

ANALYSIS

Vatican Note on Medjugorje a desire for control amid contradictions

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Now the initial moment of satisfaction has passed among Marian devotees for the [Note 'The Queen of Peace'](#) that grants the *nihil obstat* to the 'spiritual experience' of Medjugorje, reviewing the [presentation](#) of the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine

of the Faith, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez at the press conference, and the passages of the Note, several contradictions and even some perplexities emerge.

In fact, rather than satisfaction, it is more accurate to speak of a sigh of relief because one might have feared less positive judgements on the phenomenon as a whole and therefore a lower degree of approval according to the new '[Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena](#)', issued on 17 May last.

At this point, however, one can legitimately ask what was the point of such an articulate Note, complete with a lengthy press conference to present it, a privilege normally reserved for really important matters, given that from a practical point of view practically nothing changes for the pilgrims who go to Medjugorje. Why such a hurry, given that the Church has never pronounced itself on ongoing supernatural phenomena and therefore no one could reproach it for not saying a definitive word on Medjugorje? It wouldn't have mattered if the practise of prudence and observation of the phenomenon had continued.

In fact, pilgrimages organised by parishes and dioceses had already been granted in 2019 by Pope Francis and there were never any prohibitions placed on the messages. Basically, the only novelties in this Note are the invitation not to meet the 'alleged' seers and the announced control over the messages from now on, which will therefore require the endorsement of the Apostolic Visitor Monsignor Aldo Cavalli from time to time.

It is precisely this last point that has caused concern among several of the faithful: will censorship or correction be triggered on unwelcome messages? Indeed, this would be an embarrassing eventuality, especially for the Holy See. It is easier to think - and here could lie the meaning of the Note - that it will be a sort of 'vigilant wait', given that there are several observers of Medjugorje who believe that the time is near for the unveiling of the famous secrets, ten events that should unequivocally demonstrate the truthfulness of the apparitions.

This is a delicate matter given that the Pope himself - as Cardinal Fernandez reported in the press conference - does not want to make any pronouncement on the supernaturalness and considers the affair definitively closed. This too is a strange attitude: to exclude even the category of possibility in the face of an ongoing phenomenon, which moreover promises sensational developments, leaves one perplexed to say the least.

From this point of view it is significant that in the long and detailed Note there is no reference to the matter of secrets, a subject that when speaking of the messages is difficult to avoid. And in fact, Cardinal Fernandez right at the close of the press conference, pretending to have forgotten the subject and showing with an eloquent facial expression that gives them no credit, included the secrets among the future messages that will have to be filtered by the Apostolic Visitor's scrutiny.

But the issue that is certainly most perplexing is the refusal to consider the possible supernaturalness of the phenomenon. The problem actually arises with the new Norms of 17 May, which the *Daily Compass* has already analysed ([here](#) and [here](#)) and which provide nothing more than *nihil obstat* unless the Pope himself wants to intervene to establish the supernaturalness of an event. But going into a detailed analysis of Medjugorje this Vatican approach demonstrates all its contradictions.

For example, at a press conference Cardinal Fernandez dwelt at length on the results of the International Commission created by Benedict XVI and chaired by Cardinal Camillo Ruini. He emphasised how these results were greatly appreciated by Pope Francis, who practically made them his own. Fernandez also wanted to quote the conclusion of the report, which divides the Medjugorje phenomenon into two phases: the first seven apparitions, between 24 June and 3 July 1981, and everything that happened afterwards. With regard to the first seven apparitions, the Ruini Commission established - and Fernandez stressed this - that 'the devotion that arose in Medjugorje has a supernatural origin, it is authentic'.

So the question arises: how is it possible to adopt a report that unequivocally establishes that Our Lady appeared in Medjugorje and at the same time claim that it is impossible to establish its supernaturalness? The contradiction is obvious.

Just as incomprehensible is the claim to separate the fruit from the tree on principle, recognising the positivity and goodness of the former but deliberately ignoring their origin. Cardinal Fernandez relied on a thought expressed by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his famous book-interview with Vittorio Messori '*Report on the Faith*'. One of Messori's questions was precisely about Medjugorje and Ratzinger actually states that, 'in addition to patience and prudence' a third criterion for judging alleged apparitions - not only Medjugorje - is 'to separate the aspect of the apparition's true or presumed "supernaturalness" from that of its spiritual fruits'.

But what Fernandez asserts as an absolute and definitive criterion, it is clear

from the context of the interview that for Ratzinger it concerns the investigation of new phenomena still under investigation, for which a conclusive judgement is not yet possible. But spiritual fruits can be decisive in judging the veracity of an apparition, as has happened so many times. Let us also remember that the Ratzinger-Messori conversation took place in August 1984, three years after the apparitions began: it is quite different to speak about it today 40 years later.

Furthermore, claiming the impossibility of pronouncing on the supernaturalness of an event ('it would take a magic wand', Fernandez said twice, quoting Pope Francis) means separating faith from reason, reducing it to sentiment or a form of auto-suggestion. Yet Jesus is very clear: 'Do you pick grapes from thorns, or figs from brambles? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot make bad fruit, nor a bad tree make good fruit. (...) Ye shall therefore know them by their fruits' (Matthew 7:16-20).

Prudence in the face of events of this kind is therefore more than justified, but renouncing on principle to establish their supernaturalness suggests that there is a certain basic incredulity of the possibility of God intervening in this way; and that the *nihil obstat* is then a measure more 'political' than evangelical.