

## THE APPARITION AT MEDJUGORJE: A TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE – PART I

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*ABSTRACT:* This is the first part of a two-part article that provides in-depth background information and a critical examination of a phenomenon that has importance not only to transpersonal psychology but also to psychology and science more generally—the protracted Marian apparition at Medjugorje. The article presents four perspectives that may advance understanding of what the apparition and related phenomena might mean and the implications that it has for our respective disciplines and areas of interest. Critical realism and parapsychology are addressed in Part I, while aspect psychology and empowered Imagination are treated in Part II, where future work suggested by the proposed models is also presented. The goals of this two-part article are to increase awareness of the Medjugorje apparition and identify alternative ways of interpreting the phenomenon.

The apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Madonna or *Gospa*, as the local Croatian Catholics call her) that is associated with the small Catholic parish of St. James in the remote mountain village of Medjugorje (pronounced *meh'-joo-gor-yeh*) in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina of the former Yugoslavia, began on June 25, 1981 and continues to this day. To afford a fuller account and analysis of the phenomenon the article is divided into two parts. Part I presents an outer history of the events tied to the apparition. Background information is provided about the percipients, the apparitional experience, the Messages and ten “Secrets,” its sociological impact and scientific studies, and the Roman Catholic Church’s official position regarding the phenomenon. Four key questions that frame the present inquiry are identified, judgments about the apparition’s validity are discussed, and the ambiguity of the situation is acknowledged. The perspective of critical realism is then presented that addresses the complex psychological and philosophical issues posed by the apparition. Critical realism is defined and distinguished from other interpretations, inner and outer order of events are differentiated, and the problem of literalizing symbolic experience is discussed. The issue of the extent to which different forms of religious experience are intrinsic or unnecessary to basic transcendent reality is examined. An argument is made for moving beyond the perennialism/constructivism debate to a framework of participatory spiritualism and noetic pluralism. The implications of this move for understanding the nature of basic reality are described. Finally, a parapsychological perspective is presented that draws upon studies of other types of apparitions to place the Medjugorje phenomenon in the context of scientific literature. The Marian apparition’s classification and resemblance to secular apparitions of the living and the dead, its evidential aspects and collectively-perceived nature, and quasi-physical features are examined. Two parapsychological theories (psi-mediated

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and discarnate spirit) and four psychological hypotheses (pure hallucination, dissociation, inner voice, and normal creativity) are presented as alternative interpretations/explanations of the apparition. Part 2 examines the Medjugorje apparition from the perspectives of aspect psychology and empowered imagination and presents future work suggested by the proposed models.

### RELEVANCE TO TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

What is the importance of the Medjugorje apparition to transpersonal psychology, and to psychology and science more generally? This type of phenomenon (if its characteristics can be verifiably established) has crucial significance in its bearing on some of the most fundamental problems of philosophy, psychology, religion, and science. It has important implications for extending and broadening understanding of human personality action, the multidimensional nature of reality, and the creativity of consciousness. It also has important bearing on the problem of the survival of personality beyond bodily death. Apparitions of the Medjugorje-type can be considered transpersonal events in which “the sense of identity or self extends beyond the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, and cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 3). The apparition arguably presents knowledge to the six percipients from an inner order of events beyond the boundaries of their known selves that springs into physical existence to actualize new dimensions of experience and fulfillment in their lives and the lives of others. But is this all that is happening? How does the universe participate in the creation of such experiences of the sacred? What role does Being play in the occurrence of such a transpersonal event?

An abundant literature about the apparition exists in print materials published primarily in French, Italian, and Croatian languages (Medjugorje Books and Publications, 2005). If the growing number of Internet references on Medjugorje is any indication (according to Google at the time of writing, it approaches 2.25 million results), there is little sign that public interest in the apparition is diminishing (Apolito & Shugaar, 2005). The disinterested observer will find that websites devoted to the phenomenon display an almost evangelical fervor in support of the genuineness of the apparition (e.g., [www.medjugorje.net/](http://www.medjugorje.net/); <http://www.medjugorjeusa.org/>; <http://www.childrenofmedjugorje.com>; <http://www.medjugorje.org>). Public declarations of the Roman Catholic Church are much more reserved and state that it is impossible to prove or disprove that the BVM has ever appeared to anyone in Medjugorje. The controversial issue for scholars interested in religious issues is whether the apparition at Medjugorje is valid and discloses the existence of an actual transcendent reality. If so, then how? If not, then what else might be happening?

### OUTER HISTORY OF THE CASE

#### The Percipients

On June 25, 1981 six Croatian adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 – Vicka Ivankovic (age 17), Mirjana Dragicevic (age 16), Marija Pavlovic

(age 16), Ivan Dragicevic (age 16), Ivanka Ivankovic (age 15), and Jakov Colo (age 10) – first reported seeing an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). The phenomenon is referred to as an “apparition” instead of a “vision” because in a vision there is nothing necessarily external to the percipient being perceived through the physical senses, whereas in an apparition there is something external to which the percipient responds, which is what the six adolescents (now adults) claimed to experience. During the first year, the purported apparition appeared and spoke to the six percipients (or “Seers” as they are called in the popular literature) every day at 6:40 p.m. when they assembled at a hill called Podbrdo on Mount Crnica in Medjugorje. Today, the rigidity of that schedule has given way to a more spontaneous framework. The Marian apparition is no longer tied to their collective assembly or a particular location, but to the individual percipients themselves (all of whom are currently married) who can experience the apparition separately or alone, regardless of their location.

### **The Apparitional Experience**

According to percipients’ self-reports, the apparition possesses a number of characteristic features. The apparitional figure – who identifies itself as “the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Peace” and whom the percipients see as a woman—typically appears following a period of fervent praying, usually the Rosary. The BVM is preceded by a bright light and seen always standing on a small whitish cloud, floating about two feet above the ground, with a crown of twelve gold stars circling her head. Sometimes the apparitional figure appears with tears in her eyes or comes with the infant Jesus in her hands and arms. The apparitional figure greets the percipients, prays the Our Father and Glory Be with them, and then conveys a “Message” that is intended for public distribution or a private communication intended only for the percipients themselves. Percipients report that they perceive the BVM in the same manner that they see everyday objects and people – as solid, tangible, and real – but do not feel their bodies during the time they converse with the BVM. The BVM looks straight at them or at something else to which she is directing their attention and speaks to them in their native Croatian language, while remaining invisible and inaudible to bystanders. Bystanders report that the percipients’ voices stop although their mouth, jaw, and throat muscles continue to move. The apparition then disappears, as the percipients simultaneously raise their eyes and head and vocalize the word “Ode” (“Gone”). The Marian Message is subsequently written down, translated and made public. The entire apparitional experience may last from a few minutes to more than an hour.

### **The Messages**

Over 30,000 Marian Messages have been recorded to date, and typically begin with the words “Dear Children” and end with the sentence “Thank you for your response to my call.” By way of illustration, the Message of June 19, 1986 consisted of the following eight sentences of text:

Dear children! In these present days Our Lord has permitted me to intercede for extra graces for you. For this reason I again wish to invite you to pray. Pray without ceasing. In this way I can give you the joy that Our Lord gives me. With these graces, dear children, I wish that your suffering may be transformed into joy. I am your mother and I want to help you. Thank you for your response to my call. (quoted in Laurentin, 1987, p. 68)

The following Message was given on June 25, 2011, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions:

Dear children! Give thanks with me to the Most High for my presence with you. My heart is joyful watching the love and joy in the living of my messages. Many of you have responded, but I wait for, and seek, all the hearts that have fallen asleep to awaken from the sleep of unbelief. Little children, draw even closer to my Immaculate Heart so that I can lead all of you toward eternity. Thank you for having responded to my call. (<http://www.medjugorje.com>)

Messages consistently urge people to pray daily, especially the Rosary; fast weekly, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays; read the Bible every day; confess one's sins every month; and receive the Eucharist. The BVM is reported to have dictated her biography to Vicka Ivankovic that will one day be revealed. The previous schedule of daily apparitions and Marian Messages has given way to a more flexible framework with special monthly Messages now given on the 2nd of every month for "nonbelievers" and the 25th of each month for "believers."

### **The Ten "Secrets"**

In addition to the Marian Messages, ten "Secrets" have been communicated intended for special groups of people (e.g., the sick, the young, priests, souls in purgatory, unbelievers, families). The frequency of each percipient's apparitional experience varies with the number of Secrets that the individual percipient has received. The BVM appears more frequently to percipients who have received nine Secrets (i.e., Vicka Ivankovic, Marija Pavlovic, and Ivan Dragicevic) and once a year to percipients who have received all ten Secrets – on Christmas Day to Jakov Colo (Dec. 25), on the anniversary of the apparitions to Ivanka Ivankovic (June 25), and on the birthday of Mirjana Dragicevic (March 18). Only one of the ten Secrets has been revealed to the general public – the miraculous appearance of a great shrine in Medjugorje in honor of the BVM as a "great sign" to atheists that the apparitions are real. This prophecy has not yet materialized, although its occurrence has been greatly anticipated (Franken, 1999). When all ten Secrets have been disclosed to all six percipients, the apparition will reportedly cease. Three "warnings" will then occur intended to encourage humanity to turn away from a life of sin and convert to the teachings of Jesus (although not necessarily convert to the Roman Catholic Church).

## **Sociological Impact**

A virtual cottage industry has grown up around the events tied to Medjugorje. Pilgrim guides and tourist agencies, merchandise and souvenirs, websites and newsletters, brochures and prayer books, and even a Hollywood movie (*Gospa* in 1995 starring Martin Sheen and Morgan Fairchild) publicly promote the apparition. The apparition has attracted an estimated 22 million pilgrims who arguably seek to confirm their faith (Davies, 2004). It is this “Fruit” of Medjugorje – the converted lives, the increase in piety and devotions, and the recovery of lost faith – that defenders of the apparition point to as the ultimate sign of its authenticity (Laurentin, 1987, chap. 8).

## **Scientific Studies**

The regularity of the Medjugorje apparition has provided the opportunity for a number of psychiatric and medical studies to be conducted into the mental and physical condition of the six percipients. Ocular, auditory, respiratory, cardiac, electrodermal and cortical measurements and behavioral observations have been obtained before, during, and after the apparition (Gramaglia, 1987; Laurentin, 1987, chap. 5; Resch & Gagliardi, 2000). Results indicate that percipients enter into an “ecstatic” state of consciousness during the apparitional event (Laski, 1961) characterized by synchronous behaviors (e.g., simultaneous kneeling, raising of eyes and head, verbal responses) and complete absorption of attention upon a stimulus that is apparently objectively perceived. The perceptual stimulus is neurologically processed along normally functioning sensory pathways to an alpha-rhythm entrained brain, accompanied by variable sympathetic nervous system hyperactivity, heightened anesthesia, and the absence of normal blinking and startle reflexes (Laurentin & Joyeux, 1987). Percipients report that the apparitional figure possesses quasi-physical properties, although the interposition of an opaque screen between the percipients and the apparition does not occlude the apparitional figure from percipients’ view (Frigerio, Bianci, & Matalia, 1986). Psychiatric testing indicates the percipients are neither delusional, hysteric nor epileptic, but are quite normal individuals dealing as best they can with the stresses that celebrity status has brought into their lives (Bartulica, 1991). Pandarakalam (2001) found “no evidence to suggest the probability of autohypnosis” (p. 229) and experiments attempting to induce “hypnotic” ecstasy in the percipients have proven inconclusive (De Vincentiis, 1999).

## **The Roman Catholic Church’s Position**

What is the Roman Catholic Church’s position regarding the Medjugorje apparition? The official conclusion of Church authorities after a 10-year investigation conducted by three ecclesiastical commissions between 1981 and 1991 was expressed by bishops of the former Yugoslavia in the Zadar Declaration of April 10, 1991: “On the basis of the investigations so far, it cannot be affirmed [*non constat de supernaturalitate*] that one is dealing with

supernatural apparitions and revelations” (Zadar Declaration, 1991, para. 2). In 1991, a five-year war broke out between the Republics of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and all official ecclesial investigations came to a halt. On March 17, 2010 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the official voice of the Vatican in Rome, announced the formation of the International Investigative Commission on Medjugorje to again look into the reported apparition of the BVM (Zent, 2010).

Of 386 Marian apparitions reported to occur during the 20th century that are listed on the Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute website (<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/>) at least 13 have been affirmed by Church authorities as having a “supernatural” character that is not attributable to fraud, demonic possession, psychopathology, or naturalistic causes. Like Medjugorje, several approved Marian apparitions have been of protracted duration (Varghese, 2000). Medjugorje has not followed the same pattern of approved Marian apparitions, however, and falls into the category of apparitions to which Church authorities neither approve nor disapprove (Foley, 2002). Some church authorities began to question the genuineness of the apparition when the parish priest (Fr. Jozo Zovko) and local bishop (Msgr. Pavao Zanic) came to believe that the messages purportedly being communicated by the BVM contained contradictions and falsehoods, and reflected a certain human manipulation and interference in Church affairs deemed inappropriate for an authentic Marian apparition, particularly the BVM taking sides on questions of parish jurisdiction (Davies, 2004; Jones, 1994; Sivric, 1989). This latter issue has been called the “Herzegovina Question” and refers to the matter of local Franciscans refusing to turn over religious parishes to diocesan clergy, establishing parishes outside the diocesan structure, erecting ecclesial buildings and forming religious communities without permission, and performing unauthorized marriages and Confirmations. Proponents of the apparition claim that the Herzegovina Question is a separate issue. Bishops see them as inextricably linked with the Blessed Virgin Mary being used to justify continued Franciscan disobedience to diocesan Church authority.

In 1996, in response to a request from the Bishop of Langres in France (Msgr. Leon Taverdet) for a clarification of the Church’s position regarding pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the Secretary Archbishop of the CDF (Msgr. Tarcisio Bertone) announced that “official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, understood as a place of authentic Marian apparitions, are not permitted to be organized either on the parish or on the diocesan level, because that would be in contradiction to what the Bishops of former Yugoslavia affirmed in their forementioned [Zadar] Declaration” (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, March 23, 1996, Prot. No. 154/81-01985). Although official pilgrimages are not to be organized, private pilgrimages to Medjugorje have been deemed acceptable. While not denying the deepening of spiritual life that has occurred world-wide, the CDF does not agree that the Marian apparition at Medjugorje is necessarily its cause. Needless to say, there has developed a palpable tension between believers in the apparition who judge it to be authentic and Church authorities who remain uncertain. The Vatican’s current position on Medjugorje is that, as an ongoing phenomenon, the Marian

apparition is still under investigation and “a definitive judgment can be given only if the phenomenon has ended” and all the evidence is available (Varghese, 2000, p. 228). The apparition was initially predicted to occur for only a few days, but has continued now for more than 30 years, and it theoretically could go on for some time. The BVM has promised three of the percipients (Jakov, Ivanka, and Mirjana) apparitions for life and a second generation of percipients has emerged who hear but do not see the Blessed Virgin Mary – Jelena Vasilj and Marijana Vasilj who both live in Medjugorje.

### FRAMING QUESTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The Marian apparition at Medjugorje raises a number of questions that are important not only to transpersonal psychology, but also to psychology and science more generally.

- Is something supernormal and exceptional happening at Medjugorje or is it a psychological con and “one of the most subversive hoaxes in the history of the Catholic Church” (S. Caldwell, quoted in Davies, 2004, p. 175)?
- Is the Marian apparition and its Messages solely the product of the percipients’ subconscious mind, is an “outside” transcendent source actually producing them, or is some combination of these two possibilities an accurate representation of the facts? That is, might the apparition and its Messages originate from an outside source but enter the awareness of the six percipients from a “within” that is “conterminous and continuous” – to use William James’ (1902/1936, p. 499) terminology—with what is “without”? In such a case, subconscious processes would filter and transmit the figure represented by the apparition rather than be the originating source that creates and produces it.
- Does the Medjugorje apparition disclose the existence of an objective transcendent reality?
- Can a science of psychology be expected to investigate or interpret with any success this or other related experiences and phenomena, or is such a project beyond the reach of psychology’s existing theories and concepts, linguistic frameworks and philosophic assumptions, subject matter and methods of inquiry?

Psychological science cannot begin to answer these questions or understand the nature of the Marian apparition at Medjugorje unless it first enlarges its understanding of human personality action, acknowledges the multidimensional nature of reality, and recognizes the true creativity of consciousness.

### Acknowledging the Ambiguity of the Situation

In order to formulate preliminary answers to these questions, the apparition at Medjugorje is examined from four perspectives – critical realism, parapsy-

chology, aspect psychology, and empowered Imagination. The value of examining alternative models is that it facilitates exploration of other potentially effective ways of thinking about the phenomenon under investigation. No one theory addresses all aspects of the phenomenon and alternative ways of interpreting/explaining the data are always possible. As Slife & Williams (1995) put it: “‘Empirical’ ‘facts’ are never purely factual nor purely empirical. They are always interpreted in the light of what the observer is looking for and how the observer frames what he or she sees” (p. 222).

As children of one’s culture and the modern scientific age, individuals search for certainties. Many individuals are taught from childhood to consider so-called objective, sensory-based facts as the only criteria of reality and that what is subjective or imaginary is not real. They soon refuse to admit into existence as real, legitimate, or valid anything that they cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch through the physical senses. They do not trust anything unfamiliar which does not occur in the usual manner on the physical level – such as the apparition at Medjugorje – unless they have personal experience of it, are consciously aware of what is happening, how it occurs, and why. They want to know where the apparition is coming from, if it is part of the percipients’ subconscious and they want their answers given to them in a manner that the logic of their intellect and comprehending ego can understand.

The nature of the apparition at Medjugorje is so uncertain to most people because they try to examine it from the perspective of normal waking consciousness and the interpretive filters of conventional religious concepts and rational true-or-false terms. They naturally interpret the apparition’s manifestation and any symbolic meaning that it may have in light of their beliefs of good and evil, the possible and the impossible, what is normal and abnormal, real and unreal. They seem to think that if they can name and label the apparition a “supernatural miracle” on the one hand, or a “subconscious fraud” or “delusional hallucination” on the other, then it will be more acceptable and real. Relying solely upon traditional religious concepts and rational true-or-false approaches, however, can make an adequate (*adequatio*) interpretation of such highly creative and important phenomena extremely difficult.

It is important to recognize, psychologically speaking, that when people pray fervently or enter an ecstatic state of consciousness, have peak experiences, ingest entheogens, commune with nature, engage in meditation, or even use the Ouija board, they are working through areas of the psyche (Grof, 2000; Hastings, 1991; Maslow, 1968; Roberts, 1970; T. Roberts, 2001). At some indescribable point, a certain state of dissociation may be achieved, and the psyche opens up into levels of being, experience, and understanding usually unavailable to ego-directed awareness. Because most people do not understand their own inner reality or have been taught to mistrust themselves, revelatory material must then erupt *as if* it came from an outside source if it is to be accepted or even perceived at all. It may personify itself in order to get its message across, dramatizing itself through the creativity of the percipient’s beliefs and personality. Often this presents the percipient with an irreconcilable

dilemma. He or she must prove that the outside source really exists as it is physically perceived or else lose faith in the actuality of the phenomenon and face the fact that one's perception and understanding is not infallible. However, it is possible and actually much more efficient to accept this fact and also acknowledge that there is more to reality than what the physical senses can show, and that much exists in the subconscious to which we will not admit.

### **Judging the Apparition's Validity**

The Medjugorje apparition is direct and convincing evidence of the reality of a spiritual world for the six percipients and the pilgrims who travel there. Transpersonal psychologists, however, can take neither a naïve realist stance toward the apparition that automatically sees proof for the existence of actual discarnate spirits, nor a non-realist position that skeptically rules out such a possibility *a priori*. Transpersonal psychology cannot afford the luxury of either uncritical naïveté or uninformed skepticism if it is determined to think more deeply about what validity and meaning such phenomena might have and open up into a “transpersonal vision to bring forth a transpersonal world” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 7). The word *validity* in the present Medjugorje context refers to a judgment about whether the apparition is in fact what it purports to be – the objective presence of an actual BVM entity from another dimension of being manifesting in four-dimensional space/time to the Seers of Medjugorje. It is a judgment to be based on evidence about the appropriateness of inferences drawn from the apparitional experience. The validity of the apparition is to be evaluated by (a) scrutinizing the action and content of the phenomenon, (b) relating the Medjugorje apparition to other apparitions and apparitional experiences, and (c) conducting a comprehensive analysis of how the Medjugorje apparition can be understood within theoretical frameworks constructed to interpret/explain apparitions and related experiences and phenomena.

Assuming that apparitions have in fact been occurring at Medjugorje over the past 30 years, there is no *prima facie* need to attribute them to the discarnate spirit of the BVM. If the apparition is valid, then it is not obviously more likely to be produced by Our Lady than by the six percipients. The question of the apparition's actual occurrence and its nature must be argued on its merits. The issue is made more difficult by the “non-evidential” character of the apparition; namely, (a) the apparitional figure does not provide sufficient empirically-verifiable data to prove its supernormal character, (b) percipients' contact is with a religious personage (BVM) who does not belong to physical reality, and (c) the apparition's quasi-physical features cannot be independently verified outside the group of the six percipients. In other words, the occurrence of the Marian apparition cannot be independently corroborated by persons other than the percipients themselves and veridical information of an extrasensory nature is not communicated. In the absence of veridical extrasensory information, objective confirmation of the apparition's identity, and independent corroboration of the apparitional event itself, how does one decide whether the apparition represents a genuine communication from a

discarnate Blessed Virgin Mary personality? It is through following the facts and remaining open to all avenues of fruitful speculation and intuitive possibilities that an understanding of the nature of the apparition at Medjugorje will most likely be achieved.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE MARIAN APPARITION AT MEDJUGORJE THE PERSPECTIVE OF CRITICAL REALISM

### What is Critical Realism?

One approach that may advance understanding of the nature of the Medjugorje apparition is critical realism. The principle of critical realism derives its inspiration from the writings of Immanuel Kant (1781/1990, 1788/1996). The *realism* element posits that which is basic reality exists independent of the human knower – there *is* “something” out there – but the form that “something” takes depends upon the sensory apparatus and cognitive processes the perceiver happens to have operative at the time. The noumenon (that which is in-itself) is never directly experienced or known, but is always mediated both by the percipient’s receptor mechanisms that detect and encode its energies (sensation) and conceptual schemas that organize and interpret that sensory input into a meaningful pattern (perception). St. Thomas Aquinas expressed the principle this way: “Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower” (quoted in Hick, 1999, p. 43). There are no “pure” channels of experience and understanding in those terms. Direct, unmediated, undistorted knowledge of the world is not possible using the physical senses or its extensions and all information will be colored by the personality who holds it and passes it on. The senses actualize stimuli of the physical world that otherwise exist only as potential experiences, and then the perceiver creatively transforms what the senses provide. The ever-actual integrity of the natural world cannot be denied, while the experiencing subject is always a part of the world that she (he) experiences.

*Distinguishing Non-realism, Naive Realism, and Critical Realism.* In the present Medjugorje context, a *non-realist* interpretation of the apparition would consider it to be either a hoax or a pure hallucination and the delusional product of a disordered mind. A *naïve realist* interpretation – which is how the six percipients understand their own experience – accepts the apparition at its face value as a pre-given reality “already out there now real” (Lonergan, 1957, pp. 251–252) and considers it the physical embodiment of a personally present BVM personality speaking in the percipients’ native Croatian language. The *critical realist* interpretation would view the apparition as representing the percipients’ genuine contact with a vital basic reality, but an encounter that expresses itself in symbolic form and filtered through the percipients’ particular historical situation, cultural environment, and religious commitments. The apparition at Medjugorje would reflect, in distorted form, greater actualities of an inner order of being. “Religious experience, then, occurs in many different forms, and the critical realistic interpretation enables us to see how these may nevertheless be authentic responses to the Real” (Hick, 1999, p. 42). Making

discernments about the “unreal,” “real” or “mixed” nature of the apparitional experience – that is, identifying and questioning the assumptions underlying the percipients’ beliefs and actions, and conceiving and exploring alternative ways of thinking about the phenomenon – comprise the *critical* nature of the approach.

*Translating an Inner Order of Events in Terms of the Outer.* From a critical realism perspective, there is an inner and outer order to events. The inner order of events constitutes what William James (1902/1936, p. 507) called “the higher part of the universe.” The outer order constitutes the camouflage appearance that inner events take within four-dimensional space/time. On this view, the Medjugorje apparition originates from an inner order of events. As a reality in the inner order, however, the figure represented by the apparition can only manifest itself *symbolically* in the outer one. Like a round peg trying to fit a square hole, the resulting translation creates events that are squeezed out of shape to some degree. Instinctively sensing the apparitional figure’s multidimensional nature, the percipients interpret information from that inner order *in terms of* the outer one with its religious commitments and cultural traditions, altering it to some extent, even though the phenomenon’s own reality might well exist in different terms entirely. The apparitional figure may represent a deep part of the psychical structure of the six percipients *as well* as their encounter with an “other” multidimensional consciousness (BVM), which becomes personified in exteriorized form according to their ideas of Christianity and personality. According to this view, the percipients deflect that which is the BVM through their own nature *as it expresses itself* through them. In these ways, legitimate experiences of basic reality become clothed in the religious images and symbols of the times.

*Accepting Symbols as Literal Truth in a Fact World.* In a further application of critical realism, the Medjugorje apparition would be considered to be both true and not true. As a symbolic representation of an inner order of events, the apparition is true; as a literal interpretation of a basic reality, it is false. When symbolic realities become interpreted literally or when the symbol is accepted as literal truth, however, its nature is inevitably misunderstood. The symbol is not the reality, just as the map is not the territory, the menu is not the meal, and the word is not the thought or the emotion that it seeks to convey. The apparitional figure of Mary is in a different semantic category than the basic reality of the BVM. They are different orders of reality and to confuse them is to commit what Aristotle referred to as a category mistake (Bannister, 1958; Ryle, 1949, pp. 17–18). The criteria used to measure what is “fact” at one level cannot be used to measure what is fact at another level. “When we accept the symbol as literal truth in a fact world, we make lies of them or let them make lies of us, so that they stand between us and the truths they’re meant to represent... We end up with romantic pretenses, false in both worlds” (Roberts, 1976, pp. 304, 352).

*Looking Beyond the Symbolism for the Greater Meanings Beneath.* An analogy from modern physics clarifies the nature of the distortion. Modern physical theory and experiment have shown that the physical objects we see, feel, hear,

taste, and touch exist in entirely different terms than our sense experience reveals. In terms of their physics, physical objects are neither solid, stable, nor indivisible but instead composed of swiftly moving swirls of atoms and molecules with more space than matter that constantly intermix with other elements in the environment from which they differ only in molecular organization and density. The Medjugorje apparition may be considered in a similar light. The “solidly real” apparition of the BVM presents its own kind of evidential data that is experienced by the percipients as being no less valid than the solidity of cups or other people seen through the physical senses. Interpreting their experience literally, the percipients take it for granted that some entity *is* communicating without questioning what that term might mean. When literal interpretations are demanded, however, then the BVM must be *seen* to be believed and the methods of objective physical science are brought into an area where such methods may not meaningfully apply. The problem is in taking that exterior dramatization and quasi-physical personification literally – a natural enough mistake given the fact that Western culture and science teaches that only “literal fact” is true. The answer or solution lies in looking behind the symbolism of the Marian apparition and its communications, beyond the inner morality play, for the greater meanings beneath.

### **To What Extent Are Different Forms of Religious Experience Intrinsic to Basic Reality?**

A further question arises: To what extent is the Marian apparition and its Messages essential and intrinsic to the transcendent basic reality that it discloses, or instead a matter of arbitrary interpretation and of nonessential subsequent understanding of the six percipients? That is, to what degree is the figure represented by the apparition (BVM) a fundamental element of the apparitional experience or purely the product of *a priori* interpretation and subsequent religious expression? This question is relevant to the ongoing debate in transpersonal psychology between two schools of thought represented by the perennialist and constructivist views of mystic experience (see, for example, Hollenback, 1996, pp. 5–17).

*The Perennialist View.* The perennialist view (also known as “*philosophia perennis*”) assumes that basic reality is that which is constant, identical, and invariant across all senses, all systems of reality, and all perspectives (Huxley, 1945). On this view, basic reality is best represented by a phenomenon’s trans-contextual, trans-historical, and trans-subjective “core” elements. This nucleus is discovered by identifying what is similar across individual instantiations of an experience and ignoring the differences, similar to what occurs in Husserlian eidetic reduction (Husserl, 1913/1962). The culturally-conditioned, linguistically-shaped, and psychologically-colored content of individual mystic experience is considered a derivative of this essential/intrinsic center. Representatives of the perennialist view include William James (1902/1936), Stanislav Grof (2000), Arthur Lovejoy (1936/1964), Rudolf Otto (1923/1958), Frithjof Schuon (1984), Huston Smith (1976), Fritz Staal (1975), Walter Stace

(1960), Evelyn Underhill (1911/1961), Frances Vaughan (1982), Roger Walsh (1999), and Ken Wilber (1997).

*The Constructivist View.* The constructivist view (also known as “postmodern constructivism”) asserts that mystic experience is essentially a function of the biological, cultural, economic, philosophical, political, psychological, religious, and social contextual realities within which it occurs. The inner knowledge that personal mystical experience provides has no reality outside of those biopsychosocial structures and processes. On this view, contextual realities shape and color the mystic’s experience and response both *while* the experience is occurring and *after* it is over. They influence what the mystic will experience and can experience. The epistemic content is automatically transformed through the mediumship of the mystic’s body and colored by the very characteristics of thought itself – personal, changing, continuous, selective, and purposive (James, 1890/1950, vol. 1, pp. 224–238). Representatives of the constructivist view include Philip Almond (1982), Ernst Arbman (1963–1970), Moshe Idel (1989), Steven Katz (1992), and Wayne Proudfoot (1985).

*Beyond the Perennialist/Constructivist Debate.* When taken to extremes, radical perennialism minimizes the differing revelations of mystics as relatively unimportant byproducts of an invariant basic reality. If the perennialist view is the whole story, then world religions would eventually more or less agree even in their particulars, just as sensory perceptions of the physical world have more or less come to agree. When taken to extremes, radical constructivism conceives basic reality as being so formless and acutely responsive to the mystic’s beliefs and feelings that it automatically translates itself into the form and function expected of it. If the constructivist view is the whole story, then there would be no truly original content, creative interpretation, or individual “paths beyond ego” discovered by the first founders of the world’s religions (Forman, 1990, pp. 19–20). It is one thing to recognize that context-dependent elements are part of the mystic experience and another to realize that there is a basic reality that is simultaneously immanent and transcendent and that is independent of those context-dependent elements.

*Exterior Injunctions Become Interior Conventions.* It is reasonable to suppose that the outer conventional religious stereotypes which now form the context-dependent elements that pattern mystic experience were themselves once the product of an original vision of that which is basic reality. The private visions and revelations of Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed provided its own evidential data that was subsequently expressed in terms the people of the times could understand through parables. Having heard the teachings, disciples would begin to clothe their own private visions in the guise of concepts and images embodied in the teachings of the founders. The “instrumental injunctions” (e.g., “If you do this, then you will experience this”) (Wilber, 1990, pp. 31–35) became interior conventions that, like outer ones, forced the individual seeker to conform to the generally accepted ideas of what it meant to be “enlightened.” When carrying out the founder’s injunction, the disciples no longer would insist upon their own unique expressions of basic reality that they encountered, for who would accept them? Under pressures to conform,

disciples made their “direct apprehensions” conform to preconceived packaging imposed by the requirement of “communal verification.” Consulting beforehand with those who had been adequately trained in the injunction and being told what to expect, the experiences of new disciples become programmed ahead of time. Guided tours of transcendent reality in which disciples are told to follow certain injunctions in order to experience the “same” thing soon ended up restricting mystic experience and response rather than expressing it. The clear vision, the original interpretation, the unique expression of the founders becomes lost in subsequent disciples.

Individuals would perceive inner data according to the mythologies and rituals, religious doctrines and symbols that had now become established. Once the doctrines and dogmas of established religions set themselves up as Truth (capital “T”), the search for deeper truths ends in one’s determination to protect whatever certainty one thinks one has already found. Religious and philosophic commitments would make certain experiences possible and hide other very legitimate spiritual realities that the seeker then does not perceive. If an individual’s inner experience did not conform, then it would be called “mistaken.” Or worse, the person would be considered an outcast or a heretic, and who wants that given the consequences of such a path? Such “unofficial” experiences would represent holes or gaps in the culturally promoted picture of spiritual reality, and provide the inner impetus for new religious movements in the modern world (P. Clarke, 2006). They would stand for alternate perspectives and paths beyond ego by which *original* content and *creative* interpretation may again be viewed and reached.

In the present Medjugorje context, it is possible that the six percipients may have been subjected to a similar conditioning process and pressures to conform, transforming what might have been original visions of “the higher part of the universe” (William James’ phrase) into the stylized soteriological and eschatological expectations of this time. But why should individuals be concerned or worried if their private interpretation of “the mystical region, or the supernatural region” – to use William James’ terminology – does not agree with others’ (James, 1902/1936, p. 506)? If the individual expects photographs of the exterior physical world to differ according to where one travels, why should the person expect or require that all the “pictures” of basic reality look alike? To insist that all pictures of transcendent reality be the same or similar is not expecting very much on the one hand, and expecting too much on the other. It is possible and actually much more practical to accept the fact that mystic experience and response reflects that which is basic reality as it exists beneath its context-dependent patterns of experience, and acknowledge that the context-dependent pattern is itself part of basic reality.

*Beyond Critical Realism.* According to critical realism, different religious commitments and cultural traditions result in different “faces” or voices being given to basic reality. We cannot know what that basic reality as it is in itself, but only describe its effect on the percipient. Suppose instead of a single absolute basic reality that can never be known as it is in itself but only as it appears filtered through the psyche of different experiencers, however, basic reality is multi-

dimensional and each religious experience reveals a *different* basic reality. On this alternative view, there may be as many basic realities as there are individuals who experience them – an epistemological position that William James called “noetic pluralism” (James, 1909/1971; Taylor, 1996, p. 134)—such that “reality MAY exist in distributive form in the shape not of an all but of a set of eaches, just as it seems to... making of God only one of the eaches... [and] the universe as existing solely in the each-form” (W. James quoted in McDermott, 1967, pp. 497, 528). James’ recognition of the multidimensional aspect of spiritual reality and its “radical pluralism” may be one reason why he titled his classic study of mysticism the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902/1936). No individual’s reality is identical to anyone else’s, whether physical or spiritual. Moreover, every individual’s experience of her (his) primary spiritual existence is empirically-based (i.e., experientially) and self-validating. Those experiences are as real and legitimate manifestations of basic reality as conventionally accepted ones, and are not therefore *unreal* and mistaken. They instead represent one of the appearances that basic reality takes.

While critical realism recognizes that mystic experience and knowing is a *participatory* affair between the individual and the universe (Hick, 1999, chap. 5), it may not fully appreciate the extent to which the mystic and that which is basic reality co-create each other, or the full degree to which subjective continuity is always a part of the reality that the mystic perceives (Ferrer, 2008). The mystery of individuality is that it always exists as a part of oneness; the mystery of oneness is that it always translates itself into individuality (Roberts, 1976, p. 270). In the creative field of probabilities, the unity of being consistently seeks greater diversification without destroying the original unity.

*The True Nature of Basic Reality.* On this view, basic reality is more cohesive than constructivists acknowledge, and more varied and diverse than perennialists recognize. Basic reality would not be reality as it appears to any particular perceptual system, within any particular dimension of being, or from any particular frame of reference. Basic reality would not be that which is constant or identical or invariant across all senses, all dimensions, or all perspectives. Instead, basic reality would be the sum of that which is perceived by all the senses, in all systems of reality, from all perspectives. It is not a matter of something possessing certain properties and only being real to one sensory system, in one system of reality, or from one perspective and therefore necessarily *unreal* to all others. Basic reality would be more the perception of the whole picture of reality, the sum of all reality as seen by the various senses, within the various systems or fields of reality, from the different perspectives considered in totality (Roberts, 1998, p. 42). According to the present view, the Medjugorje apparition is simply one of an infinite number of ways of perceiving the various guises through which basic reality expresses itself.

#### THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY

A second approach that may advance understanding of the nature of the Medjugorje apparition is to examine it within the context of studies, findings,

and theories produced by the parapsychological research community. Parapsychology's primary relevance to transpersonal psychology is two-fold: (a) its scientific study of those phenomena in which the human personality appears to exist independently of the body and has access to information beyond the five senses (Braud, 1997; Tart, 2009), and (b) the support and confidence that those scientific findings provide for validating "some kind of reality to a spiritual world and spiritual life" (Tart, 1997, p. 25).

### **Resemblance to Other Post-Mortem Apparitions**

How would the Medjugorje apparition be classified by parapsychologists? Four categories of apparitional experience have wide acceptance in the parapsychological research community: experimental, crisis, post-mortem, and ghost experiences (Tyrell, 1942/1953, p. 35ff). Since there is no special category for religious apparitional experiences of the Lourdes or Fatima type, the Medjugorje case would be classified as a post-mortem apparitional experience in this taxonomy (i.e., the person represented by the apparition (BVM) has been deceased for more than 12 hours). How do phenomenological features of the Medjugorje apparition compare with traits of typical apparitions of the dead? A preliminary analysis indicates sufficient surface resemblance on 21 traits to justify Medjugorje's classification as a post-mortem apparitional experience (Hart and collaborators, 1956, Table I, p. 159; Table III, p. 168; Tyrrell, 1942/1953, pp. 60–66, 77–80). On the basis of this analysis alone, however, it is not possible to draw any strong conclusion about whether or not the Medjugorje apparition is drawn from the same or different universe of post-mortem apparitions studied by parapsychologists. As Stevenson (1978) has reminded us in another context, "resemblance does not mean similarity" (p. 321).

### **Evidential Aspects**

With few exceptions, parapsychologists have shown little interest in investigating the Medjugorje apparition. Modern parapsychologists are generally interested in only investigating apparitional experiences with three salient characteristics: (a) apparitions that can be corroborated by detached and disinterested witnesses, (b) apparitions that convey empirically-verifiable data that would otherwise be unavailable to the primary percipient (or "experient") through ordinary sensory means, and (c) apparitions that temporally coincide in a meaningful way with an unexpected or personally significant event happening to the apparitional figure at the time of the apparition's appearance (Irwin, 1989, chap. 13). The Medjugorje apparition possesses none of the characteristics – independent corroboration, veridical extrasensory perception, or synchronicity – that would make it susceptible for the kind of investigation necessary to make a scientific judgment about its validity. Unlike post-mortem apparitions that have primary evidential value (e.g., "Case of the Will of James L. Chaffin," 1926), veridical information of an extrasensory nature is not communicated by the Medjugorje apparitional

figure. It is thus difficult to formulate a satisfactory parapsychological theory of the Medjugorje apparition given (a) the limited number of taxonomic categories used by parapsychologist into which religious-type apparitional experiences do not easily fit, and (b) the absence of evidence verifiably establishing the characteristics of the reported apparition.

*Standards of Evidential Value.* There are many kinds of apparitions, including out-of-body projections, telepathic impressions from the living, apparitions of the dead, doppelgangers, dream objects, and other types of projections of consciousness within and outside of the physical system (Tyrrell, 1942/1953). The standards of evidence used to evaluate the validity of an apparitional experience may correspondingly vary. The standards of the parapsychological research community (e.g., the Society for Psychical Research and the American Society for Psychical Research) that are used to identify apparitions with “primary evidential value” are very different from standards of evidence used by the Roman Catholic Church to identify apparitions that have “supernatural character” and “faith expression.”

For instance, in order for the report of an apparition to have primary evidential value for a parapsychologist, “the accounts must have been written out by two or more percipients, or must have been approved in writing by both of them, within one year of the date of the occurrence. The accounts must contain internal evidence that each percipient had a clearly independent experience of the phenomenon, and did not merely endorse or assent to an experience alleged by another percipient” (Hart & Hart, 1932–33, p. 205). In order for an apparition to be accepted as having supernatural character and faith expression, the investigator must demonstrate with “moral certainty” that the characteristics of the apparition have been verifiably established, the contents of the revelations conform to officially accepted Church doctrine and dogma, the personal qualities of the percipients are beyond reproach, and the events tied to the apparitions promote expression of the faith (Norms of the Congregation for Proceeding in Judging Alleged Apparitions and Revelations, 1978). Although the Medjugorje apparition may arguably approach the evidential value that the parapsychological community calls for, it does not possess the moral certainty that the Roman Catholic Church requires at this time.

*Identity of the Communicator.* Establishing proof of identity of the discarnate communicator is important in assessing its evidential character and for determining (a) whether the communicated messages will be valued and judged to be credible, (b) whether the communication has come from its attributed source, and (c) whether the communicator is believed to exist. As one parapsychologist put the matter: “I want to know not just who he claims to be, but the evidence supporting his claim. A communicator should not say that he is a chemist, much less a saint, if he cannot show us is that he was one, and this means proof of identity” (Stevenson, 1978, p. 326). In the absence of an opportunity to interview the purported agent of the Medjugorje apparition (i.e., BVM) –as one would be able to do in an investigation of an experimental,

crisis, or reciprocal apparition of the living –how does one establish proof of the communicator’s identity?

### **A Collectively-Perceived Apparition**

Because the Medjugorje apparition is experienced by more than one person – the six percipients (Vicka, Mirjana, Marija, Ivan, Ivanka, and Jakov) and the two “Hearers” (Jelna and Marijana) – it would be classified as a collectively-perceived apparition. Collectively-perceived apparitions comprise a small but noteworthy subset of cases in the parapsychological literature (E. Sidgwick, 1962). “Among cases in which more than one person *was* present, a third (H. Sidgwick et al., 1894, pp. 320–321; Tyrrell, 1942/1953, p. 23) to half (H. Hart and collaborators, 1956, pp. 204–205) involved collective perceptions” (Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gault, Grosso, & Greyson, 2007, p. 407). In one case, eight people were reported to simultaneously witness the “same” apparition (Green & McCreery, 1975, p. 41). Not everyone who is present during an apparitional event perceives the apparition. The perception of an apparition therefore may be a function of the percipient’s inner focus since apparitional experiences tend to occur “either in circumstances conducive to absorbed mentation or for people with an enduring need for absorption” (Irwin, 1985, 1989, p. 231). In rare cases, it may be a bystander who perceives the apparition while the primary percipient to whom the apparitional figure intends to appear does not see it (Rhine, 1957, p. 39).

Individuals’ descriptions of collectively-perceived apparitions typically show similar discrepancies as occur in ordinary sensory perception and eyewitness accounts of shared experiences (Hart & Hart, 1932–1933). Differences in descriptions may be due to different physical positions or differing sensory acuities of the observers, faulty inference, false memory, mismatches in cognitive schemas, or perceptual set. In the present Medjugorje context, bystanders are consistently unable to see or hear the apparition, while the primary percipients report seeing and hearing the same apparition when they are together. Collectively-perceived apparitions typically are fleeting, transient events, and it is rare for them to occur daily or at pre-designated times for a protracted period of years as has occurred at Medjugorje. The only exception would be ghost experiences that involve recurrent, lingering apparitions of persons or animals that display stereotyped, somnambulistic-like movements with little awareness of percipients or of their surrounding, and that are perceived in the same locality on a number of occasions by a different number of percipients (Banks, 1996).

### **Quasi-Physical Features**

Apparitions of the dead (both solitary and collectively perceived) have been reported to possess pseudo-material features that endow it with a quasi-physical status. Some apparitional figures have been reported to cast a shadow, obstruct the view of objects it moves in front of and become occluded from

view by objects it moves behind, and be sensed by animals (Tyrell, 1942/1953, pp. 77–80). Stevenson (1982, p. 353) reports that some apparitions of the dead are reflected in mirrors, make adjustments to persons and objects in the physical surroundings in which they appear, and can be viewed from different positions with corresponding differences in perceptions. “In those respects, therefore, apparitional figures are not the transparent misty forms popularized in fiction... Most attempts to touch an apparitional figure are unsuccessful but people who do so generally report their hand to have gone through the apparition” (Irwin, 1989, p. 230).

Collectively-perceived apparitions that possess quasi-physical features call into question the assumptions that all apparitional experiences are (a) solely subjective phenomena, (b) exclusively pathological in nature, or (c) merely physiologically or psychologically generated, and imply that some apparitions may be trans-subjective phenomena that possess semi-objective features (Myers, 1889). The Medjugorje apparition is reported to possess several quasi-physical features (i.e., full figure, solid, details vivid, normal movements, adjusts to people, speaks 3 or more sentences, seen collectively, perceived tactually as well as visually and auditorily, color other than black or white). The mixture of subjective and objective elements of the apparition needs to be accounted for in any adequate theory of the phenomenon.

### **Theories and Models**

Theories used to explain apparitions of the dead provide a source of hypotheses that may be useful in understanding salient aspects of the Medjugorje apparition. Because there are many kinds of apparitions, there is no one explanation that will apply and the underlying mechanism may or may not be the same in all cases (Irwin, 1989, pp. 234–238). Two parapsychological theories (psi-mediated and discarnate spirit) and four non-parapsychological theories (pure hallucination, dissociation, inner voice, and normal creativity) are briefly discussed here.

*Psi-mediated Hypotheses.* Psi-mediated theories propose that apparitional experiences – “the perception of persons not present in the ordinary space-time way” – are informed largely by information obtained via extrasensory means (Hart & Hart, 1932–33, p. 206). This information may be obtained clairvoyantly from books, living persons, or other physical information sources of which the percipient is consciously unaware (Green & McCreery, 1975). If the existence of independent and fully individual discarnate agents is acknowledged, then the figure represented by the apparition may be considered to play a role in bringing about its own apparition by telepathically prompting the percipient(s). Although one does not have to be in a hypnotic state of consciousness in order to experience an apparition, trance is one method by which focused concentration and the elimination of distractions may lead to a dissociated state in which apparitional experiences are reported to occur (Myers, 1892). On this hypothesis, percipients may become more sensitive to

inner telepathic data subconsciously received while in a dissociated state, regardless of what causes the state to come about.

In the present Medjugorje context, the six percipients may be telepathically reaching out to the BVM entity and using the subconsciously acquired information to give the apparition its exterior dramatization and quasi-physical personification (Rhine, 1957). The telepathically-acquired information may spread from one percipient to another by a process that Gurney et al. (1886) called “contagious telepathy,” resulting in the apparitional figure being collectively perceived and producing consistent perceptions for the different percipients. The discarnate BVM entity may take a more active role by intermingling and blending its own psychical energy with the subconscious minds of the percipients to create the Madonna persona represented by the apparition (Tyrrell, 1942/1953).

*Discarnate Spirit Hypothesis.* Discarnate spirit hypotheses assume the figure represented by the apparition to be a fully individual identity who has survived the physical death of the body and that acts in a purposeful manner (Hart, 1967, Hart and collaborators, 1956; Irwin, 1989, p. 235; Osis, 1986; Stevenson, 1982, 1995). The discarnate entity may cause changes in the “metethereal world”—a nonphysical dimension of existence that intertwines with physical space—which permits its perception by individuals in the vicinity of this change (Myers, 1903, vol. 1, chaps. 6–7). On this view, the discarnate entity is actually present in the guise of its “astral” or mental body at the location where it is perceived by extrasensory means. The mental body or idea form of an apparitional figure is considered to be a psychical structure somewhere between matter and nonmatter (called “subtle” matter) that represents a counterpart to the physical body associated with living personalities and is adopted during projections of consciousness in out-of-the-body and dream experiences (Crookall, 1966, 1970; Fox, 1979; Green, 1968). The idea-body may vary its form according to the abilities of the individual, the conditions in which consciousness operates, and the dimensions encountered representing various stages of consciousness (Monroe, 1971; Muldoon & Carrington, 1929/1974). In the present Medjugorje context, the BVM apparitional figure would be a basically independent and self-consciously aware discarnate entity composed of subtle matter, which projects its consciousness into/onto the physical material field from another dimension of being in answer to an inner psychological need on the part of either the agent or the percipient.

### **Alternative Psychological Interpretations**

*Pure Hallucination Hypothesis.* The pure hallucination hypothesis is a non-realist psychological theory that suggests the apparition may be the product of an undisciplined imagination or the confabulations of goal-directed fantasy, and a function of ordinary psychological processes occurring solely within the individual who may or may not be psychologically disordered (Alcock, 1981, p. 83; Neher, 1980, p. 200; Rawcliffe, 1959, pp. 372–377; Reed, 1972, p. 39). In the present context of Medjugorje, the apparition would be the product of

percipients' suggestibility and expectancies, personal needs and desires, and unconscious childhood memories of Our Lady, or the result of cultural conditioning of socially accepted fictions about the BVM, and would possess no substantial reality outside of these psychosocial processes. The collective nature of the apparition would be due to selective suggestion in which the six percipients pliantly endorse one another's reports by saying they saw the same apparition when they did not. The apparition's quasi-physical features would be a function of subliminal hypnagogic-like imagery processes intruding into waking consciousness.

While it is true that some apparitional experiences may be hallucinatory and pathological (Bentall, 2000; Siegel & West, 1975), it is also true that not every "idiophany" or unshared sensory experience is hallucinatory or pathological (Stevenson, 1983). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) recognizes that an hallucination—"a sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the sensory organs"—is not necessarily a sign of psychopathology (APA, 1994, p. 767). Surveys indicate that a significant minority of otherwise ordinary and quite sane individuals report having at least one apparitional experience – ranging from 10% to 33% of the population depending on the sample surveyed (Green & McCreery, 1975; J. Palmer, 1979; Persinger, 1974, p. 69). Irwin (1989, p. 224) proposed three criteria for distinguishing a pathological hallucination from a *prima facie* apparition. Authentic apparitional experiences (a) convey veridical information about facts obtained through extrasensory means, (b) provide recognizable details about identifiable persons or animals, and (c) are collectively perceived. These elements are generally lacking in psychotic and drug-induced hallucinations. In the present context of Medjugorje, although veridical extrasensory information is not communicated, the apparition does provide sufficient detail to permit a clear identification of the agent (BVM), and it is experienced by more than one person. On the basis of Irwin's diagnostic criteria, the Medjugorje apparition would not be considered a pathological hallucinatory experience.

*Dissociation hypothesis.* Dissociation can be defined as "the narrowing of awareness such that significant aspects or temporally relevant constituents of one's consciousness are excluded from self-concept, either temporarily or at length" (Edge, 2001, p. 54). Dissociation forms a continuum that ranges from the pathological through the normal to the exceptional and transpersonal (Braun, 1988; Cardeña, 1994; Krippner, 1997). Edge (2001) proposes a spectrum of consciousness that differentiates five types of dissociation and the kinds of "knowings" that may be accessed through each. On the basis of Edge's classification scheme, the Medjugorje apparition may be characterized as any one of the three non-pathological forms of dissociation – purposeful, directed, or associative – that increase access to transpersonal forms of knowing (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000; H. Palmer, 1998).

Although Pandarakalam (2001) found "no evidence to suggest the probability of autohypnosis" (p. 229), certain percipient behaviors reported to occur during the Marian apparition suggest the presence of a dissociated state of

consciousness (e.g., presence of involuntary responses, absence of ordinary startle response and reaction to stimuli, restriction of the visual field, little or no awareness of ambient stimuli, muscular rigidity, pupillary dilation, slow eyeball movement, effortlessness of waiting (Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976, p. 306; Laurentin, 1987, chap. 5). The dissociation hypothesis is further supported by the reported presence of phenomenological features typically associated with hypnosis, including a tendency to accept facticity of the experience, absence of doubt and skepticism, absence of fear and concern, sense of comfortableness about in going into ecstasy, sense of timelessness, loss of goal orientation, and feelings of oneness and peacefulness (Shor, 1979, p. 132). A state of dissociation being achieved would make available lines and possibilities of communication in accordance with the abilities of the individual.

*Inner Voice Hypothesis.* Perceptual phenomena form a continuum that ranges from pathological and regressive hallucinations, through normal illusions and veridical sensory perceptions, to perceptions of the imagination and intuitions and transcendent revelations (Liester, 1996). Distinctions are to be made between the auditory hallucinations of a paranoid schizophrenic and such “inner voice” phenomena as the promptings of private conscience, the revelations of Muhammad, and the inspired musings of Beethoven. “For at least two thousand years, inner voices have been valued as a source of creative inspiration, divine guidance, and intuitive knowledge” (Liester, 1996, p. 2). Liester (1996, p. 22) reports that non-pathological inner voices tend to communicate discursive narratives that are personally supportive, culturally valuable, and interpersonally beneficial and occur in the absence of organic pathology, whereas hallucinations do not. On the basis of his classification scheme, the Medjugorje apparitional figure and its “Messages” could be considered a *transpersonal* inner voice phenomenon that has trans-ego, trans-temporal, and trans-spatial effects and consequences (Liester, 1996, pp. 8–19).

*Normal Creativity Hypothesis.* While apparitions may sound quite esoteric, in certain respects they are highly practical experiences, and in certain terms we may be dealing with the very nature of creativity itself (Gowan, 1975, 1980; Maslow, 1968, chap. 10). Considered as extensions of normal creativity, apparitions are natural kinds of phenomena that, just like other natural events, can be studied by scientific research methods. On this view, the apparition of Medjugorje represents an extension or expansion of normal human creativity that provides empirically verifiable evidence for the existence of “exotic” and “cosmogenic” abilities that potentially lie within each individual (Gowan, 1980, pp. 52–53, 77). As such, the phenomenon gives concrete expression to the species’ innate primary impulse toward creativity that underlies transcendence and through which the creativity of the universe expresses itself. In these terms, the apparition and its “Fruits” have brought into physical existence something that did not exist before; opened up avenues of choice, channels of awareness, and avenues of expression previously overlooked or not believed possible; and reveals possibilities of development and achievement that might have otherwise gone unknown. As J. R. R. Tolkien (1977) said in *The Silmarillion*: “In every age there come forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do

not proceed from the past” (p. 18). A similar creative process may be occurring at Medjugorje.

The article continues in Part 2 to consider the Marian apparition at Medjugorje from the perspectives of aspect psychology and empowered imagination, along with the implications for future work suggested by the proposed models. Does the Marian apparition at Medjugorje give some hint of the multidimensional nature of the human psyche and provide some indication of the abilities that lie within each individual? Or of the connection between the known three-dimensional system of reality in which we dwell and other dimensions of reality in which we also have our existence? If so, then how? If not, then what else might be happening?

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