

## **Religious apparitions**

Religious apparitions belong almost exclusively to the domain of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Protestant Churches, Judaism, as well as in Islam, nobody is worshipped apart from God, and there are no intermediaries between the believers and the Creator. In Judaism and Islam, prophets enjoy great respect, however no divine features are attributed to them, although it is assumed that the prophets passed on information received from God. The Roman Catholic Church, with the extensive pantheon of saints, and most of all with the figure of the Virgin Mary, continues pre-Christian traditions and therefore fulfils the subconscious needs of the human psyche. The Mother of God is an important psychological phenomenon, referring to goddesses such as Isis, Iris, Aphrodite and Astarte, worshipped thousands of years ago. For many of the faithful in their everyday life, the Virgin Mary is more important than Jesus Christ and her image is instantly recognized by every believer. Therefore the large majority of religious apparitions had a connection with the Mother of God.

Religious apparitions belong to very frequent phenomena and some sources quote that in the years 1960-1969 there were 376 cases of Marian apparitions recorded. Special Church Commissions investigate only a small fraction of reported cases, the majority of them are ignored, and only a few are officially recognized as genuine. Because many people compare the events in Fatima to other religious apparitions, it is worthwhile to look more closely at a few of them. The most important apparitions in the 19th century took place in La Salette and in Lourdes.

### **Apparition in La Salette**

The village La Salette is situated in the French Alps not far from Grenoble. It was there on September 19, 1846 where the Virgin Mary appeared to two illiterate shepherds: Mélanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud. At that time Mélanie was 14, and Maximin 11 years old. As the majority of children there they earned a living herding cows. That day they took the cows high on the slopes of the nearby mountain, above

La Salette. Some time later they ate their lunch, and then dozed off. After waking up at about 3 p.m., they saw that the cows were missing. While searching for them, they noticed a light more blinding than the sun, which came from a big globe of fire, about 5 meters in diameter, suspended above the earth. Even though they were terrified, they noticed that inside the globe a woman was sitting with her face resting in her hands. The figure slowly got up and then the children noticed that tears flowed down her cheeks. According to the visionaries she was a tall, very beautiful lady. She was wearing a long, white, pearl studded, sleeved dress, and a yellow pinafore, with some sort of tiara or crown on her head. Hanging from her neck was a large crucifix adorned with a small hammer and pincers, with a brilliantly shining figure of Christ on it. She had white shoes decorated with colorful roses. The Lady turned to the children and said "do not be afraid, I came here to tell you great news". At first she spoke to them in French, but because they did not understand, she spoke to them in their own local dialect.

After passing the message to the children she went through the stream, and then moved about thirty steps in the direction of a small hill. When she walked her feet hardly touched the grass. Maximin tried to touch a rose decorating her shoes, but his hand hit an empty space. The children followed her until she rose to the height of about 3 feet/(0.9 m), and then she started slowly disappearing. First her head and shoulders disappeared, and then the rest of her body.

The Bishop of Grenoble commenced examinations of the seers in 1847 and he reached the conclusion that the children did not lie and did not have hallucinations. His report was presented to a church commission, which at the end of 1847 recognized the authenticity of the apparition. The short description of the events was written by Mélanie in a monastery in England in 1858. This version was disclosed to the public in the same year. The secrets were revealed gradually, but were published for the first time in April 1873. Maximin died in 1875, and Mélanie who led a monastic life in England, France and Italy, died in 1904.

### **Apparition in Lourdes**

In 1858, in the grotto of Massabielle, near Lourdes in southern France, Our Lady appeared 18 times to Bernadette Soubirous, a young peasant girl. Bernadette, then

14 years old, saw in the grotto, for the first time on 11 February, a figure of a beautiful young girl, 4 ft 8 in/(140 cm) tall. The figure had a white dress on with a blue sash around her waist, and a yellow rose on each foot. Bernadette started saying the rosary and noticed that Our Lady had moved the rosary beads in her hand and was saying it without moving her lips. This vision lasted about 15 minutes. Other children who were in the grotto with Bernadette could see nothing.

The next apparition took place on 14 February. There was no conversation then, however the witnesses observed that Bernadette had fallen into an ecstasy. Only during the apparition on 18 February, did the Lady tell the seer to come for 15 days. From then on the visions took place every day, and more and more onlookers came to the grotto. It is interesting to notice, that when on 22 February police officers turned up at the grotto, in order to check what happened, the figure did not appear. During the ninth apparition the Lady told the seer to drink water from a small spring. Water in the grotto was muddy, so Bernadette dug deeper, until clean water gushed. During the apparition on 25 March, Bernadette asked the Lady what she was called and then received a reply: "I am the Immaculate Conception". The girl did not understand this expression, since the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was approved by the church only on 8 December 1854 and was not widely known.

Bernadette received from the mayor of a local town a large candle, as a votive offering, and she took it to the grotto. On 7 April people present in the grotto witnessed "the miracle of the candle". During the ecstasy which lasted almost an hour, Bernadette held the burning candle. When the candle burnt itself out, its flame touched Bernadette's hand, but she did not feel it. The doctor after examining the hand stated she had no traces of the burn. The last apparition in Lourdes took place on 16 July.

The Catholic Church in November 1858 commenced interrogations of the witnesses and in January 1862 the local bishop announced approval of the apparitions. Bernadette after the events started attending convent school. There she learnt how to read and write, and at the age of 22 entered a convent in Nevers, where she died in 1878.

The apparitions in Lourdes have a completely different character than the events in Fatima. In Lourdes there was only one visionary and the Lady appearing in the grotto

was dressed as the nuns from the nearby monastery, while in Fatima the Lady's clothes were very distinct and unusual. During the apparitions Bernadette was in a state of ecstasy or hypnosis and ignored the outside world, whereas Lucia retained full awareness. The apparitions in Lourdes were quite long, sometimes even up to an hour, but Bernadette's accounts of what happened are very brief and quite vague. In contrast, Lucia was able on the same day to repeat exactly the dialogue with the Lady. The apparitions in Lourdes took place "on demand" at different times of the day, soon after Bernadette's arrival at the grotto, while in Fatima the hour of the majority of the apparitions was the same and sometimes the seers had to wait quite a long time. The Lady told Bernadette to come every day, but she did not appear on 22 and 26 February. The most significant difference is that in Lourdes the witnesses in the grotto were not able to observe anything unusual and could not hear anything. The only unusual event in Lourdes was the flow of clear water out of a spring which was dug out by the seer in the place where water already barely trickled.

### **Apparitions in Fatima**

Apparitions in Fatima took place between 13 May and 13 October 1917 in Fatima, Portugal, in a place called Cova da Iria, located about 85 miles/(135 km) north of Lisbon. During this period a figure of a Lady appeared six times to three children: Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco and passed to them certain information which later became known as the secrets of Fatima. At the end of the apparitions about 50,000 people witnessed a very unusual display in the sky which made a lasting impression not only on the believers but also on the skeptics.

### ***Description of events***

On May 13, 1917 after mass at the local church, Lucia – 10, and her cousins, Francisco – 9 and Jacinta – 7 years old, took provisions and went to graze the sheep. Lucia decided that they would go to Cova da Iria. Sheep grazed calmly between rocks and oak trees, and the children played, when suddenly they saw a flash of light. Lucia decided that a thunderstorm was approaching and it was better to get back home. When the children started to gather the sheep, another flash of lightning struck and they saw a Lady on top of a small holm oak tree, which of course

frightened them greatly. Then the Lady started to speak: "Do not be afraid, I will do you no harm." However Lucia was not as terrified as the others, since she asked: "Where are you from?", and she heard the reply:

–My place is in heaven.

–What are you doing in this world?

–I have come to ask you to come here every month for six months, and at the end of this period I will tell you what I want.

–Can you tell me if the war will go on for a long time or will it end soon?

–I cannot tell you that now, just as I cannot tell you what I want (d'Armada, 1980, p. 179).

This apparition was followed by another 5 events on the 13th of each month, during which the exchanges between the Lady and Lucia were similar to the above pattern.

On August 13 the meeting did not take place because on the morning of the apparition Artur de Oliveira Santos, the mayor of Vila Nova de Ourem, the county in which Fatima belonged, took the children under false pretenses to his house where, with threats and bribery tried to force them to reveal the communicated earlier secret. However the terrorized children did not give in and emerged victorious from this terrifying confrontation, even though they were alone throughout, without their parents. They had experienced horrifying moments, but their faith gave them strength. These events, although very unpleasant for the three visionaries, assure us that the apparitions could not have been a product of the children's imagination. Being subjected to such great stress and expecting to die any time, the children did not reveal the Fatima secrets and did not change their earlier testimonies.

Instead of in Cova da Iria, the next apparition took place on August 19 in Valinhos, a village not far from Fatima, where on that day the children were staying with their relatives.

### ***What the visionaries noticed***

According to Lucia's description, the figure which appeared to her in Cova da Iria looked like a beautiful doll, had black eyes and a pretty face, that was incomparable to the faces of the local belles. Also Jacinta and Francisco mentioned the heavenly beauty of the Lady, whose age was at first estimated to be about 15, and later 12

years, and measuring 3 ft 8 in/(1.1 m) in height.

The visionaries were not only dazzled by the beauty of the Lady, but they were literally blinded by the light radiating from her. Lucia said that the brilliance of the figure had sometimes been so strong that she had to rub her eyes. Jacinta confirmed that on October 13 she could not look at the Lady, because she was so bright. The children recalled that very often during the apparitions they had had to lower their eyes, on account of the strongly radiating light.

The entire figure was dressed in white. She had a skirt which was narrow and short just below her knees, and a white blouse which had two or three cords on the sleeves at the wrists. Over the blouse she had a coat fixed under the neck. On her head she had a white veil falling to the hem of her skirt. The veil covered her hair and ears. The skirt and the veil were embroidered with squared golden stitches.

Descriptions of the figure changed with time. For example, in the notes of Father Ferreira, published only in 1992, it was stated that the figure was dressed in a skirt which was only knee-length. In the course of the examination conducted by Canon Formigão Jacinta confirmed Lucia's version, that the skirt was only knee-length. Since at that time no woman in Portugal would wear such an indecent dress, Lucia's original statements were kept secret and official descriptions only mentioned the skirt falling to the feet.

The Lady did not smile or look sad, she was always serious. She never looked at other people present. She did not pray, did not move the beads of the rosary, and never made the sign of the cross. Without a doubt the fact that she did not move her lips while speaking is a most important observation. During several apparitions the figure did not move her hands and never moved her feet. When she was departing, she did not walk but glided through the air, with her back turned to the people observing her.

### ***Phenomena observed during the apparitions***

Before the first apparition, Lucia noticed a flash in the sky. She thought that it was lightning and said to Jacinta and Francisco that a thunderstorm was coming, although the sky was cloudless. However the children did not hear any thunder claps that normally accompany lightning. Similar flashes of light preceded all the meetings in Cova da Iria and in Valinhos.

Lucia and other witnesses noticed, just before the apparitions, certain atmospheric changes. They had the feeling that the air had cooled off, and the sun was slightly dimmed, although it was not obscured by clouds. Since the visions took place about noon, it was very hot and any fluctuation in temperature was easily noticed. After the apparitions the intensity of the sun light returned to normal.

In the statements of many witnesses, apart from the seers, one can find a description of a cloud which was observed above the tree, where the Lady appeared. The cloud was faint and resembled fog or smoke. It seemed that it surrounded and covered the appearing figure. After the apparition finished, the cloud rose and disappeared. It appeared each time, from June to October.

Among the most interesting phenomena, noticed by many witnesses during the apparitions, were the acoustic effects. During all the apparitions from June 13 onwards, strange sounds, similar to the buzzing of insects, were heard. Normally witnesses standing near the seers could hear when Lucia talked to the Lady, then followed silence, and in this silence a faint sound was heard which occurred at the same time as Lucia was listening to the reply to her questions. It was not possible to distinguish words, and the voice was similar to the sound made by a bee. One witness compared it to the buzzing of a big fly in an empty barrel, others to the sounds produced by cicadas.

### ***Fatima secrets***

During the Fatima apparitions were transmitted three secrets to the seers. The first secret a vision of Hell was disclosed to the children on July 13 1917. The children in spite of large pressures from the mayor of Vila Nova de Ourem did not disclose them.

Without any doubt the most important information was included in the second secret, foretelling the outbreak of the second world war. According to Lucia's memoirs, in the sky would appear unusual lights which would herald terrible events which would take place during the pontificate of Pope Pius XI. And thus it happened. On 25 January 1938 the sky above the entire continent of Europe burst into flames. The glow was visible from Scandinavia to North Africa. It was the result of the formation of an intense aurora borealis, unseen so far in Europe. The prophecy, although known earlier, was published on 13 October 1942. The second secret also contains

a prediction that Russia will “convert herself”, something that happened only in 1991. The third secret which was written by Lucia in 1944 and placed in Vatican in 1957 was only revealed in 2000 forecasts some horrifying events, but especially the death of a Pope. The prophecy has a very general character and it would be difficult to establish when these events were supposed to take place.

On October 13, 1917 after the apparitions took place [display in the sky](#).

### **Apparitions in Medjugorje**

The apparitions in Medjugorje have not been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, but since they are well known in Europe, and according to the visionaries still take place, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at them.

Medjugorje is a small village in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, being a part of former Yugoslavia. Apparitions in Medjugorje started on 24 June 1981, when six young person between the ages of 15 and 17 saw, on the hill Črnica, above the village, a young woman with a child in her arms who gave them a sign to come closer. Being surprised and frightened they ran away. The next day four of them came back to the same place and again saw a figure of a woman but without a child. They were joined by two new people but two other children left the original group and never again had any apparitions. The members of the new six-person group, from that day had apparitions every day, individually and collectively, in various places. On the third day the appearing figure told the visionaries that she was the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the fourth day the Lady spoke to the visionaries three times and gave them a message for the priests: “[May the priests firmly believe \(in the apparition\)!](#)” On the fifth day 15,000 people appeared on the Hill of Apparitions. On the sixth day the visionaries were sent to the nearby town of Mostar for medical examinations, but no psychological disorders were diagnosed. The Lady appeared on the hill every day until 15 January 1982, when the visionaries, on account of large crowds of pilgrims, moved to the parish church, and then in 1985 to the parish house. At the beginning reports about the apparitions were provided every week, but from 1987 they have been made available once a month.

The apparitions continue until now ( 2018) and some of the visionaries have daily

visions, although one of them lives in the USA, and the other in Italy.

The events in Medjugorje have a different character than the earlier described apparitions. Although the visionaries, as in the other events, came from a small village and were young, unlike the others, they were literate since in communist Yugoslavia they had full access to education, television and books. In this part of the world sixteen or seventeen year old girls are more like young women than small children, but they were so called by the believers. It is difficult to understand why these educated young people got so scared by the sight of a woman with a child that they ran away, while in other apparitions, considerably younger and inexperienced visionaries, showed no fear in truly unusual situations. It is also puzzling why two young people left the group and rejected the chance of experiencing divine apparitions, unless from the very beginning they did not believe in it. On the other hand, two new young people who joined the group started having visions similar to their friends. It looks as though the visionaries established a club. Those who left it lost the ability to experience apparitions, however new members received this gift.

The apparitions still take place, however the contents of received messages becomes more and more trivial. It is interesting that such numerous visions did not have any significant influence on the life of the visionaries and the long term contact with the Mother of God did not affect their psychological and spiritual development in the least. None of them took a religious path by entering a religious order or devoting themselves to charity work, as was the case with many other visionaries. The fact that they benefit financially from the apparitions also does not reflect well on their intentions and on the authenticity of the events described by them.