

The Complexity of Establishing a Sacred Place and its Symbolic Meanings: the Religious Field of Medjugorje

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Abstract

In the past, the understanding that a sacred place attracts visitors solely by virtue of its embedded sacredness and its related story of miracle has neglected the role played by religious authorities in the construction of the sacred place. This article focuses on Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia-Herzegovina), the most popular 'active' apparitional site in the world. Since the alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the 1980s, this site has attracted millions of curious and faithful followers. However, Medjugorje has not as yet been recognized as a sacred place by the Vatican. The devotional movement in Medjugorje has been described in terms of rivalry between the religious elites. Adopting Bourdieu's concept of 'religious field', this article examines the relations and stances of the religious elites and the role of lay actors in establishing this sacred place and its symbolic meanings.

Keywords: sacred place, pilgrimage, religious field, symbolic meanings, Medjugorje

要旨

聖地に備わった聖性や奇跡のみが人々をひきつけているという従来の考え方によって、聖地の構築における宗教的権威の役割はあまり注目されてこなかった。この問題を克服するため、本論では聖母マリアの出現で世界的に知られているボスニア＝ヘルツェゴヴィナのメジュゴリエを対象とし、聖地の構築過程について考察をおこなう。1980年代初頭の聖母出現以降、メジュゴリエは何百万人もの信心深い、または好奇心からの巡礼者をひき寄せてきた。しかしながら、このように多くの巡礼者が訪れるものの、メジュゴリエはヴァチカンによって公式な聖地と認められていない。当地における宗教的行為は、宗教的エリート間の敵対的關係という点から言及されてきた。本論では、ブルデューの「宗教的フィールド」のモデルをもとに、聖地の構築とその象徴的意味における、宗教的エリートたちの関係と姿勢、さらに世俗的指導者、一般の信者などの役割について検討する。

キーワード：聖地、巡礼、宗教的フィールド、象徴的意味、メジュゴリエ

Introduction: the irony of Medjugorje

According to Bax (1995: 24-26), the alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary¹ in Medjugorje have continued for such a long time due to the discord existing between the religious elites in the area. In the case of other Marian shrines, the apparitions and the visionaries were assimilated by their local diocese and the Marian devotion brought in line with Catholic doctrine.

While discord between the religious elites prevents the sacred place in Medjugorje from receiving official recognition from the Church, the informality and un-institutionalism seem to be the main advantages that attract modern pilgrims. The rise of secular values within modern society has resulted in a general detachment away from existing religious traditions (Reader 2007; Woodhead 2005). Modern pilgrims are often on a personal search for the meaning of life; they come to Medjugorje seeking the sacred outside of religious institutions. In Medjugorje, a noticeable number of pilgrims maintain their individual experience of the sacred place through direct contact with the visionaries, neglecting traditional religious authorities and their interpretation of the sacred. These vast numbers of pilgrims gathering in Medjugorje are said to be the spiritual fruits, or proof, of sacred intervention in Medjugorje. However, the absence of a strong religious monopoly (i.e. the local Catholic diocese) allows for numerous deviational movements which present serious prejudice to Medjugorje's image as a Catholic sacred place and makes its recognition by the Church government, the Vatican, difficult.

The next two sections of this article will briefly outline the politico-religious situation of former Yugoslavia and place the apparition phenomena in Medjugorje in a wider socio-historical context. The section following will discuss the dynamic process of establishing a sacred place in Medjugorje and will attempt to consider it within the conceptual framework of the 'religious field'.

2. Bosnia-Herzegovina on the religious map of former Yugoslavia

A state on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe, Yugoslavia existed from 1918 to 1991. Yugoslavia emerged after WWI when the South Slav region (Yugoslavia means South Slavia), which had until then been under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, became part of the kingdom of Serbia. After WWII, Yugoslavia became a federal republic, comprised of five nations in six republics, one of which was Bosnia and Herzegovina explicitly defined as a republic incorporating Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Yugoslavia

fell apart in 1991-1992, when four of the six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia) proclaimed their independence.

Religious tradition in the Balkans has been characterized by constant tension between the main religious communities, especially between the Roman Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Yugoslavia, as a multi-ethnic and multinational state, was especially sensitive to any attempt at identification between Church and nation. The idea of Yugoslavism was to unite Christians, while with regard to Muslims it was always believed that they would gradually return to their 'real national identity', Serb or Croat. However, the primacy of religious affiliation and tradition as a criterion for national identity made it impossible for Bosnians and other Muslims of Slavic origin and Serbo-Croatian language to define themselves as Serbs and Croats (Kerševan 1998: 797-800). Collective religious identities, which, in the past, were merged with ethnic and national identities, were repressed during communist domination. However, after the disintegration of the communist system, these religious identities were re-affirmed and used for nationalist political strategies (Vrcan 2001: 39). In former Yugoslavia, during the late 1980s, the leaders and ideologists of all religious communities supported not only anticommunist and democratic movements but also nationalistic tendencies among their respective peoples. After the otherwise peaceful abolishment of the communist system in 1990, the Church was free to resume its activities, its influence grew and concern regarding the special endangerment and suffering of particular peoples with regard to their true religion was resuscitated. The war in Croatia and Bosnia that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia was a war for power and territory but with heavy religious overtones (Kerševan 1998: 797-800).

3. The apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje

On the 24th of June 1981, on the hill known as Podbrdo, six children from a nearby village reported that they had seen the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary, the Lady, *Gospa*, of Medjugorje, described herself as the Queen of Peace, bringing the people a message of peace, love, prayer and conversion. Since then, the Virgin Mary has continued to appear regularly to three of the visionaries, and on the 25th of each month she conveys to them a special message that is made public to the faithful.



(<www.medjugorje.ws/en/pictures/26-years-anniversary-apparitions/>)

Fig.1: Medjugorje visionaries during celebration anniversary.

Events in Medjugorje first caught the attention of the local population subsequently spreading to the global population, attracting millions of people every year from all over the world (Šego (ed.) 2007: 8).

Medjugorje is one of many places around the world associated with alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The most well-known apparitional cases include Guadalupe in Mexico (1531), La Salette (1846) and Lourdes in France (1858) and Fatima in Portugal (1917). However, not all apparitions receive official recognition from the Church. The Medjugorje apparitions are still not recognized by the Vatican. What makes Medjugorje particularly interesting is the fact that it represents an active apparitional site and that it attracts global patronage.

What then was the situation when the initial claims of apparitional phenomenon were made?

3.1. The socio-historical aspect of the geographical location

Medjugorje is a remote mountainous village in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As mentioned above, historically, Bosnia-Herzegovina lies on the dividing line between the great religious and cultural areas of Europe: between Western and Eastern Christianity and on the battlefield of Christian and Islamic civilizations. Medjugorje is situated in the Croat, dominantly Catholic, region of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Figure 2). It could be said that following the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, this sacred place emerged at the juncture of three different religions (Delakorda 2008).



Fig. 2: Medjugorje is situated in the Croat, dominantly Catholic, region of Bosnia-Herzegovina (based on Shiba 1992: 192).

3.2. The socio-historical aspect of the apparitions

The beginning of the apparitions, in the early 1980s, coincided with the beginning of the economic and political crisis in Yugoslavia following the death in 1980 of Tito, the country's communist leader since 1945. Due to the fact that Medjugorje was located within the ethnically and religiously mixed Bosnia-Herzegovina while being an integral part of the dominantly Catholic Croat Herzegovina region, the communist political leadership immediately perceived the apparitional process as being tainted by oppositional pro-nationalist, anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist agendas. While Medjugorje events were clearly associated with the mobilization of Catholic Croats, the 1980s were also a time of increased mobilization of some Orthodox Serbs and certain Muslim Bosnian cultural and academic circles (Skrbiš 2005: 447).

The Medjugorje apparitions within this particular socio-political situation came to symbolize opposition to Communist rule as well as Christian renewal in the face of a perceived Islamic threat.

The Franciscans, who are credited with the continued Catholic presence in Medjugorje, fought alongside the local people against the Islamic threat. Due to political instability caused by the Turkish invasion, the Franciscan clergy had owned and managed the parish of Medjugorje for centuries. However, by the end of the 1970s, the long-lasting discord within the Church regarding ownership of the parishes in Herzegovina threatened that the Franciscans would have to relinquish jurisdiction over their parish in favour of the Mostar diocese.² Since the apparitions occurred shortly after, the bishop of

Mostar strongly denied their occurrence (Bax 1990: 65). In other words, the events in Medjugorje were opposed by both the Communist authorities and the bishop of the Mostar diocese.

However, the intense popularity of the local Franciscans easily overrode the accusations of the Communist authorities and the skepticism of the Catholic hierarchy. The media campaign and accusations against both the local Franciscans and the visionaries rapidly provoked reaction from abroad in their support, and they were viewed as 'political martyrs'. The exceptional interest which the Medjugorje phenomenon generated worldwide eventually pushed authorities to relax their stance (Bax 1990: 65). In the eyes of the global public, the firm opposition of local people and Franciscans against the Communist and the Church authorities was perceived as an important sign of their true faith. The fruits shown by Medjugorje today, such as mass conversions and people in prayer, are said to prove the divine presence.

4. The complexity of establishing a sacred place and its symbolic meanings: the different actors in the religious field of Medjugorje

There seem to be plenty of possibilities for appropriating and interpreting the sacred in Medjugorje. Skrbiš noted at least two types of appeal to this apparitional phenomenon: firstly that of the universalistic Christian and secondly that of the particularistic/local such as nationalism (2005: 458).³ This supports the idea that "the sacred center to which the pilgrim is drawn may 'assume many different forms'" (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 9).

An institutionalized sacred place, such as Lourdes for example, has its own official story of miracle. A sacred place, not yet recognized by the Church, however, is in a difficult position to hold to one specific story. There is a constant struggle for a dominant definition of the sacred. In order to grasp plural interpretations of the religious in the dynamic religious arena of Medjugorje, this article applies the concept of religious field as expounded by Bourdieu (Schultheis 2008).

First, some of the major actors involved in the struggle for dominance of the sacred will be discussed along with their official stance. Certain actual activities, which are intended to legitimize their dominant role through the appropriation of symbolic meaning of the sacred place, will then be examined in more detail.

4.1. The Franciscan friars' parish in Medjugorje and the diocese in Mostar

Since the beginning of the apparitional phenomena, the most prominent role in the process of establishing the sacred place in Medjugorje has been played by the Franciscan friars of the local parish. Seen as 'political martyrs', they received global support from numerous colleagues of the global Franciscan network. Currently, dozens of Franciscan friars of different nationalities live and perform their religious duties there, holding masses and confessions for pilgrims in several languages. However, at an un-institutionalized sacred place such as Medjugorje, Franciscans have no official right to the dominant position. Being one of many religious parties in the area, the Franciscans are in an exceedingly difficult position to keep their authority as well as to manage the sacred place in line with their theological doctrine.

Moreover, deriving from the historical context of the struggle between the Franciscan friars and the local diocese explained above, it might be presumed that the bishop of the diocese in Mostar, as the competent ecclesiastical authority, by virtue of his doctrinal and pastoral duty, would closely investigate devotion in Medjugorje (more especially the Franciscans and the visionaries) with the aim of proving nothing supernatural has been happening. The bishop can intervene immediately to prevent abuse in the exercise of worship or devotion, to condemn erroneous doctrine or to avoid the dangers of false mysticism, etc. The official stance of the Diocese towards the apparitions in Medjugorje is based on the "Zadar Declaration" issued in 1991 at the second Bishops Conference of Yugoslavia:

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

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

However, the numerous gatherings of the faithful from different parts of the world, who come to Medjugorje, prompted both by motives of belief and various other motives, require the attention and pastoral care in the first place of the diocesan bishop and with him of the other bishops also, so that in Medjugorje

and in everything connected with it a healthy devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary may be promoted in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

For this purpose, the bishops will issue especially suitable liturgical-pastoral directives. Likewise, through their Commission they will continue to keep up with and investigate the entire event in Medjugorje.

(www.medjugorje.hr/en/medjugorje-phenomenon/guide/zadar-declaration/)

4.2. The visionaries and Mary's messages

Wherever the diocesan organization is firmly established, authorized devotional movements are soon co-opted, their forms of worship are brought into agreement with the teachings of the Church, and the visionaries are kept out of the public eye. This happens because the visionaries and their messages constitute a potential threat to the teachings of the Church and religious authorities. In Medjugorje, however, the Mostar diocese lacks the power to conceal the visionaries and their messages. Furthermore, it is in the interests of the Franciscans to maintain the presence of these visionaries.

Initially, one would presuppose that the Franciscans and the visionaries were on friendly terms; however, tensions also exist between the two. The Franciscan friars of Medjugorje have constantly had to prevent the visionaries from operating independently since they would thus become a threat to the priests' position as spiritual leaders of the parish and the devotional movement. Secondly, they have had to keep the visionaries from speaking or behaving in any way that could compromise their reputation or discredit the devotion itself.

Therefore, Mary's messages not only serve as a function for believers, they also appear to be a function of power relations in the religious arena of Medjugorje. For example, the messages brought to the visionaries are interpreted and corrected by the local church: "Dear children, I invite you to turn completely to God and his sacraments. I want more and more of you to always come here and be with me and my son in God's house." Whereas according to the visionaries the original message was: "Wherever you are, I am always there too. That is where the special grace will be found."

According to Catholic doctrine, a blessing can be received exclusively through the intermediary of priests of the Church. However, it can easily be imagined that the visionaries constitute powerful competition to the religious authority of the Franciscan

friars and the Church government since they are being worshiped and regarded as sacred by numerous pilgrims. Pilgrims visit the visionaries' houses to listen to them speak, to touch and pray with them. In Medjugorje, even cult groups are organized by the visionaries, with their relatives as the central figures. Gathering and praying at visionaries' houses or outside in the open, without the Church priests, has been perceived as a deviation from official Catholic doctrine. Therefore, the visionaries can be viewed as religious actors competing with the Church for the same 'customers'.

4.3. Lay helpers in the organization of the pilgrimage

Since "it cannot be established that one is dealing with supernatural apparitions and revelations", the Church must refrain from organizing pilgrimages to Medjugorje.⁴ Therefore, Medjugorje depends on the services of so-called lay helpers (Eade and Sallnow 1991), more than might be the case at other pilgrimage sites.

4.4. Spiritual leaders

Since official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, understood as an authentic spot of Marian apparition, should not be arranged neither at the parish nor at the Episcopal level, as this would be contrary to what bishops of ex-Yugoslavia decided in their "Zadar Declaration", pilgrimages to Medjugorje are arranged by so-called 'leaders'. The leaders also play prominent roles in Peace Centers and Medjugorje Prayer and Charity Groups. These leaders are said to be faithful Catholics strongly affiliated with the Church. The Franciscans of the parish in Medjugorje regularly provide the leaders with instructions in order to avoid errors of religious practice at the sacred place in Medjugorje. Special meetings are held annually where leaders are taught to prepare and lead people to God. It can be assumed that leaders play an important role in the formation of the Catholic-type pilgrimage to Medjugorje and thereby in the process of Catholicization of Medjugorje.⁵

4.5. Local tourist guides

Besides the spiritual leaders, there are also secular tourist guides working in Medjugorje. One of the conditions to becoming a tourist guide in Medjugorje is to be Herzegovian by nationality and Catholic by religious conviction. Their role is to mediate between the Church and the pilgrim/tourist. This and other precise regulations that every guide must obey are explained in the book *A Guide Book for a Guide (Vodič za vodiča, Dugandžić*

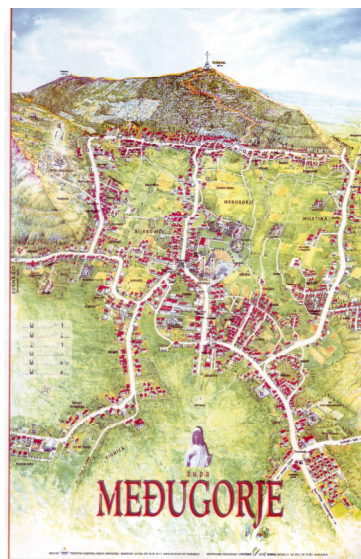
1999), published by the Information Center “Mir” Medjugorje. According to this book, guides must lead visitors from the material to the spiritual sphere of Medjugorje. They are expected to lead all visitors, pilgrims as well as curious tourists, to God.

Entrusted with their role as mediators between the Church and the laity, lay helpers participate in the formation of the pilgrimages. In the next section, some concrete examples of appropriation of symbolic meanings of the sacred place, i.e. the landscape of the pilgrimage, will be shown.

5. The Catholization of Medjugorje: the Virgin Mary does not suffice

5.1. The pilgrims and the recommended pilgrimage path

According to the distributions of Holy Communion registered by the shrine, every year more than one million people come to Medjugorje.⁶ They come from eighty-eight countries, mostly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italia, Poland, Germany, USA, Mexico, Philippines, Vietnam, etc. People come to Medjugorje for many reasons: curiosity, physical and spiritual healing, to find inner peace, conversion, reconciliation/reunion with God, and so on.⁷



(Medjugorje 2004 © 2007 Stef.hr)

**Fig. 3: Map of Medjugorje
with Maria's Apparition Hill, Cross Mountain and the Sv. Jakov Church.**

It could be said, that there are as many variations on the pilgrimage as there are pilgrims in Medjugorje. In the case of institutionalized Catholic pilgrimage sites, the pilgrimage and its center are controlled and regulated by the Catholic Church, whereas in the case of un-institutionalized pilgrimage sites, there is no official pilgrimage path or center of pilgrimage. However, although Medjugorje is an un-institutionalized pilgrimage site, there exists a 'recommended' pilgrimage path which is actively imposed on pilgrims. Upon arrival in Medjugorje, pilgrims and tourists come across the rules of behavior and the correct order of pilgrimage.

In March 2008, I, the author of this paper, participated in a bus pilgrimage from Slovenia to Medjugorje to gain deeper insight into the pilgrimage path. Out of fifty-one pilgrims, seven people (including myself) were participating in the pilgrimage to Medjugorje for the first time. The pilgrimage was organized by one of the spiritual leaders related to the Franciscan friars of Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia. I had heard about this specific pilgrimage from my grandmother. However, people in Slovenia usually learn about bus pilgrimages to Medjugorje from announcements on bulletin boards at their local church, through local priests or from the *Slovene Catholic Weekly*, etc. Reservations are made by telephone to the so-called leaders of the pilgrimage.

Our bus started at 19:00 from a small town, Tržič, in the northern part of Slovenia (Fig. 2). After picking up pilgrims at several stops, the 'spiritual preparation' began. The leader encouraged us to open our hearts with the Rosario Prayer and openly speaking about our motives for making the pilgrimage. Finally, we were promised we would receive the 'blessings'. In the morning, while we were approaching Medjugorje, morning prayers began. Upon arrival at Medjugorje a Slovenian representative of the Franciscan order offered us a greeting and noted that we should behave in the Catholic way as good pilgrims.

First, we climbed the Hill of Mary's initial apparition, Podbrdo. The leader led with the Rosario Prayer all the way up to the statue of the Virgin Mary at the place of her initial apparition (Fig. 4). Afterwards, praying the Way of the Cross, we climbed Cross Mountain, Križevac, to the top where the Cross is situated (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4: Statue of the Virgin Mary on Apparition Hill (Podbrdo).



Fig. 5: The Way of the Cross on Cross Mountain (Križevac).

On descending the mountain, we were given free time to pray, visit the conversion room or purchase amulets, books or souvenirs in the parish shop. However, the leaders strongly recommended that we attend the evening prayer program at 17:40 in the church. Our return bus to Slovenia departed at 23:00. We prayed shortly after our departure and then again at 06:00 the next morning. The pilgrims on the bus were encouraged to express their thoughts and experiences of Medjugorje, which were, as our leader pointed out, the spiritual fruits of our pilgrimage, the blessings from the Virgin Mary and God, as we had all become better individuals.

In Medjugorje, pilgrims are basically left to their own discretion. However, as I observed, many pilgrims followed the order of pilgrimage suggested by the Franciscans. The Franciscans have given a metaphorical meaning to the order of pilgrimage in Medjugorje: Apparition Hill symbolizes Bethlehem the birthplace of Jesus Christ, while Cross Mountain symbolizes Golgotha of the Passion. Franciscans recommend that pilgrims start their pilgrimage at Apparition Hill where they can become aware of the love of Christ, and then recognize their sins on Cross Mountain. Following this path, pilgrims would find the significance of salvation and prepare themselves for Holy Mass in the church. Finally, pilgrims would be blessed by God through mass and confession.

In summary, the behavior of pilgrims in Medjugorje is considered to be in accordance with Catholic interpretation and meaning.

Table 1: The prayer program

08:00	Holy Mass in Croatian Holy Mass in other languages Silent adoration in Adoration Chapel
14:00	Rosary on Apparition Hill/Way of the Cross on Cross Mountain
17:20	Evening prayer programme and confession
17:00	Joyful and Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary
18:00	Holy Mass
19:22	Blessing of objects, prayers for the health of soul and body, Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary

(Šego (ed.) 2011: 39)

The prayer program offered in Medjugorje focuses on three specific places for prayer: Apparition Hill, Cross Mountain and the Sv. Jakov Church.

5.2. Discussion

Inconsistent devotional practices and alternating emphasis on the visionaries' houses, Apparition Hill and Cross Mountain on one hand, and on the Church and the sacraments on the other, as representing different paths to salvation, reflect the rivalry and the delicate balance of power between the contestant actors. The Franciscan friars' position might be the most dominant one in Medjugorje, but it is far from being the only one. In the absence of a powerful dominant religious elite, there exist various obstacles that prevent Medjugorje from receiving official recognition from the Church. Under strict investigation by Church authorities, in fear of being condemned as heretics, the Franciscans strive to make Medjugorje a Catholic sacred place. They constantly endeavor to control the visionaries and their messages and to bring all visitors in line with Catholic doctrine. Through secular mediators, such as the Information Center "Mir" Medjugorje, the Franciscan friars indirectly utilize multilingual multimedia to promote a proper image of Medjugorje. This includes the webpage of the Information Center "Mir", the Radio Station "Mir", the magazine *Glasnik mira*, the *Press bulletin*, etc. Apparently, these media claim exclusive rights over information on proper behavior in Medjugorje. They strive for the monopoly of legitimate interpretation of the sacred

place by imposing the correct path to salvation through the recommended order of the pilgrimage, the prayer program and the schedule of penitence and masses held in the church. They also widely educate lay spiritual leaders and organizers of pilgrimages and prayer groups in order to spread the official Catholic view of Medjugorje. In order to “officially represent the position and attitudes of the shrine” and “to minimize the spreading of false information about the happenings at Medjugorje” the Information Center “Mir” Medjugorje also publishes the *Press bulletin* in several languages (Croatian, English, German, French, Italian, Polish and Spanish), available from their official website.

6. Conclusion

It has often been asserted that Medjugorje, as an unauthorized, un-institutionalized sacred place attracts mostly pilgrims who seek an individual spiritual experience that is outside of a pre-constituted (institutional) discourse of meaning (Pace 1989: 229-244). However, the results of this research show the sacred place they find is not free of religious institutionalization. In Medjugorje, we find at least three positions struggling for monopoly of the legitimate interpretation of Mary’s apparitions: the Franciscan friars; the local diocese; and the visionaries. By applying Bourdieu’s concept of religious field their relation becomes clearer and easier to analyze. This article has pointed out the way religious specialists strategically turn to the laity in order to give emphasis to their teachings and obtain approval. The result of their struggle, however, is a systematic, although unofficial, institutionalization of the pilgrimage site.

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- 1 The act of apparitions of the Virgin Mary is a phenomenon whereby the Virgin allegedly appears and communicates messages to selected individuals.
 - 2 According to Church hierarchy, the parish in Medjugorje officially belongs to the Mostar diocese.
 - 3 Skrbušić describes Medjugorje as two places in one. The first Medjugorje presents itself as a cosmopolitan place of active intercourse between the divine and the human. It is this cosmopolitan aspect that transformed Medjugorje into one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the world. At the same time, however, there is also “another Medjugorje that is exclusively Croatian, through its connection with the Croatian ethnic territory and Croatian visionaries, distinctly culturally enclosed, parochial, ethno-specific, and in the extreme, nationalist” (2007: 317).
 - 4 Some groups of pilgrims include priests, however, because pilgrims are accompanied by priests ‘in order to go to confession’, the Church can allow priests to attend these pilgrimages.
 - 5 For events organized specifically for leaders, such as the “19th International Meeting for Organizers of Pilgrimages, Leaders of Peace Centers and Medjugorje Prayer and Charity Groups”, see the official website of Medjugorje: www.medjugorje.hr.
 - 6 In the year 2011, there were 2,027,900.00 Holy Communion given in the church, and a total of 41,094.00 priests who concelebrated at Holy Mass. (<www.medjugorje.hr/en/news/statistics-for-december%2c-2011_.3844.html>).
 - 7 This information was obtained in an interview with Mr. Krešimir Šego, editor of the magazine Glasnik mira, in Medjugorje in June 2007.

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