

TEN YEARS SINCE THE ZADAR DECLARATION

(1991-2001)

Ten years have passed since the Bishops' Conference of former Yugoslavia published its Declaration on the events of Medjugorje.

The Declaration was preceded and prepared by long and painstaking work of several Commissions: two diocesan Commissions and a Commission of the Bishops' Conference of former Yugoslavia had worked for seven years. Based on these studies, the Bishops' Conference, published the following Declaration at its meeting in Zadar on April 11, 1991:

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

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

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

For this purpose the bishops will issue especially suitable liturgical-pastoral directives. Likewise, through their Commission

they will continue to keep up with and investigate the entire event in Medjugorje.

This Declaration of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia represents the official position of the Church on the events of Medjugorje.

The Declaration means:

1. The bishops leave open for further investigations the question of the supernatural character of the phenomenon of Medjugorje: it is neither accepted nor denied.
2. The bishops underline their pastoral care for the faithful who come to Medjugorje for diverse reasons.
3. They want to promote a healthy devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in accordance with the teaching of the Church. For this purpose, the bishops will issue especially suitable liturgical-pastoral directives.
4. Through their Commissions, they will continue to keep up with and investigate the entire event of Medjugorje.

With this Declaration, the Bishops have in fact accepted Medjugorje as a place of pilgrimage, and have announced that they will continue to follow the events of Medjugorje through their Commissions.

In that spirit, Mgr Vinko Puljić, Archbishop of Sarajevo, Mgr Pavao Žanić, the local Bishop of Mostar, Mgr Franjo Komarica, Bishop of Banja Luka and President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia, and Mgr Slobodan Štambuk, Bishop of Hvar, came to Medjugorje on June 17, 1991. They were accompanied by four priests, members of a future Commission: don Tomo Vukšić, don Ivan Vukšić, fra Marinko Leko and fra Marko Babić. They met with the pastoral staff of Medjugorje and

concelebrated the evening Mass, which was presided by the local bishop, and during which the archbishop of Sarajevo delivered the homily.

A meeting of the newly formed liturgical and pastoral commission with the pastoral staff of the parish of Medjugorje was announced for June 27th, but on June 25th, 1991, the war broke out in Yugoslavia. The falling apart of the former Yugoslavia brought about the end of the Bishop's Conference of Yugoslavia, and probably the end of its Commissions. Since then, no Commission ever came to Medjugorje.

Since the text of the Declaration is the result of a compromise obtained in the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia, it leaves open various interpretations. Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, Archbishop of Zagreb, says in an interview given to the catholic newspaper "Glas Koncila" on August 15, 1993: "After three years of studies by the Commission, we, the bishops, have accepted Medjugorje as a Shrine, as a sanctuary. This means that we have nothing against the veneration of the Mother of God in accordance with the teaching of the Church and our faith... This is why we leave this question to further studies of the Church. The Church is not in haste."

Nevertheless, Mgr Pavao Žanić, Bishop of Mostar, interprets the Declaration of Zadar as a negation of the supernaturality of the events of Medjugorje, and as a document forbidding pilgrimages. The Ordinary of Mostar continues to uphold this position: "The Ordinary has on several occasions warned that the supernatural character of the apparitions cannot be spoken about nor announced publicly in churches, as it was not possible to state that Our Lady is appearing. This is why official pilgrimages to Medjugorje are not allowed", writes Mgr Ratko Perić, successor of Mgr Pavao Žanić. (See Prijestolje

Mudrosti, Mostar 1995, p. 282) And he continues: "Neither the diocesan bishop, as head of the local diocese and Church of Mostar-Duvno, nor any other competent person, have until now declared the parish Church St James of Medjugorje as a Marian shrine, nor confirmed the "cult" of Our Lady based on the supposed apparitions. On the contrary, because of its contestability, he has on many occasions prohibited to speak on the altar or in the church about supernatural "apparitions and revelations", and to organize official pilgrimages in the name of parishes, dioceses, and generally in the name of the Church. These and similar warnings were published also by our former Bishops' Conference and by the Holy See itself. Anyone acting in an opposite manner, is acting expressly against the official position of the Church, which, after 14 years of supposed apparitions and developed commercial propaganda, are still valid in the Church". (Ibid, p. 285-286)

In a letter addressed to the French weekly "Famille Chretienne", Mgr Perić refers in two official letters of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith addressed to two French bishops, to the pilgrimages to Medjugorje. "These letters say, among other things, that official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, understood as a place of authentic apparitions of Our Lady, should not be organized either on the parish or the diocesan level, because it would be in contradiction with what the bishops of the Bishops' Conference of ex-Yugoslavia affirmed in their Declaration of April 10, 1991." Mgr Perić continues: "My conviction and my position is not only non constat de supernaturalitate, but constat de non supernaturalitate of apparitions and revelations in Medjugorje".

Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Speaker of the Holy See, said about the letters of Mgr Bertone, Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith: "The Vatican never said to Catholics they could not go to Medjugorje, but it said to bishops that their parishes and dioceses could not organize official

pilgrimages to the place of supposed apparitions of Our Lady." He added that the Church does not prohibit priests from accompanying pilgrims traveling to Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized by lay people. He said also that Mgr Bertone's letter does not say anything new on this issue.

Mgr Bertone himself clarifies his position in a letter of May 26, 1998, addressed to Mgr Aubry, Bishop of La Reunion: "Concerning the authenticity of the "apparitions", this Dicastery agrees with what the bishops of former Yugoslavia have said in the Zadar Declaration of April 10, 1991. After the division of ex-Yugoslavia into several independent states, it would be the concern of the members of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina to eventually re-examine this case and to publish new declarations.

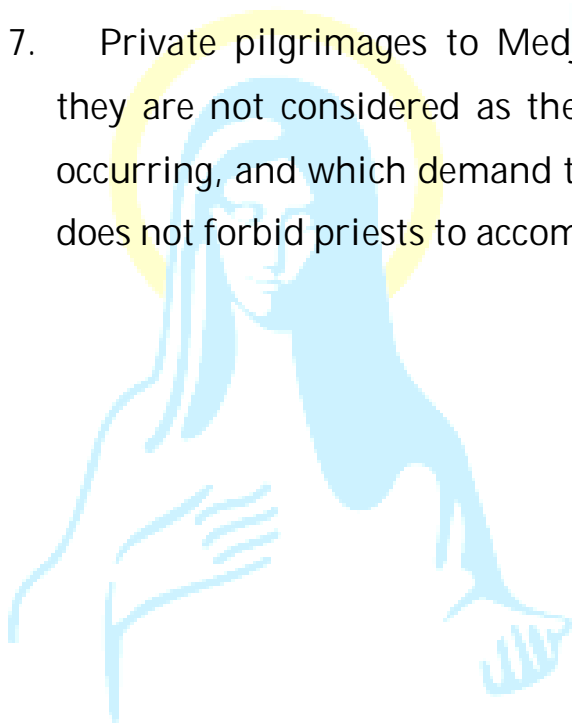
With regard to the statement, made by His Excellence Mgr Perić in a letter addressed to the Secretary General of "Famille Chretienne", it has to be understood as the personal conviction of the bishop of Mostar who, as the local bishop, has always the right to express what is, and remains, his personal opinion.

Finally, with regard to private pilgrimages to Medjugorje, this Congregation considers them to be allowed, under condition that they are "not understood as recognition of the events which are still happening and which still demand to be examined by the Church".

Ten years after the Declaration of Zadar, we can say:

1. The Zadar Declaration is and remains the only official declaration of the Church on the events of Medjugorje.
2. All subsequent declarations of the Holy See refer to this Declaration.
3. The position of Mgr Ratko Perić, Bishop of Mostar, has to be understood as his personal conviction.

4. The final judgment on the supernaturality of the apparitions and revelations remains open. The events are still happening and have to be examined by the Church.
5. The “especially suitable liturgical-pastoral directives” envisaged by the Declaration of Zadar have still not been given.
6. Nothing is known about the existence of the envisaged Commission, supposed to “continue to keep up with and investigate the entire event in Medjugorje”.
7. Private pilgrimages to Medjugorje are allowed under condition that they are not considered as the recognition of the events which are still occurring, and which demand to be examined by the Church. The Church does not forbid priests to accompany these pilgrimages.



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