

The Stance Of The Bishop Of The Mostar-Duvno And Trebinje-Mrkanj Diocese With Regard To Medjugorje

When, on the 24th-25th of June 1981, Our Lady's apparitions began in the parish of Medjugorje, in the diocese of Mostar-Duvno and Trebinje-Mrkanj, the bishop was Pavao Zanic (1971-1993). He was succeeded by Dr. Ratko Peric.

1. Bishop Pavao Zanic

His position with regard to the apparitions moved from vehement approval to vehement opposition. And so, his positions made a big contribution to the spreading of the knowledge of Our Lady's apparitions throughout the world.

In the first two months of Our Lady's apparitions, the Bishop was in Medjugorje five times. Afterwards he came only to confer the sacrament of Confirmations to the faithful.

He clearly said: "I am deeply convinced that no child who says that they have seen Our Lady has been talked into doing so. If we were speaking about one child only, one might say he could be stubborn and that not even the police could make the child renounce what he said. But six innocent, simple children in the space of half an hour, would, if they were pushed, admit all. None of the priests, I guarantee, had any idea of putting the children up to something... I am also convinced that the children are not lying. The children are only speaking out what's in their hearts... It is certain: the children are not lying". (From a sermon given on the feast of St. James, the patron saint of Medjugorje, on the 25th of July 1981). In "Glas Koncila", the Croatian national catholic newspaper, 16th of August 1981, he

stated; "It is definite that the children were not incited by anyone, and especially not by the church, to lie."

At that time, the Parish Priest of Medjugorje was Fr. Jozo Zovko. Fr. Zrinko Cuvalo worked together with him in the parish. Both of them at the beginning were strongly opposed to having anything to do with the apparitions. Bishop Zanic had called on them to be more decided and to recognise Gods' deeds around them. They answered him that there was no need to hurry, but that it would be better to wait to see how it would all develop. However, the Bishop's favourable position inspired and gave courage even to them and to just about anyone who, for whatever reason hadn't yet taken a positive stance towards the apparitions of Medjugorje.

The then Yugoslav communist government didn't look very benignly on all that was happening at Medjugorje. They proclaimed it to be a counter-revolution. (4th of July 1981). The secret police called Bishop Pavao Zanic to their head-apartment in Sarajevo for examination. They also called Fr. Jozo Zovko. But the happenings took their own course. Bishop Zanic began to speak less and less about the apparitions and Fr. Zovko as Parish Priest began to believe more and more in the supernatural origins of the apparitions. Because of his favourable position towards the happenings, Fr. Jozo was arrested and sentenced to three and a half years of harsh imprisonment. (17th of August 1981). Together with him, Fr Ferdo Vlasic was imprisoned, and a little bit later Fr. Jozo Krizic. The situation had become extremely tense. It was dangerous to say anything about Medjugorje. Everybody felt this, especially as some of the people of the village, and pilgrims finished up in prison.

After a period of silence, Bishop Pavao Zanic actively joined in challenging what was happening in Medjugorje. He even edited two written statements directed at the whole world. 1. "The actual (unofficial) position of the Episcopal curit of Mostar in reference to the happenings of Medjugorje",

30th of October 1984; 2. "Medjugorje, 1990. In an official memorandum of the Vatican State Secretary Office No. 150.458, on the 1st of April 1985, Cardinal Casaroli charged Croatian Cardinal Franjo Kuharic to convey to bishop Zanic that he should "suspend the airing of his own personal statements and renounce making judgements, until such time as all the elements could be conclusively gathered together, and the happenings could be clarified", because bishop Zanic's statement, "The actual position..." had had considerable reverberations in the press. Unfortunately, this request didn't have very much response with the Bishop.

a) The Commission for the Examination of Events at Medjugorje

For a long time, Bishop Zanic didn't think that anyone should help him in the reviewing of the events in the parish of Medjugorje. It was only when the requests were renewed on all sides that he drew up a commission of four members. (January 1982). Even though the commission said at the beginning that they would scrupulously apply themselves to the task, unfortunately, that didn't happen. Rarely or nearly never did they turn up at Medjugorje. The then Bishops commission of Yugoslavia desired that the matter be taken more seriously to hand. They advised Bishop Zanic to appoint a competent commission who might be able to throw some light on the events at Medjugorje. In February of 1984, Bishop Zanic expanded his commission to fourteen members. Many, however were dissatisfied, as the members of the commission were mainly those who had already declared themselves to be against the alleged events. The first sitting of the commission was held on the 23rd/24th of March 1984. In conclusion to their long awaited sitting, they issued a statement for the press in which, amongst other things they, in words, supported the suggestion of the Holy See to the Bishop, not to hurry in the bringing forth of a decision.

The second time that the commission met was in October 1984. Following this, they made a similar statement to their previous one.

The year 1987 saw a big change; the President for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, entrusted the examination of the events into the hands of the Yugoslavian bishops' conference.

b) Declaration of the Former Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia

After three years of study the former Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia on April 10, 1991 published their declaration in which among other things it states: "On the basis of investigations up till now it cannot be established that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations." It is not, therefore, said that there is no apparition, but only that it is not yet established. Words like these were really a compromise between the position of Bishop Zanic and the good fruits which the Medjugorje events produce. Sensing the magnitude of the Medjugorje events, the bishops decided to devote care to teaching about the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish of Medjugorje. They obligated themselves to issue special appropriate liturgical-pastoral directives.

Some bishops officially came to Medjugorje on June 17, 1991. The day before in Mostar they organized a commission for pastoral life in the parish of Medjugorje. At the head of the commission were Dr. Franjo Komarica, bishop of Banja Luka, and its members were Vinko Puljic, archbishop of Sarajevo, Slobodan Stambuk, bishop of Hvar and Paul Zanic, bishop of the Mostar-Duvno-Trebinje-Mrkanje diocese in which Medjugorje is located. The commission consisted of four more advisors. All four bishops, together with the other priests, celebrated the solemn evening pilgrims' mass. Bishop Zanic presided at the Eucharistic celebration and Archbishop Vinko

Puljic gave the sermon. By this fact, they confirmed Medjugorje as a place of prayer, as a shrine in which people come closer to God.

The commission for pastoral life in the parish of Medjugorje decided to meet again on June 27, 1991. However, one day before, Serbia attacked Slovenia and the war broke out that put the last nails in the corpse that was called Yugoslavia. With the dissolution of the state of Yugoslavia, the Bishops Conference of Yugoslavia was also dissolved.

2. Bishop Dr. Ratko Peric

Bishop Dr. Ratko Peric, who at the time of Zanic's time as bishop was a professor at the Gregorian University at Rome, became Pavao Zanics' successor. In the past, he had been a great help to Pavao Zanic on the occasion of his arrival at Rome.

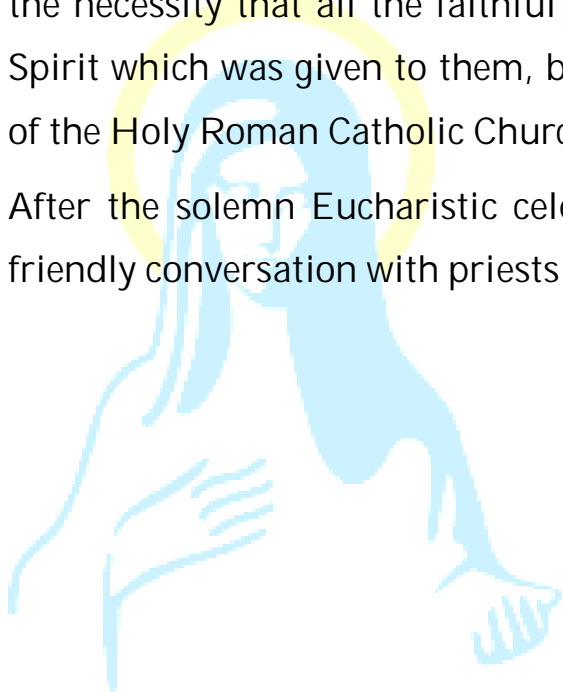
He became Bishop in 1993 with administration over the Mostar-Duvno-Trebinje-Mrkanj diocese. He continued in the footsteps of his predecessor with regard to the apparitions at Medjugorje. Neither did he visit the parish except when he had to officially do so, on the occasion of confirmations or for some other official reason. To demonstrate the falsity of Our Lady's apparitions at Medjugorje he usually refers to the statement of the former bishops' conference of Yugoslavia. He interprets it to mean that the bishops clearly said that Our Lady is not appearing at Medjugorje. His public position is most clearly put forward in his book, "The throne of Wisdom" (Crkva na Kamenu, Mostar 1995).

The title of the book is, "Criterion for prejudice towards apparitions", with a subtitle, "About Medjugorje' phenomenon". On page 266-286, he tries to show that our Lady's apparitions are not authentic. In conclusion of the chapter, he summarises his position in 10 points.

On the feast of the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Christ, June 14, 2001, Msgr. Ratko Peric, Bishop of Mostar, administered the sacrament of Confirmation to 72 candidates in the parish of St. James in Medjugorje.

In his homily, he repeated that he does not believe in the supernatural character of the apparitions of Medjugorje, but he expressed his satisfaction about the way the parish priest is administering this parish. He also underlined the importance of the unity of the Catholic Church, which is manifested through the unity with the local bishop and the Pope, as well as the necessity that all the faithful of this diocese, in the power of the Holy Spirit which was given to them, be faithful to the teaching and the practice of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

After the solemn Eucharistic celebration, Msgr. Ratko Peric remained in friendly conversation with priests in the Presbytery.



medjugorje