

MARIAN APPARITION

Vatican approves Medjugorje but the supernatural is overlooked

ECCLESIA

20_09_2024



**Nico
Spuntoni**



Yes to worship and pilgrimages, no to the supernatural. This is the response of the much anticipated note 'The Queen of Peace' drawn up by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on Medjugorje. The former Holy Office has granted the Papal approved nihil

obstat on the basis of the many positive fruits of the spiritual experience at Medjugorje but does not recognise the supernatural character of the phenomenon.

The criterion behind this new document is the same one Joseph Ratzinger outlined to Vittorio Messori in 'The Ratzinger Report' in 1985. At the time, the future Benedict XVI speaking about Medjugorje said: 'One of our criteria is to separate the aspect of the true or presumed "supernaturalness" of the apparition from that of its spiritual fruits. The pilgrimages of early Christianity went to places about which our critical spirit as moderns would sometimes be perplexed as to the 'scientific truth' of the tradition attached to them. This does not detract from the fact that those pilgrimages were fruitful, beneficial, important for the life of the Christian people. The problem is not so much that of modern hypercriticism (which then ends up, among other things, in a form of new credulity) but that of evaluating the vitality and orthodoxy of the religious life that develops around these places'.

Cardinal Prefect Víctor Manuel Fernández, in the press conference presenting the note, quoted Ratzinger and said that both the Dicastery and Francis made that criterion their own in drafting and approving one of the most eagerly awaited documents of the last 40 years. This is already news within the news: the prefect who arrived with a mandate to mark a discontinuity with the former Holy Office's past method, defined by Francis in a letter as 'sometimes even immoral', relied on his best-known predecessor to explain to the world the outcome of the most awaited dossier.

The note 'The Queen of Peace' extolled the many fruits of Medjugorje ('the abundant conversions, the frequent return to sacramental practice (Eucharist and reconciliation), the numerous vocations to priestly, religious and married life, the deepening of the life of faith, a more intense practice of prayer, many reconciliations between spouses and the renewal of marriage and family life'), separating them, however, from the chapter on visionaries. Or rather, as Fernández was keen to point out in the conference, the 'alleged seers'. The conclusions of the document, it is written in the Note, 'do not imply a judgement on the moral life of the alleged seers'. Not only: the former Holy Office felt the need to point out in the text that the positive fruits 'occur above all in the context of the pilgrimage to the places of the original events rather than during the meetings with the "seers" to attend the alleged apparitions'. These, according to the Note, 'are no longer to be perceived as central mediators of the "Medjugorje phenomenon", in the midst of which the Holy Spirit works so many beautiful and positive things'.

In light of this, in granting the nihil obstat to the cult, the Holy See invited the

people who go to Medjugorje to be 'strongly oriented to accept that pilgrimages are not organised to meet with alleged visionaries, but to have an encounter with Mary, Queen of Peace'. A concept reiterated in the conference by the Cardinal Prefect who defined the relationship with the alleged visionaries as 'not advisable'.

In the conference, however, Fernández defended the Medjugorje experience and the orthodoxy of the messages of the Queen of Peace. For the Cardinal Prefect, 'the alleged messages are not to be read like a magisterial text or a catechism, but one must grasp the core behind the imprecision of the words'. Citing the example of saints such as John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena and Thérèse of Lisieux, Fernández recalled that even their texts are sometimes theologically imperfect and in the past have also earned them various accusations, including, for Thérèse, of Lutheranism. The alleged messages of the Queen of Peace are similarly characterised by an accessible language behind which hides a 'very Catholic conviction'.

The Note itself established a 'positive evaluation of the majority of the Medjugorje messages as edifying texts does not imply declaring that they have a direct supernatural origin', while admitting that 'some few messages deviate from such positive and edifying contents and even seem to contradict them'. For this reason, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has analysed the collection of messages and has indicated the 'necessary clarifications' to be offered to the faithful 'to avoid this treasure of Medjugorje being compromised'. Fernández clarified that they cannot be accepted as private revelations because the certainty that they are Our Lady's messages is not recognised, but they are considered 'edifying texts capable of stimulating a beautiful spiritual experience'. The problematic nature of some of them, according to the Note, stems from the insistence on orders regarding dates and ordinary matters attributed to Our Lady and which instead 'are explained solely from the personal wishes of the alleged visionaries'.

In his lecture, Fernández emphasised this point, claiming that such examples would be the manifestation of the 'model of Our Lady postmistress that Pope Francis rejects'. In order not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, the Holy See has equipped itself by stipulating that the Apostolic Visitor of special character for the parish of Medjugorje 'will have to verify that, in every publication that collects messages, the (...) Note is included as an introduction'. In the light of the 'necessary clarifications' of the document, Monsignor Aldo Cavalli will have to discern future or past messages that have not yet been published. In discerning the central aspects of the messages, the Note also highlighted charity, which - it is reported - allows us to 'bring peace to the world, it

also implies love for those who are not Catholic’.

On this element, Fernández's statement at the press conference was noteworthy, touching on another topical issue: criticism of the Pope for his words on religions in Singapore. In some way the Cardinal Prefect ‘corrected’ Francis by explaining about the passage on the Note but probably thinking about the controversy that arose during his last trip: ‘this does not mean that all religions are equal before God, mind you: there is no syncretism or relativism, but men are, they are all beloved of God. it is not enough to belong to the Catholic Church to be saved’.