participating in a peaceful walk.<sup>261</sup> Father Slavko Barbarić, a Franciscan priest in Medjugorje, started in 1993 an organization called "Mother's village" to help the orphaned children during the war. The organization's first location was in Medjugorje and officially became operational in 1996. Today the association is spread all around the world.<sup>262</sup>

On the other hand, five concentration camps were close to Medjugorje;<sup>263</sup> Muslims died just on the other side of Mount Križevac, which is right next to the village. Villages next to Medjugorje assisted in ethnic cleansing, and the non-Catholic population was killed or deported. One of the harshest criticisms about Medjugorje is that Croat nationalists used the visions for their ethnic cleansing.<sup>264</sup> This allegation is consistent with the move by Franjo Tudjman, the leader of the Croat nationalists, to declare the country's independence on June 25, 1991. This date happens to be the tenth anniversary of the apparitions of Medjugorje.<sup>265</sup>

#### **4.5.3 The wealth of the seers of Medjugorje**

The last of the controversies about the apparitions in Medjugorje deals with the amount of wealth accumulated by the seers. All the seers have prospered and own a house and more. At the beginning of the visions, the seers came from low-income families, mostly from farming

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<sup>258</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 454.

<sup>259</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 318.

<sup>260</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 265.

<sup>261</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 319.

<sup>262</sup> "Who are we?," mothersvillage.org, accessed February 14, 2020, [http://www.mothersvillage.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=46](http://www.mothersvillage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=46).

<sup>263</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 320.

<sup>264</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 454.

<sup>265</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 320.



families. Five of the six seers today have either a hotel, restaurant or souvenir shop in the village.

Marija Pavlović, the only one who does not have a hotel, owns a spiritual centre, called “The Magnificat”, which opened in 2012.<sup>266</sup> An Italian bank called San Paolo and offers from pilgrims sponsored the building. The purpose of the Centre is to let pilgrims assist in the daily visions of the seer, and everyone has to pay to join. The Magnificat also provides lodging to pilgrims for the night, always at a cost. The spiritual center, in the end, has the same characteristics as a hotel, but with rumors of tax fraud and illegal jobs.<sup>267</sup> The building, indeed, was investigated and searched by federal and state agencies several times over the years.<sup>268</sup> The Croatian scholar Vencel Čuljak, in his thesis “The phenomenon of Medjugorje as a global brand and a top destination for religious tourism” in 2013, stated that most of the jobs in the village are illegal and the workers are paid under the table.<sup>269</sup>

The seer Ivan Dragičević often has been criticized for his standard of living. The seer got married to Lauren Murphy, an ex-Miss Massachusetts. The couple now lives in Boston and own a house with a swimming pool worth 800.000 dollars, paid off in only one year.<sup>270</sup> From the United States, the seer coordinates a tourist agency called “206 Tours,” for pilgrims who go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje. The agency offers the possibility of being in Medjugorje with Ivan and his family. The vacation package is called “Medjugorje with Ivan Dragičević, with accommodations at the Dragičević family home.” The pilgrim is a guest in his second house; Ivan, indeed, spends half of the year in Boston and the other half in Medjugorje, from May until September. He is able to see Mary every day, wherever he is in Boston or in Medjugorje. The period when he is in Medjugorje corresponds with the available dates for the pilgrims, who can dine, witness an apparition and often talk with the seer.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Ignazio Ingrao, “E se chiude Medjugorje?,” *Panorama*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.cinquantamila.it/storyTellerArticolo.php?storyId=0000002318273>.

<sup>267</sup> “Le attività economiche dei veggenti di Medjugorje,” YouTube video, posted by “L’Illusione di Medjugorje,” March 30, 2017, <https://youtu.be/y17VxYNWgJM>.

<sup>268</sup> Marco Corvaglia, “The Seers and Money: A Documented Analysis of an “Ambiguous Relation” [Part 2],” *The Medjugorje Illusion*, (Blog) accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.marcocorvaglia.com/medjugorje-en/seers-in-conflict-of-interests-part-2.html>.

<sup>269</sup> Marco Corvaglia, “The Seers and Money: A Documented Analysis of an “Ambiguous Relation” [Part 2],” *The Medjugorje Illusion*, (Blog) accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.marcocorvaglia.com/medjugorje-en/seers-in-conflict-of-interests-part-2.html>.

<sup>270</sup> Marco Corvaglia, “The Seers and Money: A Documented Analysis of an “Ambiguous Relation” [Part 1],” *The Medjugorje Illusion*, (Blog) accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.marcocorvaglia.com/medjugorje-en/the-seers-and-an-unescapable-conflict-of-interests.html>.

<sup>271</sup> “Medjugorje with Ivan Dragičević with Accommodations at the Dragičević Family Home,” 206 Tours Inc. The Leader in Catholic Tours, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.pilgrimimages.com/medj/>.

Another seer, Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo, has as a summer mansion, an enormous villa of 314 square meters in the Blace Bay, part of Croatian isle of Hvar.<sup>272</sup> Vicka Ivanković lives in a small village next to Medjugorje, called Krehin Gradac. Vicka's house, like those of the other two seers, is of considerable size.<sup>273</sup>

#### 4.5.4 The position of the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church's guideline for supernatural apparitions is the document "*Normae Congregationis*," published in 1978.<sup>274</sup> The concept of visions from a heavenly being cannot be denied by the religious institution. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes itself as a "living body,"<sup>275</sup> where past biblical times and present events merge. The Communion of Saints<sup>276</sup> supports this view: the members of the Spiritual Church are still available and present, and they can interfere with the terrene orders. Both living orders make the Roman Catholic Church, and they can interact. The notion of modern miracles cannot be denied, because if they happened in the Bible and are legitimate, there is no reason why they should not occur again.<sup>277</sup> The Vatican released the document after an increase in the number of visions. In the document, priests and religious authorities could find the appropriate procedure to follow. The diocesan bishop, the national episcopal conference or the Holy See are now the only religious authorities in charge of judging a presumed apparition. The 1978 document outlines the procedures that these ministers have to follow. The spiritual leadership has to analyze if an apparition falls into positive or negative criteria. The first standard alludes to the behavior and psychological stability of the seers. The subjects must show a certain level of honesty and moral correctness. Their state of mind must not be altered by mental illness or medicine. In these initial phases, the religious authority also analyzes the miracles or testimonies of conversions. The messages from the seer must correspond with the doctrine of the Roman Catholic faith. The negative criteria are, for example, the desire for economic gain, mental disorders or amoral behaviors. If

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<sup>272</sup> Vedran Pavlic, "Medjugorje "Visionary" Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo Pours Concrete over Public Beach?," *Total Croatia News*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/lifestyle/37525-medjugorje>.

<sup>273</sup> "Le attività economiche dei veggenti di Medjugorje," YouTube video, 03:17, posted by "L'Illusione di Medjugorje," March 30, 2017, <https://youtu.be/y17VxYNWgJM>.

<sup>274</sup> "Norms regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations," Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed January 18, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19780225\\_norme-apparizioni\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html).

<sup>275</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 205.

<sup>276</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 206.

<sup>277</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 206.

the initial research is positive, then the authority can allow some forms of cult and devotion. If the results of the worship prove to be beneficial, they will determine the final acceptance of the apparitions. The process takes an extended amount of time because only longevity can truly show if one vision or revelation is worthwhile or not.<sup>278</sup> The first authority who investigates an apparition is the local Bishop.<sup>279</sup> The episcopal conference can intervene too if asked by the Bishop. The Holy See can always intervene, no matter if asked or not.

As previously stated, the Bishop of Mostar is against the apparitions of Medjugorje. The Roman Catholic Church has still to express a final decision on Medjugorje. Since the beginning of the visions there have been three popes. The first was Pope John Paul II, who was notably favorable to the seers; he even met one of them, Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo, as she claims. The seer stated that during their meeting, the Pope and she spoke about their common veneration to Mary. Mirjana noted that on that occasion, the Pope told her that if he were not Pope, he would be in Medjugorje.<sup>280</sup> Pope John Paul II believed in the apparitions of Fatima and was fond of the secrets. He revealed, in fact, the third secret of Lucia of Fatima in 2000 and consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>281</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI sent a commission to study the apparitions of Medjugorje that lasted from 2010 until 2014. The main leader of the commission was Cardinal Camillo Ruini; the total number of the group amounted to thirteen members. The Roman Church published the results of the commission in 2017. The members generally agreed on the authenticity of the first few apparitions, but they are less confident about the long-lasting period of the visions. The commission's doubts are focused on the most recent years.<sup>282</sup>

The current Pope, Francis, has been less open about Medjugorje and criticized the idea of the Virgin Mary as a “mail woman”, who carries news to her devotees.<sup>283</sup> One of the reasons that the Roman Catholic Church did not condemn the visions of Medjugorje is because of the

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<sup>278</sup> “Norms regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations,” Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed January 18, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19780225\\_norme-apparizioni\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html).

<sup>279</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 10.

<sup>280</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 205.

<sup>281</sup> “The Message of Fatima,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed March 25, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

<sup>282</sup> Torielli, “Medjugorje, ecco le conclusioni della relazione Rudini.”

<sup>283</sup> Francesco Antonio Grana, “Medjugorje, Papa Francesco contro i veggenti: “Questa non è identità cristiana,”” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, June 9, 2015, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/06/09/medjugorje-il-papa-contro-i-veggenti-questa-non-e-identita-cristiana/1761249/>.

positive reports of conversions. The apparitions, moreover, are still happening; religious authorities, indeed, usually proceed to a verdict after the end of a supernatural phenomenon. Pope Francis in 2019 officially authorized pilgrims to go to Medjugorje, which does not imply an authentication of the apparitions. This was due to the vast multitude of people who go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje, not counting all the conversions and stories of spiritual healing.<sup>284</sup>

## 5 Analysis of the interviews of Italian pilgrims

I decided to divide the thesis in two parts: the first includes the theoretical and historical aspects of Medjugorje, with a lens on Lourdes and Fatima. In the first section of this thesis I presented a general idea of Medjugorje, the theories I studied, researched and that now I apply to classify the interviews of Italian pilgrims.

The second part of the thesis focuses on a different method, which deals with field work from my experience in Medjugorje and from the interviews of Italian pilgrims who went to the Herzegovinian village. As mentioned in the introduction, I interviewed five Italian pilgrims and I gave them symbolical Italian names from the *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri. As Dante is on a metaphorical pilgrimage to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, the pilgrims are as well on a spiritual journey. As the Italian pilgrims before their pilgrimage, Dante was eager to change his life and his spirituality, in order to become a better believer. As all Italian pilgrims, he changed during the process. These are the reasons why I chose names from the famous narrative poem. The five pilgrims become then: Dante, Virgilio, Beatrice, Francesca and Lucrezia.

None of the two parts can be understood and discussed without the other. The two main sections present the possibility of studying Medjugorje as a whole. In the first part the reader can see the history of Medjugorje and its comparison to previous pilgrimages, while now the reader will see what it means to the pilgrims who go there on a pilgrimage. The book *Moved by Mary* divide Marian pilgrimages in four directions: physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and healings, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement.<sup>285</sup> Now I analyze the interviews according to these directions.

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<sup>284</sup> Francesco Antonio Grana, "Medjugorje, il Papa dà il via libera ai pellegrinaggi. "Ma la Chiesa deve ancora esprimersi sulle apparizioni"" *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 12, 2019, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/05/12/medjugorje-il-papa-da-il-via-libera-ai-pellegrinaggi-ma-la-chiesa-deve-ancora-esprimersi-sulle-apparizioni/5172717/>.

<sup>285</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6-7.

## **5.1 The Physical movements of pilgrims going both to and while at sacred places**

In this section, I analyze the physical movement of pilgrims, both to and at sacred places. The pilgrimage does not end with the arrival at the shrine: the pilgrims have paths to follow and prayers to recite.

### **5.1.1 Italian pilgrims going to Medjugorje**

All the five Italian pilgrims that I interviewed stated that they have gone to Medjugorje more than one time. They usually went by car or bus and travelled mostly with a priest. The graphic “celebrating priests in Medjugorje”<sup>286</sup> (see p. 54) shows the number of Masses celebrated in Medjugorje throughout the years. The results demonstrate that the number of Italian services ranks second among all the languages, immediately following the percentage of those in the Croatian language, the national language spoken in Medjugorje.<sup>287</sup> The statistics show that in many years, the number of Italian “celebrating priests”<sup>288</sup> is higher even than the number of Croatian priests, as in the years 2019, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012 and so on.<sup>289</sup> The other high number is from “Middle and Eastern Europe,” which does not classify one population but many. The number for these populations cannot be compared to the numbers of Italian pilgrims, since they represent one nation. The graphic confirms the high number of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje and hence the need for the many celebrations of the mass. For example, in the recent year 2019, the number of Italian celebrating priests is the highest of all other populations, even of the Croatians.

The large number of Italian pilgrims could be explained with two facts: the proximity of Italy to Medjugorje, which makes it an easy and not too expensive journey, and the long popular Marian devotion that Italians embrace from their Roman Catholic tradition.

Italians can go on pilgrimage by bus, car or airplane. Because of the great number of Italians going to Medjugorje, a new direct flight from Ancona has recently been added, that it

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<sup>286</sup> “Statistics, celebrating priests,” Medjugorje Phenomenon, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.medjugorje.hr/en/medjugorje-phenomenon/statistics/>.

<sup>287</sup> As explained before, Medjugorje is a Croatian and Catholic village. Jurkovich and Gesler, “Medjugorje,” 455.

<sup>288</sup> “celebrating priests” alludes to the number of ceremonies in which they spoke Italian language.

<sup>289</sup> The gathering of the statistics started only in 1986 because of the large number of pilgrims coming to Medjugorje.

is directly connected to Split. This Croatian town is two hours by car from Medjugorje, and connections are always available.<sup>290</sup>

The Second Vatican Council stressed Mary's connection to Christ, especially by refocusing on the aspect of Theotokos, so Mary as mother of Christ. The idea was, that Marian devotion should become more Christ-centered. In the liturgy therefore, Marian hymns and prayers have disappeared.<sup>291</sup> By some Catholics, this was perceived as a devaluation of Mary's cult.<sup>292</sup> As mentioned before, Marian apparitions have increased since the Second Vatican Council in 1962.<sup>293</sup> According to the scholar Michael Carrol, the country with the most reports of Marian apparitions is Italy, even if not one of them has been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>294</sup> The fact that Marian apparitions are widespread in Italy and the great number of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje confirms the power and reverence that Mary holds over Italian devotees.

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<sup>290</sup> Paul Bradbury, "Good News for Italian Catholic Pilgrims, as Croatian Seaplane Connect Ancona and Medjugorje," *Total Croatia News*, November 21, 2015, <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/travel/1539-good-news-for-italian-catholic-pilgrims-as-croatian-seaplanes-connect-ancona-and-medjugorje>.

<sup>291</sup> Haardt, "The Marian Paradox," 172.

<sup>292</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 140.

<sup>293</sup> Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 141; and Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 565.

<sup>294</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 574.

## CONCELEBRATING PRIESTS MEDJUGORJE

Unfortunately, it is only in 1986 that we began to note the number of concelebrating priest.

TABULAR VIEW ▾

Year	Croatian speaking area	Middle and Eastern Europe	German speaking area	English speaking area	Italy	French speaking area	Other	Evening Mass	Total
2020	664	147	71	135	379	49	33	607	2085
2019	5211	4564	2228	4351	5331	1380	1218	20481	44764
2018	5019	3564	2088	3819	4947	1301	915	17451	39104
2017	5183	3123	1893	3859	5156	970	912	15760	36856
2016	4781	2880	1692	3362	5095	1159	996	14693	34658
2015	4377	3049	2002	3443	5990	1122	1245	17642	38870
2014	4306	2767	1870	3432	6362	971	944	16846	37498
2013	4210	3045	1883	3716	7162	1029	1124	16486	38655
2012	5052	3079	1827	3649	8630	1098	1261	17413	42009
2011	5006	2878	2069	3779	8171	1084	1165	16942	41094
2010	5032	2680	2103	3924	7270	1018	1250	14950	38227
2009	4740	2423	1802	4167	4718	1262	865	13325	33302
2008	4255	2181	1840	4485	3320	1099	1104	11954	30238
2007	4888	2267	1698	5165	3554	1356	1070	14267	34265
2006	4504	1807	1985	5632	3505	1315	1024	12322	32094
2005	4252	1688	1604	5323	2968	1276	999	11563	29673
2004	4130	1609	1621	4801	2179	1248	1037	11541	28166
2003	3802	1783	1649	4326	2279	1336	1059	11264	27498
2002	3639	1743	1567	4114	1948	1236	1123	12007	27377
2001	3433	2212	1640	3796	1682	1239	1226	12094	27322
2000	3212	1659	1345	3499	1476	1204	1115	10748	24258
1999	3108	2126	1434	3173	1277	1267	990	10097	23472
1998	2930	2864	1496	4295	1572	1634	931	12132	27854
1997	2891	2677	1542	4063	1330	1408	1184	10667	25762
1996	2541	1573	1418	3465	1014	1340	563	8009	19923
1995	2497	700	742	2687	769	1183	419	5438	14435
1994	2434	437	677	1995	775	986	380	4517	12201
1993	1719	129	291	1340	382	558	237	2430	7086
1992	1566	22	153	399	281	142	207	1705	4475
1991	2379	412	590	3536	1191	762	380	6023	15273
1990	2692	895	1885	9641	2511	986	1268	14269	34147
1989	2472	654	1789	8512	2165	796	1102	12667	30157
1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13018	13018
1987	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11915	11915
1986	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7438	7438

Figure 2: Celebrating priests in Medjugorje<sup>295</sup>

<sup>295</sup> “Statistics, celebrating priests,” Medjugorje Phenomenon, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.medjugorje.hr/en/medjugorje-phenomenon/statistics/>.

### 5.1.2 The description of the places in Medjugorje

The paper now briefly describes the rituals and sites in Medjugorje; it is crucial to do so because it helps to understand the practices of Italian pilgrims. The description of the areas come from the study in locus.<sup>296</sup> The aim was to track the path of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje. There is a “map”, a specific route that every pilgrim must walk in when they come to this sanctuary. It is also important to mention that this “internal journey” at the shrine gives them a sense of fellowship, of *communitas*, that is not to be found anywhere else but in Medjugorje. Italian pilgrims usually go in groups to Medjugorje; they are led by a priest, who shows them the critical places and explains to them which prayers suit the specific situations.

From a pilgrim:

*We went to Medjugorje with a very rigid person, who had a very strict opinion on prayers. When we arrived in Medjugorje, the days went differently from each other because we went to see the various organizations that had developed around the country. And then there were the apparitions, the most important thing. There were also visits to Podbrdo and Križevac, the two mountains of the apparitions. In the morning, we got up with tender church songs; then there was a passage of your choice from the Bible. Then we had breakfast, and then we did a meditation on the piece that had come out. We prayed a bit and also read the messages of Our Lady and then we left for the actual day. Visits to testimonials. Then there was lunch and after a nap. Older people with physical or psychological problems usually took a nap. Many people go there because of their problems. All these rituals help you understand that there is something extraordinary in Medjugorje.*<sup>297</sup>

In this quote, the interviewee is explaining the right procedure for pilgrims when in Medjugorje. At the shrine, there is a certain schedule that pilgrims follow in order to experience Medjugorje from a physical and spiritual perspective; different routes have different prayers. The “rigid person” who guided the pilgrim had clearly a strict opinion of how pilgrims had to experience

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<sup>296</sup> From Latin, “in place”. It means from the field work I collected when I was in Medjugorje.

<sup>297</sup> LUCREZIA.

All quotes in italics refer to the pilgrims’ statements.



the pilgrimage to Medjugorje: the day, as mentioned in the quote, was structured and did not give much space for personal initiative.

The unity of the group of pilgrims soon expands to others. Pilgrimage is not only about visiting the sanctuary, but also about fellowship.<sup>298</sup> Going on a pilgrimage is not only an external itinerary; most of the times, the pilgrim starts a journey as a spiritual movement towards their faith. The spiritual traveler wants to deepen their relationship with God; the right behavior helps to do so. That is why, when the pilgrim arrives in Medjugorje, there is a way of praying, behaving and thinking about one's self.<sup>299</sup>

From one pilgrim:

*Medjugorje is a school of prayer, despite all the signs that are there. When I go to Medjugorje, it is essential to specify what kind of pilgrimage it is; because if you do not follow a priest with his selected prayers, you lose the experience of Medjugorje. If you want to live and breathe its air, you must participate in the prayers that the parish organizes, in the program that the priest offers you. Many pilgrims make the mistake of going there and going left and right or to testimonies, perhaps even to overlapping testimonies; but in that way, you do not live the Madonna. There is a program to follow, there are many masses during the day. Mass in Italian at eleven in the morning, so it is crucial to participate in that, then in the afternoon there are three rosaries, two rosaries called one behind the other, the Holy Mass and the last rosary.<sup>300</sup>*

In this quote, it again shows the strict schedule that pilgrims must follow in Medjugorje. There is a path, a right way of how to experience the place. Medjugorje is called a “school of prayer,” because the pilgrims can learn again how to pray. All the pilgrims stated that before Medjugorje, they did not attend Mass every week and they did not pray the rosary every day.

The physical landscape of Medjugorje is vital for another reason; it reflects the places of most shrines. Many sanctuaries are in areas of mountains, hills and rocks. The habitat is desolate and difficult to reach; indeed, many pilgrims had a hard time finding Medjugorje in the years after

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<sup>298</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 204.

<sup>299</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 188.

<sup>300</sup> DANTE.

the first visions. The difficulties in arriving at the shrine put the pilgrims into a position of suspense and personal introspection.<sup>301</sup>

What follows is a brief explanation of the sites in Medjugorje.

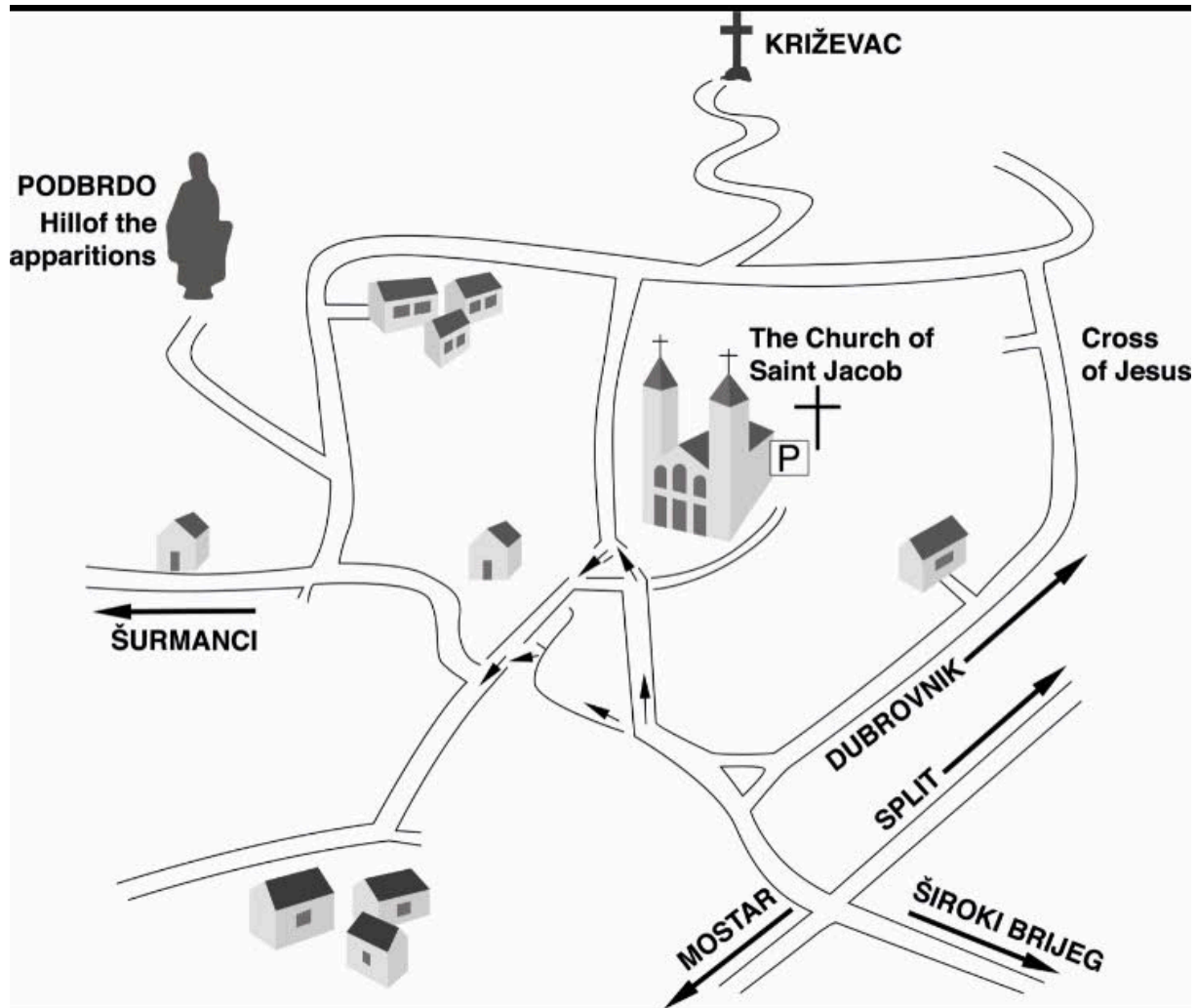


Figure 3: Map of Medjugorje<sup>302</sup>

### 5.1.2.1 Podbrdo

The starting point of the areas in Medjugorje is mount Podbrdo; here, the seers had the first apparitions. It is not a challenging climb per sé because it takes only about fifteen to twenty

<sup>301</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 318.

<sup>302</sup> Modified version of: "Map of Medjugorje," accessed April 23, 2020, <https://www.medjugorjehotelspa.com/de/kontakt/>.

minutes. The ground is rocky and bristly; many pilgrims reach the top either barefoot or on their knees. The history of pilgrimages shares this practice which forms a kind of penance before arriving at the shrine.<sup>303</sup> During the walk to the top of Podbrdo, many pilgrims pray the rosary with a priest, usually, the ones who “shepherd” them.

One Italian pilgrim said about it:

*Afterwards we went up to Podbrdo, which is where the Madonna appeared. It is a rocky path, but not too difficult to travel. Some do it barefoot or on their knees. Some are unable to walk to the top, and the volunteers bring them up. However, we reached the top while praying. When you climb the mountain, you do it by praying with your group. I always had this sense of peace and sadness because I could have gone there many years before. But still this sense of tranquility and respect. I have not seen scenes of hysteria; I have only seen a lot of faith and hope with due expectations. I have also seen many young people who go, not just the elderly, who know that they have little to live for and therefore convert. I have also seen many young people.<sup>304</sup>*



Figure 4: Statue of Mary at the top of Podbrdo

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<sup>303</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 321.

<sup>304</sup> BEATRICE.

In this quote the Italian pilgrim describes her journey to Podbrdo how important the prayers are while walking to reach the top and once they arrive. The prayers comfort and give peace to the pilgrim.

At the top of Podbrdo, there is a cross and a short distance from there, there is a white statue of the Virgin Mary where the seers had the first apparitions. Every day many pilgrims pray around the figure of Mary.<sup>305</sup> At the foot of the wooden cross, there are black rocks. The color of the stones is due to the many burning candles from the pilgrims. Close to the rocks, there are all sorts of presents for Mary such as pictures, flowers, rosaries and candles. The built-in crosses in locum are everywhere, along the road and at the apex of the mount. Pilgrims make wood crosses with what they find along the way to the top, and then leave them next to the statue of Mary. There is always someone praying at the statue of the Virgin day or night. At night it is possible to see the light of the candles on Podbrdo from the little town; the route is illuminated.

From a pilgrim:

*At ten in the evening there was an apparition in Podbrdo. We were a multitude of people, with candles in hand. I see on this hill all the people below me; while I was at the top of the mountain and I felt great emotion. We were saying the holy rosary, and we suddenly stopped, and there was silence; from the flash of the cameras, we understood that Mary was there. I did not see her, but the seer Ivan did.<sup>306</sup>*

In this quote, the interviewee explains his great emotion during an apparition: the pilgrim does not see Mary, but he believes she is there.

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<sup>305</sup> The statue of Mary was made in 2001 by an Italian artist, Dino Felici.

<sup>306</sup> VIRGILIO.



Figure 5: One of the views from Podbrdo

#### 5.1.2.2 The “blue cross”

The “blue cross” is another focal point in Medjugorje. It is a meeting point at the bottom of Podbrdo where the seers, Mirjana and Ivan, meet to pray with the pilgrims. According to the history of the village, this is where the apparitions continued for a few days when the police did not allow the seers to go to the top of the hill. The blue cross is more comfortable to reach for elderly and disabled people who cannot walk to the apex of Podbrdo. Next to the cross, there is another white statue of the Virgin Mary.

An Italian pilgrim stated:

*I stopped on a place at the bottom of Podbrdo where Mary appeared to Mirjana. The Virgin warned her not to climb the mountain because there were soldiers waiting for her. And so she had the apparition there at the foot of the hill. So I stopped to pray there and I asked Our Lady for the conversion. It did not happen overnight. It took time to change my lifestyle. In fact, it happened little by little. When I got home, I started a different path of life.<sup>307</sup>*

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<sup>307</sup> BEATRICE.

The pilgrim here states that her life changed after Medjugorje and all the pilgrims said the same. There is a connection between place and the Sacred: when the Italian pilgrim was next to the cross, she was praying to Mary and asked her for her blessing and conversion. It is an important moment of the pilgrim's experience in Medjugorje and it implies that she believed that Mary could listen to her in that place, next to the cross. The pilgrims in Medjugorje all felt the Holy at the shrine, something that they could not feel at home.

#### 5.1.2.3 Mount Križevac

One of the most crucial spots of Medjugorje's pilgrimage is the Križevac, also called The Mount of the Cross.<sup>308</sup> The cross was built in 1933, for the 1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passion of Jesus. An Italian pilgrim stated:

*Križevac is much more challenging to do than Podbrdo and takes even more hours. There you go up, and you get to that concrete cross that was made in 1933 because there were powerful winds there and the inhabitants of Medjugorje carried the cross. The date also refers to commemorate the years of Christ, thirty-three. The winds seem to have calmed down there. Everything seems like a plan of God.*<sup>309</sup>

In this quote the pilgrim tries to explain how the visions of Mary in Medjugorje had all along been a plan of God.

Križevac is a more demanding walk than on Podbrdo; the trail is long, rocky and full of obstacles. Pilgrims often celebrate the hike by recalling "Via Crucis", the way of the cross. Next to the road, indeed, fourteen wooden crosses act as stations. Next to the crosses, there are bronze monuments that depict the life of Jesus. In every picture, there is also Mary.

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<sup>308</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 461.

<sup>309</sup> DANTE.



*Figure 6: One of the stations at Križevac*

At the top of Križevac, there is a gigantic white cross; below it is another monument showing Jesus praying in Gethsemane. It is the only bronze not depicting Mary. The sculptor of these bronzes is Carmelo Puzzolo, an Italian. The Way of the Cross is a religious practice that has a long history. In many pilgrimages since the Middle Ages, it was customary to remember and imitate the ways of the Lord.<sup>310</sup> This imitation happened thanks to the reading of the sacred scriptures, prayers and liturgy. The practice helped the pilgrim to have a closer and deeper relationship with God.

Father Slavko Barbarić stated:

With the ascent on Križevac the pilgrim comes into contact with death and life, with transience and eternity, with love and hatred, with prayer and curse, reconciliation and

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<sup>310</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 190.

revenge, the violence and mercy, poverty and greed, power and weakness, truth and lie, grave and resurrection, the goodness of men and their wickedness, the fall and rise again.<sup>311</sup> Thanks to this meeting on Križevac, the pilgrim's heart opens to God, and he is ready to repent for his sin, to forgive and ask for forgiveness. In this place, a man knows his earthly journey with God and with other men. Without such an encounter, he would not be able to come into contact with his suffering, nor open himself to God, precisely because of his misery. Along this way, the soul prepares for the new meeting in the temple.<sup>312</sup>

The view from the Križevac, indeed, offers the whole landscape of Medjugorje. At the foot of the cement cross, pilgrims believe that Mary prays for her son Jesus, and many pilgrims do the same.<sup>313</sup>

From one of her messages on August 30, 1984: "Dear children! The cross was also in God's plan when you built it. These days, especially, go on the mountain and pray before the cross. I need your prayers. Thank you for having responded to my call."<sup>314</sup>

#### 5.1.2.4 The Church of Saint Jacob, the confessionals, and the statue of Jesus

There are two more important places in Medjugorje: The Church of Saint Jacob, patron of pilgrims, and the confessionals. The church holds services in a variety of different languages, and it is unusually big for such a small village like Medjugorje. When it was first built in 1969, many people wondered why; now pilgrims often allude to the fact that everything connects to a plan of God.

From one pilgrim:

*Near the confessionals, there is the church of San Giacomo. The church was built in the middle of nowhere in the fields. One could not understand why, when now, it can no*

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<sup>311</sup> It is interesting to mention that the last priest, died at the top of the mount. He used to lead pilgrims along the stations of the way of the Cross. On November 24, 2000, after reaching the white cross, he died. He is popular among Italian pilgrims.

<sup>312</sup> "Le dimensioni antropologico-bibliche e religioso-spirituali del pellegrinaggio, con particolare riferimento a Medjugorje," Medjugorje website, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/it/articles/anthropological-biblical-religious-spiritual-dimensions-pilgrimage/>.

<sup>313</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 456.

<sup>314</sup> "Medjugorje Message, August 30, 1984," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1984, accessed February 13, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1984/#m8>.



*longer contain pilgrims. And this was not a plan of God? Sure. God studied everything.*<sup>315</sup>

And another one:

*A great sign was this massive church, a cathedral in the desert. The Lord knew Mary would have appeared, and you can see how He sometimes intervenes first. God had his plan for the inhabitants of Medjugorje.*<sup>316</sup>

The opinion of the two pilgrims is clear: The Church of Saint Jacob was a plan of God. The small village has an enormous church and it is convenient for the gathering of huge crowds of pilgrims.



*Figure 7: The Church of Saint Jacob*

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<sup>315</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>316</sup> DANTE.

The confessionals are in different languages and are next to the church; here, people can confess their sins and be able to appreciate Medjugorje's atmosphere.

From an Italian pilgrim:

*Medjugorje is a place of conversion, and conversion goes hand in hand with confession. If you convert and want to change your life, you must go to confession. In the Catholic religion, you must confess your sins to the parish priest. The priest, at that moment, is not another person. He is the representative of God on earth, and he acts as a link between God and me. This connection is our Catholic creed. The more I confess, the more I appreciate this thing; the priest, who listens to your sins, consoles you, gives you advice, and can also scold you. It may also not give you absolution if you have not repented. But this is all a path of faith; you cannot convert or say to change your life if you do not go to confession. And then a little bit at a time you remember sins and you confess them gradually. I have never found priests who got angry.<sup>317</sup>*

I found this quote important to show how strict and structured is the agenda of a Catholic pilgrim. There are rigid rules that the believers must follow in order to be a “good” Catholic. Next to the confessionals, there is a statue of Jesus crucified. Pilgrims often come here to take some of the liquid that drops from the knee of Christ. A large number of pilgrims believe that it is a miracle and wait hours in line to get some of it. The knee of Jesus has a different color after the number of pilgrims that have touched it. This phenomenon is commonly found in shrines, where water flows from unexpected places. Pilgrims use sacred water for different purposes, mainly as a cure. The liquid is also often taken home to relatives and family.<sup>318</sup> The same happened in Lourdes, where Bernadette found a spring next to the Grotto and now the pilgrims attribute the water to have healing powers. The water of Lourdes is famous for its miracles.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>318</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 321.

<sup>319</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 50.

One of the pilgrims reported:

*I have no big thoughts on this thing. I went like many there to take the liquid from the knees. I did it once, and it is enough, I haven't thought about it anymore. I do not know if it is actually an extraordinary thing or if it is a physical law, either way, I have it.*<sup>320</sup>

This quote is important because it shows how this pilgrim relates to the liquid from the knees of Jesus crucified. The pilgrim does not believe that the liquid is holy, or at least, she is not sure. Her opinion does not exclude her from taking it after hours in line with other pilgrims.



Figure 8: A Pilgrim collects the liquid from the statue of Jesus

The village of Medjugorje has changed after the apparitions of 1981. The place was rural and poor; now there are hotels and restaurants everywhere. Along the streets there are many stands where pilgrims can buy rosaries, books, statues of Mary and Jesus and all sorts of objects.

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<sup>320</sup> LUCREZIA.

Although many people come here for a spiritual journey, many are tourist pilgrims;<sup>321</sup> they might have different motivations and needs, but often they can still feel the sacred, the holiness in Medjugorje. The people coming to Medjugorje think that Mary has touched this place and left a mark on it; people who come here witness something that is not from everyday life but comes from another dimension. The sacred manifests itself in some particular places in the world where humankind can feel closer to God. God is omnipresent, and men are limited. The fact that He is in one place does not interfere with His presence in the whole world.<sup>322</sup>

To this last sentence, I connect the theory “the reality of the sacred” by Mircea Eliade. In his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, there is a clear distinction between those two ideas. The profane covers all human affairs, while the sacred is something from a different world. The sacred makes people interact with the holy, the untouchable or divine. This realm does not imitate the world of God but feels like a part of it.<sup>323</sup> Eliade’s theory applies to Medjugorje; Italian pilgrims come to Medjugorje to assist the Holy. Anyone could today listen to the messages of Mary from their home, thanks to the radio, TV or internet. What brings people to this shrine is a chance or hope to encounter the realm of sacred, to experience through its different internal places a piece of Mary.

From an Italian pilgrim:

*In the sanctuaries, there is a surplus of grace; this happens because God, Jesus, Mary or saints touched it. Like God, that once felt the earth. Every country has a sanctuary because every man needs to see it, needs to hear. God calls the faithful to pray and receive grace. Of course, you can obtain it anywhere, but you still know that there you increase devotion. Humankind, in his weakness, needs to feel the sacred.*<sup>324</sup>

In this quote the pilgrim believes that some specific places are sacred: in these sanctuaries a person can be closer to God than in other places. The importance of going to Medjugorje is simple then and it explains the need to feel the sacred more than one time.

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<sup>321</sup> Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, 43.

<sup>322</sup> Gordon Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today*, 178.

<sup>323</sup> Pals, *Nine Theories of Religions*, 237.

<sup>324</sup> DANTE.

## 5.2 Emotional transformations and experiences of healing of Italian pilgrims

In the next pages I describe the second direction of Medjugorje from the book *Moved by Mary*. The focus is on the emotional transformations and experiences of healing of Italian pilgrims. The interviews with the Italian pilgrims showed that most of them had a similar experience in Medjugorje: Mary heals and transforms them. Most of the Italian pilgrims stated that their need to go to Medjugorje was brought about because of certain difficult issues they were facing in their lives, either psychological or physical. The pilgrimage did not resolve their problems but praying to the Virgin made Italian pilgrims accept their suffering. For the pilgrims, Mary is a friend, loving mother, sister, confidant. As soon as pilgrims see that they have arrived in Medjugorje, they are overcome by a feeling of peace and satisfaction.

From an Italian pilgrim:

*I was skeptical about myself; I was a person so far from faith, and I was always angry. I thought I would have gone over there and felt nothing at all. However, I still remember what I felt, deep inside of me. We arrived by bus, and the bus is high. I saw the two towers of the church of Saint Jacob. I do not know how to explain it, but I started to cry, a lot and for long. I still cry when I think about this moment. I knew I arrived. Mary called me. All these years Mary was calling me to go to Medjugorje. So when I saw the church, I was moved and felt like all my life led to that point.*<sup>325</sup>

Another pilgrim stated: *“The first thing I saw in Medjugorje was the Church of Saint Jacob, and I cried. I cannot describe it; it is a potent emotion.”*<sup>326</sup>

These two quotes show the emotional response of pilgrims their first time in Medjugorje. The pilgrim’s reactions are strong, and they express an apex of relief: they arrived in a place where they can start their lives again and work on themselves. All the pilgrims stated that Medjugorje changed their lives. The experience of crying and releasing of emotions is present in more than one pilgrim; indeed, another pilgrim stated:

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<sup>325</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>326</sup> FRANCESCA.

*I went to Medjugorje, and I was full of anguish. As soon as I arrived, I felt this desire to cry, and I did not stop for days, basically for the whole time that I was there, and evidently, it did me good because it brought peace to my heart.<sup>327</sup>*

These quotes confirm that Medjugorje is a place of transformation, where often pilgrims stated that their journey changed their way of looking at life. All the Italians in the interviews said that the pilgrimage to Medjugorje changed their faith and their view of life. Accordingly, in the following pages, I divide the experiences of Italian pilgrims into four different topics: the episodes of conversion, feeling of *communitas*, sense of spiritual recharging and testimonies of apparitions and supernatural phenomena. The pieces of interviews are from different questions and answers of pilgrims and did not mean to follow the division here reported. I divided the topics to order and explain the experiences of Italian pilgrims. It often happens that Italian pilgrims experience at least two of the selected patterns.

### **5.2.1 Episodes of conversion**

The first situation defines the events of conversion. It is essential to mention that Medjugorje is a place of conversion, where people decide to change their lives and to dedicate them to God. It is a spiritual rebirth that, in these cases, implies a deeper relationship with God. For some pilgrims, it means starting a conversation with God after years of neglect. Many pilgrims said that their faith either was born again or got stronger in Medjugorje. In this section, there are two different kinds of transformations: from ordinary people and from priests. In one of the interviews, one priest stated that his calling to the religious order happened in Medjugorje. In another one, a pilgrim said that many priests converted themselves a second time after being in Medjugorje. The opinions about Medjugorje, in the Catholic Church, are discordant. Many priests, indeed, started to believe in the sacred place only after having visited it.

I analyze first the conversion of ordinary people. Most of the Italian pilgrims stated that before going to pilgrimage in Medjugorje, their lives were very different and their problems afflicted them deeply.

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<sup>327</sup> LUCREZIA.

From a pilgrim:

*The first time I went to Medjugorje, I was in a phase of my life where I was very sad because I felt defeated by certain situations of my life. My daughter was depressed, and my marriage was broken. Inside of me, there was this desire of going to visit Mary. I wanted to change my life and get closer to God.*<sup>328</sup>

From this quote I see a common feature with all the Italian pilgrims that I interviewed: they were dealing with psychological or physical pain and were suffering. Many times this pain comes from stressful situations in life like a divorce, illness, depression. The last seems the most common. One pilgrim said that he could feel every day the emptiness of his life and soul.<sup>329</sup>

From another pilgrim: *“I went to Medjugorje as the last hope; I had big problems with my daughter, and I was deeply depressed. I wanted to go to Medjugorje, and I felt the call of going there.”*<sup>330</sup>

This quote indeed shows the unhappiness of the Italian pilgrim.

The spiritual problems often come from physical ones. Pilgrims often go to Medjugorje, as mentioned before, because of physical problems. One pilgrim interviewed went to Medjugorje with her husband because of his cancer. The reason for the pilgrimage was not to solve or heal the man, but to accept his fate. The couple was far away from God, but once the illness was discovered, they tried to reconnect with a higher being. The Italian pilgrim called her spiritual transformation a “silent conversion” because it was not sudden; it took time.<sup>331</sup> The struggles of Italian pilgrims bring them to Medjugorje, where their faith is reborn. Many pilgrims felt the need to pray and to change their lifestyle. When they went back home, Italian pilgrims stated that they started a new spiritual life. One pilgrim still thanks the Virgin every day, because she gave her the grace of the conversion. It was not immediate, but with prayers and acceptance, she reached her peace.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>329</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>330</sup> LUCREZIA.

<sup>331</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>332</sup> BEATRICE.

Another pilgrim stated: *“I was lucky because the first time I went to Medjugorje I spiritually met the Lord. I met Him through His Mother Mary. I was far away from God before Medjugorje, and now we have connected again.”*<sup>333</sup>

This quote is especially important because it shows the role of Mary: she connects the pilgrim to God, through her one reaches the sacred. People invest their time while praying to the Virgin and through Marian devotion, pilgrims empower themselves. The episodes of conversion relate to the category of reciprocity described in the book *Moved by Mary*.<sup>334</sup> Reciprocity involves the idea that through the offerings to Mary, pilgrims receive something in return. The offerings are not only made with objects, such as candles, flowers and gifts to Mary; they can also be made through devotion, like prayers and spiritual reverence. This last kind of offering is the one that I encountered the most in the interviews of Italian pilgrims. The Italian interviewees often stated that they prayed to strengthen their devotion to Mary and to improve their personal lives. In the last quotes, there is indeed pilgrim Beatrice sad for her broken marriage and depressed daughter and Lucrezia hopeful to heal her depression.

The second kind of conversion is of priests. One Italian pilgrim had his call from God in Medjugorje. The pilgrim stated that he visited the sacred place because he felt the emptiness of his life, and he needed a change. He was a professional musician, and nothing apparently was wrong with his life, except that he was depressed. During one apparition that he was witnessing, Mary left a message to one of the seers, Ivan, saying that Jesus needed collaborators to establish the kingdom of God. After months of reflection, the Italian pilgrim decided to become a priest. The message of Mary deeply touched him by its accuracy and clarity, which seemed explicitly addressed to him.<sup>335</sup> The last type of conversion still involves priests, but the ones who did not believe in Medjugorje. Many pilgrims in their interviews stated that even religious persons were skeptical of the appearance of Mary in Medjugorje. They changed their minds after visiting the sacred place.

In all the cases, there is a common feature: after Medjugorje, every person changed, in one way or another.

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<sup>333</sup> LUCREZIA.

<sup>334</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>335</sup> VIRGILIO.



From Mary's message on February 25, 1987: "Dear children, today I want to wrap you all in my mantle and lead you all along the way of conversion. Dear children, I beseech you, surrender to the Lord your entire past, all evil that has accumulated to your heart."<sup>336</sup>

From a pilgrim: "*Conversion does not mean only to convert to the Catholic religion but changing your life. We must be brothers and sisters because we all have the same spiritual mother: Mary.*"<sup>337</sup>

With this quote I apply the metaphor of the ellipse<sup>338</sup> used with pilgrimages by the Turners. Pilgrims, after a pilgrimage, are different; they have changed their lives, especially in a spiritual way. That is the reason why pilgrimage is compared to an ellipse and not to a circle; the return road is different. In Medjugorje, among Italian pilgrims, the ellipse becomes a metaphor for conversion, meaning a transformation of lifestyle and beliefs. The definition of pilgrimage as a transformation journey is from Rene Gothóni,<sup>339</sup> and is the closest theory, on this specific matter, to what Italian pilgrims experienced in Medjugorje.

### 5.2.2 Feeling of *communitas*

Another common feature seen in Medjugorje is the affection and change of status of Italian pilgrims. Although this paper considers the studies of inequalities in pilgrimages and the broad critics of the concept of *communitas*,<sup>340</sup> the main focus remains on interviews of Italian pilgrims and observations from my trip to Medjugorje. The data represented here confirm the Turners' theory: the feeling that on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, there is another level of empathy, respect and affection for one another, absent in ordinary life. One of the Italian pilgrims stated that she went for the first time to Medjugorje with a group of people of which she knew no one. Everyone had already been at the shrine at least one time, while for her it was the first. All the people in the group, moreover, knew each other.

From her interview: "*Even though I was alone, they welcomed me. They spoke and asked me things about my life. I never felt excluded.*"<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> "Medjugorje Message February 25, 1987," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1987, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1987/#m2>.

<sup>337</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>338</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 22.

<sup>339</sup> Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," 107.

<sup>340</sup> See: Gothóni, "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey," 104; and Simon Coleman, and John Eade, "Introduction: reframing pilgrimage" in *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, ed. Simon Coleman and John Eade (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 4.

<sup>341</sup> BEATRICE.

This quote demonstrates the feeling of empathy and mutual affection that the pilgrim encountered with her companions on her pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Some of the pilgrims even stated that one of the most significant gifts from Medjugorje was their attitude towards people. One pilgrim said that Mary gave her the grace of communicating with an open heart to people, something that she struggled with before.

She added:

*Mary led me to be more open towards people. I've always been skeptical towards anyone who was different than me. In Medjugorje, even when we sit and wait to pray the rosary, we all smile at each other. There are moments that people come to tell you about their stories, what they've been through, and what they found here. There are different ethnicities, different social status, and yet in Medjugorje, none of it matters.<sup>342</sup>*

Once again, this statement recalls the feeling of *communitas*. In Medjugorje all pilgrims agreed on the fact that they felt part of a Christian community. The fellowship among pilgrims in Medjugorje is one of the most important characteristics of the experience at the shrine. Mary welcomes everyone and invites people to be kind to one another. One of her most repeated sentences is ‘mir, mir, mir’, which in Croatian means “peace”. Pilgrims in Medjugorje try to overcome distances and differences. Italian travelers experience various and dissimilar approaches to Mary, but she speaks to them all. Medjugorje is a meeting place for people in two ways: with those you share the pilgrimage and with those you encounter once there.<sup>343</sup>

### **5.2.3 Sense of spiritual recharge**

This section is similar to the one about conversion but has a different starting point. The study here focuses on the multiple visits back to Medjugorje by Italian pilgrims. While conversion was the main concern their first time in the sacred place, the sense of spiritual recharge characterizes how the pilgrims feel during subsequent visits. The Italian pilgrims declared that they visited Medjugorje at least one time per year. The reasons are all similar: the place transmits harmony, sense of joy and peace. All the pilgrims have been to Medjugorje more than one time. The pilgrim goes on average, from five to ten times after their first trip.

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<sup>342</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>343</sup> VIRGILIO.

From an Italian pilgrim:

*I often go to Medjugorje. It feels like a recharge, like when your phone does not have battery, and you need to plug it in to start again. This emptiness is why I need to go to Medjugorje; I find peace, acceptance and forgiveness. I try to hold on to it when I go home, but as soon as I finish my battery, I try to go back.*<sup>344</sup>

The pilgrim in this sentence tries to explain her need for returning often to Medjugorje. She compares herself to a phone empty of power that needs to be recharged. The feeling of recharge is important and explains the will of coming back to Medjugorje more than one time.

The same behavior occurs in another pilgrim: *“I was in Medjugorje two months ago, but if someone asked me, I would come back right away. It is never enough, the strength you receive from that place.”*<sup>345</sup>

One pilgrim affirmed that going to Medjugorje only once would be useless. He tries to go to the sacred place at least one time per year. He needs to recharge his *“strength and inner light.”*<sup>346</sup> Every time he went to Medjugorje, he was able to receive a new grace from Mary, which he could then bring home.

Italian pilgrims take their free time and holidays to visit Medjugorje because, as the Turners claimed, religion has been confined to the sphere of leisure time. People, then, decide to pray in their free time and as a consequence, to go on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are liminoid systems because they become part of a non-obligatory activity.<sup>347</sup> As a part of this willingness to go to Medjugorje, there is the need of taking time to cure your soul and inner being. Most of the Italian pilgrims stated their lives at home were always hectic due to work, family, friends. Life is full of problems and commitments. The pilgrimage becomes an opportunity to escape ordinary life. The mundane world does not apply its laws in sacred places.

From a pilgrim: *“In Medjugorje, you can find your inner self. This introspection is something that does not come from yourself, but the help of Our Lady.”*<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>345</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>346</sup> DANTE.

<sup>347</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 231.

<sup>348</sup> DANTE.

This quote shows again the importance and central role of Mary for the Italian pilgrim: the recharge is possible thanks to the Virgin's presence in Medjugorje. And once again I apply the category of reciprocity:<sup>349</sup> the pilgrims prove their devotion to Mary while going on a pilgrimage. Through their spiritual journey, they empower themselves with peace, faith and love that it is given thanks to their reverence to Mary.

#### **5.2.4 Testimonies of apparitions and supernatural phenomena**

This last section is about records of paranormal experiences. At the beginning of the interviews, most of the Italian pilgrims stated that they did not witness any peculiar phenomena. During the meetings, though, they often changed their version. The revisions could be because they did not feel judged or condemned for it. I now explain different experiences.

In this paper I have already mentioned some particular experiences; one pilgrim decided to become a priest after hearing a message of Mary by the seer Ivan, where she, Mary, was asking for collaborators to establish the kingdom of God. Another example is the belief that the statue of Jesus crucified is losing holy liquid. The supernatural testimonies in Medjugorje are many, and various. One of the most common concerns the sun spinning or reflecting the picture of Mary.

From one pilgrim:

*We were hundreds of people witnessing an apparition. The seer was Mirjana, and everyone was silent. I saw some people looking at the sun while gasping with astonishment. My husband and I both turned to look at the sun, and we saw it, too; the sun was spinning. The rotation stopped after a while, and the sun began to throb, like if it was a heart. Then it stopped again, and inside we saw the image of the Virgin while holding her baby. We were not the only ones who saw it; a girl next to me was crying.<sup>350</sup>*

This quote is particularly important: the pilgrim affirmed that she saw the image of Mary and Jesus in the sun. She adds that she was not the only one, as to reinforce her testimony.

The reports of the sun spinning are one of the most popular in Medjugorje. The pilgrim quoted above was with her husband and son. The couple was able to see the supernatural phenomenon,

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<sup>349</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>350</sup> FRANCESCA.

but she also admitted that her son did not. She explained that she received grace from Mary, and that was a particular gift that she needed for her faith. The son did not see the sun but believes that his parents did. Many pilgrims stated that they did not witness any paranormal activity while in Medjugorje, and that it is not the purpose of going there. Italian pilgrims said that they go to Medjugorje to feel the sacred, to pray the rosary and to connect with Mary. If they have a chance to see something supernatural, then even better. Another pilgrim reported one episode that impressed her; it was during an apparition in the house of the seer Mirjana. A large crowd surrounded the house to the street. The seer's dogs were barking non-stop. When Mirjana knelt and started to have the vision, the two dogs stopped and looked where the seer was looking. The dogs, as the Italian pilgrim said, were quiet till the end of the apparition. The behavior of the dogs impressed her, and after this episode, she never questioned Medjugorje again.

As she stated: "*Humans are capable of lying, but animals cannot.*"<sup>351</sup>

All the Italian pilgrims who went to Medjugorje witnessed one or more apparitions by the seers. The unique fact about Medjugorje is that the seers, all of them, are still having visions of Mary after more than twenty years since the start. The seers were children when the visions started, and Mary appeared to them; to some seers every day and to others monthly or annually. During each apparition, Mary leaves a message. Hundreds of people are always gathering to assist, and the numbers are increasing.<sup>352</sup> Medjugorje's popularity is not fading away with the passing of time. Medjugorje has many similarities with modern Marian apparitional sites, especially Lourdes and Fatima. There are multiple similarities: huge crowds gathering to witness apparitions, messages from Mary and the behaviors of the seers. One fact, though, does not correspond and shows the particularity of Medjugorje; the visions are not over. They did not cease like in the other two apparitional sites. Medjugorje's messages are delivered every month as if from a newspaper giving news to its subscribers. There is even a radio station called "Radio Maria", where people can listen to the rosary and pray together to worship Mary. The station was installed after the events of Medjugorje; every day, people can listen to Mary's messages, their interpretation and comments from priests and other theologians.

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<sup>351</sup> LUCREZIA.

<sup>352</sup> See the statistics of celebrating priests in Medjugorje.

### 5.3 Mary's own movement

The following section describes the third direction of the Marian site and evaluate Mary's ability to travel to the pilgrims' homes and various places. This movement concerns images, statues and rosaries of the Virgin. The paper discusses how Italian pilgrims see Mary, how they pray and worship her. In the book *Moved by Mary* the scholars address the "transnational use of her image"<sup>353</sup> to explain all the rituals connected to Mary, such as the rosary and specific prayers. This last characteristic is one of the main foci in the next pages. The subsequent pages, then, describe the media and their connection to Mary today. The establishment of Radio Maria in 1987 provides an essential example of Marian devotion through the practice of the rosary. The first few pages concern the images and ideas that Italian pilgrims have of Mary. The last pages describe a famous statue of Mary of Medjugorje that some believers claim wept blood.

#### 5.3.1 The image of Mary for Italian pilgrims

The pilgrims' opinions are all similar, although expressed differently; Mary is the spiritual mother of humanity.

From one of the pilgrims:

*Mary is the mother I never had. I had my own mother, but she was very, as we would say, down to earth. Never taught me any values or devotional prayers. I was baptized but never went to church. When I met Mary's grace, I understood endless love and care.*<sup>354</sup>

This quote highlights Mary's first and foremost role as loving mother.

Another pilgrim stated that when she prays, she imagines Mary as not too tall, slim, with beautiful eyes and brown hair. The seers of Medjugorje reported that the Virgin has twelve stars around her head; that is how the pilgrim had pictured her. While describing Mary, she was holding a small image of Our Lady, on the back of the Lord's prayer.<sup>355</sup> Almost all the Italian pilgrims, when asked about a physical description of Mary, answered in the same way. The image of Mary's head surrounded by twelve stars is the established iconography of the Virgin

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<sup>353</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 7.

<sup>354</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>355</sup> BEATRICE.

of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>356</sup> This derives from Diego Velázquez's painting *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*, in 1618.<sup>357</sup> Although the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is from 1854, long is its history in Catholicism between those who supported it and those who did not. Velázquez's depiction relates to his perception of "the Apocalyptic Woman in the Book of Revelation".<sup>358</sup> After this portrait of the Virgin, later painters presented the same image of the Virgin that still persists today.<sup>359</sup>



Figure 10: Statue of Mary in Tihaljina, 30 minutes from Medjugorje<sup>360</sup>

The pilgrims focused mostly, though, on the fact that she was the celestial mother of every human. From Paradise she protects everyone. One pilgrim affirmed: "*She is a universal mother, no matter what your religion is.*"<sup>361</sup>

The interviewee's quote corresponds to the statements from the other pilgrims: Mary loves everyone, and she is a mother to all humanity.

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<sup>356</sup> Beth Williamson, *Christian Art – A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>357</sup> Williamson, *Christian Art*, 29.

<sup>358</sup> Williamson, *Christian Art*, 29.

<sup>359</sup> Williamson, *Christian Art*, 33.

<sup>360</sup> "Sacred Scripture," The Spirit of Medjugorje Online, accessed April 2, 2020, <http://www.spiritofmedjugorje.org/march2010.htm>.

<sup>361</sup> DANTE.

One pilgrim stated that he prays to start a dialogue with Mary. As he has a relationship with his friends and family based on conversations and communication, so he does with Mary. He does not ask extraordinary things because being Christian is also a matter of trust. The Italian pilgrim trusts Mary and knows that she, in one way or another, will take care of him and of what he needs.

As he stated: *“To me, faith is total bliss. The Virgin will take care of me.”*<sup>362</sup>

From one of Mary’s messages, on March 25, 1990: “As I bore Jesus in my womb, so also, dear children, do I wish to bear you into holiness.”<sup>363</sup>

Mary for the Italian pilgrims was the mother of Jesus and made possible the transformation of God into a human shape, to walk among men. God was able to save humankind also because Mary, accepted to become the God-bearer. Thanks to Mary, God reached humanity. It is through Mary that Italian pilgrims can reach God. She is a woman, a human being who received extraordinary power and grace from God. Italian pilgrims identify with her; they trust her because she suffered throughout her life; she is a mother who knows about pain, and so she can comfort her children.

From one pilgrim: *“Mary is the highway that leads you to Jesus. She is the intermediary between the Holy and us.”*<sup>364</sup>

This quote is especially important when considering the definition of Mary as the “highway” to God. Through Mary, believers get closer to the sacred. She embodies that role because she is a woman, not a deity. But through her, as a God-bearer, the divine became flesh. The same transition happens to her spiritually; she is the intermediary between humanity and a celestial dimension.

From the same message on March 25, 1990: “Therefore, little children, understand also the greatness of the gift which God is giving you through me, so that I might protect you with my mantle and lead you to the joy of life.”<sup>365</sup>

In all the interviews, all five Italian pilgrims agreed on calling Mary the “highway to heaven”, which is a straightforward yet functional metaphor. During the services in Medjugorje,

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<sup>362</sup> DANTE.

<sup>363</sup> “Medjugorje Message, March 25, 1990,” Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1990, accessed January 29, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1990/#m3>.

<sup>364</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>365</sup> “Medjugorje Message, March 25, 1990,” Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1990, accessed January 29, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1990/#m3>.



at least the ones in Italian, the definition of Mary as the “highway” is often used, and it is crucial to note that it appeared in all the interviews with the Italian pilgrims.

The Catholic theology of Mary as “one of us” was explained as well in the Turners’ book. Mary’s worship, as the scholars said, is deeply connected to her role as “Theotokos.”<sup>366</sup>

From another pilgrim:

*Mary is the highway to heaven. If I worship her, I know I am praying to God at the same time because she is the link between God and me. I do not forget God; God is everything, but Mary helps me getting closer to Him.*<sup>367</sup>

Once again, the quote shows the importance of Mary and her role as an intermediary to God. The category of reciprocity<sup>368</sup> works also in this case: through their devotion and worship to Mary, Italian pilgrims hope to access heaven and to get closer to God. In return for their reverence, pilgrims expect something. God indeed is not forgotten. In Medjugorje every week during the service, there is the adoration of God, which lasts a few hours. There are many moments of silence, introspection and prayer; one pilgrim said that during these episodes, Mary is not there, because that is “for Jesus only.”<sup>369</sup>

### **5.3.2 The rosary**

Although Italian pilgrims said that they only worship Mary as a human with a special grace, their actions and prayers reveal a more profound adoration. The practice of the rosary shows the close relationship that they have with Mary. In Mary’s messages there is an active invitation to using it.

From the message on September 2, 2019: “Dear children! Pray the Rosary every day - that wreath of flowers, which, as a mother, directly connects me with your pains, sufferings, desires and hopes.”<sup>370</sup>

Italian pilgrims pray the rosary at least once per day. In the interviews, they stated that while praying the rosary, they can communicate with Mary. The time used for the rosary was part of

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<sup>366</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 153.

<sup>367</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>368</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>369</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>370</sup> “Medjugorje Message, September 2, 2019 – Apparitions to Mirjana,” Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of year 2019, accessed 2 April, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/2019/#m9>.

their free time. Religion, again, is confined to the leisure sphere. One pilgrim affirmed that praying the rosary was a break from the business and craziness of her life. Through her prayers to Mary, she could detach herself from her work, family, troubles and afflictions. The rosary makes her peaceful, something that was hard to find in ordinary life.<sup>371</sup>

In the next pages I explain the importance of the practice of saying the rosary among Italian pilgrims. The practice of the rosary started in the Middle Ages, around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,<sup>372</sup> and its name comes from the Latin *rosarium*, which means “rose garden.” The set of prayers were called “roses.”<sup>373</sup> The core of the structure of the rosary did not encounter significant changes and its essence has been the same since its beginning.<sup>374</sup> A rosary is a form of devotional prayers from the episodes in the lives of Mary and Jesus. The complete set of prayers contains twenty mysteries. Four crowns divide them into the Joyful, the Luminous, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious mysteries. Each of them corresponds to a different day of the week; Monday and Saturday are the days for the Joyful mysteries, Tuesday and Friday for the Sorrowful, Wednesday and Sunday for the Glorious and Thursday for the Luminous ones.<sup>375</sup> Their order has to be respected to follow the correct sequence of the history of Jesus. Their differentiation and classification give the believer moments of meditation and affiliation to the life of Jesus and Mary.

The apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, by the supreme pontiff John Paul II,<sup>376</sup> published in 2002, reinforced the importance of the rosary as a prayer for peace and for the family. Peace, first of all, since the beginning of the millennium, presented multiple scenarios of violence and war. The attack of September 11, 2001 had happened just one year before and the world was still in shock after it. In the letter, the Pope affirms: “to rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ.”<sup>377</sup> The second important

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<sup>371</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>372</sup> Nathan Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism*, (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>373</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 1.

<sup>374</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 5

<sup>375</sup> “Esposizione dei Misteri,” Il Santo Rosario, I Santi Misteri, accessed March 22, 2020, <http://www.vatican.va/special/rosary/documents/misteri.html>.

<sup>376</sup> “Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the most Holy Rosary,” John Paul II, apostolic letters 2002, accessed February 17, 2020, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20021016\\_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html).

<sup>377</sup> “Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the most Holy Rosary,” John Paul II, apostolic letters 2002, accessed February 17, 2020, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20021016\\_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html).

point for the Pope was family because it is the most important social unit of our society. Dark forces are against families, by trying to tear them down and separate them. The rosary has to be said in families, in their homes with all their relatives. John Paul II focused on the importance of the rosary as contemplative prayer. The mysteries are not passive prayers just meant to be repeated but episodes, narratives and stories of the holy life of Jesus and Mary. The believer must contemplate the prayers of the rosary, otherwise they become a set of mechanical formulas, a “body without a heart.”<sup>378</sup> The mysteries represent the greatness and agony of us all. The rosary allows believers to reflect on their connection with God.<sup>379</sup>

From one pilgrim:

*Mary says to pray the rosary, especially inside families, with the children too. People must pray the rosary to young children so that they know the essence of the mysteries from the beginning. The rosary is not something mechanic but has to come from the heart.*<sup>380</sup>

The quote shows the importance of praying the rosary with the family. Children must learn with their parents how to pray. As pilgrims learnt how to pray in Medjugorje, they should teach it to their children. Many pilgrims stated that Medjugorje is like a school of prayer. In the sacred shrine, Italian pilgrims learn again what it means to pray, to reach the holy and connect with a superior being.

### 5.3.3 Radio Maria

Radio Maria is a radio station established in 1987 in Italy. In the following years it became a worldwide radio. Its primary purpose, as explained on the website, is to help Mary’s mission of salvation.<sup>381</sup> The name already indicates its main focus and identity: to spread wide Marian devotion and Christian personality. The manifesto of Radio Maria clearly explains its evangelical purpose. The transmission of the word of God is more effective if it uses modern

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<sup>378</sup> “Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the most Holy Rosary,” John Paul II, apostolic letters 2002, accessed February 17, 2020, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20021016\\_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html).

<sup>379</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary*, 4.

<sup>380</sup> DANTE.

<sup>381</sup> “L’Identità di Radio Maria,” Radio Maria, accessed March 28, 2020, [https://radiomaria.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-06-Identità-di-radio-maria\\_ita.pdf](https://radiomaria.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-06-Identità-di-radio-maria_ita.pdf).

media; the radio is a useful tool that can reach different people in various places. Radio Maria is, moreover, a help for families and all society in embracing Christian values and teachings. The radio station is a civic organization made possible by people with shared values and interests. The station has the permission of The Vatican and operates with the donations of its listeners and followers. The director of Radio Maria is Father Livio Fanzaga, who has his own channel and often speaks and comments on Italian and international news on the radio. The transmission hosts famous theologians and priests. Radio Maria airs the rosary three times per day: in the morning at 5:30 and 7:30, while in the afternoon it is at 16:45. The first prayer, at 5:30, is the one dedicated to John Paul II.

From an Italian pilgrim: *“I always try to pray with Radio Maria. I feel like I am not alone, that I connect with all the people that pray the rosary. We all share the same passion for Mary.”*<sup>382</sup> This quote shows the importance of the radio program for the Italian pilgrim.

The connection between Radio Maria and Medjugorje is explicit; on the website, there is one channel dedicated to the transmission and explanation of the messages of Medjugorje. Before and after the visions, which usually are transmitted online, people pray the rosary all together. The apparitions of Medjugorje happen on the second and twenty-fifth of every month. Radio Maria connects online with Medjugorje where the seers Vicka or Mirjana<sup>383</sup> have the visions. Father Livio Fanzaga is a great supporter of the sacred shrine and often comments on the messages of the Virgin. The director of the station stated that although the apparitions started long ago, they are still enduring because they are preparing humanity for what will happen. The Queen of Peace has a plan that began with Fatima and it is coming to its closure. Mary has a central role in the salvation of humankind.<sup>384</sup>

We live in a world, according to Father Livio Fanzaga in his book *The secrets of Medjugorje*,<sup>385</sup> where the Devil is free and drags people to commit sinful acts. The Antichrist is all around us, and people let him in because they believe it is possible to live without God. Mary is coming so often to us because she is desperately trying to save humanity from the Devil. She is the first “road” through which we can reach God. She is the “highway” of faith. Those who choose themselves instead of Christ are unknowingly choosing the Devil.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>383</sup> Vicka has the visions on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of every month, Mirjana on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>384</sup> “Medjugorje,” Radio Maria, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://radiomaria.it/medjugorje/>.

<sup>385</sup> Livio Fanzaga and Diego Manetti, *I segreti di Medjugorje*, (Milano: Piemme, 2010), 5.

<sup>386</sup> Fanzaga and Manetti, *I segreti di Medjugorje*, 6.

From one of her messages from October 25, 2008:

Dear children! In a special way I call you all to pray for my intentions so that, through your prayers, you may stop Satan's plan over this world, which is further from God every day, and which puts itself in the place of God and is destroying everything that is beautiful and good in the souls of each of you. Therefore, little children, arm yourselves with prayer and fasting so that you may be conscious of how much God loves you and may carry out God's will. Thank you for having responded to my call.<sup>387</sup>

The messages of the Queen of Heaven, according to Father Livio, are always directly connected to the eschatological prophecies of the Holy Scriptures, where there is a woman who will save humanity by smacking the snake's head. The woman is acknowledged as Mary. She will "bring down rulers from their thrones but lift the humble."<sup>388</sup>

From another of her messages, on January 14, 1985:

My dear children! Satan is so strong and with all his might wants to disturb my plans which I have begun with you. You pray, just pray and don't stop for a minute! I will pray to my Son for the realization of all the plans I have begun. Be patient and constant in your prayers. And don't let Satan discourage you. He is working hard in the world. Be on your guard!<sup>389</sup>

The history of men is heading towards a time of peace, where Mary's Immaculate Heart will triumph over the Devil. During these future centuries of peace, mankind will be reunited with God. After this period, the end of time will come.

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<sup>387</sup> "Medjugorje Message, October 25, 2008," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1997, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/2008/#m10>.

<sup>388</sup> Fanzaga and Manetti, *I segreti di Medjugorje*, 7.

<sup>389</sup> "Medjugorje Message, January 14, 1985," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 1985, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/1985/>.

The radio in 2009 had an average of 1.608.000 Italian listeners per day.<sup>390</sup> In 2014, Radio Maria won the prize “The Golden Headphones”<sup>391</sup> for being voted the most popular station by Italians on the web.<sup>392</sup> Today it has more than 30 million followers from all over the world.<sup>393</sup>

The difference between Medjugorje and the previous Marian apparitions, such as Lourdes and Fatima, is significant when it comes to the influence of media. Medjugorje is considered a modern apparition and has many similarities with the previous visions, but it differs because newspapers, TV, internet and radio have a crucial role in its diffusion. The visions of Lourdes happened in 1858 and Fatima in 1917. The times in history were certainly different, but those two Marian apparitions did not benefit from media exposure as did those in Medjugorje. The apparitions of Fatima, for example, were not known outside Portugal for more than two decades.<sup>394</sup> Medjugorje, on the other hand, has its own website,<sup>395</sup> where archives of the messages are kept per month and per year. At the various sites of Medjugorje, people can see the videos of the seers during their visions with the Virgin Mary. The role of media in Medjugorje is essential and made possible its popularity. Medjugorje, in its messaging and values seems to have an anti-modern direction while it makes use of very modern media to spread its message through various media.

### 5.3.4 The Madonnina of Civitavecchia

The Madonnina of Civitavecchia is a famous statue of Mary that allegedly wept blood from February 2, 1995, till March 15, 1995. The name is easily explained: “Madonnina” refers to the small size of the plaster statue, of 42 cm; and “Civitavecchia” is where the presumed miracle appeared.

The priest of the small village bought the little statue in Medjugorje on September 11, 1994 and offered it as a present to one of the families of Civitavecchia. The family was devoted to Mary and built a niche in the garden where they placed the statue. The family had two

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<sup>390</sup> “Gli ascolti di dieci anni fa: quando la radio superava i 39 milioni quotidiani,” FM-world, accessed April 4, 2020,

<https://www.fm-world.it/news/gli-ascolti-di-dieci-anni-fa-quando-la-radio-superava-i-39-milioni-quotidiani/>.

<sup>391</sup> In Italian: “Cuffie d’Oro”.

<sup>392</sup> Gianni Poglio, “Cuffie d’oro Radio Awards 2014: la serata conclusiva,” *Panorama*, September 21, 2014, <https://www.panorama.it/societa/cuffie-doro-radio-award-2014-serata-conclusiva>.

<sup>393</sup> “Radio Maria nel Mondo: la Famiglia Mondiale,” Radio Maria, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://radiomaria.it/radio/radio-maria-nel-mondo/>.

<sup>394</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 90.

<sup>395</sup> “Medjugorje, Luogo di preghiera e riconciliazione,” Medjugorje, accessed April 4, 2020, <http://www.medjugorje.hr/it>.

children; the five-year-old girl was the first one who saw some liquid falling from Mary's eyes. The phenomenon soon became popular, and large crowds were coming to witness "tears of blood". The bishop of Civitavecchia-Tarquini, Monsignor Girolamo Grillo, was quickly informed of the fact; he sent a committee to analyze the statue. At the beginning, the Bishop did not believe in the icon and was very suspicious until he saw for himself that the statue wept blood. A scientific team inspected the object and found that there were no technological or mechanical devices on the bust or inside it. The liquid was human, from a man.<sup>396</sup> The scientific team did not find any possible objective explanation. The Roman Catholic Church never expressed a clear favorable statement concerning the Madonnina of Civitavecchia even though the statue is now back in the village church and can be worshipped by its devotees. Pope John Paul II prayed in front of the figure.<sup>397</sup> This can be understood as an informal recognition by the Roman Catholic Church of the Madonnina of Civitavecchia.

The statue of Civitavecchia is a perfect example of the transitional use of Mary's image:<sup>398</sup> devotees in front of the statue pray as if in front of Mary herself. The Queen of Peace travelled from Medjugorje to Rome, Italy. The phenomenon strengthened the image of the Mary of Medjugorje. The statue of Civitavecchia is an example of the category of conflation,<sup>399</sup> from the book *Moved by Mary*. The scholars of the book explained that in this type of "cogent connection,"<sup>400</sup> there is a combination of different places, time or substance. The Madonnina of Civitavecchia embodies substance: the statue it is not just an object because believers think that it embodies Mary's presence. The presence of the Virgin made possible the miracle of the blood.

A man from the village of Civitavecchia asserted on March 4, 2020 that the blood found in the bust of Mary was his own. The man said that he was repairing his motorbike and injured himself and later stroked the icon. The investigations on the Madonnina of Medjugorje are again open.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> "Lacrimazioni miracolose," Esploriamo i misteri per raccontare la scienza, accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.cicap.org/n/articolo.php?id=278162>.

<sup>397</sup> "Vaticano, morto il vescovo della Madonnina di Civitavecchia. Resta il mistero delle lacrimazioni: miracolo o truffa?," *Il Messaggero*, August 22, 2016, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/vaticano/morto\\_vescovo\\_madonnina\\_civitavecchia\\_mistero\\_lacrimazioni\\_truffa\\_miracolo-1923727.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/vaticano/morto_vescovo_madonnina_civitavecchia_mistero_lacrimazioni_truffa_miracolo-1923727.html).

<sup>398</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 7.

<sup>399</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>400</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 8.

<sup>401</sup> "Madonnina di Civitavecchia, scatta un'indagine dopo le rivelazioni a "Porta a porta"," *Il Messaggero*, March 4, 2020, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/civitavecchia/madonnina\\_di\\_civitavecchia\\_scatta\\_un\\_indagine\\_dopo\\_le\\_rivelazioni\\_a\\_porta\\_a\\_porta-5090469.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/civitavecchia/madonnina_di_civitavecchia_scatta_un_indagine_dopo_le_rivelazioni_a_porta_a_porta-5090469.html).

## 5.4 Marian devotion as a social development

I now describe the last direction of Medjugorje as a Marian pilgrimage. This last section explains the role of social developments in Marian devotion. The focus is on Mary's role against Satan who acts against Christian values.

The term "social developments" alludes to social inequalities, discrimination because of gender or age, use of violence and abuse of political power. Devotees of Mary use their devotion to combat social disparities. In Medjugorje's case, this group represents a conservative force fighting against secularization. Italian pilgrims often criticized modern society which they describe as too hectic and demanding, especially in the work sphere. The families of the pilgrims did not comfort or reassure them, but they were the cause of anxiety and disappointment. These feelings were the result of illness of a family member, the advancing of elderly age, marital crisis or identity crisis. Although these are not the only reasons why the pilgrims decided to go on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, they still are significant. The search for one's identity seems to have been fulfilled in the shrine, where through Mary's messages, pilgrims found new fellowships, values and meanings.

It is crucial to note that Medjugorje is not only a place to fight social battles but also a place of pilgrimage that hides an apocalyptic scenario related to the ten secrets. In the following pages I show the conservative forces behind the Marian messages and then the Italian pilgrims' opinions on the secrets of Medjugorje. The two points are connected.

The apparitions of Medjugorje started in 1981 when the small village was part of the former Yugoslavia, a communist state. As mentioned before, the police questioned and psychologically abused the seers multiple times, who at the time were only children. Their age probably saved them from a darker future. The state tried many times to stop the seers from having their visions; for example, they kept the children from climbing to the top of Podbrdo. For the communist and therefore anti-religious state of Yugoslavia, the popularity of Marian apparitions created a problem.

One pilgrim stated:

*When I heard in 1981 that Mary appeared, I had no doubt. Yugoslavia was a communist state and atheism reigned. I remembered that they had 'Father Frost' instead of Santa*



*Claus. Children from an impoverished village saw Mary. How could this be false? I never questioned the apparitions in Medjugorje.*<sup>402</sup>

In this quote, the pilgrim highlights the role of Mary as a savior. The enemy is communism and Mary appeared in a country where Catholic values were threatened.

When the seers of Medjugorje asked Mary why she appeared to them, she answered that it was because of the faith of the local people.<sup>403</sup> The people of Medjugorje were indeed known to be fervent believers. As mentioned before, the population of Yugoslavia was made up of different faiths, such as Islam and Orthodox Christianity,<sup>404</sup> but the majority in Medjugorje was Catholic.

I apply here the category of appropriation from the book *Moved by Mary*.<sup>405</sup> Through Marian devotion people fight their own battles that usually concern social matters. Mary embodies the heroine who wants to preserve Catholic values from communism, the atheist enemy. By fortifying their Catholic identity though, they risk othering other people's faith and beliefs.

The fact that the apparitions appeared in a communist country trace a parallel with the visions of Fatima in 1917. Portugal was facing a difficult phase after joining the First World War; in government, there was a Republican party which started a series of reforms against religion. The acts involved the abolition of the teaching of religion in educational institutions, the dissolution of religious communities and the dissociation between Church and State.<sup>406</sup> The message of Fatima showed a Mary against modernism and communism.<sup>407</sup> According to the second part of Lucia's secret when revealed the salvation of humanity depended on the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. If Mary's request did not happen, terrible consequences awaited humanity. In Fatima, the three children stated that the Virgin took them to hell and their description of that place is famous: full of souls of people tormented by demons and strange animal creatures.<sup>408</sup> Mary, during the children's vision, taught them a prayer, which

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<sup>402</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>403</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 448.

<sup>404</sup> Sells, "Crosses of Blood," 309.

<sup>405</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

<sup>406</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 567.

<sup>407</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 566.

<sup>408</sup> "The Message of Fatima," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, accessed February 18, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html).

people still say at the closing of the rosary:<sup>409</sup> “Oh my Jesus, forgive us for our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Your Mercy.”<sup>410</sup>

The messages of Medjugorje seem to follow the same pattern from the time they started in a country that was hostile to the Catholic religion. After the dissolution of the state of Yugoslavia, Medjugorje was part of the civil war that started in 1991. The civil war in the countries of the ex-communist regime was brutal, yet many reports of pilgrims in those years stated that the peace in Medjugorje was never troubled. During the war, the different ethnicities started to kill people because of their religion. If religion did not matter before, now it was one’s primary identity.<sup>411</sup> Medjugorje was a refuge for everyone, no matter the religion they belonged to.<sup>412</sup> One Italian pilgrim stated:

*If you go to the towns next to Medjugorje, you can still see the traces of the bullets on the houses’ walls. In Medjugorje, there is not a single house touched by guns. Medjugorje did not get hit by any bomb, because every time they tried, they said that some mysterious fog did not let the pilots see anything. Mary protected Medjugorje.*<sup>413</sup>

In this quote Mary is again seen as a rescuer: at the beginning she was against communism, and now she is against war and its atrocities.

The seer Mirjana affirmed that during the war, Medjugorje became a centre for aid supplies from America and all around Europe. In Medjugorje, people could still feel hope.<sup>414</sup> She continued by saying that, although they could hear the shooting, people in Medjugorje felt as though they were in a protective bubble.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 155.

<sup>410</sup> “The Fatima Prayer,” The Holy Rosary, accessed February 15, 2020, <http://www.theholynosary.org/rosaryprayers.html>.

<sup>411</sup> Sells, “Crosses of Blood,” 310.

<sup>412</sup> Sells, “Crosses of Blood,” 319.

<sup>413</sup> BEATRICE.

<sup>414</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 265.

<sup>415</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 267.

### 5.4.1 Mary against Satan

Mary often warns the seers of Medjugorje; the dark forces of the devil compromise the world. God allowed Satan to tempt humankind and he is showing his power in this century.<sup>416</sup> Mary, in the messages of Medjugorje, often says that the devil acts in our society and breaks apart families without God. One Italian pilgrim stated that people are now worshipping themselves and not God.<sup>417</sup> The absence of prayer gives room for the devil who is real and works against us. The power of the devil lies in the fact that people do not believe in his existence.<sup>418</sup> Mary's role is to save humanity; as the devil challenges humanity, the Virgin acts in the opposite direction. The "Age of Mary"<sup>419</sup> explains the multitudes of Marian apparitions. Many of the most famous Marian sanctuaries started in the nineteenth century. The majority of them began with a vision of Mary who had a crucial message for the salvation of humanity.<sup>420</sup>

The devil, who Mary calls openly by name, is always trying to stop her plan for the world.

From a message on January 28, 1987: "Whatever the place where I appear, and with me also my Son, Satan also comes. You permitted him to subdue you without realizing that you were being led by him."<sup>421</sup>

This antagonism between Mary and Satan shows a dualistic vision of the world, divided between the two forces.<sup>422</sup> The pilgrims who converted to God were able to discover the truth about a corrupted society. In this way, the devotees often make a process of othering other people, because of their wrong beliefs and actions. The other, who is everyone different, is the one who needs to be saved or condemned. Pilgrims see those who do not believe in Medjugorje as sinners. Here again, there is the category of appropriation, from the book *Moved by Mary*:<sup>423</sup> to reinforce and strengthen their Catholic identity, Italian pilgrims "polarize" and "other" whoever is different. Dualism is again present between whoever is a Catholic believer and who is not.

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<sup>416</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 568.

<sup>417</sup> DANTE.

<sup>418</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>419</sup> Ryan, "Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje," 565.

<sup>420</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 209.

<sup>421</sup> Rene Laurentin and Juan Gonzales, *Messages and Teachings of Mary at Medjugorje: Chronological Corpus of the Messages*, (Toledo, OH: Riehle Foundation, 1988), <http://www.medjugorje.eu/messages/#1987>.

<sup>422</sup> Luebbbers, "The Remnant Faithful," 229.

<sup>423</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 9.

### 5.4.2 The secrets

The scenario around Medjugorje's secrets and messages concerns apocalyptic narratives<sup>424</sup> similar to the ones of Fatima. Although it is not known about the content of the secrets, it is perceived that they relate to the faith of all humanity. The apparitions of Medjugorje are believed to be the last on earth and they represent the last opportunity for humankind to redeem itself.<sup>425</sup> This last statement also explains one of the reasons why Medjugorje's apparitions have occurred since 1981 and still continue today. The revelation and final happening of the secrets will convert a large number of people, and their faith will be more profound than in the past.<sup>426</sup> People will live daily with God.<sup>427</sup>

An Italian pilgrim stated that the apocalyptic events of Medjugorje did not scare him; Sodom and Gomorrah will happen again as a punishment for the world. People do not need to be afraid, though, because the history of humanity is still long.<sup>428</sup> The secrets are also a chance to pray, live by Christian values and bring people together.<sup>429</sup>

The same pilgrim added:

*God loves his children. He gives them a choice, freedom to choose wrong or right. The man could walk towards his purification if he wants to. God cries by seeing humanity choosing evil forces. We are lucky because Mary does not give up on us and has a plan to save us all.*<sup>430</sup>

In this quote there is once more the role of Mary as a savior for Italian pilgrims.

The plan here mentioned by the Italian pilgrim is the one involved in the ten secrets. Mary, in this apocalyptic scenario, is standing between God and the devil, trying to lead people towards the heavenly Father. With her triumph, which is never questioned by any pilgrim, the world will see a long time of peace and prosperity. This will be possible because of the conversion of many people. The sign on the hill at Podbrdo will undoubtedly be from heaven, and it will last forever. From the pilgrims' speeches, these signs will happen soon; the seer Mirjana will tell

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<sup>424</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 238.

<sup>425</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 238.

<sup>426</sup> Jurkovich and Gesler, "Medjugorje," 464.

<sup>427</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>428</sup> DANTE.

<sup>429</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 240.

<sup>430</sup> VIRGILIO.

them to a priest three days before their appearance. Since the children are all grown up now, the pilgrims believe the time of truth will soon come. They also believe this because the priest chosen to reveal the contents of the secret, Father Petar Ljubičić,<sup>431</sup> is getting old.

From a pilgrim: “*The triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will defeat the devil.*”<sup>432</sup>

This quote shows that Mary’s success against Satan is never questioned. The Italian pilgrim believes in his mother.

The triumph of Mary ends her plan started with Fatima.<sup>433</sup> In Fatima, Mary reinforced the power of the rosary and showed her mission to save humanity by giving the secrets to Lucia and consecrating Russia to her Immaculate Heart. In Medjugorje, the Virgin finally seeks to finalize her plan; Mary will save humanity, and she will triumph.<sup>434</sup>

There is again the contrast between Eve and Mary. The first woman on earth was tempted by the angel Lucifer and sinned. Every human, after her, was born with original sin. Eve disobeyed God’s law, and since she had a husband, she was not a virgin. Mary is the total opposite of Eve; when she meets the angel Gabriel, she obeys the law of God and becomes the God-bearer. Even though she had a husband and a son, she was a virgin for all her life. Mary, in this scenario, restores humanity. As Eve embodies the physical descendants of men, Mary becomes the figure who saves humankind; she is the spiritual mother of the world.<sup>435</sup>

One pilgrim compares Medjugorje’s teachings with the story of David and Goliath.<sup>436</sup> The hero, with his five pebbles, defeats the monster. Mary, the heroine beats her antagonist, the devil, with the five pillars of faith: the reading of the Bible, the monthly confession, fasting on Wednesday and Friday, joining the Sunday service and praying the Holy Rosary every day. These five pillars are a synthesis of the messages of Medjugorje from its beginning. One Italian pilgrim affirmed that, although it was difficult at times, he always tried to follow the pillars of Medjugorje. Another stated that she chose to pray the rosary every day and to go to Mass on Sunday. She stated: “*The beauty of Mary is that I decided what to do. She gives us freedom. I follow some of the pillars, and I am sure she understands that sometimes it is hard in our society.*”<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 193.

<sup>432</sup> LUCREZIA.

<sup>433</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 152.

<sup>434</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>435</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 156.

<sup>436</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>437</sup> BEATRICE.

### 5.4.3 The importance of the family

One of the biggest challenges for Mary is to preserve the social unit of the family. Mary affirms in multiple messages that Satan is trying to induce people to divorce. Evil forces are succeeding in the families who do not pray and accept God in their lives. Mary often states how Satan is active and tells her followers how to fight against his power. The five pillars, again, become a reality; these are the weapons against him.

From one of Mary's most recent messages on January 25, 2020: "There must be holiness in the families, little children, because there is no future for the world without love and holiness. (...) This is why He sends me to you."<sup>438</sup>

Mirjana Dragičević-Soldo stated that children have to pray with their parents from a young age. As they see their parents praying together, they will learn the beauty of the rosary, of a family that is united in front of God's grace.<sup>439</sup>

From one Italian pilgrim:

*Mary's values are not old. Her principles are especially needed in our society, where there is a spread of inequalities. If you go on the top of a hill, and you look around you, you will understand that God gave us everything. We do not need to crush other people to be happy. The answer is to pray. That is the simplest message of Mary: peace, peace and peace.*<sup>440</sup>

In this quote the pilgrim affirms her will to change society into a simpler one, where there is not the corruption of Satan and where peace will reign. Through Marian devotion the pilgrim hopes for a better society. I apply again the category of appropriation.<sup>441</sup>

One pilgrim stated:

*My nine-year-old granddaughter did everything. She asked me if she could join in all activities. She had been twice in Medjugorje before, and she had expressed her desire to return with her uncle. She went to Mass at 10.30, in the evening to Podbrdo and the*

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<sup>438</sup> "Medjugorje Message, January 25, 2020," Our Lady of Medjugorje Messages of Year 2020, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.medjugorje.ws/en/messages/2020/>.

<sup>439</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 308.

<sup>440</sup> DANTE.

<sup>441</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 12.

*next day with 38 degrees in the afternoon she went up to the cross with her uncle at Križevac. She likes praying along with the different stations.*<sup>442</sup>

In this quote, the pilgrim explained how Medjugorje was a place also for children. It is important to get children accustomed to prayers and pilgrimages from the time they are little. In this way, they do not grow up far from Christianity and its teachings. The seers of Medjugorje often explain how important it is to pray in families.

The seers of Medjugorje did not choose to become priests or nuns like the visionaries from Lourdes or Fatima. They all got married and had children. Italian pilgrims do not see this as a contradiction; God evaluates both behaviors; the sacrament of the priest shows the face of Jesus as a pastor. The choice of starting a family, on the other hand, is the backbone of our society and illustrates the love of God for humanity.<sup>443</sup> As Mary often states, God loves men and cries when they choose to sin, but still gives them freedom of choice. Mary did the same with the seers of Medjugorje. She never forced them to join religious orders.<sup>444</sup>

## **5.5 Conclusion of the analysis**

I classified the interviews of the five Italian pilgrims into four main directions that I took from the book *Moved by Mary*: physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and experiences of healing, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement.<sup>445</sup>

From the first section of the physical movements of pilgrims I described the spaces and areas of Medjugorje and how the Italian pilgrims experienced them. The pilgrimage to Medjugorje follows a certain routine that helps the pilgrims to live their experience in a meaningful way. The pilgrims described how powerful their first time at the shrine was, and how that trip led to other ones.

The second section analyzes the emotional transformations and the experiences of healing of the five Italian pilgrims. I divided this part into four main sections: the episode of conversion, the feeling of *communitas*, the sense of spiritual recharge and testimonies of apparitions and supernatural phenomena. All five pilgrims stated that after Medjugorje they felt changed and they were able to bring to their faith a new, deeper level of commitment. All the

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<sup>442</sup> FRANCESCA.

<sup>443</sup> VIRGILIO.

<sup>444</sup> Soldo, *Il mio Cuore Trionferà*, 175.

<sup>445</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 6-7.

Italian pilgrims were members of the Roman Catholic Church, but most of them were not practicing Catholics. The pilgrimage to Medjugorje taught them how to become better believers. I have examined the “episode of conversion” that pilgrims experience. This transformation refers to the theory by the Turners of pilgrimage as an ellipse system. The pilgrim has changed at the end of their experience. Another important factor is the feeling of *communitas* that pilgrims encounter on the pilgrimage to Medjugorje. The pilgrims stated that their level of empathy towards other people was higher at the sacred shrine. These sections on conversion and feeling of *communitas* reflect two of the reasons why pilgrims stated that they needed to return to Medjugorje more than one time. The spiritual experience of peace was strong, but after a while the intensity of the Sacred fades at home. The last section analyzes the paranormal phenomena that happened in Medjugorje. Because of Mary’s presence, all the pilgrims affirm that something extraordinary happened in Medjugorje. The fact that some of them witnessed some particular phenomena, strengthens their position on the truth of Medjugorje.

The third section is about Mary’s own movement. Her icons, statues and images are carried around by the pilgrims. Medjugorje is supported by the media, and through them the messages and videos of the seers during their apparitions are spread in the web. Pilgrims from all around the world connect through modern media to worship Mary. It could seem that Marian sites are not trendy or well known, but their popularity shows differently. As stated in the book *Moved by Mary*, the Virgin has “become a megastar.”<sup>446</sup>

Mary’s popularity leads to the last section, the one regarding Marian devotion as a social movement. Mary is the heroine, the mother of humanity who will redeem the world. The Virgin is trying to save people from Satan’s actions. The Virgin stands for the defense of Catholic values against the forces that threaten them. Through Marian devotion Italian pilgrims try to establish Catholic values, in a society that seems to have long forgotten them.

## **6 Conclusion**

Medjugorje is a little town in Bosnia Herzegovina that at the beginning of 1981 was little known, but that now welcomes thousands of pilgrims every year. Of the many pilgrims most are Italian. I interviewed five Italian pilgrims because I wanted to know their motives and

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<sup>446</sup> Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, 1.



beliefs that prompted them to go to Medjugorje. I especially questioned their reasons for going on pilgrimage to Medjugorje and what this place meant to them. Is this pilgrimage like other pilgrimages to Marian sites? What is the significance of the Virgin Mary to Italian pilgrims? I addressed these questions in two ways:

### 1. Theoretical

I analyzed theories on pilgrimage from two main books, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor and Edith, 1978; and *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, 2009. In the first book, I found three main concepts to be important: *communitas*, ellipse pilgrimage system and the liminoid aspect. *Communitas*, is the feeling of fellowship that pilgrims experience on pilgrimage. The Ellipse pilgrimage system explains the journey of pilgrims: after their experience, the pilgrims are different from when they started. The pilgrimage changed their lives. They are liminoid experiences, because pilgrimage today has become something that people do during their leisure time. Pilgrimage has become optional. All the Italian pilgrims chose to go on the pilgrimage voluntarily.

In the second book, *Moved by Mary*, scholars have divided Marian pilgrimage in four different directions: physical movements of pilgrims, emotional transformations and healings, Mary's own motion and Marian devotion as a social movement. These directions especially describe Marian pilgrimages and the relationship that pilgrims establish with Mary.

I compared Medjugorje's pilgrimage to other Marian sites, Lourdes and Fatima. The main reference in this case was from the book *Encountering Mary. From La Salette to Medjugorje* by Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, 1991. The Mary of Medjugorje is similar to the Virgin of Lourdes and Fatima in multiple aspects. The apparitions of Lourdes are considered the first Modern Marian visions and they represent a starting point for the next generations. There are some characteristics that later Marian sites, like Medjugorje, have in common: the behavior of the seer, the ecstasy during the vision, the publicity at the site during and after the apparitions. In the apparitions of Lourdes, crowds accompanied the young Bernadette. The visions of the French girl were serial and witnessed by many people. The apparitions of Lourdes happened four years after the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The young Bernadette said that the beautiful Lady described herself as the "Immaculate Conception". Lourdes and the dogma are connected, and it seems that the apparitions of

Bernadette helped to reinforce and strengthen the legitimacy of the dogma.<sup>447</sup> I drew a connection to Medjugorje: the dogma of the Assumption of Mary to Heaven was established in 1950 and the visions in the village started in 1981. The dogma of the Assumption is connected to the one of her Immaculate Conception:<sup>448</sup> since she was not conceived with sin, and did not commit sin throughout her whole life, Mary's body does not have to wait until Judgment Day.<sup>449</sup> The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary to Heaven leads moreover to support Marian apparitions: since the body and soul of Mary are already in Heaven, it is easier for believers to communicate with her.<sup>450</sup> Marian apparitions have indeed increased after the dogma of her Assumption to Heaven and the Turners, in their book *Image and Pilgrimage* underline the connection.<sup>451</sup>

The apparitions of Fatima are crucial to study and to understand the ten secrets of Medjugorje: the seers claim that Mary will end in Medjugorje what she started in Fatima. Mary entrusted them with ten secrets that will change the world. As in Fatima, the visions of the Virgin in Medjugorje started in a time when the national state was threatening the Catholic religion. Mary here stands against any oppressor as she did in Fatima. The Virgin fought against the communist enemy and the war. Today Mary stands for Catholic values and traditions, such as praying the rosary, going to Mass, fasting, reading the Holy Scriptures and confession. The Virgin is also highly committed to the integrity of the family, unit for a cohesive modern society.

In this initial theoretical framework, it was important to describe the historical aspects of the initial apparitions, starting from communism, the antagonism between the Bishops of Mostar and the Franciscan priests, the war of the former Yugoslavia and the position of the Roman Catholic Church on Medjugorje. The Roman Catholic Church has not officially approved the visions at Medjugorje, but it is, most probably, just a matter of time. The Vatican cannot deny the great number of pilgrims that go to Medjugorje every year, as well as all the "good fruits" from it, such as, for example, the episodes of conversions. The messages of the Mary of Medjugorje were never against Catholic theology and never introduced any new

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<sup>447</sup> Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 199.

<sup>448</sup> "Defining the Dogma of the Assumption, 4.," Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII, accessed March 22, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_apc\\_19501101\\_munificentissimus-deus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html).

<sup>449</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 155.

<sup>450</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 10.

<sup>451</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, XIV.

concept. The “five pillars of Medjugorje” are just a reminder of what a “good” Catholic believer must do. This is also one of the reasons why Medjugorje is good for the Roman Catholic Church: its teachings do not introduce any new theology but follow and empower the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church.

## 2. Empirical

I applied, as mentioned before, the four divisions from the book *Moved by Mary*, to the interviews of Italian pilgrims. In the four movements of pilgrims to Medjugorje I applied also the concepts of *communitas*, ellipse pilgrimage system and pilgrimage as a liminoid experience. In the analysis of this thesis I merged the first and second definitions. The conclusions that I have written here are drawn from the unanimity of all the respondents on a question or specific matter.

My interviews show that all the pilgrims decided to go on a pilgrimage because they were experiencing difficult emotional problems due to illness, family history, and personal unhappiness. These concerns often lead to depression: all the pilgrims stated that they were feeling miserable and troubled. All the five Italian pilgrims, on their first pilgrimage to Medjugorje experienced an emotional revelation and stated that their lives changed. Most of them cried at the sight of the Church of Saint Jacob, and some cried during the whole journey. The first pilgrimage offered the pilgrims a sense of fellowship, of *communitas* that they did not find in any other place. In Medjugorje, people are more friendly and open towards one another. Pilgrims in Medjugorje feel more connected and share their problems and personal history. At the Marian shrine, people share the same values, hopes and opinions towards a society that is at risk of losing its Christian beliefs. Sharing their experiences of suffering and pain, plus the worship of Mary, are the major links among Italian pilgrims. At Medjugorje the pilgrims seek to enrich their Catholic values and learn the power of prayer: the rosary is often said, and all the pilgrims stated that Medjugorje is a “school of prayer.”

My thesis shows that the first pilgrimage leads to others, because Italian believers often need a recharge of the emotional sense of peace they found in Medjugorje, that the Virgin gives to them. The Virgin Mary is the highway to God: through Marian devotion Italian pilgrims feel closer to the Holy and their veneration will open to them the doors of Heaven. All the Italian pilgrims that I interviewed went to Medjugorje more than three times, some more than one time per year. They went on pilgrimage when they had holidays, to take some days as their own

leisure time. The Turners indeed described Modern pilgrimage as liminoid because as religion is optional and something achieved during free time, it can be reduced to the status of pleasurable past time.

The main emotional transformation in all the Italian pilgrims has been the grace of conversion: conversion not to Catholicism, because all of them were already baptized, but conversion meaning becoming true believers, followers of Mary and God. The Italian pilgrims learned in Medjugorje how to be “better” Catholics: to pray the rosary every day, to confess their sins, to go to church every Sunday, to fast. The ellipse system applies to this transformation: all five pilgrims changed because of their experience in Medjugorje, and their return home presented them as different believers. The pilgrimage to Medjugorje is empowered by modern technologies: radio, TV and internet share the messages of Mary. Mary has her own Radio, called Radio Maria, where believers can pray; Marian devotion connects people from all around the world. This is one of the main differences with Lourdes and Fatima, because Medjugorje can benefit from media: every month people can assist from their homes with the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the seers of Medjugorje.

Italian pilgrims show devotion to Mary in different ways: they pray the rosary, her icons, and her images. In Medjugorje, at the feet of the Virgin statue, they leave candles, flowers, crosses, and pictures as gifts in exchange for favors and special grace. Especially through the cult of the rosary, Italian believers demonstrate their affection to Mary, and through their prayers they communicate with her. Mary to them is a loving and celestial mother, who is the means to an end: to reach God. Mary for Italian believers is seen as the medium to reach the Holy, the Sacred. In Catholic theology, this is explained in two ways: first, God became flesh through her and second, her Assumption to Heaven. In her human nature, the Virgin was able (even without sinning) to give birth to Jesus. Through Marian veneration, Italian believers can reach the Sacred. Italian pilgrims feel in Medjugorje her presence: in this isolated, previously unknown, little village, Catholic believers believed in her apparitions from the start.

The apparitions of the Virgin in Medjugorje can also be explained to the satisfaction of Italian pilgrims by historical events: in 1981 the town was in a country under communist rule and later it was part of the war of the former Yugoslavia. Mary here takes the side of Catholic values and champions the fight against the corruption of the society: she is the fighter against Satan and the one who will redeem and save humanity. The world as we know it will soon end, and through her ten secrets people will convert to Catholicism. Humanity with the help of Mary

will defeat the Devil and live for many centuries in peace and harmony. This desire for a new society is shared by all the Italian pilgrims.



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## **8 Attachments**

### **8.1 NSD assessment**

**Project title**

Medjugorje, "A case study of Italian pilgrims and their practices"

**Reference number**

752874

**Registered**

24.10.2019 av X - X@stud.mf.no

**Institution responsible project**

MF vitenskapelig høyskole for teologi, religion og samfunn

**Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)**

Lauritzen, Solvor Mjoberg, solvor.m.lauritzen@mf.no, tlf: 22590597

**Type of project**

Student project, Master's thesis

**Contact information, student**

X, X@gmail.com, tlf: X

**Project period: 30 June 2020**

**09.12.2019 – Assessed**



## **8.2 Information letter to potential research participants**

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

### **Italian pilgrims to Medjugorje, A study of Marian devotion?**

**This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to understand the practices and beliefs of Italian pilgrims in Medjugorje. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.**

Purpose of the project

The purpose is to explain what brings Italian pilgrims to Medjugorje and what they do once they are there. Are there prayers that are more said than others? Do Italian pilgrims go alone or in groups? What do they ask for in front of the famous statue of Mary? The scope of this project is to show how Medjugorje is linked and connected to the history of Marian Catholic pilgrimages.

The research project is a master's thesis in History of Religions, from MF university, Oslo.

The data collected will be only used only for this thesis.

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

MF, Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society is the institution responsible for the project.

### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

The survey concerns Italians who have gone on pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Most of them have been more than once to the sacred place. Most of the contact information for the pilgrims has come from a priest who managed pilgrimages to the sacred place.

What does your participation in this survey involve?

The method used is the interview. If you choose to take part in the project, this interview will take approximately 45 minutes. The survey includes questions about your journey in

Medjugorje, your practices and prayers. There will be a few questions also in how you see and imagine the Virgin Mary. Your answers will be recorded electronically.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

The student taking care of the interview and her advisor for the master's thesis will be the only persons taking care of your data. The information will be in a locked computer with a password. None of the pilgrims can be identified from the interview. The only description that will be given is they are Italian pilgrims and their age.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 30 June 2019. After this date all the data processed will be deleted.

The result and analysis of the data will be anonymised and used in the master's thesis.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

access the personal data that is being processed about you

request that your personal data is deleted

request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and

send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

**What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society and NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

**Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society via XXXXXX

The advisor's email is [solvor.m.lauritzen@mf.no](mailto:solvor.m.lauritzen@mf.no).

Our Data Protection Officer: [info@mf.no](mailto:info@mf.no)

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: [personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)  
or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Student

(Researcher/supervisor)

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**Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project Medjugorje: a case study of Italian pilgrims and their practices and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in *an interview*)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *30 June 2019*

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(Signed by participant, date)

### **8.3 Interview guide**

1. What is the main purpose of taking a pilgrimage to Medjugorje? Have you been there more than once?
2. How would you describe your experience in Medjugorje? Has it changed your life? If yes, how?
3. Are there any specific rituals that you take part in or prayers that you say when you go there?
4. What do you think about the fact that the Vatican still has not approved Medjugorje as an official sacred place?
5. What does Mary mean to you?