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MEDJUGORJE:
ARE THE SEERS
TELLING THE TRUTH?

A Psychiatrist's Viewpoint

An answer to some skeptics
(M. Jones, Bishop Zanic, and Fr. Sivric, O.F.M.)

by Nicholas Bartulica, M.D.

Chapter VI
INACCURACIES AND
MISINFORMATION

Fr. Robert Fox: "Do you realize the effect this book could have on your future work if you are proven to be wrong?"

M. Jones: "I've never done any work I so carefully documented."

(From the introduction of "*Medjugorje: The Untold Story*" by M. Jones.)

In the previous chapters we already tried, on some occasions, to expose several misleading assertions and unsubstantiated speculations contained in the writings and statements of the three critics.

In this chapter we will focus on a few specific issues where Mr. Jones, Fr. Sivric or Bishop Zanic are either misinforming the public or their assertions are patently inaccurate.

M. Jones, the author of *The Untold Story*, responded in his *Fidelity* magazine to a letter from Bill Reck of the Riehle Foundation regarding the English translation of Fr. R. Laurentin's book, where some passages were omitted, and he (Jones) wrote, "It is this type of dis-information that made my article (that is, *The Untold Story*) necessary."

In view of the fact that *The Untold Story* itself is replete

with inaccurate assertions and misinformation, we felt that the clarification of several issues was imperative.

1. Have the apparitions been taking place in the church since July 2, 1981?

As we read previously, during the evening Mass on July 2, 1981, Fr. Zovko gave an inspirational sermon when the whole parish appeared to experience a genuine conversion. In regard to this event M. Jones made the following comment: "Zovko's afternoon service on July 2 was the crucial turning point in the history of so-called apparitions. From this point on the children were spiritual hostages of the priests. From now on the apparition would take place in the church..."

Then elsewhere in his book, the author of *The Untold Story* insinuates that Fr. Zovko must have become aware that the whole thing was a "joke," but "instead of calling the whole thing off, he (Fr. Zovko) decides to take it over"... and again "as his (Fr. Zovko's) skepticism grew so did his desire to direct the apparitions"... and "from that time on (July 2, 1981) it would be virtually impossible for the average pilgrim to learn what the seers said from what the priests who watched over them wanted the world to hear."

Any reader who has received the information on Medjugorje events from *The Untold Story* must have reached the conclusion that from July 2, 1981, the apparitions have been occurring in the church and that the local clergy, in particular Fr. Zovko, took supervision of the events.

That is simply not true.

The following are the well-established facts in the early development of the Medjugorje events.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, on July 2, 1981, the visionaries had for the first time an apparition in the parish rectory where they were hidden by Fr. Zovko after they

were chased by police. Afterward they gave their testimony, which was tape recorded, in the church at the beginning of the evening Mass, and we quoted a part of it.

The next day on July 3, 1981, as we described, they again had the apparition in the rectory, and they believed that this was the last one (see the next subchapter 2. "Was the last apparition on July 3?")

From that time on, there are no regular daily records from which we could follow the events on a day-to-day basis. The diary of Vicka's sister Ana contains 26 entries over 75 days between June 24 and Sept. 6, 1981. This diary specifies several different places where some apparitions were taking place, e.g. Apparition Hill, different private homes of visionaries and the home of friends. Fr. Ivo Sivric, the author of *Hidden Side of Medjugorje*, which is frequently quoted by the author of *The Untold Story*, writes: "The vision continues to take place on Podbrdo (Apparition Hill) until August 12, 1981," and afterward "the apparition were taking place in the visionaries' homes and bedrooms and in the fields." And then Fr. Sivric adds, "Thus from that day on (Jan. 11, 1982) they began having their visions in the church."

The Untold Story is the only publication on the Medjugorje events asserting that the apparitions started to take place in the church beginning July 2, 1981.

The diary of Vicka's sister Ana has few entries on the sporadic apparitions in the church, e.g. on July 29, 1981, after having a regular apparition in Vicka's room at 6:30 p.m., the visionaries "saw the Gospa on the choir loft" but no conversation took place.

On August 28th they claimed seeing the Gospa in the church sacristy, and she gave them a brief message. On August 29 they again briefly saw the Gospa in the sacristy, and she gave them "greetings from Fr. Jozo" (he was already in prison).

Fr. Zovko was arrested on August 17, 1981, but the

evening Mass and other devotions continued. Fr. Zrinko Cuvalo became the pastor, and Fr. T. Vlastic was appointed his assistant and gradually took on the role as an unofficial spiritual advisor of the visionaries.

The last apparition recorded in Ana's diary took place on September 6, 1981, in Marija's home.

In view of the fact that the apparitions started to take place on a regular basis in the church on January 11, 1982, that is, almost five months after Fr. Zovko's arrest, it follows that he could not have had any influence on the development of events, contrary to the insinuation from *The Untold Story*.

From the above it is clear that M. Jones's assertion that on July 2, 1981, the apparitions started to take place in the church and came under supervision of Fr. Zovko cannot be substantiated and is contrary to all available evidence and is totally false.

2. Was the last apparition on July 3, 1981?

After misinforming its readers that since July 2, 1981, the apparitions allegedly started to take place in the church, *The Untold Story* in the same paragraph contains an allegation that Fr. Zovko has "suppressed" from the public the fact that the last apparition took place on July 3, 1981.

M. Jones writes, "An interesting case in point is the fact that Zovko suppressed the visionaries' claim that the last apparition took place on July 3 as Mirjana had predicted on the tape on June 30th."

This information was taken from *Hidden Side of Medjugorje*, by Fr. I. Sivric, where this issue is discussed in Chapter 3 on seven pages.

We are here dealing with three different issues: a) The visionaries, in particular, Mirjana, were of the opinion that the apparition would end on July 3, 1981. b) What did happen

during this particular apparition? c) Fr. Zovko's attempt to "suppress" the fact of the "last" apparition?

Let us consider each of those issues.

a.) Visionaries' subjective opinion.

In Chapter IV, while describing the developments on June 30, we quoted a statement from Mirjana who said that when she asked the Gospa how many days she will remain with them, she (the Gospa) allegedly answered: "Three days."

On the other hand, we also learned that during the apparition on June 29 to the similar question the Gospa allegedly answered, which was heard by all the visionaries: "As long as you wish."

Next morning (June 30) during the interview with Fr. Zovko, Ivanka said that she was the one who asked the question, and she confirmed the above-quoted Gospa's answer.

Can we explain that within 24 hours the Gospa had changed her mind?

In view of the fact that all visionaries claimed to have had the apparition on July 4, we must seek out an explanation on how the visionaries had formed their opinion about the last apparition and about Mirjana's claim that she heard the Gospa saying "three days."

Thus we will review chronologically the events and look into some factors that had a bearing on the visionaries' thinking.

1. We learned that Ivanka, during the first interview with Fr. Cuvalo on June 27, said that after they returned from the hill on June 24, several people were telling them how the Gospa appeared at Lourdes for 18 times "on the same occasion."

It seems that the visionaries heard for the first time that the Gospa had appeared in the past and about the exact number of the apparitions.

2. Between June 24 and June 27 (probably June 25) Mirjana had received a book on Lourdes, which she mentioned during her first interview with Fr. Zovko on June 27, and she and some other visionaries were in the process of reading it. (see next subchapter 3 on Mirjana and the Book on Lourdes).

3. The same day (June 27) little Jakov, during the interview with Fr. Zovko, mentioned some events that took place during the apparitions at Lourdes. He said: "In some country the Gospa said to a little girl 'Bring me some water... pick up a little soil' and some brook started to flow." To a question where he heard this, Jakov answered, "This is in a book. They said."¹

It is obvious that by June 27 Jakov also had heard about some events that took place in Lourdes and which were described in a book that the visionaries must have been reading together.

4. As we already quoted, on the morning of June 30, Mirjana, during the interview with Fr. Zovko, revealed that she was preoccupied with the end of the apparitions by saying: "I am going to question her on how many days she is going to stay with us, exactly how many days..."

A little later to Fr. Zovko's question on how many days she will see her, Mirjana answered: "Something keeps telling me two to three days..."

5. The same day (June 30) in the evening during the interview Mirjana repeated her question which she allegedly asked the Gospa during the apparition by saying to Fr. Zovko: "I asked her how many days she is going to stay with us, exactly how many days she is going to stay with us." She (Gospa) said: "Three days" and then Mirjana expressed her own conclusion: "Which means until Friday." Then immediately she continued, "Then we asked her if she was angry because we left the hillside."

It is significant to note that Mirjana's alleged question to

the Gospa is word by word identical with the one that she had mentioned during the morning interview.

Second point to be noted is Mirjana's assertion that after she had asked a question on "how many days" to which the Gospa answered "three days," the other visionaries apparently entered the conversation as Mirjana continued: "Then we asked her...". It seems that, during the conversation on "how many days," Mirjana was excluding the other visionaries, as if she (Mirjana) and the Gospa had a "private conversation."

6. During the same interview, Mirjana, while referring to the next Gospa's apparition in the church, said: "Until Friday, which means Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday." And again, a little later she (Mirjana) commented: "After all it is going to last a few more days in the Church."

No other visionaries had yet made similar comments, and Mirjana appears obviously "preoccupied" with the termination of the apparition.

7. In Chapter IV we quoted from Fr. U. Loncar's diary relating Vicka's testimony in the church on July 3, when she stated: "This evening she (the Gospa) appeared last time."

From the above information we can reach the following conclusions:

a. Immediately after the beginning of the apparition the visionaries first heard from other people about Lourdes, and then they read additional details on those apparitions.

b. On January 30 during the interview, Mirjana was manifesting some preoccupation with the end of the apparitions. It seems that she had formed the question that she planned to ask, but during the same interview Mirjana already "knows" the answer, that is, "two to three more days."

c. In the evening Mirjana said that she asked a question and allegedly heard the Gospa answering: "Three days." No other visionary ever confirmed that they heard any such statement from the Gospa.

d. Vicka had confirmed her belief when on July 3 in the Church, after the apparition in the rectory, she said that this was the last apparition.

e. Ivanka, already on June 24, learned that the Gospa appeared at Lourdes "18 times."

f. Jakov learned from the other visionaries that the Gospa also appeared in Lourdes. It means that they (the visionaries) were reading a book on the Lourdes apparitions.

It follows that all visionaries were under the impression that the apparitions were coming to an end, and it is probable that they reached this conclusion after learning about 18 apparitions in Lourdes. They apparently counted the number of apparitions and, since on some days the Gospa "appeared and disappeared," they thought that during those days there were several apparitions. We are assuming that according to their count on June 30, the 15th apparition took place, and they expected that the last one (18) would occur on July 3.

Among the visionaries Mirjana is one who is obviously preoccupied with the end of the apparition. This was manifested through her several statements on June 30 in the morning as well as in the evening.

But how to explain Mirjana's assertion that the Gospa said, "Three days," which appears to be an enigma?

We would suggest the following hypothesis:

As we learned during the day (June 30) Mirjana was preparing herself to ask the Gospa a question on this subject (the end of apparition). Therefore, in her mind, she was "processing" the question as she phrased it during the interview with Fr. Zovko in the morning, but at the same time, she believed that the apparitions would end in "two to three days," which she also told Fr. Zovko during the same interview without identifying the source of her knowledge.

Thus we must assume that while Mirjana in her own mind was conversing with the Gospa, she was asking the question

to which she already had the answer.

After the apparition at Cerno, Mirjana must have erroneously interpreted her subjective conversation with the Gospa, which she might have entertained several times during the day, as if it occurred during the apparition.

Therefore, it is our contention that during the apparition at Cerno, Mirjana did not have a factual conversation with the Gospa on this subject (the end of apparition), but she projected her internal conversation into the outer world, and she was under the impression that her subjective conversation with the Gospa took place objectively.

Several years later, during the interview with this writer in August 1989 and May 1990, Mirjana remembered that she was convinced, under the influence of the book of Lourdes, that the apparitions would end on July 3. She also remembers that on June 29 the Gospa said, "As long as you wish," but she could not remember all the details of the apparition on June 30, nor that the Gospa had said, "Three days," which she knew was recorded during the interview.

When I suggested to Mirjana the above mentioned explanation i.e. that she must have had "a subjective conversation with the Gospa" instead of hearing "three days" during the real apparition, she agreed that this might be the most plausible explanation.

In this way we can understand that no other visionary claimed to have heard the answer "three days" and none of them confirmed Mirjana's statement to Fr. Zovko about the Gospa's saying "three days." All of them believed that the last apparition was taking place on July 3, 1981 because in their opinion this would have been the 18th apparition, that is, "the standard number" about which they read in the book on Lourdes.

**b.) What actually happened during the
“last” apparition on July 3, 1981.**

As we already wrote in the previous chapter, the apparition on this day took place in the parish rectory. There were four visionaries (Vicka, Ivanka, Marija and Jakov) and several adult witnesses, among them Fr. U. Loncar, who in the evening described the event in his diary.

Fr. I. Sivric, in his book, *The Hidden Side of Medjugorje*, quotes Fr. T. Pavlovic, who was present and supplied Fr. Sivric with the information on the event. Fr. Sivric had interviewed him in August 1986, that is, five years after the event took place, and he (Fr. Pavlovic) allegedly told him: “All said that the Gospa told them that it was her last apparition.” Then Fr. Sivric writes: “No one told the crowd that the last apparition had just taken place.”

As we said above Fr. Pavlovic gave his account five years after the event took place. We believe that Fr. Loncar’s diary is more credible source of information since it was written the same evening. He (Fr. Loncar) wrote that after the apparition they briefly questioned the visionaries in regard to some comment from Ivanka to Ćakov, and the visionaries immediately went to the Church.

It is unbelievable that Fr. Loncar would not have written in his diary such an important announcement that this was the last apparition.

In addition, Fr. Loncar’s diary refutes Fr. Sivric’s remark that “no one told the crowd” about the last apparition. Fr. Loncar wrote that in the Church, Vicka briefly talked about the apparition and she (Vicka) said: “This evening she (Gospa) appeared for the last time.” As we mentioned, this was subjective opinion of all visionaries, but none of them, except Mirjana, maintained that they learned it from the Gospa.

c.) Fr. Zovko’s “suppression” of facts.

As we heard, Fr. Zovko allowed the visionaries to talk openly in the Church (July 3) after the apparition took place. He probably didn’t even know what they would announce, and, as we read, Vicka freely expressed her opinion telling the crowd that this was the “last” apparition.

Fr. Zovko had apparently changed his attitude and opinion on the events during the previous day, and he probably was relieved that the people started to come to the Church instead of going to Apparition Hill. The next day (July 4) the visionaries, not expecting the apparition, did not get together, but each of them later claimed to have had an apparition wherever they found themselves at apparition time. Afterward they started to meet in different places, such as in the fields, private homes or on some evenings on Apparition Hill.

On August 17 Fr. Zovko was arrested, and the visionaries continued to gather at different places claiming the daily apparitions.

There is no evidence that Fr. Zovko either had anything to do with their private gathering nor with “suppressing” their claim that their last apparition took place July 3, 1981. Thus the assertion of *The Untold Story* in this regard is totally misconstrued and cannot be substantiated.

Finally, we would like to raise the following question: As we heard, *The Untold Story* maintains that the apparition started as “joke,” that is, the visionaries never had experienced an authentic apparition. Therefore, Mirjana’s assertion on June 30 that the Gospa answered “three days” must have been a part of a “joke” and one cannot understand why *The Untold Story* should be concerned about “the last apparition” if the “first one” had never in reality taken place.

3. Mirjana and the Book of Lourdes Apparitions

In the preceding chapter we learned that the visionaries heard about 18 apparitions in Lourdes, which explained their belief that the last apparition was taking place on July 3, 1981.

However, there is some disagreement among the investigators of the Medjugorje events regarding the time when they read this book on Lourdes and whether this reading might have had any influence on the visionaries' experience.

For instance, M. Jones in trying to explain the children's experience as a result of manipulation by the sensitivity training, wrote: "What would happen if you added the charismatic emphasis on signs and wonders and direct contact with the beyond with the powerful techniques known as sensitivity training and applied them to impressionable young people, one of whom had just lost her mother and another who had just read a book on Lourdes." He later "modified" his theory asserting that "all things started as a joke," and he writes: "Mirjana had just read a book on Lourdes, so the vocabulary of apparitions was fresh in her mind."

This second comment was made in support of the "joke hypothesis," that is, that the book on Lourdes allegedly was a factor which influenced one of the two initial "instigators" (Mirjana) to concoct the "joke" about the apparition.

The source of information concerning this subject is *The Hidden Side of Medjugorje*, by Fr. I. Sivric. The author contests Fr. Zovko's assertion that he gave the book to the visionaries, and Fr. Sivric maintains that Mirjana received the book from a woman, Zdravka Ivankovic, known as "Kovilja." Fr. Sivric wrote: "Fr. Zovko ought to have remembered that he never gave the visionaries either a book on Lourdes or a Bible on June 30, 1981 or earlier. It appears clear that Mirjana read the book on Lourdes. However, she got the book from

Mrs. Zdravka Ivankovic, known in the village as Kovilja, "the girl with curly hair" (p. 68).

In addition Fr. Sivric speculates that Mirjana probably read the respective book between June 6 and June 24, 1981, that is, before the apparition had begun.

We must mention that Fr. Sivric has developed a hypothesis of Medjugorje being a "copy" of Lourdes, and thus, the time when Mirjana had read the book on Lourdes became to him a special significance (See 9. Is Medjugorje a Copy of Lourdes?).

Fr. Sivric based his conclusion after analyzing the taped interview which was the first one that Fr. Zovko had with Mirjana during the afternoon on June 27, 1981. The part of the interview dealing with this subject is not very clear, and between two interruptions of the recording it contains only four questions by Fr. Zovko and four answers by Mirjana.

Below is this writer's translation of that interview from the Croatian original as published in *Vatru Vjere u Medjugorju Zapalila je Gospa*, by Fr. V. Nuic (*The Fire of Faith in Medjugorje Was Lit by the Gospa*).

Fr. Zovko: Are you reading some holy (religious) book?

Mirjana: I read the book about Lourdes... We just talked how it was to that girl (St. Bernadette).

Fr. Zovko: Was this in this year?

Mirjana: Now, when we came down here.

Fr. Zovko: And who gave you the book?

Mirjana: This she gave to me... Do you know, perhaps, Kovilja?

Fr. Zovko: Kovilja? She is Angela's...

Mirjana: Mother of Cathy and Angela... They gave it to me. Vlatka gave it to me. And I read... Is it really God's word? I like to read the Bible.

From the above conversation it is clear that Mirjana was reading a book about Lourdes and that they (visionaries) had

talked among themselves about some incident of St. Bernadette.

Fr. Sivric apparently had concluded that Mirjana had received the book from "Kovilja," whom Mirjana mentioned in her third answer. However, this is not what Mirjana had said and to Fr. Zovko's question "Who gave you the book?" Mirjana started to answer. Before completing the answer she, herself, asked a question "Do you know Kovilja?" Therefore, Fr. Sivric's conclusion that "Kovilja" gave the book to Mirjana cannot be substantiated from the tape and is only his speculation.

Furthermore, Mirjana's next answer refutes totally Fr. Sivric's hypothesis, as we read, she (Mirjana) was saying: "They gave it to me" and a little later "Vlatka gave it to me."

Fr. Sivric was prevented from reaching the accurate conclusion because part of his tape, as he noted, was "incomprehensible"; that is, the tape lacks part of the last answer from Mirjana ("they gave it to me... Vlatka gave it to me.")

From the above it is clear that Mirjana did not receive the book from "Kovilja" but from "they" and from Vlatka. It is obvious that Mirjana was talking about three sisters (Kathy, Angela, and Vlatka) who are the daughters of "Kovilja" (Zdravka Ivankovic) and this explains Mirjana's question to Fr. Zovko "Do you know perhaps Kovilja?"

From the above it became understandable why Mirjana was able on June 27, 1981, to tell Fr. Zovko that she was reading a book on Lourdes and therefore she became convinced that the number of apparitions would be eighteen and that the last one would take place on July 3, as we described in the previous chapter.

In order to clarify this issue this writer interviewed "Kovilja" in August 1989 she denied that she ever gave any

book to Mirjana. By her statement Fr. Sivric's hypothesis was refuted.

In July 1991, during a trip to Medjugorje, I personally met separately Kathy and Vlatka, who are the two daughters of "Kovilja" and both of them confirmed that, at the end of June 1981, they had a book on Lourdes, and Vlatka remembered giving the book to Mirjana.

On the other hand, Mirjana categorically denied that she ever heard about Lourdes apparitions before reading the book on this subject. This author received the same answer from Vicka during the interview in October 1981.

We would like to make a brief comment regarding the reports that Fr. Zovko gave a book to the visionaries. He did say, for instance, to Fr. Kraljevic, Fr. Rupcic and also to this writer (August 1989) that he gave some religious books to the visionaries and in particular to Mirjana. However, this couldn't be the book that Mirjana mentioned on June 27, 1981, since this was the first meeting between Mirjana and Fr. Zovko and, as we have established, Mirjana received the book from Vlatka and denies that it was given to her by "Kovilja" (Vlatka's mother) as Fr. Sivric maintains.

It is interesting to note that Fr. Sivric, who construed the hypothesis about Mirjana receiving the book from "Kovilja" and allegedly reading it before June 24, 1981, had never insisted that he had talked with any of those involved, i.e. Mirjana or Kovilja

We can conclude that Fr. Sivric's insistence that Mirjana read the book on Lourdes before June 24, 1981 represents a self serving speculation which he needed in order to develop his hypothesis about Medjugorje events being an imitation of Lourdes apparitions (see sub chapter 9 Is Medjugorje "a copy of Lourdes?").

4. The Apparition at Cerno (June 30, 1981)

In Chapter IV, while describing the events on June 30, 1981 (seventh day of the apparition), we mentioned that during the afternoon two social workers appeared in Vicka's house and offered to take the children for an outing.

Fr. Sivric, in his book *"The Hidden Side of Medjugorje,"* addresses this incident, and he appeared a little incensed that some local people branded those two women for their action as "Communist girls." He writes that "they were unjustly accused of malevolence towards the visionaries" (p. 62).

Furthermore, Fr. Sivric argues that the initiative for going to some other place actually originated from the visionaries and that two social workers had only made themselves available and complied with the visionaries' wishes.

To quote Fr. Sivric, "Mica (a social worker) said that the communist authorities in Citluk were not considering removing the visionaries from Medjugorje that day, nor that they, Mica and Ljubica (another social worker), had been sent by any official to carry out that task. The idea of leaving Medjugorje came originally from the visionaries themselves in order to verify that the Gospa could appear to them elsewhere" (*The Hidden Face of Medjugorje*, p. 64).

In view of such conviction, Fr. Sivric raised several questions regarding the visionaries' attitude and "irresponsible" behavior. For instance, he asked, "Why did they want to stop having their visions on Podbrdo" (Apparition Hill)? And a little later: "On the other hand if the apparitions were really the Madonna's, how could they dare interrupt Her visits?" (p. 65).

Since we are studying the visionaries' behavior and trying to understand their attitude and reaction to their unusual experiences, the motivation behind the children's decision to

leave the village appears to be of paramount importance.

In fact it is irrelevant if two social workers were given the task to take the visionaries away or they (social workers) did it on their own initiative. We have to determine whether Fr. Sivric's thesis that the "idea of leaving" to "test" the Gospa came initially from the visionaries and can be substantiated by the available evidence.

What proof is Fr. Sivric offering for his hypothesis?

As we mentioned earlier, he (Sivric) first cites a statement from the social worker Mica who said that she and Ljubica (second social worker) were not sent "by any official to carry out that task."

One is here entitled to ask how Fr. Sivric knows that Mica was telling the truth?

Could anyone expect that either one of the two women would openly admit that they were sent by the local government? Or must we believe Mica because she is Fr. Sivric's "second cousin"?

We will see later that during the same interview Mica contradicted herself and inadvertently admitted that the local officials were behind their (social workers') task.

Fr. Sivric writes that to Fr. Zovko's question whether others had induced them (visionaries) to do so (to go to Cerno), the visionaries protested vehemently and were unified in saying, "It was our idea and we decided on the place."

Vicka in particular said, "We chose the place and the rest and we did not need anyone to tell us what to do."

From the above "evidence" it appears as if Fr. Sivric has "proof" for his hypothesis. However, we will demonstrate that the visionaries' statement was taken out of context and that an attentive reading of the whole interview will evaporate totally Fr. Sivric's hypothesis.

Therefore, we will carefully scrutinize the tape of this crucial and last interview of first ten days. The interview took

place immediately after the visionaries and two officials returned. Fr. Zovko first interviewed the children, not knowing that they did not go to Apparition Hill, while the two social workers waited outside his office.

During the interview Mirjana was describing the social workers' arrival and said: "We were just eating and Mica (social worker) said that some sort of inspection would take place so it would be better if we move to some other place to see if the Gospa was going to appear in another place."

A little later Vicka commented: "She (Mica) said that the inspection is coming and that we should go to some other place to see if she (Gospa) is going to appear to us at the other place, to try that."

Vicka's statement about "choosing the place" which was quoted by Fr. Sivric, should be understood within the whole context, that is, after realizing that they will not return in time for the apparition, they (visionaries) "chose" the place where to stop for the apparition.²

When Fr. Zovko finished the interview with the five visionaries, two social workers entered the office and the interview continued in their presence. Mica tried to explain "how the whole thing happened," and she said: "All day long today, I was attending different meetings." From her further conversation it is clear that the main topic of the meetings was the recent events in Medjugorje. For instance she related that "when they (Communist officials) said they would take the children to the hospital (mental), I said what is the matter with you? The children are normal. You are going to take them to the hospital and make them crazy."

A little later Mica tried to excuse the officials of local government from any involvement saying: "There was no word about the children or if the children should go to some other place. Nobody suggested that to me."

She then proceeded to explain her motivation. "I, alone,

in some way since I studied some psychology in school, wanted to see the reality of how the children would behave at the other place. That was the constant interest to me since the whole time up on the hill, I was in the crowd. Every time I went, I was unable to see their reactions from far away."

Her friend Ljubica, half jokingly, made the comment that during the apparition at Cerno she was telling Jakov: "Ask the Gospa what she's going to do to me since I stole you in this way?"

In addition Ljubica made comment concerning the expenses they had: "We were going to give a bill to the county office when we were leaving. Marinko (Sego-president of the executive committee) told us, 'All the expenses on my bill take them some place.'"

A little later Mica added that when she asked the question: "On whose bill the dinner is going to be?" He (Marinko) said: "Put everything on my bill."

The above statements definitely contradict Mica's insistence of non-involvement by government officials.

Vicka's mother, Zlata, confirmed to this writer (May 1990) that while the two social workers were conversing with her in the day room, the two men of the security police were waiting in front of the house. Mica allegedly informed her that those two men had an order to "remove" the children, and it would be more advisable to allow the children to go for an excursion, and Vicka's mother agreed with Mica's suggestion.

Considering the above evidence, we must conclude that a. Mica herself protested that they were acting on their own idea and tried to absolve the government officials of any influence, b. she then accidentally implicated the other officials as being behind the whole plan, and c. the visionaries (Mirjana and Vicka) expressly stated that it was Mica who suggested going for a ride.

In view of the above, it is clear that Fr. Sivric's hypothesis

that the visionaries on their own decided to "test" the Gospa is contrary to all available evidence and is without any foundation.

5. "Unfaithful" Judas or "Doubting" Thomas?

The Untold Story contains a brief chapter on "Incredulous Judases" where its author quotes a part of the interview of June 30, 1980, between Fr. Zovko and Ivanka.

According to M. Jones, Fr. Zovko had the seers "contradicting themselves and making what are obviously absurd statements." "The contradictions" and the "absurdities" are allegedly contained in the part of the interview when Ivanka mentioned that the lady physician who was with the visionary at the apparition site on previous day (June 29, 1981) asked if she could "touch" the Gospa. When the visionaries transmitted this request, the Gospa allegedly had said: "There would always be incredulous Judases who come to her."

Fr. Zovko was surprised with the Gospa's use of the attribute "incredulous" for Judas and he commented: "Judas was not incredulous" to which Ivanka replied: "Incredulous. That means a traitor."

At the end of the conversation Fr. Zovko again raised the question: "Why should it be Judas since he has faith like the rest of the apostles?"

There is an additional remark in *The Untold Story*, that Fr. Laurentin changed Judas to Thomas in his edition of the messages. M. Jones explained that he (Fr. Laurentin) like Fr. Zovko "considered it significant as well as damaging to their case."

Any reader could rightfully ask whether is it possible that the Gospa doesn't know the difference between the doubting Thomas and betraying Judas.

In order to clarify this controversy, it is imperative to

search for the real word used by the Gospa and the circumstances under which it was applied.

It appears that we are dealing with the problem of semantics. For instance, the Croatian word that the Gospa used was "Nevjerni Juda" which was translated differently in English in three separate books.³

Furthermore, M. Jones made a translation error that contributed to the already existing confusion. He translated Ivanka's statement to Fr. Zovko from the French edition of Fr. Sivric's book, and it sounds as if Ivanka was quoting the Gospa by saying, "There would always be incredulous Judases who come to her," and Jones commented, "The statement takes Zovko aback."

Due to such error of translation the Gospa's statement really appears "absurd"; that is, it appears that she was saying that "Judases" or "the traitors" keep coming to see her.

The French version (from which M. Jones made the translation): "Il y avait toujours des Judas incredules, qu'elle vienne."

The correct translation: "There were always the incredulous Judases. Let her come."

But one might wonder why Fr. Zovko, whose native language is Croatian, was "surprised."

As we read in the previous chapters, at the time of the interview Fr. Zovko himself was "unbelieving" and was very skeptical towards the visionaries' story. He was obviously trying to find if there was any contradiction in the visionaries' statement in order to discredit them, and at the same time he was not aware of some details regarding the lady doctor, which we will describe below.

Therefore, when he heard Ivanka saying "Nevjerni Juda" (unfaithful Judas), he interpreted this attribute as meaning "unbelieving," which is sometimes used in Croatian for the apostle Thomas, who did not believe until he "saw and

touched." However, the more accurate meaning of the Croatian word "Nevjerni" is unfaithful, as was translated in the books by Fr. Kraljevic and Fr. Bubalo, and the same word is used for disloyal, infidel or "one who cannot be trusted," e.g., the same adjective is used for a spouse in a case of marital infidelity.

It's clear that the Gospa used the attribute in this sense, and therefore 15-year-old Ivanka had no problem to retort to Fr. Zovko's surprise by saying: "Unfaithful. He (Judas) was a traitor."

Who was the female physician, and what she was doing on the Apparition Hill?

As we learned from Chapter IV, on June 29, 1981, the visionaries were taken for psychiatric examination in Mostar, and after their return they went to Apparition Hill. Two local physicians were instructed by the police to accompany them to observe their behavior. One of them was the above-mentioned lady physician (Dr. D. Glamuzina) who, according to Fr. Kraljevic, a Franciscan in Medjugorje, was a "self-proclaimed atheist."

When this writer interviewed Vicka on Oct. 20, 1981, she vividly remembered a "lady doctor" who came to her house on June 29, 1981, a little while before the visionaries went to Apparition Hill. According to Vicka, the doctor "bragged" of being a fallen-away Catholic and among other things was talking of not needing the sacraments and specifically mentioned having not received the sacrament of confirmation. It was obvious to this writer that the doctor was ridiculing Vicka's faith as well as religious practices.

One must be aware that in the province of Hercegovina fallen-away Catholics are considered as traitors of their religious as well as cultural patrimony. When this writer heard that during the apparition the Gospa called the physician Judas, I felt that the comparison was totally appropriate.

Later, I learned that this statement caused some controversy which can be explained as partially caused by a problem of semantics due to inadequate translation and secondly by lack of knowledge of the above details which probably influenced Fr. Zovko to raise some questions.

We can summarize the above by stating that the lady physician who, on June 29, 1981, was sent to observe the visionaries during the apparition was not a case similar to Thomas the Apostle who refused to believe until he "saw and touched," but she was rather a person, who until a little while ago, was ridiculing Vicka's faith, and when the Gospa called her "unfaithful Judas," she (Gospa) knew very well that in front of her was not standing Thomas "The Doubter."

6. Fr. Laurentin's "Misrepresentation" of Fr. Zovko's Arrival

There is a chapter in *The Untold Story* titled "Zovko's Arrival in Medjugorje" where the author quotes Fr. Laurentin's book *Is Virgin Mary Appearing at Medjugorje?* and he imputes that Fr. Laurentin "intentionally" tried to misrepresent Fr. Zovko's arrival by writing: "Fr. Zovko was only named the pastor a few days before the first apparition."

M. Jones then comments: "This is simply not true. Zovko was named pastor at St. James Parish in October of 1980, which is to say nine months before the apparition started." Then after quoting Fr. Laurentin's alleged disclaimer that Fr. Zovko "might be suspected of instigating or orchestrating the apparitions," M. Jones comments: "It's hard not to believe that the misrepresentation of Zovko's arrival at the parish is intentional. Laurentin misrepresents the situation as a way of clearing Zovko of influencing the seers."

This writer does not feel that Fr. Laurentin, the distinguished French Mariologist, needs a defense attorney,

but since we are exposing several “inaccuracies and misinformation” from *The Untold Story*, we felt that the above alleged “misrepresentation” requires brief clarification.

Any reader of the book *Is the Virgin Mary Appearing at Medjugorje?* can find on its cover that it was co-authored by Rene Laurentin/Ljudevit Rupcic, and on page 17 there is a comment: “The basis of this book is constituted by the translation from Croatian of the book by Fr. Rupcic, *The Apparition of the Virgin at Medjugorje*.”

Again on page 68 it is clearly stated that “the book published by Fr. Rupcic of which chapter 2 is the translation and adaptation, restricts itself to the first seven apparitions and a general description of what followed.”

From the above it’s clear that M. Jones’s criticism was misdirected since the quote about Fr. Zovko’s arrival at Medjugorje is from the second chapter, which was prepared by Fr. L. Rupcic, a Franciscan from Medjugorje, and Fr. Laurentin cannot be held responsible for it.

Fr. Laurentin is usually very knowledgeable of his data, and in his book *Messages and Teachings of Mary at Medjugorje* (French edition, March 1988) on page 19, he wrote: “Fr. Jozo Zovko, named pastor in 1980 eight months before the apparitions.” That is he gave the same time as M. Jones.

M. Jones should have been aware of this fact, as we read in the subchapter 5 on Judas or Thomas, he (M. Jones) made a comment “that Laurentin changed Judas to Thomas in his so called definitive edition of the messages,” which proves that M. Jones had read Fr. Laurentin’s book.

It follows that Fr. Rupcic was the “culprit,” and one wonders why he “tried to misrepresent” the facts. However, a little research discovered that Rupcic is also innocent. In the original text (Croatian) he wrote, “Fr. Zovko became the new pastor a little before the apparition started” (*Ukazanja Gospe u Medjugorju – The Gospa’s Apparition at Medjugorje*, p. 28).

It follows that he was not specific; that is, he did not mention the day or month.

When this writer talked with Fr. Rupcic about the above issue, I found that he was not aware at all about the error of translation. The book *Is Virgin Mary Appearing in Medjugorje?* by R. Laurentin/L. Rupcic was translated in several languages, and it is obvious that Fr. Rupcic has not been checking and looking for the translation errors.

In conclusion, there is no evidence of any intentional “misrepresentation” either by Fr. Laurentin or Fr. Rupcic, as M. Jones insinuates, but the culprit seems to be an unintentional translating error.

7. “Disconcerting” Laughter

Under the above title we find a special chapter in *The Untold Story* in which the author prepares the reader for the “joke hypothesis.” In it, there is a description of a few incidents of “laughter” during the interview on June 30, which should prove that “everything was a joke.”

In the respective chapter M. Jones analyzed the interview which took place in the evening, after the visionaries returned from the apparition at Cerno. As we read, they spent the afternoon on an outing, where they were taken by two government officials, and this incident was described in Chapter IV wherein we wrote about “the seventh day of apparitions.”

As we already mentioned, during that interview were present Fr. Zovko, five visionaries and a little later two social workers who entered the room.

The whole interview runs through thirty-six pages, and M. Jones had selected merely two or three pages where the infrequent incidents of laughter are recorded, and an uninformed reader is under the impression that the children

are ridiculing their own story. However, there are sixteen pages of the interview which precede *The Untold Story's* quotes, when Fr. Zovko is alone with the children, and the discussion is serious, full of concerns and worries.

For instance, Fr. Zovko and the children were discussing how to explain the children's absence to the disappointed crowd who waited on the hill in vain for the visionaries. In addition, when Fr. Zovko learned that the Gospa allegedly accepted the visionaries plea to "appear in the Church," he (Fr. Zovko) suggested that the crowds should be informed accordingly, but the visionaries were reluctant to face the people.

The children were expressing their feelings and irritations for being questioned by the inquisitive people on the previous day until late into the night. Mirjana talked about how people get violent and about their fears that they might be placed in a mental hospital. Vicka made some comments that some persons are coming to the hill of apparitions to make fun of Gospa and to blaspheme.

There is no instance of laughter recorded during those sixteen pages, and some incidents of laughing took place only after two social workers entered the room and gave an explanation of how and why they took the children for a ride. However, the laughter was never related to the children's experience of the apparitions, but to some other peripheral events.

For instance, the first recorded laughter took place when Mica (social worker) mentioned the tape recorder which she and her friend activated while the children had the apparition.

Another laughing incident, which is mentioned in *The Untold Story*, happened after the children answered to Fr. Zovko that they were not bothered by the presence of the two women.

Then again they laughed after Mica said that she forgot to tell the children to ask the Gospa if she would be mad at

them (two social workers). Fr. Zovko then made a comment, "You chose another hill and now you are making fun of the people." It appears that he must have been tired and irritated, but the same must have been the case with the children, and there is no indication that they were making fun of anyone.

In regard to the above incidents of laughing, M. Jones made his own interpretation and writes, "The kids for their part are acting as if it is all a joke and that everyone knows it now." However, we believe that the majority of the people, after reading the whole interview, would strongly disagree with such assessment.

Then M. Jones proceeds by skipping eight pages of the interview, and again, he selected a part of it where there were some laughing moments. At that time, it appears that everyone was tired and hungry. Fr. Zovko was offering some treat, and the atmosphere became more relaxed. He (Fr. Zovko) made a remark about the children being "the angels" and thus contributed to the relaxed atmosphere and some laughter appeared appropriate.

This part of the interview contains mainly a conversation between Fr. Zovko and the two social workers, and through some errors of translation from French to English by M. Jones, the whole situation appears more comical. In particular, one error presents Ljubica (social worker) as if she was ridiculing the apparition. The following is her (Ljubica's) statement:

French version: "J'ai dit; 'Demande a la Gospa ce qu'elle va me faire, puisque je vous ai volés de cette façon.'"

M. Jones's translation: "I said: 'Ask the Gospa to make me fly in that fashion.'"

Correct translation: "I said: Ask the Gospa what she will do to me since I stole you in such a way."

It seems that the above translation error was unintentional. Namely the French verb, *voler*, has two meanings, that is to fly and to steal. Consequently, when M. Jones translated that

Ljubica was talking "to make me fly" instead of "I stole you," it appeared that she (Ljubica) was ridiculing the apparition and allegedly contributing to the "circus" atmosphere.

As we demonstrated, the transcripts of the interview don't reveal that the visionaries were acting "as if it is all a joke," and secondly, due to the above error of translation the reader might have had a wrong impression of "joking" atmosphere, which was not the case.

8. Vicka's "Hidden" Diary

In Chapter V on Bishop Zanic's opposition, we mentioned on several occasions the controversy regarding Vicka's secret diary. As we wrote this issue was one of five factors which contributed to Bishop Zanic's suspicions in regard to the Franciscans, and finally he became confirmed in his belief that the apparitions were a result of a "conspiracy."

According to the Bishop's statement, he learned of a diary in February 1983 when Fr. R. Grafenauer sent to him some copies of additional messages concerning the two expelled friars. Bishop Zanic apparently was under the impression that Fr. Grafenauer had seen Vicka's diary from which he made the copies, and the Bishop's "Present Position of the Bishop's Curia" had a special chapter on this subject.

It is evident, as we previously said, that the existence of this "hidden" diary almost became Bishop Zanic's obsession, and from February until December 1983 he made several efforts to get hold of this item. He wrote several letters to Medjugorje asking for the diary (in April, May, June) requesting either Vicka or Fr. Vlasic to bring it to him, and in November he went to Medjugorje to obtain the diary himself.

Finally, Fr. Vlasic, trying to dissuade the Bishop of the diary's existence, on December 14, 1983, swore on the cross

in the presence of the Bishop that "he has not ever seen the hidden diary which the Bishop talks about," but instead of persuading the Bishop of the diary's non-existence, from this moment Bishop Zanic has been branding Fr. Vlasic a "perjurer."

As a proof, Bishop Zanic claimed Fr. Grafenauer as a witness, and in addition, he (the Bishop) quotes Vicka's letter to him of May 7, 1983, in which she protests that some parts of her diary have been copied and distributed (by the diocese), and she considers her writings are for her private matter and not for public consumption.

Later, the Bishop quotes Fr. Vlasic's *Chronicle of Apparitions* in which on March 16, 1982, he (Fr. Vlasic) wrote that he talked with Vicka for a long period of time "since she has not brought her diary of the apparition." A little later Fr. Vlasic allegedly wrote, "She (Vicka) records everything chronologically."

From the above evidence Bishop Zanic had reached the conclusion that there was a special Vicka's diary, but for some unexplained reason, Vicka and Fr. Vlasic had kept it "hidden" from him.

The Untold Story refers briefly to Fr. Vlasic's swearing on the cross that Vicka's journal never existed, and then M. Jones commented: "Vlasic in other words had lied and so had Vicka," but one has the right to ask what is the evidence that "special journal" existed? *The Untold Story* is not offering any proof to the reader, and the only evidence is Bishop Zanic's statement.

What are the available facts on this matter?

We have already quoted some parts from the diary by Vicka's sister Ana which contains about 26 entries over 75 days, from June 24 to September 6, 1981. This whole "diary" was published in Fr. Sivric's book *The Hidden Face of Medjugorje*. After reading the first two entries for June 24 and

June 25, it becomes clear that the entries were written a few days later and the fact that those documentations were made by Vicka's sister demonstrates that Vicka was not a person who "keeps a diary in chronological order."

In her conversations with Fr. Bubalo, Vicka admits having in her possession the following written records about the apparitions:

1. The diary already mentioned from June 24 to Sept. 6, 1981, that was written by her sister Ana, an account of Vicka's and some other visionaries' statements.

2. The diary containing events between October 18 to December 14, 1981 (57 days), recorded by two of Vicka's sisters, Mirjana and Zdenka.

3. The diary containing events February 6 to March 25, 1982 (48 days). The recording was made by Vicka herself.

Fr. Bubalo commented that on March 25, 1982, Vicka had ceased to make any writings in spite of his advice to make the recording. He had several interviews with Vicka between 1982 and 1983, in preparation for the book *A Thousand Encounters With The Blessed Virgin Mary...*, and at the end of 1983 he wrote that out of 900 days, that is, from the beginning of the apparitions till the end of 1983, there are only 137 days when the apparitions were recorded, which is contained in the three above-mentioned diaries.

4. There is an additional diary where Vicka has recorded the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which she wrote from Jan. 7, 1982, until April 10, 1985. She will reveal the contents when she obtains the Gospa's permission.

To Fr. Bubalo's question about the existence of an additional "secret" diary, Vicka answered: "I don't have any secret notebook except the one where I record the story of the Virgin's life. I can, if you wish, take an oath to the effect."

On account of these facts it is clear that when Bishop Zanic quotes Vicka's letter about a "diary," she (Vicka) was

talking about one of those notebooks. The same would apply to Fr. Vlasic's comments in regard to Vicka's diary, which was quoted by the Bishop as proof of the existence of a "secret" diary.

Finally, Bishop Zanic's claim that Fr. Grafenauer in February 1983 had seen and made copies from a special Vicka's diary, was disavowed by Fr. Grafenauer himself. He (Grafenauer) wrote a letter to Fr. P. Ljubicic, a Franciscan in Medjugorje, dated October 7, 1984, in which he wrote: "I immediately let the Bishop know ... that I had not seen Vicka's diary. He can not consider me a witness against Tomislav (Fr. Vlasic) in this affair ... and he continues to write in foreign newspapers and refer to me as a witness as regards Vicka's diary" (*Medjugorje Facts, Documents, Theology*, by Fr. Michael O'Carroll, CSSp., p. 118).

Fr. L. Rucpic, a former professor of Theology in Sarajevo, wrote (1985) an answer to Bishop Zanic's "Present Position of the Bishop Curia" of Oct. 30, 1984. After investigating all facts on the controversy about the diary, he succinctly summarized the unsoundness of Bishop Zanic's claim:

"The Bishop refers to Vicka, Grafenauer and Vlasic as the only witnesses to the fact that the hidden 'diary' exists, whereas the witnesses, Vicka, Grafenauer, Vlasic – who even swore before God – all claim it does not exist. And now the Bishop, on the basis on their collective testimony comes to this conclusion: Vicka *wrote* the diary, Vlasic *hid* it and Grafenauer *saw* it and *copied* some of our Lady's messages from it ... The Bishop sees as 'key to the understanding of Medjugorje' things that don't exist and considers as "key" witnesses, people who witness the non-existence of such things" (*Medjugorje:FDT*, p. 119).

We would like to end this Chapter with a question: "Would any jury on this earth pass a guilty verdict of being "liars" on Vicka or Fr. Vlasic on account of such evidence?"

But, this is exactly what Bishop Zanic has been maintaining and *The Untold Story* keeps repeating.

9. Is Medjugorje “A Copy of Lourdes”?

In the last chapter of his book *The Hidden Face of Medjugorje*, Fr. Sivric tried to offer “a plausible” and natural explanation of the Medjugorje events.

First, he mentioned an opinion of some “highly educated” people, who from the beginning were acquainted with the visionaries, and they felt that some manipulation was behind the visionaries’ behavior. However, according to this speculation, the visionaries later continued to pretend as if they really have been having an extraordinary experience, which was explained as “autosuggestion, imagination, or obstinacy.”

Fr. Sivric disagrees with the above explanation and offered his own hypothesis. He wrote, “One day, they might have been at loose ends, looking for something to do to relieve their frustrations ... On their own initiative they might have wanted to try something “for the greater glory of God and the spiritual well-being of the people.” They might have decided to try to shake the people up spiritually.”

But, since the visionaries’ behavior reminds Fr. Sivric of St. Bernadette of Lourdes, he believes that the visionaries’ behavior postulates a recent reading about the Lourdes apparition.

Consequently, Fr. Sivric speculates that the Medjugorje visionaries actually tried to imitate the behavior of St. Bernadette, and he concludes that the Medjugorje is “a copy of Lourdes.”

In order to support his hypothesis Fr. Sivric enumerates several points which allegedly illustrate a similarity between Medjugorje and Lourdes events.

For instance, St. Bernadette and Medjugorje visionaries would exclaim, after noticing the apparition, “Here she is” and both used holy water for sprinkling the apparition.

Furthermore, the description of the apparition is “similar”; that is, both said that she was “beautiful and smiling.”

Both were attracted to some place e.g., St. Bernadette to the grotto and Medjugorje visionaries to the Podbrdo (Apparition Hill).

We heard that Fr. Sivric is certain that the visionary Mirjana had read a book on the Lourdes apparitions sometime between January 6 and 24, 1981; that is, before she started to claim having her own apparition and that she also must have shared her knowledge with the other visionaries.

According to Fr. Sivric, a special case of similarity was the visionaries’ imitation of St. Bernadette by conversing with the Gospa in inaudible sounds, that is, by only moving their lips. This behavior they allegedly learned from another book, and Fr. Sivric writes that to his “surprise and joy” he found out that Grgo Kozina, a friend of the visionaries, had purchased a book in September 1981 (*Lourdes: Where Heaven and Earth Meet*, by B. Nagy, S.J.) which described St. Bernadette’s seventh apparition during which she was speaking with Madonna in an inaudible voice. Fr. Sivric speculates that G. Kozina gave the book to the visionaries, who subsequently read about St. Bernadette’s behavior and tried to imitate her during their apparitions.

Is there any substantial evidence or plausibility in Fr. Sivric’s hypothesis?

Did he offer a significant and striking similarity between the two phenomena?

Fr. Rene Laurentin, who wrote several books on Medjugorje and Lourdes, commented that “Medjugorje is not a copy of Lourdes in any way. These young people did not look for a grotto or for water ... the message is not an imitation

of the messages of Lourdes" (*Seven Years of Apparition*, p. 49).

Let us examine some of Fr. Sivric's "proofs" for similarity.

To his (Sivric's) assertion that the Medjugorje visionaries would exclaim as St. Bernadette, "Here she is," Fr. Viktor Nuic, in his book (*Vatru Vjere u Medjugorju Potpalila je Gospa – The Fire of Faith in Medjugorje Was Lighted by the Gospa*) in which he criticized Fr. Sivric's book, remarked incisively, "As if they should have exclaimed, 'Here she is not.'"

What is to be said about Fr. Sivric's claim that the Medjugorje visionaries were imitating St. Bernadette when they described the Gospa as "beautiful and smiling"?

Did Fr. Sivric expect that the Madonna in Medjugorje should have been different from the one in Lourdes, for instance, instead of being beautiful would be "ugly" and "unsmiling."

What is similar between St. Bernadette's being attracted towards the grotto and the Medjugorje visionaries towards the Podbrdo? Do a grotto and a Podbrdo (Apparition Hill) look alike?

However, the whole hypothesis of Fr. Sivric is contingent on his assumption that the Medjugorje visionaries had read two books on Lourdes, one in June and the second in September 1981.

As we already have demonstrated in subchapter 3 (Mirjana and the Book on Lourdes), Fr. Sivric could not offer any evidence for his assertion, and therefore, we are dealing here with his pure speculation. Mirjana and the other visionaries deny not only reading any book on Lourdes, but according to them, they never heard about Lourdes apparition until some persons told them about the events, and that happened after June 24, 1981.

Fr. Sivric then comes out with another speculation that

the visionaries had read a second book on Lourdes after September 1981, from which they allegedly learned about St. Bernadette's inaudible conversation.

Here again we have another case of Fr. Sivric's speculation, and he does not offer any conclusive evidence, except that the book "passed through many hands."

However, even if one could prove that the Medjugorje visionaries have read the book mentioned by Fr. Sivric, he is mistaken in his belief that they started to converse with the Gospa in an inaudible voice after September 1981.

G. Kozina, who tape recorded the visionaries during the apparition on June 28–29, 1981, asserts that the visionaries usually were conversing with the Gospa in a silent manner (*Vatru Vjere u Medjugorju Potpalila je Gospa – The Fire of Faith in Medjugorje was Lighted by the Gospa*, p. 58.)

We already wrote about the apparitions of June 28–29 when they were repeating the questions which they had received from the audience and then they would repeat loudly the Gospa's answers. It is obvious that the inaudible part of the conversation could not be recorded.

In addition, in Chapter IV while describing the apparition of July 3, 1981, we mentioned an excerpt from Fr. U. Loncar's diary of the same day when he recorded his answer to Ivanka, who asked them to leave the room. He wrote, "We said that anyhow we don't hear anything while they converse with the Gospa." A little later the remarks, "They knelt down and were staring at one point and they were moving their lips. ... Little Jakov started to tell something to Gospa (we saw his lips moving), then some of the children said loudly, 'Ode' (she is gone)."

In summary, Fr. Sivric's hypothesis is a form of pure speculation and the fact is that a. the Medjugorje visionaries before June 24, 1981, have never read any book on Lourdes, and therefore they could not imitate something that they even

did not know had ever taken place; b. there is no striking similarity between the behavior of St. Bernadette and the Medjugorje visionaries; and c. Fr. Sivric's assertion that the Medjugorje visionaries started to talk in an inaudible voice after September 1981 is totally inaccurate and cannot be supported with available testimony. According to several witnesses, the Medjugorje visionaries from the beginning were conversing with the Gospa in a silent manner.

In conclusion, the Medjugorje as a "copy of Lourdes" might exist in somebody's fantasy but is without any foundation in reality.

10. Bishop's "Negative" Statement

As we already mentioned in the Foreword, since October 1988 when part II of *The Untold Story* was published, the *Fidelity* editor has continued with Medjugorje-bashing and either he or some of his correspondents have been writing adversely about the Medjugorje events.

The last major attack appeared in the *Fidelity* of February 1991 under the title "Medjugorje Goes Up In Smoke: the Yugoslavian Bishops Just Say No." The article is the lead story of the issue, and on the cover is a picture of Our Lady of Medjugorje ready to be engulfed by fire.

M. Jones appears to be jubilant in reporting to his readers that "like a great ship going down, Medjugorje was evidently going to take a lot of people with it, when it sank."

In accordance with his well-established anti-Medjugorje zeal, M. Jones's article is replete with fantasies, half-truths and misinformation. As a result the readers are left in confusion and bewilderment.

Before making some comments and clarifications, we will quote some additional statements and conclusions from M. Jones's article.

According to the *Fidelity* editor, Yugoslavian Bishops at their special meeting of November 27-28, 1990, "turned their attention to the report of the theological commission established to investigate the alleged apparitions..."

"The negative statement was approved to be all but unanimous of the Yugoslavian Bishops. Of twenty bishops voting, 19 were in favor with only one abstention. The document was not released by the bishops, but by early 1991 ASCA, the Italian Catholic news agency, got a copy and had released its own Italian translation to the Italian press."

M. Jones believes that the Yugoslavian Bishops had made their final judgment, and while arguing with a different opinion of the theologian Mark Miraville, M. Jones writes, "There is however no indication that there is any other church body investigating the apparitions at this time."

A little later he continues in the same vein by quoting Msgr. Thomas Herron, who worked for nine years for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. He apparently "disputes the notion that the doctrine is not definitive."

M. Jones then quotes a psychologist, William R. Coulson, according to whom "the Medjugorje proponent is now faced with an unpleasant choice. The Bishops' statement forces him to choose between Church authority and personal experience." Then M. Jones issues a warning to "Medjugorjians" by writing, "But with the Yugoslavian Bishops' negative verdict a crucial frontier has now been crossed. Now proselytizing for Medjugorje means proselytizing against the Church."

In order to "balance" his articles M. Jones offers opinions from some Medjugorje proponents. For instance, Fr. Rene Laurentin, the famous French Mariologist, wrote in the Italian daily *L'Avvenire* that "the question remains open."

Mark Miraville, a theologian and director of the Marian Office of Contemporary Apparitions at the Franciscan

University of Steubenville in Ohio, affirms that the statement "in no way represents a definitive pronouncement on the authenticity of the Medjugorje apparitions. That the supernatural origins of the apparitions at this time cannot be 'affirmed' does not indicate a negative final decision and completely leaves open the possibility of a final positive judgment as to its supernatural nature."

Denis Nolan, director of Queen of Peace Ministries of South Bend, Indiana, has quoted a report from Vienna that said, "The report (of Bishops) was not only not definitive, it was also incorrect. In fact, the Yugoslavian Bishops were actually favorably disposed to Medjugorje."

M. Jones obviously disregards the aforementioned positive interpretations of the Bishops' statement, and he persists with his own interpretation and concludes his article with: "The Church has spoken. The Bishops have just said no. It is now up to the Medjugorje supporters to give up their spiritual drugs."

Let us review briefly some events which took place during past year, and are, directly or indirectly related to the Yugoslav Bishop's session of November 27-28, 1990.

In the Chapter V (Bishop Zanic's opposition) we portrayed Bishop Zanic's relentless, seven-year-long campaign to "extinguish" Medjugorje, as if it were his "sacred mission." We learned that even after being relieved by the Vatican from responsibility of making a final judgment about Medjugorje events (1986), he ignored Rome's wishes and kept interfering with new commission's inquiries.

For instance:

1. The new Commission met for the first time in March, 1987 and started to gather pertinent information. However, on July 25, 1987, Bishop Zanic gave a strong anti-Medjugorje homily in St. James Church, which he visited for confirmation ceremonies.

2. In March 1990 Bishop Zanic again, in defiance of Vatican's instruction, issued a 16-page tract on Medjugorje repeating several accusations against the visionaries and the Franciscans, as he already has done in his letter of October 30, 1984 ("Present Position of Bishop's Curia"). The last publication caused a consternation in some theological circles, and a theologian in Italy (don Amorth) questioned the Bishop's mental balance (*Abbate pieta di un vescovo squilibrato*, Roma 27. April 1990 – Have Pity For an Unbalanced Bishop).

3. Fr. L. Rupcic, O.F.M., a theologian from Medjugorje wrote a book *Istina o Medjugorju – The Truths About Medjugorje*, refuting Bishop Zanic's "arguments," and at the end of the book Fr. Rupcic concludes, "Medjugorje is no problem. The only problem is the Bishop with his theological ignorance, mental illness, great inclination towards authoritarianism, abuse of authority, open disobedience to the Holy See and uncontrolled hate toward Franciscans" (p. 123).

4. On October 5, 1990, Bishop Zanic wrote a letter to all Yugoslavian Bishops protesting Fr. Rupcic's attack and requested some action ("30 days" March 1991, p. 53).

5. On October 21, 1990, Bishop Franjo Komarica, President of the Commission of Inquiry, came to Medjugorje. In his homily he declared that he came in the name of the Bishops' conference including Msgr. Zanic. He also announced that the other Yugoslav Bishops will follow his example.

6. During the next month (November 1990) two more Bishops visited Medjugorje, that is, Msgr. Marin Srakic, Auxiliary Bishop of Djakovo and Msgr. Janos Penzes of Subotica.

7. On November 27-28, 1990, an extraordinary session of Yugoslav Bishops took place. No final communique was issued, but a confidential statement was forwarded to Rome.

8. On December 29, 1990, Radio Vatican announced

that there will not be any public statement about Medjugorje events.

9. Italian news agency ASCA, on January 2, 1991, published the Bishops' confidential statement, which obviously was leaked by a participant at the Bishops' extraordinary session.

10. On February 7, 1991, Bishop Zanic was called to Rome to see Pope John Paul II. The meeting lasted only 15 minutes.

11. On April 10, 1991, there was held an ordinary session of Yugoslav Bishops in Zadar, Croatia. At this meeting the Bishops had somewhat modified their statement of November 27-28, 1990, and the document was published in the *Glas Koncila* (The Voice of Council, May 5, 1991).

Comments and clarifications

a. In view of the fact that, following the session of November 27-28, 1990, the Bishops did not issue any communique for public, we assume that it was held under unusual circumstances and they produced an ambiguous statement that did not satisfy anybody.

It looks that the aforementioned Bishop Zanic's letter of October 5, 1990, to the other Bishops, in which he complained about Fr. Rucic's book (*Truth about Medjugorje*) and then, the visit of Bishop Komarica that was followed by two additional Bishops, might have been a factor that prompted the extra-ordinary session. The Bishops probably tried to placate their colleague, Bishop Zanic.

A Croatian priest close to some Yugoslav Bishops informed this writer that one Bishop, after learning that the document was leaked to the press, told him "Zanic made a fool of all of us."

b. After it became clear that Rome would not publicize

the confidential document (Radio Vatican December 29, 1990), somebody took action to leak it to the press.

c. According to the Counter Reformation, a periodical of the French ultra conservative Catholics, this person was Msgr. Zanic. To quote this periodical, "knowing that the conclusive document will never be published, Msgr. Zanic decided to reveal its content by publishing it under the title of "The Bishops declared that the Medjugorje is not supernatural" (Catholic Counter Reformation, January 1991, No. 270, p. 10. See "10 ans d'apparitions," p. 23).

d. Pope John Paul II must have been annoyed with Msgr. Zanic's indiscretion and during their brief meeting (February 7, 1991) Bishop Zanic was allegedly rebuked. Following this meeting, while answering a question from a National Catholic Reporter, he said, "I have to remain silent" (February 24, 1991, p. 9).

e. Bishop's second statement of April 10, 1991 was somewhat modified. The first paragraph remains basically the same, that is, they said that on the basis of the inquiries made up to this time, one cannot affirm that the apparitions or revelations are supernatural; however, the second part was somewhat improved, that is, there was no reference to "deviation" but they are affirming their purpose "to promote, in harmony with the local Bishop, a holy devotion towards the Virgin Mary, according to the doctrine of the Church." In addition, the Bishops explicitly said that "the Commission, through its members, will continue to follow and develop investigations about Medjugorje events, in its totality" (*Glas Koncila*, The Voice of Council, May 5, 1991).

From the above, it is obvious that the Bishops, after recognizing the fact that Medjugorje has become an international Marian Shrine, have undertaken the task to promote the devotions that had been taking place there for the past 10 years.

f. Neither of the two statements ever mentioned that the Commission has completed its investigation and that it has submitted its final conclusion. Therefore, M. Jones's opinion that "there is however, no implication that there is any other Church body investigating the apparitions at this time" is inaccurate and misleading. The Bishops not only have not dissolved their commission, but, as it was mentioned above, they are expecting its members to continue the investigation of the events "in its totality."

One of the most authoritative voices is that of Cardinal Kuharic of Zagreb, who presided over both sessions. He was interviewed by a reporter of "Start," a weekly of Zagreb. The interview took place in December 1990, after the special meeting of the bishops but before the statement was leaked to the press. Cardinal Kuharic, among others, stated, "Our commission has not yet completed its task and accordingly I cannot prejudice any result ... the Church is not in a hurry. Therefore, I cannot say if this is authentic or not" (Start, December 22, 1990).

After the document was leaked to the Italian Press Agency, a reporter from KNA (German Catholic News Agency) interviewed Cardinal Kuharic by telephone on January 8, 1991, and the Cardinal stated, "The judgment of Yugoslavian Bishops Conference is not final," and then he added, "At the present moment even it is not possible." According to the Cardinal, "the further judgment about the apparitions will be made by the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith to which the bishops' document was forwarded," and the Cardinal added that "the Bishops' commission for investigation of Medjugorje events will continue with its work."

From the above evidence it is clear that M. Jones's

fantasies in which he saw Medjugorje "going up in smoke" are merely his wish fulfillment, and they do not correspond to the well-established facts.

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FOOTNOTES

¹This part of the interview as quoted in *Hidden Face of Medjugorje* by Fr. Sivric is missing the last part of Jakov's answer, i.e., "They said." Therefore, we used the Croatian original since it fully explains the source of Jakov's information as it was quoted in *Vatru Vjere U Medjugorju Zapalila je Gospa* by Fr. V. Nuic.

²Vicka 30 months later told Fr. Bubalo that (on June 30) "it was not easy to tell them to their face that they tricked us." Vicka also explained that when 6:00 was approaching they arrived at the place called Cerno, which is about four miles from Apparition Hill, and the visionaries asked the social worker "to stop the car but they pretended not to hear us. But, when we said we would jump out of the car if they did not stop, they stopped."

³For instance *The Untold Story* has "incredulous Judases" which is literal translation of "Judas incredule" from the French edition of the Fr. Sivric book *La Face cachee de Medjugorje*. In the English edition there is a "unbelieving Judases." The third and most correct translation is found in the *Apparition of Our Lady at Medjugorje*, by Fr. S. Kraljevic or in Fr. Bubalo's book *The Thousand Encounters with Blessed Virgin Mary in Medjugorje* where we have "unfaithful Judases."