

July 29, 2026 Apparitions of Our Lady in Medjugorje: The Church's Position and the "Scientific" Tests on the Visionaries www.fanpage.it

Medjugorje is at the center of a bitter debate between those who believe the Marian apparitions are real and those who claim otherwise. The recent vandalism of the sanctuary is thought to be linked to these divergent positions. What is the Church's position on the apparitions of Our Lady and what does science say about the visionaries?

<https://www.fanpage.it/innovazione/scienze/apparizioni-della-madonna-a-medjugorje-la-posizione-della-chiesa-e-i-test-scientifici-sui-veggenti/>

Between Monday, July 27, and Tuesday, July 28, 2026, a young man vandalized the shrine of Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, defacing several statues of the Madonna (including the one on the so-called Apparition Hill and the one located near the Blue Cross) with black paint. During the vandalism, captured on camera, the outdoor altar of the Parish of St. James was set on fire—a fire that was quickly extinguished—and graffiti was left against the six visionaries who, as teenagers, allegedly began seeing the Virgin Mary starting in 1981. They are Ivan Dragičević, Marija Pavlović, Jakov Čolo, Mirjana Dragičević, Ivanka Ivanković, and Vicka Ivanković.

The motive for the attack is currently unknown; however, the comments directed at the visionaries—who were labeled "impostors"—and the references to evil and the devil suggest that the perpetrator believes neither in the alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje nor in the cult associated with them. The alleged perpetrator is also believed to be a young former drug addict engaged in a faith journey that has also been adapted into a documentary film. The man has reportedly been frequenting the shrine for a long time, but now faces five years in prison for damage caused to the desecrated place of worship.

The alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje

Medjugorje has been at the center of significant controversy ever since teenagers began talking about the apparitions of Our Lady on Podbrdo, the Hill of Apparitions. The first to see her, on June 24, 1981, were Ivanka Ivanković and Mirjana Dragičević, who then quickly involved the other four. The six reportedly continued to have visions of this female figure—wrapped in celestial blue light and holding a child in her arms—for several consecutive days. When the news began to spread, the police obstructed visits to the hill, even requiring the "visionaries" to undergo psychiatric evaluations. The village priest, Jozo Zovko, was even arrested, accused of staging a hoax.

The children claimed to have had other Marian apparitions outside the hill, such as in the Parish of San Giacomo and in their homes, further fueling curiosity about the story. The news soon reached major newspapers, and Medjugorje became a pilgrimage destination. At a certain point, the police no longer hindered visits. As with Fatima and Lourdes—which are nevertheless recognized by the Church as authentic apparition sites—the visionaries reportedly received secrets from the Madonna. Mirjana Dragičević also claims a "parchment" from Heaven that only she can read (it appears as a blank sheet of paper). It is estimated that today around 3 million people visit the sanctuary built in the area of the apparitions each year: according to believers and visionaries, these visits continue daily (or on specific days) even today. The Church's Position on Medjugorje

The Church's position on the Marian apparitions in Medjugorje is still not definitive. In 1986, the diocesan commission that examined the case expressed the formula "Constat de non supernaturalitate," the same one used for the alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Trevignano. This means that the supernatural origin of the apparitions has not been proven. In 1991, the

Episcopal Conference issued the Zadar Declaration, which reiterated the impossibility of affirming that these are true apparitions and supernatural phenomena. Seven years later, despite not recognizing the apparitions as authentic, the Congregation authorized pilgrimages to Medjugorje. The Church attempted to clarify the situation with a special commission led by Cardinal Camillo Ruini and established by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. In 2014, it concluded that the first seven apparitions could be authentic, while the subsequent ones were deemed not credible. In 2017, Pope Francis appointed a special envoy for the Holy See to Medjugorje, and in 2019 authorized pilgrimages organized by dioceses and parishes, but he has repeatedly emphasized that this process neither recognizes nor authenticates the apparitions.

Bergoglio, moreover, has often been critical of the cult of Medjugorje, especially regarding the apparitions. Marian apparitions "on a timetable and scheduled basis," which is the basis of much of the business associated with pilgrim visits to the shrine (hotels and other facilities have been built to accommodate them). "I prefer Our Lady as Mother, not Our Lady as an office manager who sends messages every day," said Pope Francis, expressing his perplexity regarding the continuous apparitions. Although Medjugorje is under the direct control of the Vatican, which oversees sacraments and pilgrimages, it does not recognize it (or at least not yet) as a site of authentic apparitions like Fatima and Lourdes. It is, however, considered a place of grace and prayer, with positive results related to conversions, healings, reconciliations, charitable works, etc.

What science says about the apparitions of Medjugorje

Since the first apparitions, the visionaries have been subjected to various tests and studies to verify their sanity, what happened during ecstasies, how they perceived the real world, and the like. One of the most cited studies by followers of the Medjugorje cult is that of French physician Henri Joyeux, who, between 1984 and 1985, applied electrodes to the visionaries during their ecstasies. He wrote that their visual perception of the external world disappeared and that science was unable to explain the data, therefore the phenomenon should be considered supernatural. A neurophysiologist and another neurologist also concluded that the ecstasies of the visionaries, who were sane, had mystical characteristics. However, as emphasized by CICAP (Italian Committee for the Control of Claims of Pseudoscience), these were not independent scholars, but doctors and researchers closely associated with religious movements and therefore not neutral. Sometimes they even espoused pseudoscientific positions. Joyeux, for example, was struck off the medical register, while others advocated pranotherapy and medieval holistic medicine. The visionaries reportedly refused to submit to independent scientific testing to verify their condition.

A curious experiment conducted by Jean-Louis Martin in 1985, documented on video, shows that during ecstasies, the visionaries were anything but disconnected from the outside world. On that occasion, he pretended to stick his finger in Vicka Ivanković's eye, but instead of remaining still, she jerked her head to avoid being hit. This behavior contradicts Joyeux's theory, according to which visionaries enter a total "suspension of the senses" during ecstasies. The French doctor attempted to demonstrate this by holding a card in front of their eyes, which—according to the visionaries—did not obscure their vision of the Virgin Mary. Vicka's reaction, however, demonstrates that the visionaries perceive what is happening around them. Vicka Ivanković justified her behavior by saying that at that moment, the Virgin Mary had shown her the child, and she thought she was about to fall. The "scientific evidence" cited by Medjugorje supporters does not stand up to methodological scrutiny, and the simple finger-in-the-eye experiment can confirm this.