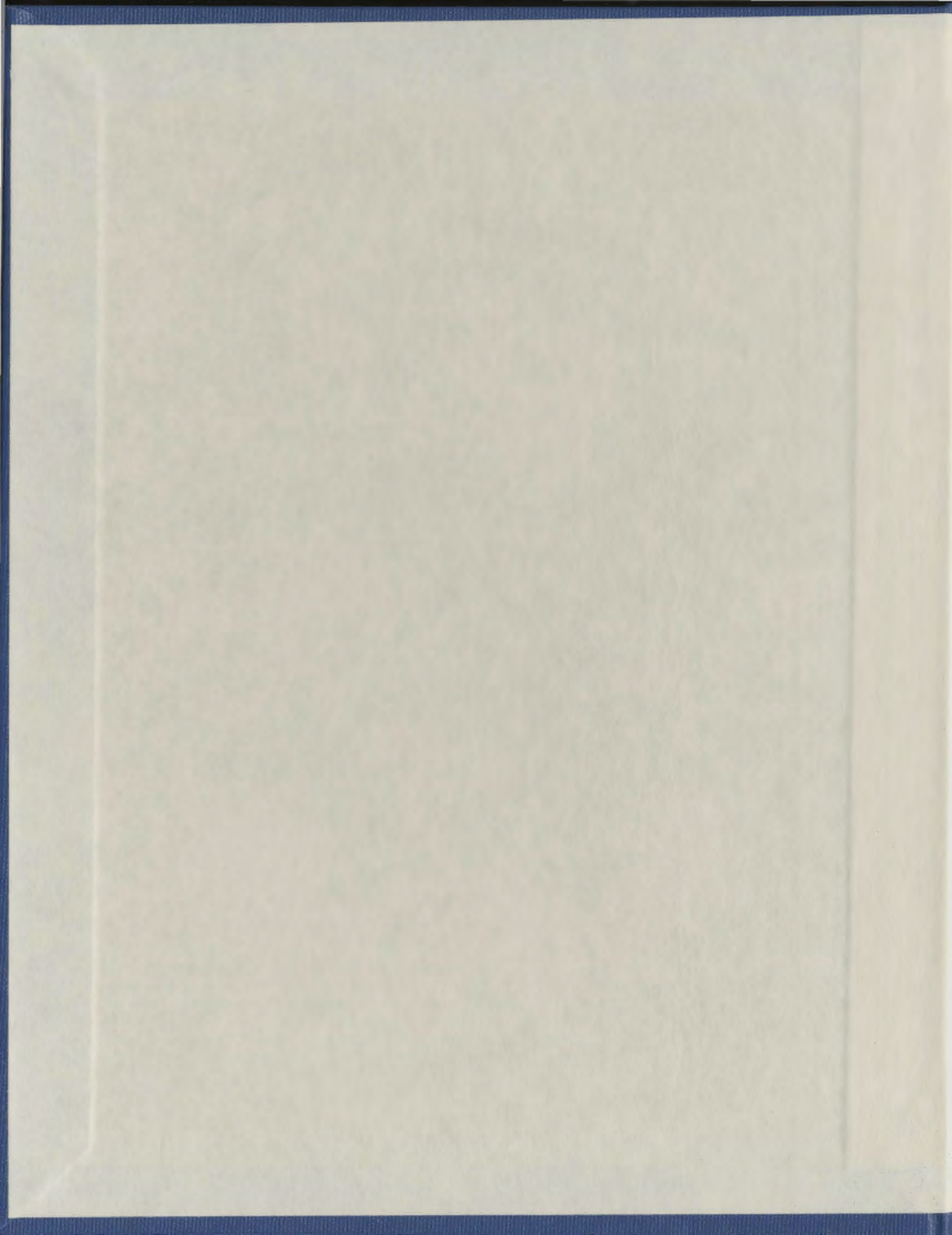


THE BODY/IES OF THE FAITHFUL:  
A CORPOREAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF CANADIANS  
ON A ROMAN CATHOLIC MARIAN PILGRIMAGE  
TO MEDJUGORJE, BOSNIA

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By

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## ABSTRACT

As human beings who know the world through our bodies, understand the world through our bodies, and think through our bodies, we engage our “most natural tool” (Lock 1993, 148) in the process of belief in a number of ways. The body is “our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty 1945); a self that acts on the world “necessarily does so through the medium of the body” (Csordas 1990). For this reason, I endeavour in this thesis to properly engage the body in the work of Religious Studies, highlighting the body’s tangible impact on belief and worldview by exploring how it is perceived as being engaged in the process of belief. This ethnography of a group of thirty-two Francophone pilgrims from Canada explores the ideas, stories, beliefs and philosophies of members of this group in the context of their involvement in a Roman Catholic pilgrimage to a Marian apparition shrine, at Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina. This thesis’ focus is on the highly developed and intricate framework with which pilgrims understand their venturing out to meet God and the confirmations of faith they hope to receive. Concentrating on the manner in which they perceive their minds, bodies, and souls as being involved in corporate and private devotional practices in the context of an organized group pilgrimage, I assess these pilgrims’ understandings of their own (as well as that of their fellow pilgrims’) inclinations, motivations (religious, spiritual, physical, social, etc.), thoughts, views, and beliefs regarding these practices.

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Heather, I wish to express my appreciation for your support. Thank you for bearing with me during long, long hours. Thank you for encouraging me to keep writing, and thank you for accepting to live the student's life with me.

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# PREAMBLE:

## THE MEDJUGORJE APPARITIONS

Medjugorje is one of the many villages of the municipality of Citluk, in South-Western Herzegovina, in today's state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bordered to the east by Montenegro, to the west by Bosnia, to the south by Croatia and the Adriatic Sea, Herzegovina is situated between a mountainous region to the north and a coastal region to the south. As the largest of the five surrounding villages (Medjugorje, Bijakovici, Vionica, Miletina, Surmanci), Medjugorje (of Slavic origin, the name means "area between two mountains") lent its name to the Roman Catholic parish which was founded in 1892 which is now inhabited by approximately 4000 Croat-speaking Roman Catholics.<sup>1</sup> This parish is located twenty-five kilometres from Herzegovina's main cultural and administrative centre, Mostar. With its gentle winters and warm summers, Medjugorje's main traditional activity is the production of wine and tobacco. The 1969 naming of Saint James (the patron saint of pilgrims) as the patron saint of the parish has

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics quoted in this Preamble were taken from the Tourist Association of Medjugorje/Bijakovici's official Website, which can be accessed at [www.tel.net.ba/tzm-mediugorje/ulazaken.html](http://www.tel.net.ba/tzm-mediugorje/ulazaken.html). The narrative accounts presented in the Preamble are from the oral accounts commonly presented to pilgrims at the shrine.



been seen by many as harbinger of the community's future, as the parish is now one of the best known and most visited places of pilgrimage in the world.

Until June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1981, the parish of Medjugorje was of little consequence to even the regional economy. On this date, however, a young teenager named Ivanka Ivankovic reported having seen a young woman carrying a young child in her arms, motioning her to come nearer while she was out walking on Mount Crnica with her friend, Mirjana Dragicevic. The two teenage girls had gone up the mountain to hide from their parents in order to smoke cigarettes. Frightened, they excitedly went down to the village and told other youngsters about the apparition. Four of Mirjana's and Ivanka's friends climbed Mount Crnica with them the next day and caught sight of the lady, which this time they recognized as the Virgin Mary. On the third day, the children were again drawn to the site of the first apparition, though one of the original six could not be there, but was "replaced" instead by another young girl. From this day onward, the *Gospa* (which means "Our Lady" in Croatian) is said to have appeared to the same six individuals<sup>2</sup> on a daily, then weekly, monthly, or yearly basis.

From the very first day of the apparitions, numerous people were interested and trekked up the hill to see to what the children were referring. Within two days, in excess of three thousand people had flocked from the surrounding towns and villages to be in

---

<sup>2</sup> The seers' names are Jakov Colo, Ivan Dragicevic, Mirjana Dragicevic, Ivanka Ivankovic, Vicka Ivankovic, and Marija Pavlovic.

the presence of the children, to perhaps witness the apparition themselves, and to hear "first-hand" the message which the apparition had for the children. On one of the first days, when the six children began to pray at the site, all in attendance saw brilliant flashes of light, signalling the arrival of the *Gospa*. On the sixth day of the apparitions, the parish priest of Medjugorje, Father Jozo Zovko, told the seers that he would prefer that the apparitions took place in the parish church. The children were hesitant, and told the priest that they were unsure of whether the *Gospa* would appear to them in the church. On that day, at the prescribed time, however, the children were graced with the presence of Our Lady. From this day, the visionaries have reported having apparitions, as a group or separately, wherever they were located.

Every day, at around 5:00pm (6:00pm with Daylight Savings Time), the seers begin to pray the rosary. About half an hour later, the seers kneel, typically in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary, and pray seven *Pater noster*s, seven *Ave Marias*, and seven *Glorias*. The seers describe the beginning of the apparition as three luminous flashes followed by a large white space. At this point, it is said that the seers are no longer able to see or hear what happens around them. The visionaries describe the *Gospa* as a beautiful young woman of no more than nineteen, resplendent with holiness, who appears to them as a three-dimensional real image. She stands but a few feet away from the visionaries upon a small cloud, gazing with piercing blue eyes, her dark hair kept together with a crown of twelve stars. Almost every single time she has appeared to the

children, she has welcomed them with the same "My dear children" (cf. Csordas' study on prophecies [1997, 322]) and has dismissed them by thanking them for having responded to her call.

The messages of the Virgin have evolved at much the same pace as the pilgrimage centre. During the first three years of the Medjugorje apparitions, the Virgin gave messages at irregular intervals. Destined for the seers themselves, these messages are rarely shared by pilgrims or the shrine organizers. Every Wednesday from 1984 to 1987, Marija received messages from the Virgin which were destined for the parish of Medjugorje. From then on, the Virgin began to give "Messages to the World" on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of each month. The content of these messages is typically very straightforward, consisting of simple reminders to humanity about the importance of peace, love, and conversion. Acting as a motherly figure, the *Gospa* is said to insist on five key elements: Peace, Conversion, Prayer, Reconciliation and Fasting. At times, the seers are said to have a two-way conversation with the Virgin, and at other times, the *Gospa* simply gives them messages or secrets. The three seers who report still having a daily Marian apparition are said to have received nine of the ten "secrets of Medjugorje." The remaining three, who see the *Gospa* only once or twice yearly, are said to have received all ten secrets. These secrets have not (yet) been revealed, nor is it clear whether these secrets are the same for all the seers. Thus far, the only secret which has been made (partially) public by the seers is that the Virgin promised to leave a durable,



indescribable, and indestructible sign on Apparition Hill, a sign which will prove the veracity of the apparitions.

The village of Medjugorje has much changed since 1981, most especially in its organic adaption as a pilgrimage centre. The once-minuscule parish now boasts the capacity to host, lodge, and “entertain” almost 20,000 pilgrims concurrently. The Franciscans who manage the pilgrimage centre estimate that over thirty million people have made the pilgrimage to date. Over the years, over four hundred medical dossiers have been collected by the parish documenting reported medical healings (Medjugorje Archives).

The drawing power of the Medjugorje apparitions is difficult to overemphasize. The small parish of Saint James, which, in 1980, was made up of little more than one thousand souls served by a handful of Franciscan clerics, has become an international gathering place of faithful. Roman Catholics from all over the world make the difficult journey to the village. Unquestionably the most important symbol of (Roman Catholic) Croatian Identity in the region of Mostar, this site of hierophany (cf. Eliade 1959) and center of spiritual energy (cf. Glazier 1992) is believed by many to be permeated with great mystical powers (cf. Preston 1992). In just over twenty years, Medjugorje attracted more pilgrims than both Lourdes and Fatima (Sells 2003, 319), becoming “[o]ne of the most famous and most visited pilgrimage centers in the Roman Catholic world” (Bax 1992, 116). Since statistics began to be compiled in 1985, over 20,000,000 communions



have been given by over 400,000 concelebrating priests (Tourist Association of Medjugorje/Bijakovici). There are presently 22 restaurants in the parish,<sup>3</sup> and over 80% of the total accomodational arrangements are in private homes, though 5,000 more beds are presently available in guesthouses. At present, hotel accommodation in Medjugorje and Bijakovici is still sparse, totalling 350 places (*ibid*).<sup>4</sup> For Gabriel, one of the pilgrims in our group, Medjugorje is "an international Carrefour" for the faithful:

The site is à la mode, at present. The site that is snowballing actually, the sacred site where the most people are converging actually, is Medjugorje. That's because in Medjugorje, the apparitions are still happening, and that the contents of the message is current. It's natural for people to tend towards the contemporary. And what is most contemporary presently is Medjugorje (*personal communication*).

Since the apparitions began in 1981, the vast majority of local people have abandoned their traditional occupations and now earn their livings from the religious tourism trade. The percentage of residents who take part in the religious life of the parish is very high; pilgrim guides boast that around ninety percent of the population takes part in the Mass at least weekly. One can hardly fail to notice that this generally spurs on the pilgrims, encouraging them in their faith and in their pilgrimage.

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<sup>3</sup> These are: Adriana, Alf, Coco, Colombo, Dubrovnik, Fontana, Galija, Garden's, Juka, Martin, Međugorje, Mir, NN, Orbis, Palma, Porta, Queen, Titanic, TOMATO, Vlaho, Victor's, and Šumica Circle International.

<sup>4</sup> Along with the growth of the popularity of the pilgrimage, there has been a steady growth in the number of inhabitants since the beginning of the apparitions. Because of a combination of the apparitions at Medjugorje and a significant increase in birth rates, the number of inhabitants increased by one third during the first fifteen years of Our Lady's apparitions. The population of Medjugorje currently numbers about 3,500 inhabitants, all of whom are of Croatian nationality, speak Croatian, and are Roman Catholic.

# INTRODUCTION:

## THE STUDY OF PILGRIMAGE

### PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is an understudied topic in the social sciences. This is attributable to a number of reasons, not the least of which being the difficulties that the social scientist must face in this field of study. First, the question of how one is to study a phenomenon that is by its nature transitory and fluid is a difficult one facing the ethnographer. Dubisch notes that the traditional method of participant observation is challenged by the conjunction of the moving body with the specific sites involved in various ways in pilgrimage (2004, 111). For this reason, the scholar must seek a balance between what, following Coleman and Elsner (1995), Roseman refers to as the four coordinates of person, place, text, and movement (2004, 70) by combining "the study of pilgrims and their networks," and "the pilgrimage itself and pilgrim sites" together (cf. Bowie 2006, 259). Second, as Bowie highlights, anthropology is not well equipped to contend with personal experience (2006, 237), a problem that is amplified by the fact that pilgrimages are, by definition, "exceptional practices, irregular journeys outside habitual social

realms" (Morinis 1992, 2). Pilgrimage's "enactment of a physical, spiritual, and emotional journey, and a search for transformation, healing, or sociality," presents an even more important challenge to the anthropologist (Bowie 2006, 237), who also must translate pilgrims' experiences into text, and this, at the risk of "losing the spontaneity and multilayered richness of human religious activity" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 9).<sup>5</sup> To add to these difficulties, the practice tends to not fit into conventional anthropological categories, being

a composite process pieced together from elements of mythology, ritual, belief, psychology, social roles, architecture, geography, literature, drama and art, and spiritual concerns. Pilgrimage partakes of the mystical, and nothing is less amenable to investigation by social science (Morinis 1992, 2).

Scholars from a range of disciplines have proposed methods, philosophies, and epistemologies for investigating the corporeal and carnal aspects of belief and religious involvement. Among the most prolific have been anthropologists (cf. Bowie 2003; Csordas 1990, 2004, Goffman 1974; Lock 1993; Reischer and Koo 2004), sociologists (cf. Clark-Rapley 1999; Farnell 1994, 2000; Roth and Bowen 2001), psychologists (cf. Belzen 1999), folklorists (cf. Sklar 1994; Young 1993, 1994), and philosophers (cf. Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1979; Lefebvre 1991). Notwithstanding the recent surge in interest, which has focused primarily on such aspects as the body's symbolism, meaning, impact

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<sup>5</sup> Coleman and Elsner explain that any written account "almost inevitably simplifies and overclarifies the ambiguities and evocative associations of symbols, rituals, and experience. No book written in prose can be fully free of this difficulty in representing the dynamic character of human behaviour" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 9)



(on identity, individual action, on consciousness), and movement, the body is still not considered as "central to the anthropological endeavour," and this, in spite of the fact that it "mediates all reflection and action upon the world" (Lock 1993, 133). The hesitation to consider the body's involvement in the practice of belief is all the more surprising in the field of Religious Studies. Religious Studies, in its search "for the unquantifiable, the ultimate, the other, that which so exceeds our understanding that it is beyond material expression" is often deprived of the material vehicles of expression capitalized on by such disciplines as Folklore and Anthropology, objects which can serve to "illuminate both the individual and communal search for meaning" (Primiano 2001, 56). These disciplines, Primiano notes, can also easily be excessively focussed on the material "item," to the detriment of the absolute. For this reason, Primiano explains, these disciplines can contribute to each other by materializing one and de-materializing the other. However, in the face of the increasing number of scholars' recent works towards conceptualizing and developing an epistemology of the body, the failure to theorize the body in the context of pilgrimage or contact with the "marvel" is astounding, especially when one considers the fact that the human body's involvement in pilgrimage has innumerable and obvious ramifications. Bodily / corporeal / carnal participation has an important impact on the pilgrims' (and the involved/concerned institutions') motivations and beliefs. In 1992, Alan Morinis underscored the fact that little attention had yet been paid to the psychophysical aspects of pilgrimage performance; the relationship between pilgrimage beliefs and behaviour, he pointed



out, had hardly been studied at all (18). In the same edited volume, James Preston highlighted a number of areas where little research had yet been made, and underscored the need for more scholarship in these areas which included, among others, individuals' motivations to undertake sacred journeys, the manner in which these pilgrimages psychologically change people, the role perceived salvation, suffering, and penance play in the pilgrimage process, healing as a by-product of pilgrimage, and the manner in which physical as well as mental illnesses are influenced by visits to sacred center [Preston 1992, 43]. Almost two decades later, little research has focussed specifically on these issues.

As Coleman and Eade observe, "recent studies of pilgrimage have noted the contrasts between the topic's relative neglect in past ethnographic writing and its current growth both as an activity and as an object" (2004, 4; cf. Morinis 1992, 2). Likewise, Roseman notes the increasing interest in "comparative pilgrimage studies" and in "research on pilgrim-tourists, religious tourism, ethnic tourism, and the history of human journeying" (2004, 70). In the context of the Roman Catholic Church, interest in the subject of pilgrimage in the academy has swelled since the Second Vatican Council's affirmation of the Roman Catholic Church as herself a "Pilgrim Church" (*Lumen Gentium*). The study of pilgrimage is a promising field with much legroom. Eade and Sallnow note that in spite of the pioneering work done since the 1970s, "the anthropological study of pilgrimage, and particularly Christian pilgrimage, is still in its

infancy" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 26). The "extraordinary and exceptional event" that is pilgrimage (Dubisch 2004, 111-12) is for its participants

a particularly rich realm for examining the interplay of power, identity, and personal experience. Specifically, the hardship of the road, the constant contact with other pilgrims, the structuring of every moment of every day, all cause participants to reflect on their own lives, their relations to others, and their relationships to the divine (Galbraith 2000, 61),

If this is the case for pilgrims, it is no less so for those interested in the study of the practice. Pilgrimage, in its essence, is a very different object than the typical subject of folklife studies, and is an exceptionally fruitful space for inquiry.

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#### PILGRIMAGE SCHOLARSHIP

Pilgrimages are expected to change something in the participants' lives (Frey 1998). Consequently, the activities, landscapes, physical exercises and movements with which pilgrims are involved in the context of their spiritual quests have important and lasting impacts on their sense of self, their sense of the other, and their identity as a whole. As such, pilgrimages are exceptionally fruitful spaces for exploring relationships between power, identity, and personal experience (Galbraith 2000, 61), between belief, the body and the individual, between the person, the group and the 'Other.' The study of pilgrimage is indeed a fertile endeavour, one which will never be exhausted of its fruitfulness.

As Coleman and Elsner highlight, pilgrimage scholarship incorporates "a wide range of approaches – academic, confessional, personal and canonical" [among others].

They warn that any one approach can provide only "a limited and therefore misleading view" (1995, 8). Indeed, though pilgrims may be attending the same sites at the same times, they undergo vastly dissimilar experiences; "worshippers' perspectives are formed by their position in the crowd, their expectations, their cultural backgrounds," write Coleman and Elsner (1995, 198). Pilgrimage is thus best considered in an interdisciplinary and multi-paradigm manner (cf. Schryer 1991, 357-8). For this reason, this small-group ethnography draws from the gamut of recent pilgrimage scholarship in order to better contextualize the environment, the circumstances, and the pilgrimage experience of the participants.

#### THE CONTESTED "MEANING" OF MEDJUGORJE

Pilgrimages to Medjugorje are mostly organized by church groups, not-for-profit organizations, and travel agencies specializing in faith travel. For this reason, the village has been transformed into a locale constructed in order to accommodate groups walking to and from the important sites of the village, as well as their tour buses. The great majority of tourists visit many of the popular sites during their one or two-week stay, and most people choose to take part in a number of the "essential" activities offered (these are all-the-more essential when one considers the fact that there are no other options for most tourists!).

The "meaning" of a site is a carefully constructed creation. Although pilgrimages typically occur (literally) outside of churches or other such buildings associated with



religious institutions, and are understood to offer "liberation from profane social structures that are symbiotic with a specific religious system [...], they do this only in order to intensify the pilgrim's attachment to his own religion" (Turner & Turner 1978, 9). Pilgrimage organizers and shrine administrators often comprehend their function as being that of channelling the experiences of participants. This is done by choreographing their steps in a variety of ways; "through icons, symbols and stories, organizers seek to reinforce attachment to the more abstract entities of the Church and the nation" (Galbraith 2000, 65; 61). Pilgrimage shrines' highly organized structures impose severe limits on the possible interpretations which pilgrims can make of them (cf. Eade 1991, 73-74). This serves to promote a religious community by creating memorable experiences centered on religious doctrine and practice where participants' religious identities are reinforced (Galbraith 2000, 65) and collectively validated (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 54).

As Jennifer Porter highlights, the common understanding of pilgrimage falsely suggests that the meaning of pilgrimage centers is given to participants in "pure, paradigmatic form" (2004, 168). On the contrary, profound differences in the ways pilgrims and shrine officials relate to the shrine exist (cf. Coleman 2004, 54); as Coleman and Elsner make clear, pilgrims "engage in a multiplicity of frequently incompatible interpretations" (1995, 202). According to Eade and Sallnow,

the meanings and ideas which officials, pilgrims, and locals invest in the shrine – meanings and ideas which are determinately shaped by their political and religious,



national and regional, ethnic and class backgrounds – which help to give the shrine its religious capital, though this investment might well be in a variety of theological currencies. The power of a shrine, therefore, derives in large part from its character almost as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices... This, in the final analysis, is what confers upon a major shrine its essential, universalistic character: its capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses, to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires. Universalism is ultimately constituted not by a unification of discourses but rather by the capacity of a cult to entertain a respond to a plurality. The sacred centre, then, in this perspective, appears as a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers, and aspirations (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 15).

For some, this understanding is unduly pessimistic, since sites are not simply “empty vessels” but naturally pregnant with meaning. (cf. Coleman and Elsner 1994, 85).

Younger notes that though organizers’ attempts at encouraging “correct” interpretations are rarely entirely successful, they do have an important impact on how pilgrimages are lived (1992, 97). An important reason for the success of shrine administrators’ efforts at channelling the experiences of pilgrims is the often voluntary disposition of participants. In order to experience the pilgrimage as “fully” as possible, pilgrims will often attempt to “locate themselves as exactly as possible, theologically and spatially, within [the site’s] particular... tradition (Coleman and Elsner 1998, 56).

Sallnow writes that “the mere fact of a mass gathering is unlikely to indicate any unanimity of meaning or motive among participants.” He remarks that “on the contrary, it is more likely to reveal severely discrepant or discordant understandings of the significance of the cult, even among those nominally sharing the same faith” (Sallnow 1991, 137). Sallnow continues:

A miraculous shrine, by its very nature, is a repository of conflicting, contradictory meanings vested in it and exploited by different sections of its cultic constituency – priest and layman, governor and governed, town dweller and country dweller, landlord and peasant. Such conflicting meanings might co-exist in uneasy coalition, or different sets of meanings might gain the ascendant at different times. A miraculous shrine is, in a very real sense, an arena of competition and struggle between different groups attempting to win control of a crucial cultural resource (Sallnow 1991, 143).

Like Eade and Sallnow (1991), Coleman and Elsner also critique the Turners, focussing on the significance of the pilgrimage centre itself. Fixed in space, a pilgrimage center “is not fixed in significance. Part of the fascination of studying pilgrimage lies precisely in examining the juxtaposition of varying views... or competing definitions of divinity” (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 202).

In the first few days of the Medjugorje apparitions, the authorities in the then-Communist state of Yugoslavia feared that these “inventions” might be cause for riot and political uprising, and so, attempted to suppress their occurrence by barring access to Apparition Hill (cf. Christian 1996, 7). In the Communist press, the apparitions received much attention, and were depicted as a “fascist” movement which “constituted a threat to the unity of the Yugoslav people” (Bax 1990, 67). The Communist authorities were rightfully concerned; like Jack Santino’s Halloween (1998, 158), Medjugorje was not a neutral text – its symbolism was, from the very beginning, divisive and sectarian. Anti-Communist rhetoric is still a paradigmatic element in the meaning of the site years after the fall of the Communist state (cf. Bax 1995; Matter 2001; Sells 2003; Velikonja 2001), in spite of its no longer being advantageous to Herzegovina’s Roman Catholic



population's struggle against the government (cf. Bax 1990, 1991; Emmanuel 1993; Herrera 1999; Markle 1994).

Although pilgrimage is in many ways an encounter with the "Other" (in this case, a once-Communist country), "pilgrimage tends to conform to the cultural patterns of its field of patrons" (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 4). Fiona Bowie explains that "it is because pilgrimage centres are repositories for a culture's ideals that they have been so commonly and extensively supported" (2006, 244). Geographies, as Bowman notes, in Roman Catholic thought, "serve primarily as loci where the pilgrims are better able to body forth the subjects of their meditations in their imaginations" (Bowman 1991, 114). Crumrine and Morinis explain that it is precisely because they are displayed outside the complex and complicated realities of the everyday home community that that ceremonies in pilgrimage attain a meaningful coherence and strength (1991, 8). The home parish is linked indexically with the pilgrimage site through a variety of rituals, including the lighting of candles in remembrance of people back home, the invocation of names of particular people during the prayers of a group (Coleman and Elsner 1998, 54), and the bringing of letters, photographs, and ex votos for those unable to make the journey. As an "activity of persons," pilgrimage is an activity where people can "engage with resonant symbols of faith and identity by breathing life into personal and institutional history simultaneously, reframing both in mutually constitutive ways" (Coleman 2004, 54).

## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF THE MEDJUGORJE APPARITIONS

The Communist government is not the only institution which has expressed suspicions about the veracity of the apparitions in Medjugorje; the Roman Catholic Church, especially the church's local representative, the Bishop of Mostar, has taken an oppositional stance, discouraging official pilgrimages to the site. The Roman Catholic Church, understood by the faithful as a "living body" historically connected to the biblical miracles and revelations and "electrically charged" with the potential for miracles at the same time as it is responsible for shielding against false claims (Turner & Turner 1978, 205),<sup>6</sup> is typically trusted to give a verdict regarding what Shanafelt refers to as "marvels" (2004, 336).<sup>7</sup> Once miracles are authenticated by the Church, they are no longer to be considered beliefs, but facts; their authenticity is ascertained from oral deposition or material substantiation that suggest some normal operation of the natural world was suspended in fulfillment of God's higher purpose (*ibid*, 206). Some marvels, however, are never authenticated by the Church, whose representatives, for political,

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<sup>6</sup> Apparition claims have been challenged on a number of levels. Freudian psychology dismisses apparitions as deriving from an especially strong sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent formed during the Oedipal period (cf. Carroll 1983), ruling out a priori the possibility that Marian apparitions are actual instances of divine intervention (Carroll 1985, 85), while social scientists understand apparitions "as deeply entwined with political and social changes" (Matter 2001, 141). As Christian points out, however, the sample size selected by these authors (the apparitions that become popular) is simply too small and restrictive as compared to the wider sample to permit generalizations. Indeed, as Christian relates, it is as likely that the apparitions that engender a wide following are successful not because they are more "powerful" (my term), but because they reflect the desires of the faithful who place their trust in them (1996, 7-8). In other words, the case of a "right time and [a] right place for heaven to intervene" (*ibid*, 17).

<sup>7</sup> Shanafelt's use of the term "marvel" is reserved to specify "any event or effect of extraordinary wonder, thought to be tangibly real that is claimed to be the result of ultranatural force" (2004, 336).



social, economic, or other reasons, deem it best to remain silent on an issue. Other marvels may take generations to be authenticated. The apparitions of Medjugorje happen to be one of the marvels about which the institution has deemed it wisest to remain silent. The Medjugorje apparitions are, however intensely debated, nonetheless “the twentieth-century apparitions that have come the closest to being recognised by the Church” (Matter 2001, 129).

Though the recognition of the Holy See is by no means a prerequisite for vernacular religion, official support of the practice of pilgrimage is an important element in its popularity. One of the primary reasons for Roman Catholicism’s official recognition of pilgrimage as a valued and valuable devotion are the numerous textual justifications for the practice in the Bible. Over and above the obvious examples selected by Coleman and Eade, (the Biblical account of the Israelites’ forty years in the wilderness, Christ’s wandering, and the journey to Emmaus [2004, 23]), there are hundreds of other references to the fact of pilgrimage in the Bible which influence the Roman Catholic Church’s attitude towards the practice. In the Book of Genesis, for instance, humankind is said to have once enjoyed peace, but with the expulsion from Paradise, life itself became an exile. This exile, in the Biblical account, becomes a pilgrimage; God’s people wander in search of their God, who, it is written, reveals Himself periodically to those who pursue Him. Moreover, in biblical tradition, a great number of pilgrimage

landscapes are mentioned, where God is said to “show” Himself in some way (cf. Josiah 24:25; 1 Samuel 10:3; Amos 5:5; Judges 6:24 and 13:19).

Although pilgrimage may be an officially endorsed practice by the Roman Catholic church, pilgrimage to Medjugorje is not. The Turners write that “there is something inveterately populist, anarchical, even anticlerical, about pilgrimages in their very essence” (1978, 32).<sup>8</sup> Writing on a pilgrimage to Chimayo, Holmes-Rodman describes her group’s treatment of a pamphlet created and distributed by the Institution:

Its contents did not seem to change or challenge their own understandings of what pilgrimage was all about. This ‘official’ reminder of the motivations for walking was quickly folded away; it had little effect on the meaning of their six days of walking or on

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<sup>8</sup> A popular way to think about the practice of religion has been to highlight the discrepancies between the “official” and the “folk.” Don Yoder, for instance, understood folk religion as being “the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion” (1990, 80). This vision is echoed by Roof, who writes: “Religion consists of formal beliefs, rituals, and practices, yet is embedded in popular modes of thinking and acting” (2002, ix). What is lacking in these definitions is of course the recognition that the emotional and experiential factors of religious life work in synergy with what is most simply referred to as “official religion” (Yoder 1974) to create vernacular systems of belief and of religion (as distinguished from “folk” – see Primiano 1995) which should be considered as fairly as the various institutions’ “official” systems. If vernacular religion is to be understood as “religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret and practice it” (Primiano 1995, 44), the exceedingly subjective character of belief needs to be considered. As different points of view and perspectives are an “inevitable part of knowing” (Hufford 1995, 58), unanimity is wholly unattainable. In fact, as Primiano explicates, “it is impossible for the religion of an individual not to be vernacular” (1995, 44). He demonstrates this by noting that even the heads of the largest religious institutions understand the world in terms of their own vernacular understandings of it (1995, 46). Badone’s definition of popular religion is enlightening for our purposes: “those informal, unofficial practices, beliefs, and styles of religious expression that lack the formal sanction of established church structures. Implicit in this definition is an opposition between the informal system and the formal structures. Yet... the relationship is more than simply oppositional. Rather than viewing official and popular religion as monolithic entities, immutable and distinct, it is more fruitful to focus on the dialectical character of their interrelationship” (Badone 1990, 6). In other words, a focus on “religion as practiced” instead of “religion as prescribed” (*ibid*) is the guiding principle of this thesis.



their anticipation of the next day's arrival [at the shrine]. The women I was with that evening seemed to find resonance in this framing of their experiences; the official interpretive prompts in the pamphlet were 'true' but not complete or definitive. The paper was soon put aside, distant and out of sight, and the more immediate business of blisters, prayers, sharing, and sleep quickly attended to (2004, 26).

These inconsistencies between "official" and "non-official" discourses can occasion conflicts between shrine custodians and shrine devotees which derive from differing perceptions of the holy place itself (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 12). Morinis writes that pilgrims seek "a relationship with an ideal, often culturally-defined but sometimes fully personal" (Morinis 1992, 20). They tend to maintain their scepticism toward the institutions that seek to control their experience of shrines (Galbraith 2000, 61) as they negotiate the relationship between the formal church and their own popular religion in the official context of the shrine (Badone 1990, 18).

#### THE SACRED TRACE OF MEDJUGORJE: APPARITIONS

At the heart of each pilgrimage is what Preston refers to as "the sacred trace" (1990). Taking many different forms, this "valued ideal" (Rountree 2002, 483) is the source of the spiritual magnetism of a shrine, "its powerhouse, so to speak" (Preston 1990, 22). Rountree defines the sacred trace as the site where "there is a breach, or bleeding... between the sacred and profane realms, and between past and present worlds" (Rountree 2002, 484). In Medjugorje, an important element in this "sacred trace" is the hierophany of the Marian apparition. The importance of spatiality and geography in current anthropological conceptions of pilgrimage is difficult to overemphasize. Indeed, spatiality and geography play an immensely important role in

the Medjugorje pilgrimage. However, as Jennifer Porter (2004) highlights, theorists such as John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991, 6-7) have demonstrated that pilgrimage can sometimes be centered around the bodies of saintly mortals or incarnate deities – or semi-incarnate, in the case of the Marian apparitions of Medjugorje. The sacred geography of Medjugorje is much more difficult to isolate than that of the majority of other popular Marian apparition sites (and the great majority of shrines of other types) because the pilgrimage site has no single “sacred centre” to speak of. On the maps distributed by the Franciscans in charge of the shrine, the parish’s three most “important” sites<sup>9</sup> where the Virgin is said to have appeared to the children (the church, the Križevac, and Apparition Hill) are shown to form a triangle. Of these sites, not one is given priority over the others by either the pilgrims or the shrine organizers. These sites are clearly of great interest to the pilgrims, and the shrine organizers have demonstrated their knowledge of this by investing in a series of large works of art which have been placed at these three sites. The attractiveness of these three sites for the pilgrim is surprising, however, when one considers that the visionaries of Medjugorje “carry” the visions with them wherever they go (see “PREAMBLE”). For instance, though Mary is said to have first appeared at Apparition Hill, she is now understood to appear wherever the seers happen to be at 5:40pm on any given day. For this reason, it is worth noting

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<sup>9</sup> At least, according to the Franciscans.



that while pilgrims insist on visiting the sites of First apparitions and that they invest a good portion of their pilgrimage at the site of the Blue Cross (where the Virgin is said to have appeared during the Communist occupation of the parish), they ignore the buildings which currently house the daily and even the "more important" monthly apparitions. For this reason, this thesis follows Porter, and stresses the study of the unbounded processes of the community which gathers to collectively interpret, negotiate, and embody the ideals of their faith (2004, 173) instead of an emphasis on the bounded structures of the shrine.

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#### DEFINING APPARITIONS

Sociologist Edward Berryman notes that the apparitions of a deity "are certainly among the strongest mystical claims that can be made in a society that offers no officially institutionalized niche for such occurrences" (2001, 597). These hierophanies (which Eliade terms as "the act of manifestation of the sacred" in mundane reality [1959, 11]) are "sudden irruption[s] of the sacred in the profane world, sacred time opening to the transcendent, resulting in radical discontinuities" (*ibid*) where "a 'concrete' link is established between humans and the divine" (Berryman 2001, 605). Apparitions are where the sacred is directly experienced in a moment "in and out of time" (Turner 1974, 197). Fiona Bowie highlights that "many of the most popular contemporary Roman Catholic shrines are associated with a theophany, the manifestation of a deity or some aspect of the divine to human beings" (Bowie 2006,

246-7). In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that apparitions have been studied by anthropologists and folklorists extensively, they have been largely ignored by scholars of religion (Matter 2001, 126). The Marian apparitions at Medjugorje have received relatively little scholarly attention compared to other important Marian Apparition sites such as Lourdes and Fatima. However, some very prolific anthropologists have studied Medjugorje, including Elizabeth Claverie (2003) and Mart Bax (1995).

In the Protestant-dominated English-speaking world, historians "have tended to misunderstand the cult of the Virgin as a basically medieval phenomenon, a relic of a former age, and in any case an idea at odds with the rational and egalitarian religiosity of modernity," notes Matter (2001, 126). In point of fact, as Nolan notes, Western European pilgrimages are predominantly Marian (1983, 427). Campo observes that more than half of the Roman Catholic pilgrimage sites in the United States favour Marian devotions, the greater share of these being commemorative shrines dedicated to (apparitions of) the Virgin in Europe, such as Lourdes, Fatima, and Our Lady of Guadeloupe in Mexico (Campo 1998, 44).<sup>10</sup> For many millions of people today, as Pelikan notes, "no form of Marian devotion or doctrine has carried more momentous significance than her miraculous apparitions" (1996, 187). It is clear that pilgrimage does tend to conform to the cultural patterns of its field of patrons, 'imaging' as it does the

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<sup>10</sup> Wood notes that there are currently no apparitional shrines in the United States and Canada with official church approval. He explains that the Shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré in Québec is the only legitimate shrine in these countries that appears to be founded on a miracle story (but not an apparition) (Wood 1992, 118).



culture of its time and place (Sumption 1975; in Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 4). The great number of Marian apparition shrines in the world is a testament to the popular devotion to the Virgin.

A number of explanations have been proposed in order to account for the astonishing popularity of Marian apparitions as opposed to those of other saints (or of Christ himself). Though none of these explanations may entirely justify the remarkable number of incidences where popular apparitions involve the Virgin Mary, considered jointly, these theories ring true. Anne Matter notes that historians in the Protestant-dominated English-speaking world have tended to misunderstand the cult of the Virgin as "a basically medieval phenomenon, a relic of a former age, and in any case an idea at odds with the rational and egalitarian religiosity of modernity," notes Matter (2001, 126). Heartney explains that while Protestants "tend to downplay Mary's role, seeing her simply as an exemplary woman, for Catholics she performs multiple functions" (Heartney 2003, 5). First and foremost, Mary is conceived of as being at one and the same time human (and therefore empathetic to the souls living), and representing the humanization of the divine. As a member of the Church Triumphant, Mary is a most effective intercessor. She is at once understood as being "the embodiment of perfect motherhood (Heartney 2003, 5), the "understanding mother" (Berryman 2001, 605), the Queen of Heaven, and the Bride of Christ. She is also often portrayed as the Champion of the Oppressed, Protector of the Church, and her lifelong virginity and her



"Immaculate Conception" (born without the stain of sin that infects the soul of all other humans born since the Fall) are often seen as making her co-Redemptrix with Christ.

#### MARIAN APPARITION SITES AS EMBODIED

In Roman Catholicism, more often than not, apparitions feature Mary. Michael P. Carroll's scholarship on the apparitions of the Virgin is an attempt to establish some of the psychological "causes" for Marian apparitions (1983; 1985). The reason he gives for the popularity of Marian apparitions over apparitions of Jesus, Saint Joseph, God the Father, or the Archangels of the Bible appears satisfying, especially when we leave space for the numinous instead of focussing solely on the psychological. Carroll highlights the fact that in popular culture as well as in the popular imagination, female bodies are seen as being more "embodied" than men's bodies. Since the very notion of a materialized divinity is linked to sensory rituals (Gemzöe 2005, 44), it follows, as Gemzöe relates, that this divinity is aptly female, and that the rituals related to the site be elaborated through the senses.<sup>11</sup> Because Mary is the most important "female" element in Catholicism, it follows that she should be the deity who reaches out to humanity in a directly "material" manner. In this spirit, Western tradition generally identifies the body with nature and the female (cf. Bynum 1995, 6). Bynum writes that in Medieval theology, the mantra "spirit is to flesh as male is to female" extrapolates from this an association of woman

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<sup>11</sup> In the case of Medjugorje, the apparition of Mary is elaborated through all senses; pilgrims trek to Medjugorje hoping see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and/or feel God).

with the body or humanity of Christ (1992, 206). "As symbol of body," Heartney explains, "woman harbours humanity's potential for salvation" (Heartney 2003, 10). Perceived as below and above reason, as the witch's or visionary's, the female body was once a locus of power, "whereas male was seen as a rather pedestrian middle, incapable of direct contact either with angelic or with demonic power" (Bynum 1995, 17). In Catholicism, the female body is a remarkable source of inspiration, posits Heartney. She explains:

Providing an alternative to starkly rationalist views about the separation of mind and body, female incarnational thinking offers a model for other forms of knowledge that do less violence to our sensate, feeling selves. Knowledge through the body, as both feminists and female Catholics concur, is knowledge that celebrates our sexual, sensual nature (Heartney 2003, 21)

#### EMBODIMENT AND PILGRIMAGE SCHOLARSHIP

"Embodiment" (a term coined by Csordas, 1990) is a good starting point for the ethnographic investigation of the body. For some scholars today, embodiment has come to represent "the performance of one's body within cultural contexts that sanction particular forms of comportment and display [...] Oriented to culture," Cheville (2005) explains, "such researchers examine the ways that people come to 'inhabit' their bodies." Other researchers, she remarks, "note how certain neurological or cognitive functions arise from bodily activity" (Cheville 2005, 86). Situated not on the level of discourse but on that of lived experience, embodiment is concerned with "understanding" or "making sense" in a pre-reflexive or even pre-symbolic, but not pre-cultural, way (Csordas 1990, 10). Examining the link between pilgrimage beliefs



and behaviour is a much different context for inquiry than day-to-day religious practice. Customs that demand that "mountains be climbed, fasts endured, [or] austerities performed" have obvious and important implications (Morinis 1992, 17), and, because of their exotic nature and the *communitas* manifest in pilgrimage groups (Turner & Turner 1978), pilgrimages foster a sense of freedom, abandon, adventure, and free expression in the participant.

Modern Western culture is uncomfortable with the fact of embodiment. Kast writes that "we tend to check our bodies at the door when we enter the sacred space" (2000, 218). Conversely, as Rountree notes, when Goddess pilgrims speak of communing with the sacred, they tend to make use of terms which emphasize bodily experience: "'connect with,' 'contact,' 'feel,' 'sense,' 'experience.'" She explains that healing and transformation "flow directly from the sacred energy intrinsic to the site; the earth's body is the Goddess's healing body" (Rountree 2002, 493). The ways in which pilgrims to Medjugorje approach the various corporeally-based activities which are part of groups' pilgrimages to the village (both those recommended by the shrine administrators and those spontaneous practices which emerge unprompted) can prove to be very revealing of the pilgrims' approach to their bodies, their faith, their worldview, and the institutions to which they subscribe. Cross-culturally, the gamut of bodily forms of religious practice is very wide. Some religious systems recommend breathing exercises aimed at achieving a state of awareness. Some systems might endorse self-deprivation,



including such practices as fasting and the observance of Lent or a Ramadan, while others might emphasize the consumption (or abstention) of certain foods. In Roman Catholic thought, bodily and corporeal practice is a significant component of faith. Immediately obvious examples might be making the Sign of the Cross, the Mass, the consumption of the Eucharist, the blessing with holy water, genuflexion, the recitation of the rosary, and the wearing of scapulars, medals, and crucifixes.

These corporeal activities may be the very focus of a practitioner's prayer, as they may be automatic and absent-minded routines. Some activities, such as making the Sign of the Cross and genuflexion upon entering a church, for instance, are generally looked upon as customary and habitual, and, for many pilgrims, typically escape reflection because of their everyday "feel." Other activities, such as a pilgrim's reaching for and laying her hands on the Crown of Thorns on a stele representing one of the Stations of the Cross, materialize on-site, impulsively and spontaneously, and though the pilgrim may attach great importance to the experience, it may nonetheless appear inconsequential to the casual observer. Still other activities, such as the climbing of a mountain, require, for some pilgrims, months of planning and physical preparation. When studying the religious practices of a people, what has often been the focus of inquiry is the bizarre, the "Other," the exotic or esoteric. Others have focussed instead on the activities which were understood by their practitioners as being of more importance. As a scholar examining the "embodiment" of both a group of pilgrims' faith

and specific pilgrimage practices however, my intent is to highlight elements of pilgrims' religious practice which allow for insight into the practitioners' worldview.

#### THE EMBODIED ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church, along with its adherents, understood the body in a decidedly sensuous manner. At this time, "theorists who dealt with eschatology tended to talk of the person not as soul but as soul and body" (Bynum 1995, 19). The Roman Catholic Church and its adherents perceived the flesh as a means whereby one could experience the sacred, and for this reason, these parties sought to "harness these somatic experiences" by developing a "sacred eating community" (Hutchinson 2006, 10). For Protestants, the body was subjugated to the prioritization of words, symbols and the mind (Mellor and Shilling 1997); the transition from 'carnal knowing' to 'cognitive apprehension' (Miles 1992; in Hutchinson 2006, 10) which Protestantism supported had the effect of devaluing the flesh and divesting the world of the immanence of the sacred (Hutchinson 2006, 10). In this manner, for medieval Christians, the body began to be considered "a source of the temptations that lead to sin [in spite of], through its association with the body of Christ, [being] the key to salvation and hence a means of access to the Divine" (Heartney 2003, 10). This intellectualizing atmosphere led to manifestations of the supernatural often being interpreted as evil (Hutchinson 2006, 10). Although the Enlightenment and the Reformation may have overshadowed the importance and meaning of the body, a "Catholic imagination"

persists. This form of essentially “incarnational” creative consciousness “proceeds by thinking through, rather than against, the body [... and] tends to emphasize the metaphorical nature of creation” (Heartney 2003, 4). Roman Catholics, according to Tracy, “assume a God who is present in the world, and thus tend to view the world, and human society, as inherently good and Godlike”<sup>12</sup> (Tracy 1990, 436–38).

An appreciation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints is the initial step in understanding the origin, meaning and purpose of corporeality in Roman Catholic belief. The Roman Catholic Church, along with most of its adherents, “conceive[s] of the struggle for salvation as a lifelong drama played out essentially in the individual soul but involving a huge cast of actors, some visible, some invisible, some natural, some supernatural (Turner & Turner 1978, 16). Divided into three main constituents, the Communion of Saints is made up of the Church Militant (the mortals presently alive on earth), the Church Penitent (the souls in Purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (God, the Saints, the angels, and the souls in Heaven). As the Turners explicates, the individual soul

is seen as dramatically involved, until the moment of death, with all these persons, personages, and corporate groups. It has free will to turn to God or away from him. God in turn plies the soul with graces (either directly or through sacramental ritual), which

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<sup>12</sup> Tracy explains that “dialectically” thinking Protestants, on the other hand, “assume that God is radically absent from the world and discloses himself only on rare occasions. Thus, for them, human society is God-forsaken, unnatural, and oppressive. Standing against society, the spiritually inclined human must break away from the world and relate to God as a completely free individual” (Tracy 1990, 436–38).



are thought of as gifts aiding in salvation or in resistance to temptation. These may be freely accepted or rejected (*ibid*).

The souls in all three constituencies help one another by interceding for each other, and often, in a very tangible, physical, corporeal sense.

Our contemporary attitude towards the body, according to Bottomley, “may spring from a confused reaction against what has been subjectively conceived as an enslaving or derogatory attitude to the body which has been identified as Christian” (1979, 155). Indeed, the Christian tradition was long dominated by what Viefhues refers to as “body-hating male ascetics.” Viefhues, a Jesuit friar himself, notes that for this reason, recovering the body as a theological site has to be in opposition to traditional forms of Christianity (2001, 415). To be fair, however, what Viefhues notes as being “traditional forms of Christianity” are not primarily Christian in any sense, but rather, as Bottomley notes, “[t]he central and persistent teaching of those who were considered ‘the best minds’ [of the classical tradition].” These thinkers persistently posited “that all man’s troubles, sins and sufferings arose from the fact that he had a body” (1979, 157). Bottomley lists some notable examples:

Plato described [the body] as ‘the prison-house of the soul’, Seneca spoke of ‘the detestable habitation of the body’, while Epictetus described himself as ‘a poor soul shackled to a corpse’ and Porphyry, in his panegyric life of his master wrote of him: ‘Plotinus, Porphyry, in his panegyric life of his master wrote of him: ‘Plotinus, our contemporary philosopher, seemed ashamed to be in the body’” (Bottomley 1979, 157).

In direct opposition to this is the central mystery of Roman Catholic belief: that Christ is both God and man. This, according to Breen, “invites the faithful to see the promise of

salvation in terms of themselves" (Breen 1992, 444). Far from rejecting and denigrating the body, incarnational theology sees the body as "the locus of struggle, trial, and the victory of resurrection" (Viefhues 2001, 415). "In the incarnate Christ," note Coleman and Elsner,

the previously ineffable and invisible God had taken a body; and in the Transfiguration that human body shone with its divine nature. The Christian supersession of the New Covenant over that of the Old was thus centrally represented in the figure of Christ as the embodiment of God (1994, 84).

The fact that Roman Catholic thought has remained more "embodied" is not a coincidence, but rather a direct consequence of bodily practice within the Institution's membership and liturgy. Viefhues writes that body *and* soul "cooperate and flourish through the Spirit's governance" (Viefhues 2001, 415). The Roman Catholic Sacrament of the Eucharist, for example,

still requires its practitioners to think in bodily ways about transcendence, and to think in transcendent ways about the body. It points inescapably to the underlying corporeal reality of Christ's body in the New Testament witness: the one who appeared in 'human form,' who was 'dead and buried,' and who was 'raised.' By emphasizing the embodied character of Christic presence and of human offering, it points also to the Christian understanding of the body as in process of resurrection, a process enacted through the opposition of the 'two bodies' of spirit and flesh (Rom. 8:1-4), leading to transformation in individuals and in society, 'the redemption of our bodies' that is 'the revealing of the children of God (Rom. 8:23, 19) (Dunnill 2003, 93).

Jesus' adult life is believed to have consisted of

putting his own body and material goods at the disposal of the Other. His response to the bodies of others, to their sickness, blindness, hunger, thirst, and even their deaths, was material: hands, spittle, wine and bread, his own mortality. In effect, the Last Supper was nothing new; it was the extension of a life that had already spent itself in service to the wretched. Jesus' body was 'for others' long before he surrendered it in death" (Sanders 1996, 585).

Hutchinson recognizes that the Roman Catholic theology (and, I would add, *popular notion*) of the Church as the "Body of Christ" can be understood to symbolize the nature and purpose of being human (2006, 17). "It is the possibility to experience the Christian community coming together before God, not as spirits only but also as bodies, that is particularly significant," writes Bethmont. "Catholic worship opens the possibility of being more fully in communion with one another as human beings who are both matter and spirit" (Bethmont 2006, 236). Because Roman Catholicism is a most directly "embodied" philosophy and practice, an appreciation of the corporeal ways of believing within (and perhaps especially, without) its official structures and dogmas is instrumental in an understanding of the faith.

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#### THE MODERN BODY

While the body was once regarded as "a transitory vehicle, a means to higher spiritual ends," modernity depicts the body as "the passport to all that is good in life." Consequently, we have become aware both of the limitations of our flesh, yet increasingly bereft of knowledge that previously enabled us to make sense of the "reified entrapment of transhistorical human longings within distorted forms" (Featherstone 1982, 30; in Hutchinson 2006, 6). In the latter part of the twentieth century, social scientists' writings (and Western culture in general) have begun to display a more acute awareness of the body. Bynum makes a good case for the "embodiment" of modernity by citing as examples some products of popular culture:



In contrast to the popular literature of the turn of the century, or even the 1950s, when table tipping, spiritualism, multiple personalities, etc., provided the medium for exploring issues of personal survival, today's popular culture worries about bodies. Its stories and images tend to erase the kind of line between mind and body that would make the transplanting or disembodying of consciousness or memory a satisfactory conception of personal continuity...In the remake of *The Fly*, what was in the earlier version a mechanical joining of human and fly parts is now the eruption from within of an alien and uncontrollable 'something' that, by replacing the material of the body, destroys the previous self. Popular fiction, such as *Who is Julia?* or *Memories of Amnesia*, suggests that transplant of a body part (and it is not only the brain that is at stake here) could be transplant of self. Moreover, it is in my view significant not only that religious groups differ in their response to organ transplants but also that they consider the matter a deeply fraught ethical issue, not merely a medical matter. To come back to the movies: medieval and modern conceptions find a strange and explicit mirroring in the recent film *Jesus of Montréal*, where the modern Christ figure saves others after his death through heart and cornea transplants. Suggesting that organ transplantation is the modern translation of resurrection, the film raises complex questions about part and whole, survival and self (Bynum 1995, 9).

A number of thinkers have drawn attention to the fact that "we no longer think there is such a thing as the body – a kind of 'flesh dress' we take up, or put off, or refurbish according to the latest style" (Bynum 1995, 2). This "stubborn enfleshment of humans" (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 22; in Hutchinson 2006, 10) has been examined from many angles, including that of the body as the subject of culture itself (Csordas 1989: 5; 1994b: 269). From this perspective, culture is viewed as grounded in the body – as one exists as a body in the world – and one comes to comprehend the world through bodily existence in it. In this way, the socially informed body is an object of interest, not because it is a symbol of the cultural (cf. Douglas 1970), but because it is its very basis (cf. Mitchell 2004, 34-5).

Bodies are important. McGuire highlights that "they matter to the persons who inhabit them, and religions speak to many of these body-oriented human concerns." She

continues, "Part of the reason our bodies matter to us is that we strongly identify our very concerns [...], our very selves, with our bodies. We experience things done to our bodies as done to our selves" (2001, 284). Indeed, we come to know the world through our bodies. The body, not just the mind (head), is, after all, "the fundamental site for all cognition" (Roth and Bowen 2001, 461). "The 'lived' body," writes McGuire,

is our vehicle for perceiving and interpreting our world. As material reality, human bodies also vividly experience the material conditions of social existence. Society inscribes itself upon the concrete bodies of its members" (McGuire 2001, 284).

Janelle Taylor writes that "The body, one might say, is not so much a thing as an -ing." She explains that "not simply the inert objects on which mind and culture perform their meaning making, bodies take shape and take place through practices of all sorts: feeding, legislating, training, cutting, explaining, beating, loving, diagnosing, buying, selling, dressing, and healing, among others" (Taylor 2005, 745). For Young, it is clear that because the world "adumbrates itself around the body [...], the body anchors the self's experience. From that anchorage, we apprehend the world, the Other, and the self" (Young 1994, 3).

The recognition and appreciation of the carnal quality of membership in a group (cf. Durkheim 1961) allows us to recognize the carnal basis of human meaning-making, since it is the corporeal aspects of social life which "provide the glue that holds together world views and cosmologies, values and social structures..., the substance, the media, and the organizing schema around which social life coalesces"



(Sklar 1994, 13). Instead of viewing the body as “an uninteresting prerequisite of human action” (Shilling 1993, 19), as has been the common and expected custom in scholarship, Reischer and Koo note that fields from across the disciplinary spectrum have “turned their attention to the body as a central concern of social theory” (2004, 298).

The recognition that “the body has a history” and that “it is no less a cultural construction than is a work of art, a philosophical text or system of table manners” (MacAloon 1991, in Young 1994, 3) has opened new doors in academia. Following Hansen, Needham and Nichols, who wrote that ethnography, not unlike pornography, serves to “produce the body as a site, and to extract respectively pleasure and knowledge from that site, while at the same time taming and mastering it” (1989, 69) Katharine Young argues for the textualization of the body not as *object*, but as *discourse* (Young 1994, 3-4). If, as Young argues, “it is through the body, and only through the body, that the domestication of the Other can occur” (*ibid*), then it follows that the corpus of our scholarly endeavours should cease being “bookish” and start being more *material* and *substantial*.

Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1975), and Mauss (1950), seeking to overturn a naturalistic approach to the body as biological given, have helped redefine the body as a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon (Reischer and Koo 2004, 298). The conclusions and propositions of these philosophers, along with the gamut of



scholarship which emerged after the publication of their ideas have brought to the fore a number of perspectives on embodiment. The three predominant perspectives on the subject in the past decade have been to regard the body as a "cultural text" (representation), as "trained" (inscription), or as an expression of identity (agency). Though each of these perspectives boasts its own proponents and scholarship, and can be treated separately, one is not exclusive of the other. Golden highlights that the body may be each of these at one and the same time (2004, 405).

There are a number of ways in which the human body is consciously and subconsciously engaged in the process of belief. These include such disparate activities and rituals as climbing mountains barefoot, kneeling during Mass, fasting, and saying rosaries. Thinkers have put forth innumerable ideas about believers' inclinations, motivations (religious, spiritual, physical, social, etc.), thoughts, views, and beliefs regarding corporeal practices, but rarely while concentrating on the overall purpose of bodily involvement. In contexts such as pilgrimage, where the body is deeply involved in the practice of belief, a theoretic frame which reconciles culture, corporeality and cognition is essential.

# CHAPTER 1:

## METHODOLOGY

### APPROACH

Pilgrimage has long been an interest of mine. Although markedly younger than the majority of the white-haired individuals accompanying me on most of these journeys, I normally participate as fully as possible during pilgrimages, and perceive the activities on offer as opportunities to encounter the sacred and deepen my faith. Since becoming a graduate student, I have visited a number of the major Roman Catholic places of pilgrimage around the world. These include, among countless lesser-known shrines and churches, Saint Joseph's Oratory (Montréal, Québec), the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica (Québec City, Québec), the tomb of Father Maximilian Kolbe (Auschwitz concentration camps, Poland), the image of Merciful Jesus in the Wawel Cathedral (Krakow, Poland), the image of the Black Virgin (Czestochowa, Poland), the statue of the Black Christ of Portobello (Portobello, Panama), the Monastery of the Infant Jesus of Prague (Prague, Czech Republic), the Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne Cathedral (Cologne, Germany), Westminster Cathedral (London, England), the Sacred Heart Basilica (Paris, France), and Medjugorje (Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina). Over and

above these pilgrimages, faith travel is an important part of almost every trip I make. For instance, when visiting Cuba, I spent a week touring the parishes and churches of the dioceses of Matanzas and Cienfuegos with my cousin (a Canadian priest posted as a missionary in Cuba since the 1960s), who even had me invited to the country's Apostolic Nunciature, where I had a short meeting with the papal nuncio. In the course of these travels and pilgrimages, I began to take note of the variations and differences between the various Roman Catholic places of pilgrimage I was visiting, and was extremely surprised by the divergences between them. Because the various shrines I was visiting and comparing solidly anchor themselves in the Roman Catholic tradition, I was astounded to see the extent to which these shrines differ from one another. Every pilgrimage centre has not only its own cult, but also its own following, traditions, procedures, rituals, customs, and understanding(s) of faith, life, and God.

The pilgrimage journey undertaken for the purposes of this thesis represents the fourth such journey to Medjugorje I have undertaken. On my first journey as a pilgrim to Medjugorje in 2001, I was very much caught up in the experience of a first-time pilgrim to Bosnia. On my second journey to Medjugorje, in 2004, again as a pilgrim traveller, I was intrigued by the panoply of methods that we, as pilgrims, were using to communicate with God, which was especially striking when considering the age of the people involved (as compared with the other pilgrimages in which I had participated). More specifically, I was struck by how organically and "naturally" our bodies were



involved in these attempts to see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and/or feel God. What was especially striking was the richness and texture of these methods, as well as the markedly high level of corporeal engagement they invited or necessitated. Moreover, it became clear to me that pilgrims appreciate this communication as being a two-way *process*, which takes the form of a call-and-answer interaction between themselves and God. For this reason, I began to study more closely the multiple ways through which God “calls” humanity, how pilgrims position themselves to hear and to respond, and how God “speaks” back.

It was clear from the early stages of planning of this project that I could not hope for this thesis to be a comparison of various pilgrimage centres, or even a comparison between two shrines – the nature and composition of each different pilgrimage group would make such comparisons (almost) impossible, and of little utility. Instead, I elected to draw attention to the various ways in which the call-and-response communication with God took shape at one single pilgrimage site, for one single pilgrimage group. In this work, I endeavour to examine the “everyday, unofficial, expressive communication” (Sims 2005: 3) of the pilgrimage group, which, for the duration of our pilgrimage together, I treat as a “self-contained” culture. I assess the “knowledge[s], understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted... by word of mouth or by customary examples” (Brundvand 1976: 4) to determine how

members “communicate creatively with each other, as well as what – and to whom – they communicate” (Sims 2005: 3).

A number of disciplines and schools of thought shape the approach used in the preparation, fieldwork, and writing of this thesis. A religious studies endeavour dependent on anthropological methods (most especially ethnography), this thesis is also informed by performance studies, folklore, and ethnology. I borrow from Roger Abrahams the concept of performance as a collection of cultural enactments in which members of a group express and reinforce community identity (1972). As a performance ethnographer, my objective is the “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of the group in the context of their participation in the pilgrimage. Geertz explains that during certain highly marked performances, performers communally confer patterned expression to their inner experiences, displaying and thus revealing their ideals and thoughts, their fears and hopes, their overall worldview (Geertz 1973). In this spirit, I endeavour to bring the reader beyond depictions of the conventional structures and behavioural patterns, to interpretation.

#### DATA COLLECTION

Much of my field research during the pilgrimage was based on interviews (face-to-face, email, and telephone) with the pilgrims, the accompanying priests, the tour operators, and the local and non-native guides. Following Glassie (1982), Taylor (1995), and Frey (1998), most of my field research focused on in-depth unstructured and semi-structured

interviews with individual pilgrims or groups. Respecting the nature of pilgrimage, I necessarily conducted interviews in a multitude of different settings. I interviewed Father Maurice at length before we set out on the pilgrimage, conducted interviews with pilgrims throughout our stay in Bosnia, and afterwards, in various informants' homes in Québec, New Brunswick and Ontario following the pilgrimage. Informal interviews in familiar, comfortable settings (such as the pension or the church grounds) were the preferred method, though more unconventional spaces for interviews were also used (such as in an airplane, on a bus, while climbing mountains and wherever else informants were comfortable sharing their knowledge and experience with me). The majority of the interviews I conducted were audio recorded, although some were video recorded as well.

During the first half-hour of the first interview with each of the twenty-three pilgrims I interviewed, I flatly refused to ask questions, and instead invited my informants to simply talk about themselves. Some chose to share what they referred to as their "life story," others told me the history of their faith, while others chose to discuss their marital problems or recount memorates.<sup>13</sup> The questions asked during the remainder of the first meeting were generally also broad "grand tour questions" concerning the pilgrimage, or pilgrimages in general. Guiding informants as little as

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<sup>13</sup> A "memorate" is an account of a supranormal event (ie. a marvel) "experienced by the narrator or a person known to him" (Pentikainen 1973, 233)



possible, I ascertained individuals' main concerns, their motivations for undertaking the journey, and their approach to faith. Using this approach, I was left with much superfluous material on subject matter very little related to the pilgrims' corporeal involvement in the pilgrimage. However, this information proved to be important in the contextualizing of narratives, memorates, rumours, and information regarding beliefs, faith, devotions, devotionals, and prayer.

Since I was participating in the pilgrimage myself, most of the interview situations flowed naturally from the context of the activities in which the other pilgrims and I were involved. These data-collecting situations were, however, often directly or indirectly occasioned by an "induced natural context" (Goldstein 1964: 87-90), where the pilgrims provided the primary audience for each other (cf. Santino 1988, 211). This goal was achieved through my asking specific questions to the group (or to the pilgrims involved) during a sharing session, or through leading the group to reflect on the activities in which they had participated together.

A large part of the field research also involved participant observation and casual conversation, which proved to be an important source of data (cf. Baer 2003, 122). I recorded on video, audio and photography as many of the activities of the pilgrims as possible. Participant observation was important in this inquiry for two key reasons: first, it allowed me to contextualize the participants' involvement in the pilgrimage and thus better understand the circumstances in which performances, activities, discussions, and

sessions were carried out. Significantly, participant observation also served to lessen the disjunction between what informants identified as 'typical' and what happened in actuality. Hackett and Lutzenhiser observe that this disjunction is due to three causes:

first, the possibility that the 'normal account' of one's behaviour is designed not to describe it but to manage the interviewing situation; second, that 'deviations' from the hypothetically normal pattern are unknown even to the deviant – the Self being social enough that persons engage in what Goffman termed 'civil inattention' in the face of their own as well as others' stigmata; and third, equipped with a reading of it such that their deviations are explained by circumstances - those interpretations that insist, in effect, that while the behaviour is deviant, the person is not" (Hackett and Lutzenhiser 1985, 318).

The "direct and unmediated examination of experience" (Hackett and Lutzenhiser 1985, 321) was for me the best way to circumvent these pitfalls. In order to capture pilgrims' efforts and activities, their various flow elements, and their approach to / attitude toward the involvement of their bodies in the context of ritual and belief, I became as "omnipresent" as possible whenever they [or rather, we] were engaging in their [our] activities, as well as when discussing participation in these activities.

In the social sciences, there has been a persistent tendency to use visual materials as merely illustrative, archival, rather than giving them a more analytic treatment (Emmison and Smith 2000). Social scientists continue to privilege verbal forms of communication over visual communication, and this, despite the fact that the "visual" is "a pervasive feature not only of social life but of many aspects of social enquiry as well" (*ibid*, 2). In order to avoid at least some of these pitfalls, photographs and film were used for narrativizing the context of participation during some of the later

interviews. This technique allowed my informants to assist me in the interpretation of their activities when I showed them photographs and film to prompt in-depth discussions (O'Neill *et al.* 2002, 73).

My research involved a host of other data-collection methods. These included written correspondence, feedback interviews using previously-made recordings, and analyses of the "souvenirs" purchased (holy objects, clothing, etc.) and created (i.e. photography, film, audio recordings [cf. Wojcik 1996]) by the pilgrims. The data collected through these secondary methods helped me better contextualize and understand the what was acquired through participant observation, observing participation, and the interviews I conducted on-site. Once data collection was completed, I began to transfer the acquired information to electronic format. I transcribed every interview I recorded in its entirety, totalling over 500 pages of transcribed interviews.

#### MY TRIPLE ROLE AS RESEARCHER, PILGRIM, AND GUIDE

In order to gain visibility in the group and thus be better able to earn the trust of pilgrims, I volunteered to become the group's guide. Having seen first-hand my ability and my will to serve other pilgrims and help ensure their safety and wellbeing, the owner of the company organizing the pilgrimage (who had been on pilgrimage with me once before) trusted my ability to fulfil this (unremunerated) task. In this way, I thus became researcher, pilgrim, and guide. Key to my positioning within the group was the



fact that as guide, I was an unpaid volunteer, and that as a pilgrim, I had, like them, invested thousands of dollars in order to experience the journey as a pilgrimage.

In each of the many phases of this thesis project, I have been acutely aware of the difficulties, pitfalls and important advantages that my special position as a pilgrim, a guide, and a scholar whose purpose is to conduct research entails. On the one hand, my involvement as a pilgrim has allowed me to access candid, sometimes extremely personal, information about other participants. On the other hand, issues about what is "private" versus what is considered "off limits," issues of objectivity, and issues of representativity, among others, have been constant reminders of the responsibilities I hold to the academic community, the Roman Catholic Church, the community of Medjugorje, and, most significantly, the pilgrims themselves. If the validity of one's research "is determined not by raw data so much as the verisimilitude and efficacy of the interpretive object" (Jackson 1988: 276), the task of the ethnographer is a precarious balancing of interests.

Diane Goldstein notes that as ethnographers, we impose our own worldview on the materials we collect and present (Goldstein 1995: 23). As Jackson notes,

the collection of this fact rather than that fact is [already] an act of interpretation, as is the decision of what among the things documented are to be presented to others, and what order is to be selected for what presentation, and what stress and what enhancement and what stripping down occur (Jackson 1988: 285).

For this reason, I aim for what Goldstein defines as a "self-conscious reflection on [my] assumptions and the personal effect of those assumptions on the materials collected

and presented" (Goldstein 1995: 23). David Hufford warns against ventriloquist scholarship, where the facts are made to speak for themselves. "If we obtain the appearance of objectivity by leaving ourselves out of our accounts," Hufford notes, "we simply leave the subjective realities of our work uncontrolled (Hufford 1995b: 58). He maintains that "the inclusion of the actor (scholar, author, observer) in the account of the act and/or its outcomes" is a requirement for scholarly work (Hufford 1995a: 2) because it "helps to control hidden bias" (Hufford 1995b: 58). "The processes of fieldwork," write Stoeltje, Fox and Olbrys, "are always imbued with questions of otherness" They explain that a fieldworker "may study his or her 'own' people, those who are familiar; or, on the contrary, he or she may study individuals or a society who represent that which is strange or unknown." However, "the very activity of fieldwork places us somewhere on a continuum between familiar and strange, self and other, domestic and foreign, same and different" (Stoeltje, Fox and Olbrys 1999, 160). Additionally, "[t]he perceived validity of... ethnographic interpretation is determined not by raw data so much as the verisimilitude and efficacy of the interpretive object" (Jackson 1988, 276),

My presence undoubtedly altered the behaviour of the pilgrims to a certain degree. However, I took a number of steps in order to lessen the impact that my presence *as researcher* had on the group. Firstly, pilgrims' assessment of me as a pilgrim myself, as well as a knowledgeable traveler and their guide to Bosnia-Herzegovina



allowed me to observe and interview the pilgrims without giving them the feeling that there was an intruder in their peer group from whom they had to protect themselves. Marian apparitions, Mariology, and Marian pilgrimages have long been an interest of mine. My knowledge of Medjugorje has been expanded by three visits to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which have allowed me to develop a keen sense of the issues with which pilgrims are faced, as well as a familiarity with the politics and conventions of the coordination of such journeys. My experience as a pilgrimage organizer and guide on a good number of prior pilgrimages overseas, moreover, made it possible for me to easily, efficiently, and effectively organize the logistics and deal with the many concerns of inexperienced or less experienced travellers. From this privileged position, I was able to observe pilgrims' movements in a more "natural" manner.

Since my objective was to understand pilgrims' activities, thoughts, and their approach to competence with the emic insight of a participant, my position as a "participating observer," an "observing participant," and "insider researcher" gave me important advantages, including that of understanding very well the culture of the group. I believe that my involvement in the group was of great assistance in the collection (as well as the later contextualization) of data. Following William Wilson, I judge that what I may have lost from lack of detachment "is far outweighed by what I gain from being a knowledgeable insider" (Wilson 1995, 14). Knowing the group from the inside (as a member of the Roman Catholic church, as an ex-pilgrim to Medjugorje as



well as a present pilgrim to Medjugorje [who “happens” to be conducting field research]), I have internalized many of its values. I also and know, by and large, what is expected and considered appropriate speech and behaviour in different situations (cf. Bowie 2003, 64). This thesis, in short, is a response to Goldstein’s critique that “few scholars have looked to religious groups themselves for an understanding of performance competence in the group’s own terms” (Goldstein 1995: 30-1),

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#### MY INITIAL POSITIONING IN THE GROUP

Approximately two years prior to my field research in Bosnia, I shared my idea with Father Maurice, an avid traveller who usually takes two overseas trips every year, who graciously accepted my invitation to become the spiritual guide for the pilgrimage during which I would conduct my field research. One of my best friends, Father Maurice is a Roman Catholic priest working as the Director of Spiritual Care in a large hospital. This pilgrimage was for him a fourth journey to the Marian apparition site. Father Maurice’s first visit to Yugoslavia was in 1988, and he returned (to Bosnia) twice with me as a travelling companion in 2000 and in 2004 before becoming one of our group’s two spiritual guides. During the pilgrimage, Father Maurice devoted himself to the group wholeheartedly. This was underscored by a number of pilgrims, who stated that they much appreciated the “spiritualizing presence” (Joseph-Marie, *addressing the group*) of this “extraordinary little priest” (Jules, *personal communication*).

Since I had no way of communicating with the other pilgrims prior to our meeting at the airport because of the privacy policy of the agency organizing the pilgrimage, I had no contact with the majority of our group prior to our meeting at the airport. I introduced the project on a one-on-one basis to the pilgrims with whom I happened to speak, though I waited until the third day of the pilgrimage, when I felt that the pilgrims were comfortable with me as their guide, as a fellow pilgrim, as a knowledgeable and practicing Roman Catholic, and as a young tourist travelling with them, to address the group as a whole. For the sake of being transparent, and because the spirit in which the interviews were held is part and parcel of the stories I was told during these exchanges, I quote at length the introduction Father Maurice gave about my project:

Sébastien, in his studies, has taken up the preparation of a thesis. Or a paper. He's writing a thesis at the university. And he has chosen, as a subject, to do a study on Medjugorje. He's not writing about the phenomenon of the apparitions, but especially what the pilgrims are living [experiencing] in Medjugorje. To conduct a deeper study of Medjugorje is a great idea, since it's a way of making Medjugorje known, as it's a way of revealing the fact that there are people who have faith. Through his paper, his research, he will touch on that. So there are certainly people who will read his thesis, which will touch them. Sébastien asked me: 'Do you think that the pilgrims would accept that I interview them, in order for me to see, in their hearts, how they VIVENT [experience] Medjugorje, how they understand apparitions, how they undertake a pilgrimage?' A pile of things like that. He'll put you in context. I told him it was a good idea. He's going to talk to you about it. Sébastien will invite you to participate in this. He will record you. It won't go in the papers. It won't go on TV. It's for research. From this, he will draw his conclusions. How this will happen, he will get you to sign a paper saying you are consenting. This won't be accessible to everybody; it's between himself and you, and it's strictly confidential. He won't even talk to me about it. He'll chat, interview you. It's not complicated. I've done it already. You don't have to get into huge things. He wants you to go with your hearts. I think that this is a way to form a 'Church.' It's a way to evangelize. We already need to rejoice that someone could become interested in that. And if, for one reason or another, you feel shy, or you're not at ease, you don't need to do it. I have the impression that in the coming days, it doesn't need to be today, but in the next few days, he will come to ask us if we can be interviewed. Can he count on your collaboration? (Father Maurice, *addressing the group*).



When Father Maurice got a resounding “YES!” from the assembled pilgrims, I was invited to give the details about how I was planning to proceed with my research. The following is the introduction I gave:

I’m a pilgrim, like you guys. I’ve done this trip twice before, and I love pilgrimages [...] There are many things that come into the idea of pilgrimage. The lens that I use is that of the ethnographer – to study what people actually do. When we study religion, there are theologians (the Catholic thinkers, the philosophers, etc), and then there are the institutional representatives (like our priests). Theologians come up with the big ideas. Then there is the institution, which puts them in place. I’m interested in a third branch, which is that of “folklore.” I’m presently doing my Master’s degree in Religious Studies... and I’m interested in what people live – in what people want to experience, in what people think they should live.... For example, the church thinks something, theology thinks something, and we, as practicing members of the laity, we may think the same thing as they do, but with little differences. That’s what I’m interested in. That’s why I’m interested in what you have to say. So if you feel like talking to me about anything, officially or not, I’m there! [...] I don’t really have questions prepared. My interest is not in something specific, since telling you what I want to hear would be counterproductive. When I interviewed Father Maurice (I may have spent 15-20 hours interviewing him already), I had difficulties with him, because he already represents the institution. He places himself in that mode, and I try to rip him away from that mode. I say to him: ‘And you, Father Maurice, what do **you** think?’ Especially for a priest who’s already doing his job. I want to know what **you** think. If you’re interested, I would really like it if you talked to me. I’ll approach you if I feel you’re comfortable with me, or you can approach me yourselves. I would appreciate it, but it’s completely as you wish. You’re on a pilgrimage, and I don’t want to come between you and your pilgrimage... I want you to see me as a tool you can use to help you deepen what you want to VIVRE [experience], or what you feel you must VIVRE [experience] (Sébastien, *addressing the group*).

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#### WHO I BECAME FOR THE GROUP

During the pilgrimage, I devoted myself to the service of the other pilgrims. Aware that having a knowledgeable and approachable guide makes the difference between a stressful, demanding and wearing trip, and a peaceful, comfortable, relaxing pilgrimage, I made myself entirely available to the participants. Every day, from morning until we went to bed, I made efforts to ensure that details were clear, that problems were quickly resolved, that language difficulties would not become barriers, and that all were at ease



and had what they needed. Pilgrims were constantly reminded of my availability through the spiritual guides. Significantly, I wish to underscore the fact that my will to help and assist was in no way prompted by a hope to position myself positively for research with the group, but rather, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, my way of reaching towards God.

I include the following comments from pilgrims in order to contextualize my presence in the group, the accountability I feel I have vis-à-vis the other pilgrims, and my reasoning regarding the treatment of materials:

"As our scout and everything, you're incredible. You're an ace, and you're a man of service. Enormously. That's what it takes for us, since... it doesn't take a big obstacle before we're done for and we turn back crying. When you're there, you're always coming to help us, and it's enormously appreciated. And not just by me. By the whole group" (Jules, *personal communication*).

"I thank you so much, Sébastien, because we really feel that you're a presence of Jesus among us. I congratulate you for being what you are. I'm happy. I think it's so beautiful. I feel that it's a witness of Medjugorje to see you" (Joseph-Marie, *addressing the group*).

"I can tell you one thing: you, you're with us, and since I'm here, I notice you, and see you go, and it's a grace that we have that you're with us, that you be with us. You're a person who has an enormous potential. You're searching, and you have an enormous curiosity. In anything. You go to the end of everything. That speaks to me. It impresses me. You're available. Your availability, your curiosity, you know. [...] You make people want [to be close to God]" (Jacques, *personal communication*).

"Sébastien, it's a pleasure to be able to respond to your call. Because if I'm responding to your call, it's because Mary invites me to share with you, since I'm not normally eager for these things. [...] You greet people as they are. You accepted me as I was. Even if you didn't know it, I sometimes felt a little distant from the others. With you, it fit on the interior. I said, 'Lord, thankfully!' This helped me a lot. I was comfortable with you. Asking you things. I didn't feel I was being annoying" (Monique, *personal communication*).

Through my efforts to serve and help, I feel the group came to accept me as a genuine pilgrim, and my thesis work as the work of the living church. More than one full year

following my return from the field, I am comfortable with the research I have conducted, and with how I have treated the trust, faith, and confidence of the other participants. Most importantly, I am certain that when my informants read my work, they will agree that I kept my word.

#### ACADEMIC DISBELIEF AND THE MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION

In the humanities and social sciences, to be current and progressive one often feels the need to establish connections with academic science (cf. Hufford 1983, 22), a fact that is peculiarly important even in the discipline of Religious Studies. Considering incredulity as the 'objective' stance, social scientists typically assume a natural/supernatural division of the world, which, as Aragon points out, "is often tied to a positivist definition of religion that is the mere remainder of science" (2003, 132). "This view of the supernatural," Aragon explains, "continues to pervade many anthropological teachings about religion" (*ibid*). David Hufford writes that the roots of academic scepticism include unconscious pressures from repressed needs and the operation of primary process impacting on traditions through projection, social needs leading to the development of social controls, creative urges that lead to hoaxes and the fabrication / modification of legends, and folk etymology and aetiology (1982, 49). "The scientific theory that the supernatural is a natural product of the imagination," writes Lohmann, "is supported by the fact that spiritual experiences occur more easily in states of consciousness that allow the autonomous imagination greater play, such as



trance and dreams.” He continues, stating that spiritual experiences seem more plausible when socially supported (2003, 180). “If everyone in the village says that witches are responsible for unfortunate events, witches come to seem very real indeed,” he explains (*ibid*). ‘Confirmed’ by the familiar claim that there is “no real cause-effect relationship between a believed supernatural strategy (e.g. prayer) and a subsequent change in state” (Hufford 1982, 52), academics’ assumed duty to be scientifically-minded (and, by extension, sceptical) in their assessments of belief systems and issues of faith stems from the felt need to confirm one’s research as credible. As Berryman highlights, it is difficult to contend with the supernatural without discounting it in advance, without transforming it into something else in the analytical process (Berryman 2001, 606). Jacques Derrida, writes:

There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the nonliving, being and non-being (to be or not to be, in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity” (Derrida 1994, 11).

The scholarly “tradition of disbelief” is indeed a “serious systematic bias” in most studies of spiritual matters (Hufford 1995, 61). When researchers perceive informants’ cosmological ideas as scientifically unfeasible, the tendency is to label them ‘supernatural’ and to understand them as indexing the limitations of empirical knowledge (Aragon 2003, 132). Aragon writes that scholars such as Geertz (1973, 87-125) wrongly bypass the issue of anthropologists’ judgment about other religions’ empirical reality (2003, 132). Although debunking approaches are now considered



outdated and old-fashioned among anthropologists of religion, functionalist, social-constructivist and relativist perspectives, as well as phenomenological perspectives, are today judged as adequate and the norm in the study of belief. These approaches, though each informative in their own right, are problematic when used to study issues of belief and the marvel in that they are only useful *if* the subject being considered is not actually true – only if marvels are not really real is there need for the additional complexities of social analysis (cf. Lett 1991). While reflexive seekers “forthrightly describe personal marvel experiences and use them to question their own premises,” naturalistic-cognitivists and social constructivists are interested in what these personal marvel experiences reveal about the individual or society (Shanafelt 2004, 324). Because science is, and very likely will continue to be, unable to adequately explain, justify and account for a great number of variables concerning the body, especially relating to the supernatural, the sacred, the holy, the numinous, the mystical, the miraculous, the transcendent and the “ultimate conditions” (Geertz 1973) of human existence, the need to “distinguish between questions about the reasonableness and empirical bases of belief on the one hand and the objective truth of that belief on the other” (Hufford 1982, 54) is made all the more essential.

The (wishfully obvious) logical error “that is the peculiar property of disbelievers; i.e. the *a priori* exclusion of one whole class of hypotheses – the supernatural ones” (Hufford 1982, 53) makes the position of academic disbelief

indefensible. For this reason, acknowledging that disbelief is open to logical flaws (Goldstein 1989, 66) is vital. "It is simply not possible today," writes Hufford, "to assemble an intellectually defensible argument to the effect that supernatural belief is only possible for those lacking judgment, sound critical faculties, observational competence, and a scientific education. (Although many continue to try)" (Hufford 1982, 54-5). The penchant for scepticism, agnosticism and plain disbelief in the academy has recently lost standing; most researchers now "recognize that from an ethnographic standpoint it is our responsibility to discover the meaning of religious beliefs for those who hold them without judgment as to truth value" (1995, 25). Shanafelt urges social scientists to investigate marvels with respect for unique social and psychological realities without abandoning questions and concerns about generalization and empirical validity (2004, 317). "Thinking critically," after all, "does not imply losing respect for a belief system" (Primiano 2001, 40). In order to think critically, academics "need not be neutral about agents but... must be neutral about processes" (1989, 66).

Disbelief is especially problematic in research which is related to both the body and belief, as when the two are brought to the fore at one and the same time, the issue of the "marvel" often (generally) crops up. Indeed, in the study of pilgrimage, the "problem" of the numinous, the supernatural, the more-than-natural, the unnatural, the mystical, the magical, and the spiritual recurrently arises. The miraculous transformation



(what Robert Shanafelt refers to as “the poof factor” [2004, 337]) is indeed an aspect of all narratives of the wondrous which is most intimately linked to the mainstay of the pilgrimage: belief and accounts of physical, bodily, carnal conversions and experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Susan Sered states that there are three main ways in which we, as academics, may understand and appreciate the supernatural: as “a matter of perception (hearing, seeing),” “a matter of affect (feeling or emotion),” or “a matter of cognition (categorisation, interpretation)” (2003, 214). While cognitive, synchronic and ‘intellectualist’ approaches to the study of pilgrimage sites tend to disregard the history of such spaces, and approaches that primarily consider the emotional and the emotive are liable to discount the “actuality” or “reality” of the events occurring at shrines, experience-centred approaches tend to trivialize the subject by focusing on the extraordinary and the bizarre.

It is a truism to state that the objective investigation of belief is very difficult (or even impossible); as David Hufford notes, because “spiritual beliefs are strongly felt and can have socially important consequences... impartiality in spiritual matters [is] an impossibility” (Hufford 1995: 61). Though our society codes the term “belief” itself as exoteric, approximating it to concepts such as superstition, thus making it “[call] into

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<sup>14</sup> Shanafelt writes that this “miraculous transformation” is what is generally most vaguely depicted in academia,” attributing the reason for our willingness to disregard this ‘poof’ and our inclination to consider its results instead to “an overriding focus and obsession with the products of our own concerns” (Shanafelt 2004, 337).



question its own validity" (Motz 1998, 340), our scholarship cannot simply ignore the issue of belief or dismiss it out of hand. DeFrance writes that it is good for us to know all that we can about the universe, but that "it is not good, however, to know nothing but the facts," since, she explains, "the debate about factual truth can distract us from a more profound truth" (DeFrance 2003, 137). Glazier and Flowerday emphasize that by taking belief and religious experience seriously, anthropologists and religious studies scholars will be able to narrow the gap between their respective fields and "rapprochement of anthropology and religious studies becomes all the more probable" (2003, 1).

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#### MY POSITION ON THE APPARITIONS AND THE STUDY OF BELIEF

My own stance on the Marian apparitions of Medjugorje is somewhat of a non-position; like a great number of people who make the pilgrimage to Medjugorje, I have not felt the need to compromise and limit myself, my beliefs, and the action of God by unambiguously "deciding" whether or not these are (still today) actual. This said, I do firmly believe that something special and numinous is happening in Medjugorje, I have repeatedly received the call to go to Medjugorje (see Chapter 2, "PULLED TO GO TO MEDJUGORJE"), and I think that the individuals visiting the parish experience there incredible, fantastic, mystical, marvellous happenings.

For the reasons above, this thesis takes a practice-centred approach which focuses on the manner in which ideas and associated practices are formulated in

response to particular historical and political events (cf. Aragon 2003, 331) and, following Sered, frames the supernatural as 'enhanced natural' rather than as 'not natural' (2003, 218), thus avoiding the value judgments that accompany polarized dichotomies. In this study of individuals' participation in the theologically and institutionally-based (as opposed to subjectively and experientially-based) Roman Catholic tradition (cf. Goffman 1959) in a mainstream context, I attempt to strike a balance between theory based on individual experience and perception, and theory based on believers' understanding of the institutional Church as herself a pilgrim (cf. *Lumen gentium*), since this approach is essential for an appropriate appreciation of corporeal practices.<sup>15</sup>

## NOTES

### CONSENT AND RELEASE

Anyone who chose to participate in this project did so freely, having been fully briefed on what was involved in the research. A "Participant Information and Consent Form" was filled out, step by step, and signed by each of the informants (see "Appendix A" for

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<sup>15</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, which, understanding itself as a 'living body' historically connected to the biblical miracles and revelations, is seen by its adherents as 'electrically charged' with the potential for miracles at the same time as it is responsible for shielding against false claims (cf. Turner and Turner 1978, 205). Once miracles are authenticated by the Church, they are no longer considered "beliefs" by both the institution and her devotees, but "facts" [T]he authenticity of miracles is ascertained from oral deposition or material substantiation that suggest some normal operation of the natural world was suspended in fulfillment of God's higher purpose (Turner and Turner 1978, 206)].



a copy). This form included a space for five different types of consent; participants were free to consent to only one, some, or all of the levels of participation proposed to them (i.e. being photographed, audio recorded, etc.). A bilingual (in both French and English) "Participant Information" sheet was also given to each participant, which included my contact information, along with that for my supervisor/advisor and for ICEHR (see "Appendix B" for a copy). Participants were made fully aware of their right to revoke their consent at any time, as well as their right to refuse to answer any questions they choose during the interviews.

Prior to the fieldwork process, I explained the details of my project to the participants and got their permission to record (via video, audio, and / or film) the group's pilgrimage. I ensured that whenever I was present, I was to be considered to be recording. As a participant observer during the field process, the only immediately visible difference between the others and myself was that my cameras / recording devices were mostly pointed at other participants instead of at the sites being visited and interacted with. I approached the group as a whole explaining to them the details of my research. I then invited informants to set up interviews with me on an individual, couple, small group, or group basis, respecting the needs/wants of my informants. Those who chose to take part in the project were made aware that they could approach me at any time in order to volunteer to be interviewed. Other than my announcing my availability, I did not once approach pilgrims to interview them; I patiently waited until



they felt ready to participate in my research. All but one came forward to share their thoughts and experiences with me. I held the interviews in the most comfortable manner possible, so as to keep the “feel” of the interview informal. I offered no monetary compensation for participation, and no other compensation was provided other than an interested and compassionate ear.

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#### THE PROTECTION OF PILGRIMS’ IDENTITIES

Because of the deeply personal character of the subject of this study, I felt it was important to protect pilgrims’ identities. I have done so by omitting the dates on which our pilgrimage took place and the name of the tour organizing company. Pilgrims each chose a pseudonym for themselves, which I use instead of their real names. Wherever I felt that the subject matter was too delicate for the use of a pseudonym (since the pilgrimage participants could potentially identify each other through recognizing each other’s ideas and speech), I “identify” the speaker as “Pilgrim X.” “Pilgrim X” can thus denote any or all of the thirty-two people on the pilgrimage at different points in this work. For the sake of clarity, throughout this thesis, the pseudonyms of the priests include their titles (i.e. “Father Maurice” and “Father Patrice”), and this, in spite of the fact that when pilgrims spoke to (or, of) the priests accompanying us during the pilgrimage, they addressed them by their first names only, preceding their names by their titles only in the rare instances when the priests were dressed in liturgical garments

and people from outside the group were present (i.e. when the priests were understood as undertaking their public function as ritual experts).

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#### NOTES ON TRANSLATION

Dennis Tedlock notes that the act of moving a spoken utterance to a page is a major act of translation (1983). Compounding this already difficult issue of transforming the spoken word into text, the fieldwork for this study was conducted in French. All conversations were directly rendered in English. The transference of meaning and the work of translation were made possible by the fact that I am a practicing Roman Catholic with much pilgrimage experience, and thus, very familiar with the codes, processes, procedures, activities, and issues discussed. Whenever translating informants' speech, my first objective was to respect wording and sentence structure, while keeping in mind the meaning I understood they were trying to convey. I have refrained from "correcting" informants' language in my translation. In rare instances when there is no equivalent in English for the words used, I have elected to leave the original French word, and mark it with ALL CAPS.

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#### NOTES ON WRITING STYLE

Because of the nature of this study, distinguishing "the natural" from "the numinous" in pilgrims' speech has an important impact on meaning. For this reason, throughout this thesis, I rely on context to establish what I perceive is the "intended meaning" of the

speaker, and I capitalize words accordingly. This is intended to allow the reader a three-dimensional sense of what is being conveyed. For instance, to denote the historical figure of Jesus, the man who died under Pontius Pilate, the word "he" is not capitalized, but when pilgrims speak of the God-Man or the Christ of the Resurrection, the "h" in "He" is capitalized. In this same spirit, when pilgrims referred to the Virgin as "Maman Marie," the word "she" is not capitalized; when they are referring to the Mary of the Immaculate Conception, however, it is rendered as "She". The question I kept in mind when doing this was: "Which of these would the speaker her/himself have capitalized if s/he were transcribing this following my convention?" Importantly, I do not mean to suggest by this the existence of a polarity or dualism between the natural and the numinous; my findings, as the reader will note, show the line to be hazy at best.



## CHAPTER 2:

### THE GROUP IS CALLED

#### DETAILS ABOUT THE GROUP

Planned, advertised and carried out by a Québec-based third-party not-for-profit organization specializing in Roman Catholic faith travel, the fifteen-day pilgrimage considered in this thesis took place in 2007.<sup>16</sup> Mirroring the majority of the pilgrimages organized by the three larger Québec-based faith travel companies, the individuals who made up the group hailed mainly from the province of Québec (twenty-seven out of thirty-two), although two were from New Brunswick and three resided in Ontario. Schryer notes that the institution of pilgrimage “not only has a long history but even today draws together a great variety of pilgrims from so many different walks of life” (1991, 357-8). Accordingly, these (mostly) previously unrelated individuals have very divergent impressions of their own (religious) identity, religion, political reality, and faith. Unlike prior pilgrimages to Medjugorje in which I had participated, the participants were all of Caucasian descent, and their mother tongue was, without exception, French.

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<sup>16</sup> Dates and other specifics have been omitted to protect the identity of the pilgrims – see Chapter 1, “The Protection of Pilgrims’ Identities.”

The participants were, on average, much more inclined to attend mass to celebrate their faith weekly than the broader Canadian population; approximately half of the participants had been on what they themselves considered to be a “pilgrimage” (as will be explored in Chapter 4, “DEFINING ‘PILGRIMAGE’,” this is a very subjective statistic), and all were baptized, confirmed, and practicing members of the Roman Catholic Church. Father Patrice and Father Maurice were both keenly aware of the difficulty of attracting individuals who had distanced themselves from the church,

“when we do want to evangelize, those who are hungriest and thirstiest are not there because we’ve let them down. We’ve disappointed them. We’ve disappointed them with our laws, our disciplines. We’ve disappointed them with our counter-witnessing. We’ve disappointed them in a thousand and one ways. And I include myself in there” (Father Maurice, *personal communication*).

Representing a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds from a fair proportion of both rural and urban backgrounds, the median of the pilgrimage participants was somewhat more affluent and more highly educated than the broader Québec population. Participants had worked mostly in white-collar jobs most commonly in the service industry (although the range was important). A slight majority of the participants were female, and they were, on average, slightly younger than the male pilgrims. Excluding myself, the pilgrims were between the ages of forty-five and eighty-eight, and all but four were parents (the youngest of their children being twenty-one, the average age of their children being about thirty).

Father Maurice describes his first visit to the small village of Medjugorje as uneventful until he underwent what he refers to as “a miraculous conversion of the heart.” From this point on, he explains that he understood, in his heart, that in Medjugorje, “there really is something *true* happening there, because what I lived there then really was supernatural.” He reports having experienced his second trip to the site “coldly enough,” in a much more cerebral manner than he was expecting. Instead of a pilgrimage, it had been “a trip like any other.” His third trip to Medjugorje “took a more interior dimension,” he relates. Instead of experiencing it as a tourist who “just happened” to be in the company of another thirty-some French Canadian pilgrims, Father Maurice got involved as a priest. “I opened up myself to the presence of others, which I had not done during the other pilgrimages.” Upon his return, he shares that engraved in his heart was “the profound idea that God was pursuing me. That’s what I retained. God pursues me. God wants me. God pursues me, and God will not let me go. God will win the last of the combats in my life.” Returning to Medjugorje “for a fourth time, probably a last time” Father Maurice anticipated eagerly the fruits from the upcoming pilgrimage:

God will certainly speak to me again. He will speak to me like He will want. I want to remain free to what He will tell me... He spoke to me last time because I had gotten lost. I was alone. This time, it won’t be that, because I’ll never again be alone. He will choose another fashion. He will choose another way. The important thing is for me to listen.



I met Father Patrice, the second spiritual guide for our pilgrimage, for the first time on the day of our departure for Bosnia. Though he was not wearing a Roman collar, I instinctively knew he was a priest from his demeanour. Undertaking his sixth pilgrimage to Medjugorje, this parish priest has a natural penchant for pilgrimages. Having been the spiritual leader and confessor for a group of youths for a number of years before these people formed a religious community of their own, Father Patrice has organized and led a number of different pilgrimages in various parts of Europe and francophone Canada. Committed to sharing the marvels of Medjugorje, Father Patrice has an important devotion to Mary, which is palpable in his prayers and homilies

Lord, we are now on pilgrimage, and we wish to offer You this first tour in a foreign land, which will prepare us for this meeting tomorrow, or late tonight, with Medjugorje. We wish to offer you what has already happened, what was not planned and the surprises that we have had. Keep our heart ready to greet everything that You are preparing for us. We ask you, Mary, to open our heart to admiring this beauty of nature, to admire, as well, the people we will discover [here]... We pray, Holy Lord, for patience and goodness today, because the day will be long. And Mary, keep us simple, warm and ready for what we will VIVRE [encounter/experience]" (Father Patrice, *addressing the group*).

#### THE CALL OF MARY: PUSHED AND PULLED TO GO TO MEDJUGORJE

When I asked members of our group about the reasons why they had taken the initiative to invest their time, money, their energy, and even their own selves to visit Medjugorje, many responded that it was because they met Father Maurice, who proposed the trip to them. Some others replied that they saw an advertisement for the pilgrimage in a magazine, while for others, the decision to make the trip resulted from a curiosity inspired by word-of-mouth testimonies. Most of the pilgrims to whom I posed the

question echoed Father Maurice's words to explain why they chose Medjugorje as a pilgrimage destination. As he explained, "They chose Medjugorje because we proposed Medjugorje to them. I'm certain that if we had proposed them Lourdes, Fatima, La Salette, I imagine that they would have pronounced the same 'yes'" (*personal communication*).

Interestingly, when pilgrims talk about how they first heard about Medjugorje, they make use of the word "push," as in, "I have a brother who has come twice, and I asked him, 'What pushed you to come here?'" (Jacques, *personal communication*). During our time together, members of the group often spoke of their time in Medjugorje as a time to "RESSOURCER [renew/revitalize] themselves" (i.e. making themselves available to God) and to take a break from "our society." For instance, pilgrims made numerous comments about how "people have forgotten, have put aside... We get used to living like as if God didn't exist" (Gabriel, *personal communication*) or how "Christians today live as pagans, and fail to show the real Christian example to the youths. That doesn't work. Today, there's only a small number of people who live as Christians" (*personal communication*). However, though the decision to undertake the difficult journey to the small Herzegovinian parish often involves a desire to be disconnected from the everyday, pilgrims dependably describe feeling "pulled" to the site. Indeed, when pilgrims speak of the deeper reasons why they chose to come to Medjugorje, they reliably exchange the more commonly used word "push" for the word "pull," thus



shifting the focus from “needing a break” to “something was pulling me here” (Jacques, *personal communication*) or “receiving a calling” (Jacques, *addressing the group*). “I had never thought of going to Medjugorje,” shares Jules, “but now, I’m going because, well, I think I’m called” (*personal communication*). In this way, the reason for their departure is semantically located at the sacred centre itself, which is approached as a spiritual magnet of sorts (cf. Preston 1992), located in Medjugorje (for more about the concept of “drawing power” see Chapter 3, “MARIAN APPARITIONS AND THE DRAWING POWER OF MEDJUGORJE” and Chapter 3, “THE SACRED TRACE”).

Slater notes that the Spirit of God “calls people to make pilgrimages to strange places, many of them not conventionally sacred” (2004, 248-9). Though some pilgrims explained that they felt called to the site by the Holy Spirit, the great majority personalized the call in terms of the Virgin Mary. During a conference talk we attended, Sister Bénédicté quoted one of the Virgin’s “Messages to the World,” saying “No one comes to Medjugorje if I didn’t invite them.” Father Patrice, during the group’s first prayer session in the airport chapel, also worded it in this manner, “Tonight, our departure is simply an answer we’re giving to Mary, who is inviting us to her home” (Father Patrice, *addressing the group*). This statement had an impact on Céline, who, almost two weeks later, addressed the group, explaining,

The first night, when we were all gathered, someone said that ‘when someone comes here, it’s because Mary is calling them.’ That struck a chord with me. The Lord speaks through people a lot. I’m discovering Mary. I don’t feel quite at home in those things, but I greet them, in all simplicity, and I think I’m discovering Mary and my faith.



## DEFINING "PILGRIMAGE": MULTIPLE MOTIVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

According to members of the group, the potential pilgrim's decision to journey to Medjugorje may be made prior to, or following the "call" to pilgrimage. The motivations voiced by pilgrims for choosing to undertake the financially and physically demanding journey are multitudinous, as are their understandings of what a pilgrimage, in its essence, "ought to be." For many of the pilgrims, a long period of reflection preceded their answer. Jacques, for example, shares that when he made the decision to make the journey, he asked himself, "Why do I want to go there? If I want to go to Medjugorje, what do I want to go get there?" (*personal communication*).

In recent scholarship, pilgrimage has been approached as "a composite of different elements" which can include such components as "ritual, organized travel, objects of veneration, the construction of temporary 'communities' at special sites, sacrifices of time and effort, requests, and offerings directed towards sacred figures" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 205). Other scholars, such as Bowman, have preferred to define pilgrimage as a journey to the sacred, with the caution that "the sacred is not something which stands beyond the domain of the cultural; it is imagined, defined, and articulated within cultural practice" (Bowman 1991, 120). Still others define the practice as a journey "entailing encounters with adversity and the unknown through which individuals undergo a process of self-discovery" (Campo 1998, 41). Badone argues for a theoretical perspective that situates travelers in an interstitial space 'betwixt and

between' cultures where they have "the potential to reformulate meanings and negotiate identities" (2004, 181). Morinis insists on a more elaborate definition:

the pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal. At its most conventional, the end of the pilgrimage is an actual shrine located at some fixed geographical point. The place has acquired a reputation that draws pilgrims. One who journeys to a place of importance to himself alone may also be a pilgrim. The allegorical pilgrimage seeks out a place not located in the geographical sphere (Morinis 1992, 4).

Because the concept of "pilgrimage" is so difficult to define and delimit, Basu suggests that it may be best understood as an 'ideal type,' "a model or idea of sacred travel which, as the weight of recent anthropological work on the subject has demonstrated, may not exist in practice," but, in the words of Lévi-Strauss (1964), "may nevertheless prove 'good to think' with" (2004, 153).

To add to the difficulty of defining the practice, not all parties involved in a specific pilgrimage define it in the same way. Proponents of the variously concerned religious institutions, for instance, often describe the "true" sense of pilgrimage as being a journey whose purpose is the meeting of the faithful with God.<sup>17</sup> For the pilgrims themselves, however, these concerns are often secondary to their own interests.

Marysia Galbraith explains that "the intense physical, emotional, and spiritual

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<sup>17</sup> Medjugorje's Father Slavko Barbaric (the most prominent advocate for the recognition of the Medjugorje apparitions as an important source of revelation for the Church), for example, writes that "Medjugorje is a place of pilgrimage in the real sense of the word, concerning the revelations of God, human needs, the possibility of encountering God and also in answer to the invitations of the Pope to prepare the world for entering the third millennium" (Barbaric 1990).



experiences of participants are orchestrated by organizers, but... participants [also] make their own sense of their experiences" (Galbraith 2000, 61). Pilgrims' interpretations of what a "pilgrimage" consists of are so manifold, in fact, that understandings of shrines can be "at times... finely differentiated from one another, while at other times, they are radically polarized (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 10). Because pilgrimage sites often attract worshippers from "widely dispersed cultural locations," their symbolic resonances must necessarily appeal on multiple, even contradictory, levels" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 207). According to Younger, this reality underscores the need for religion to be thought of as "an activity of persons" instead of the classical "blocks of reified tradition labelled Hinduism, Christianity, and the like" (Younger 1992, 98). For Crumrine and Morinis, the differences between some groups' understanding of a site can be so great that "it is not an exaggeration to say that in some cases different groups visit 'different' pilgrimage shrines located in the same building and at the same site" (1991, 7). Compounding this already difficult question, pilgrims from the same group can have completely different understandings and motivations for undertaking the journey. In his function as both the pilgrimage group's spiritual guide and as a Roman Catholic priest, Father Maurice's first words to the group served at once to signal his awareness of the multitude of motivations which play a part in a pilgrim's resolution to visit Medjugorje, and an attempt to influence the prioritization of these motivations:



We're leaving towards a sort of sacred land, a sacred site, in order to go discover something. It can be to discover ourselves ; it can be the discovery of some profound aspirations that we hold in our hearts; but we also to go in order to discover the Lord. I imagine that each one of us is leaving with a heart full of mystery, a heart full of interrogations. A heart which hopes to discover a lot of things: a new heart, a new land, a new natural landscape. A pilgrimage is to leave in search of someone. A time to let someone speak to our hearts. To let someone come in contact with us. To let someone become intimate with each one of us" (Father Maurice, *addressing the group*).

Whatever the definition utilized, it is clear that a pilgrimage is not limited to being simple transhumance which, as Vreeland Jr. points out, is a characteristic of all forms of pilgrimage (1991, 229). While pilgrimage is not a simple substitute for the idea of travel, the journey across geographic and textual space (cf. Campo 1998, 41) is, indeed, a central part of the concept. Pilgrimage, for Alan Morinis, is found "wherever journeying and some embodiment of an ideal intersect" (1992, 3); the essence of the journey is, Morinis highlights, movement (1992, 15). "Reduced to its essence," Konrad writes, "pilgrimage signifies a passage or journey. And the pilgrim, regardless of time, place, or circumstances, is someone on a journey" (1991, 123). One of my informants defined pilgrimage as primarily a departure: "means to leave home, and leave my security behind. Abandoning all of my security and trusting the Lord" (Suzie, *personal communication*). This physical journey through time and space, maintain Coleman and Elsner, can also have metaphorical resonances on many levels (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 6). As Jacques' comments below reveal, the distance travelled and the difficulty involved play a large part in pilgrims' understandings of what can be considered as being a pilgrimage:

I've made a number of small pilgrimages, but they weren't- you know, in Québec, it's not- Well- I went to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Notre-Dame-du-Cap, the Hermitage of Saint-Anthony of Padua, Saint Joseph's Oratory, these are all places I've gone often. Once every two years, I'd go to those places. But outside the country, outside of Canada, or even Québec, you know, for a real- this is the first time" (Jacques, *personal communication*).

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## TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Because pilgrimage is necessarily linked to travel, it also shares many of the attributes of tourism. In this spirit, Turner and Turner note, "a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist" (1978, 20). The activities commonly linked to tourism and those commonly linked to pilgrimage, however, are often very different. Pilgrimage is typically thought to be filled with prayer, devotions, devotionals, Sacraments, sacramentals,<sup>18</sup> rites, and rituals, while recreational tourism is often perceived as being permeated with sights, sand, sun, substance, and sex (Boissevain 1996, 22). Non-liturgical features of pilgrimages, however, often have important impacts on the journey, and are often understood as being part and parcel of the pilgrimage experience. As Coleman notes

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<sup>18</sup> In the Roman Catholic tradition, sacramentals are actions or objects that in some way resemble the sacraments, but that have been instituted by the Church rather than by Christ himself. David Hufford writes that throughout Roman Catholicism, "there are a great many sacramentals ranging from those officially taught (such as rosaries or the making of the sign of the cross before and after prayers) to unofficial actions, which might be called 'folk sacramentals.' One important feature that sacramentals have in common with the sacraments, and which sets them apart from spontaneous and purely private devotions, is the fact that they are shared with a large number of others of the faithful, past and present. This sharing is obviously significant in terms of the social support and the sense of community involved in religious approaches to illness and death... [T]he understanding of the action may vary even when its performance is conventional. In other words, even the most official action may have unofficial, traditional interpretations and meanings attached" (Hufford 1985, 198).



with respect to the English shrine of Walsingham, pilgrimage “does not merely involve an intensified form of prayer; it also involves... complex and varying forms of engagement with the physical environment provided by the village and its landscape: from the fields to the shrines, the narrow lanes to the pubs” (Coleman 2004, 53).

Religious leaders are often ambivalent about pilgrimages; though perceived as meritorious and pious, pilgrimages are also perceived as “tainted with primitive and peasant superstitions, and bearing all too clearly the marks of an ancient paganism” (1974, 188). Turner continues, explaining that though they operate on a wide scale, pilgrimages are understood to “have somehow brought features of... the “Little Tradition” into what should have been theologically, liturgically, and, indeed, economically controlled by leading representatives of the ‘Great Tradition’ (*ibid*). Likewise, individuals’ participation in the theologically and institutionally-based (as opposed to subjectively and experientially-based) Roman Catholic tradition (cf. Goffman 1959) in a mainstream context is informed and guided by their individual experience and perception, as well as their understanding and opinion of the institutional Church. Though religious authorities may condemn the “touristic” aspects of pilgrimage journeys (sightseeing, gift shopping, and the like), these activities, according to Badone and Roseman, “represent an important aspect of the total pilgrimage process and should not be ignored in anthropological analyses. The nonliturgical features of pilgrimage also give rise to *communitas*, even if such activities are not declared legitimately ‘religious’”



(2004, 4). These nonliturgical activities should thus not be treated as forms of 'impurity' but rather "constitutive aspects of the travel itself" (Coleman 2004, 47); indeed, as Turner and Turner note, those who journey to pray together also play together in the secular interludes between religious activities (1978, 37).

Father Maurice's approach to pilgrimage differs from that which is typically understood as being promoted by the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church's official policy is often understood to condemn "profane activities" in conjunction with religious holidays. Though no text recognized by the Roman Catholic Church condemns "earthly activities" in the context of pilgrimage, the lay participant often believes the Church would view these as "contradicting or defiling the sacred experience" (cf. Badone 1990, 12-13). Father Maurice, like many of his contemporaries, equally emphasizes the importance of "The discovery of new territory, new landscapes, a new earth, and a rest of the body: travel, pilgrimage and vacation. A rest for the body will bring a rest of the heart [... and] this rest of the heart will bring me a new intimacy with Jesus" (*personal communication*), he reasons. During the announcements on the first morning in Medjugorje, for instance, Father Maurice addressed the group, saying, "There will be a lot of free time, since this is also a vacation."

Most of the members of our pilgrimage group eagerly anticipated and engaged the "touristic" activities on offer. While engaging in these activities, however, the pilgrims often offered a spiritual reading of the activity, a practice that at once marked

them as part of the pilgrimage proper and sacralised them. When discussing the possibility of visiting the city of Mostar, the main cultural and administrative centre of Herzegovina, Joseph-Marie addressed the group by recommending a visit of the Old Bridge (called "the Bridge to Eternity") and explaining that the river "is the frontier between the Orient and the Occident. When you cross the bridge, you're in the Orient. Over there, things are not built the same way. There, the buildings' roofs are made of flat stone" (*addressing the group*). For Joseph-Marie, a visit to Mostar was a didactic reminder of the hundreds of years of Christian (Occidental) and Muslim (Oriental) co-existence. The majority of the group elected to participate in the side trip to Dubrovnik, a Croatian city recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in spite of the fact that there is very little in the Old City that is significant in terms of a Marian pilgrimage. However, once there, all pilgrims attended the Mass that was offered to them, and most visited the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the Franciscan monastery, blessing themselves at the holy water stoops, kneeling to pray, and participating in the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Yet another example was the individually-organized side trip to visit the Kravice (waterfall), located 25 kilometres from Medjugorje, which brought a great joy to Louise, who shared with the group that "It filled me. It's as if the Lord had come to meet me through that" (for more on visiting the Kravice, see Chapter 5, "God Speaks through Nature").

During her first pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Christiane observed that the ten days spent in Medjugorje was itself a side trip for her – at least at first. Since it was marketed as a pilgrimage to Medjugorje with a tour of Poland, she had immediately embraced the occasion to follow in the footsteps of John Paul II, who had just passed away. “I ‘discovered’ him at his death,” she shares, “They spoke so much about him, and movies, and all that. So I looked at the pamphlets that I had at home, and the pilgrimage passed by Medjugorje. I had no idea- I knew that there are apparitions here, but I didn’t know all that much about it” (*personal communication*). While sharing this with me, Christiane realized that much the same had been true for her very first long-distance pilgrimage, to Lourdes; “Lourdes did not attract me at all. Not one bit. For me, it was mostly Paris. And Rome. The trip went by Lourdes, and that was ok. What attracted me most were the Pyrenees. I’d always loved mountains, and I’d always dreamt of seeing the Alps or the Pyrenees.” However, despite her total lack of interest in visiting Lourdes, she explained that she had been very deeply touched by the site.

When I arrived at the Grotto, I really had a lot of emotions - particularly during the Mass in front of the Grotto. I cried so much receiving the Eucharist! I VÉCU [experienced] beautiful things there. And I offered one of my cousins, who just had cancer, I offered her to Mary, and told her, ‘I give her to you.’ So I brought her back some water from Lourdes, and I gave her a little bottle. She no longer has cancer. Thank you, thank you God (*personal communication*).

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#### CONCERNS ABOUT AUTHENTICITY

Modern Roman Catholic pilgrimages, having developed in the mid-nineteenth century, are, according to the Turners,



characterized by a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal piety of their adherents. [... These pilgrimages have,] almost from the beginning, been deeply involved with mass technological and scientific culture, both positively, in drawing upon it as a source of instrumental aids, and negatively, in seeing it as a challenge to the Christian, and indeed to the entire religious worldview... In tone, these pilgrimages are actually antimodern, since they usually begin with an apparition, or vision, and they assert that miracles do happen" (1978, 19).

Pilgrimages are also viewed as antimodern because of their adherent's notions of the "authentic." The very notion of travelling to a far place is a search for the authentic; as Ellen Badone observes, "[t]he perception that valued goods are localized in other places or historical periods is closely connected to the notion of authenticity and its identification with the Other" (Badone 2004, 182). In like manner, Manning writes that "[a]s archetypal moderns, tourists view their own society as shallow and spurious."<sup>19</sup> Of course, as Urry makes clear, "there is no authentic tourist experience" (1995, 140); authenticity is

not as an absolute value but rather as a culturally and historically situated ideal that is believed to exist by individuals or groups of individuals in specific social settings. Although authenticity may dissolve into a chimera of simulacra from some analytical vantage points in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, the quest for authenticity can remain a powerful motivating force for on-the-ground behaviour, including travel (Badone 2004, 182).

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<sup>19</sup> Manning observes that "as archetypal moderns, tourists view their own society as shallow and spurious." He explains that tourists "seek deeper meaning in travel, which exposes them through cultural productions to enacted versions of their own heritage and to the lives of peoples less disturbed by the discontents of modernity. Tourists are 'sightseers' (spectators), of course, but the entire semiotic ordering of tourist attractions is designed to create a sense of authenticity by drawing them 'backstage,' giving them an insider's understanding, and encouraging them to participate as well as observe. Like religious rites, tourist spectacles create and communicate a sense of reality, truth, and value" (Manning 1992, 296-7).

Although modern tourism erodes the penitential dimension of pilgrimage (cf. Preston 1992, 36), modern transportation and communications technologies are readily incorporated into constantly changing pilgrimage traditions (Nolan 1991, 44). Coleman and Elsner note the persistence of pilgrimage in adapting to and even appropriating the innovations of secular modernity (1995, 220). In like manner, Campo notes how modernity has globalized pilgrimages, “a process that involves their appropriation by expert systems, the fostering of diverse and sometimes contending interpretations of their significance, and the actual production of new pilgrimage landscapes” (Campo 1998, 40). Considering how eagerly and readily pilgrims choose to take part in “non-liturgical” side trips, it may initially seem absurd to write that the pilgrims are very clear on the fact that for them, pilgrimage is most definitely not a tourist trip. The explanation lies in the fact that the pilgrims readily adopt and adapt the various elements of the voyage to fit their own expectations of what they want to, and ought to, be doing. For this reason, Marie-Paule can assure me that she “wouldn’t be ready to put so much effort and money for a tourist trip [since] that’s not a part of [her] dreams” (*personal communication*) while we are on the way to a sightseeing tour in Dubrovnik. As Coleman notes, “non-pilgrimage” activities are not forms of “impurity” but rather constitutive aspects of the travel itself (Coleman 2004b, 47).



Manning's definition of pilgrimage as a "spectacle" (1992, 292) is very appropriate in the context of Medjugorje, since the site's landscape, culture, religious practice, and language are typically very foreign to the pilgrims who visit it. However, pilgrimage is not only "a rich context for both learning and reinterpreting cultural knowledge about the world" (Galbraith 2000, 61). Quoting the Old Testament, Father Maurice relates,

when we hear, 'leave your country, leave your family, your house, and go to the country which I will show you,' it's a departure towards the unknown. Most people who are coming on the pilgrimage are leaving towards an unknown land. They are leaving towards a country they don't know. For many, it's a first experience of pilgrimage. And even when we go twice, three times, there's always a new dimension (Father Maurice, *personal communication*).

Coleman and Elsner note that it is the very experience of travel and the constant possibility of encountering the new which makes pilgrimage distinct from other forms of ritual (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 206). Father Maurice echoes this perspective, and explains that "being on pilgrimage is to be open to new experiences" (*personal communication*).

While on pilgrimage, the participant is not only faced with the orthodoxy of his or her particular faith, but with the "Other" as well. In this sense, pilgrimage sites are "heterotopias," "places of otherness" (Foucault 1986), because they are ambiguous and disturbing, and for this reason, they can "prove... revelatory of both self and Other" (Holmes-Rodman 2004, 27). The individual is de-structured by the extreme experiences s/he undergoes (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 16), and by the carnivalesque meanings



and forms of the shrines, which are always in a state of “unfinalized transition” (Bakhtin 1984, 164).

One of the most important elements of the Medjugorje pilgrimage is, naturally, the Marian apparitions that are said to occur there. These ambiguous and unsettling happenings come to define the sacred site by delineating the spaces where they occur as holy. Sallnow’s definition of “the sacred space” is instructive: “an individuated local community physically traversing the landscape... inserts itself into a variegated macrocosmic domain, defined by collectively recognized sacred places, of greater or lesser magnitude, where theophanies are known to have occurred” (Sallnow 1987, 184). If pilgrims can be said to be eager to go on pilgrimage in order to visit sites that are believed to be “places where miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen again” (Turner and Turner 1978, 6), the individuals making up our group were no different. “A pilgrimage is a place where we come to meet Jesus and Mary, where we come to pray in groups, where we come to worship the Lord, and where we come to Mass, if there is one,” explains Diane. She continues, “It’s a site where the Holy Virgin has appeared. A pilgrimage site is always that: where the Holy Virgin has appeared. It’s a site where we pray, where we have faith, where we spend a day or a week in the presence of the Holy Virgin or in the presence of Jesus and where we pray in groups” (Diane, *personal communication*).

While most pilgrims embark on their journey to Medjugorje without hoping to experience a major change in religious state or secular status (cf. Turner 1992, 37), many pilgrims feel that the voyage is an opportunity to express their faith – in the presence of God and perhaps also in the presence of fellow pilgrims. Addressing the group, Louise noted that she had returned to Medjugorje for a second time to thank the Lord for what He had allowed her to experience in life thus far. For Marie-Paule, who came “especially for praying” (*personal communication*), the journey was a way to get to a space where her prayers would be “amplified” and where she could ask for a divine favour. “One motive for going on pilgrimage,” write the Turners, “is the feeling that a saint’s shrine has a sort of ‘hot line’ to the Almighty. One purifies oneself by penance and travel, then has one’s prayer amplified by asking a saint at his own chief shrine to forward it directly to God” (1978, 16). Jean’s motivation for coming to Medjugorje is much the same as Marie-Paule’s. He shares, “I’ve been receiving messages from Medjugorje for years now,” he shares, “and my great hope, secretly, was to go there. Not because if I didn’t go, I wouldn’t believe. Absolutely not. But I told myself that to be on-site, with her, there would be things that I could ask her. For me and for my family” (Jean, *personal communication*). In the words of Eade and Sallnow, then, participants come “in pursuit of divine favour, of some tangible sign that God and the Virgin have their various individual interests at heart” (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 10). The dominant motive for going on a pilgrimage, these authors explain,



is to request some favour of God or the shrine divinity in return for simply having made the journey or for engaging in ancillary devotional exercises. As transformation stations between the earthly and heavenly realms, pilgrimage shrines are the pre-eminent centres for dealings between human beings and the divine. In many ways, they represent the stock exchanges of the religious economy. Using the shrine divinity as a mediator, physical suffering and penance are exchanged for material and spiritual favours, contracts are forged with the saints, sin is amortized by means of a tariff of devotional or ascetic practices (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 24).

The journey is, in this way, thus conceived of as “an important means by which individuals can gain access to the sources of power believed to control their destiny” (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 14).

The divine favour most commonly sought by those in our group was God’s presence in their lives. Gabriel defined a pilgrimage as a “walk towards the places of God, a space that God has chosen, in such a way as to permit one and all to encounter Him in a more direct manner” (*personal communication*). Christiane echoed this, explaining, “For me, that’s what a pilgrimage means: to get closer to God” (*addressing the group*). Father Maurice formulated his understanding of the pilgrims’ motivation as the desire for “a new intimacy with God.” He explains,

we go [on pilgrimage] in order to renew something in our life, we go find a new way to be baptized people, to be Christians. We will let ourselves be renewed in our hope, the hope for God who will find me, who is waiting for me, a God who will speak to my heart, a God who wants to keep walking with me, like He did with the people of Israel, like the gang who followed Jesus, and like this gang who, since time immemorial, walks in order to discover someone (*personal communication*).

The performance of pilgrimage can also be “an expression of a person who searches for God in places where He has revealed Himself in a special way” (Barbaric 1990). This meeting between God and humankind, is thought to be facilitated by the



journey. Indeed, many pilgrims explained that they choose to go to Medjugorje because they perceived it as an opportunity to meet God on a more personal plane, an occasion for “full-time Catholicism” (cf. Holmes-Rodman 2004, 44). “Those who are coming on the pilgrimage with us,” relates Father Maurice, “come in order to discover – to *rediscover* – the face of a God they wish to know” (*personal communication*). Rediscover may be the key word here; since the pilgrims who elect to spend their money, time and effort in order to make the pilgrimage to Medjugorje are often already close to God, faith, and the church (and therefore have little room for religious transformations) [cf. Pieper and van Uden 1994, 103]].

The meeting with God on a more personal plane that is facilitated through pilgrimage is thought to bear many fruits. Among these, the pilgrims include peace of heart, joy, love, confidence (Jacques, *personal communication*), an enrichment and increase in faith (Rosella, *personal communication*), a re-focussing of life priorities (Murielle, *personal communication*), a rediscovery of the “real” (Diane, *personal communication*), and a general feeling of well-being in a “climate of prayer and adoration..., of people who are praying” (Christiane, *personal communication*). When voicing their motivations to engage in pilgrimage, many spoke of a felt need for “more.” Diane expresses the reason why the voyage to Medjugorje was “her dream,”

I always went to church. I never stopped. I’ve always had faith, and I always went to church, but that no longer sufficed. Just going to Mass on Sundays, there was something missing. It was no longer enough. So I started to go to religious activities. What attracted me here is Marmora, which is a pilgrimage site. It’s not very well known. It’s close to Toronto, one hour

from Toronto. I've been going for three or four years. We leave from St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal, and the bus brings us there. We get there at around 12:30 or 1:00. We make a Way of the Cross, and the Holy Virgin always appears at the tenth station. We sing on those trips, we talk in the bus, and when we come back, there are people who witness about what they VÉCU [experienced] during the day (*personal communication*).

Christiane, along with many of the pilgrims, joined the group in order to get the opportunity to know Mary better, "To really feel like she's my mother. That she's a protective mother, and to trust her. Because before that, I prayed Jesus more.<sup>20</sup> I didn't pray Mary much. And now, maybe this will help me pray her more" (*personal communication*). "What if I go," Jean-Yves had asked himself as he was considering the possibility of joining the group, "just so the Virgin Mary touches my soul?" (Jean-Yves, *addressing the group*).

Pilgrimages are also, for many, "personal therapeutic acts" (cf. Morinis 1992b: 9), and may even "entail [at least the wish for] the long-desired healing of a physical or spiritual ailment" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 6). Many pilgrims, in this spirit, perceive the pilgrimage sites in terms of a "miracle discourse" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 10). "If I've come on a pilgrimage," shares Monique, "it's because I asked a priest for the pilgrim's grace last year, when I went to Fatima and Garabandal" (*personal communication*). Linked to travel is the importance of the limen or "threshold" as "the

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<sup>20</sup> This is not an error in translation. Though this is grammatically incorrect in both French and English, I have literally translated Diane's statement, "Je prie Jésus plus" (and not "Je prie plus à Jésus") ["I pray Jesus more" instead of "I pray more to Jesus"], because it relays a very different relationship between the deity and the faithful.



place which mediates between one physical space and another and between one social state and another" (Bowie 2006, 151). As a liminal space where "you never know what can happen" (Father Patrice, *addressing the group*), the sacred centre is the site of transformation par excellence, and pilgrims continually express their will to "make the most of it" (Michel, *addressing the group*).

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#### HESITATIONS: A BIG DECISION

In spite of the fact that pilgrimage offers, for pilgrims, a great many appealing potential and/or guaranteed benefits, the decision to undertake the journey can be difficult, since though the prospect of pilgrimage is promising, it also entails a price. When Jules articulated that he had chosen to come only because it had been offered to him, I asked him to catalogue his most important reservations. The first was an obvious one: the exceptionality of the trip. "I would've never have imagined I'd come here! *Never*," he shares. His hesitation in joining the group also stemmed partly from his perception of pilgrimages as being principally a quest for the numinous, "Though I don't want to classify myself as more Catholic than the Pope," he shares, "I feel I'm not in need of anything." For this reason, Jules was uncertain about outlaying the \$3,400.00 the trip would likely cost, and his apprehensions regarding the food that was going to be served outweighed his desire to take the plunge. The decision was all the more weighty given the fact that Jules had only ever left the province of Québec twice in his life, in order to go to Atlantic City, and the problem of language was already difficult on these occasions.



With all these difficulties facing him, Jules reasoned that the pilgrimage “was like physio[therapy]: I just didn’t feel like it.” However, when Father Maurice spoke to him about it, he reasoned, “I’m sixty-some years old, and I’m no longer able to work, but that’s not a bad thing, since I started young. I’ve worked enough. I’ll leave some work for others to do, and I’ll try to take advantage of life” (Jules, *personal communication*). (For more on the costs of pilgrimage, see Chapter 4: “SACRIFICE”).

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#### PILGRIMAGE AS LIFE PILGRIMAGE

As indicated by the pilgrims’ comments above, the activities, landscapes, physical exercises and movements with which pilgrims are engaged in the context of their spiritual quests are hoped to have important and lasting impacts on their sense of self, their sense of the other, and their identity as a whole. For some, the journey to Medjugorje is perceived as being integrated in one’s very existence, one’s “life pilgrimage.” Suzie understands physical journeys to the sacred as “great plunges in faith.” She relates,

My pilgrimage began when I was very young and loving Jesus... However, my *real* pilgrimage began when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. That was thirty years ago. Ever since that time, I grow with the Lord, and I remove layers, since I have had to put aside many material things. I aim for what’s essential (*personal communication*).

Suzie’s words reveal a number of important elements about her understanding of pilgrimage. First, she reasons that one’s life pilgrimage begins with a proclivity towards God; second, “pilgrimage” involves adversity; third, the goal of pilgrimage is personal development; and fourth, pilgrimage entails denial or deprivation.

Pilgrimage not only removes the traveler from the space of his home, but also from one type of time to another (Turner 1974, 207). This removal of the pilgrim from the "time" of his home life to that of the pilgrimage results in a sense of liminality, whereby "the perceived potential for self-renewal increases when one is physically removed from the structure of everyday social interaction" (Badone 2004, 184). This liminality makes pilgrimage a "carnavalesque space and time" (cf. Coleman 2004, 63) where cultural (and ritual) expression can challenge reigning hierarchies (cf. Bakhtin 1984, 368). As Young describes it, the

carnavalesque move is to turn upside down or inside out, to invert or reverse, to transgress the boundaries between discourses or to switch their content...To cast down a discourse...is not only to carnivalize it but also to materialize it, to render it [into] matter – not inert matter but fecund, teeming productive matter (1993,117; in Kapchan 1995, 486).

It is in this way that Medjugorje becomes a heterotopia where "unsettling juxtapositions of incommensurate 'objects' which challenge the way we think [are set up]" (St John 2001, 51).

The liminality of the pilgrimage experience allows participants to live (and display) extraordinarily intense emotions, "especially of devotion or sorrow" (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 15) and to briefly take part in forms of "ritual excess" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 57). Coleman and Elsner note that an important quality of holidays, and especially of going abroad, is the willingness to do things one would not normally do, the

space of the exotic serving as a licence for experiment and self-discovery (1995, 214).

Turner and Turner explain that this phenomenon occurs because pilgrimage "liberates the individual from the obligatory everyday constraints of status and role [and] defines him as an integral human being with a capacity for free choice" (1978, 11). The Turners' understanding of this "time out of time" quality of pilgrimage is particularly useful:

Religious images strike him, in these novel circumstances, as perhaps they have never done before, even though he may have seen very similar objects in his parish church almost every day of his life. The innocence of the eye is the whole point here, the 'cleansing of the doors of perception.' Pilgrims have often written of the 'transformative' effect on them of approaching the final altar or the holy grotto at the end of the way. Purified from structural sins, they receive the pure imprint of a paradigmatic structure (1978, 11).

#### SACRED SPACE

The pilgrimage to Medjugorje is, for many, a rite of passage (cf. van Gennep 1999), which involves "transformations of one's inner state and outer status" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 6). The pilgrim is geographically separated, exposed to sacred knowledge, and expects to be transformed (cf. Coleman and Elsner 1994, 85), to enter "into a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu" (Turner & Turner 1978, 8). A process from which the individual emerges altered from his or her previous situation (Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 11), the pilgrimage to Medjugorje is an opportunity for the tainted social persona to be cleansed and renewed (cf. Turner & Turner 1978, 30).



The liminality of the pilgrimage experience derives in large part from the site where the pilgrimage takes place. The places for which pilgrims set forth are typically located on/in the margins, away from large centers. Victor Turner notes that the most popular contemporary European Catholic pilgrimages (including the Marian shrines of Lourdes, Fatima, Czestochowa, La Salette, and Oostacker<sup>21</sup>) are in peripheral places (Turner 1974, 193). This peripherality is effective in establishing the instrumental "apartness" of the sacred space. Eade and Sallnow, for instance, comment that people who live in the area of an important shrine seldom visit it, favouring shrines further afield, a fact the authors attribute to "the devotional necessity of arduous travel as a form of penance in order to make the invocation of divine power effective" (1991, 12). Cohen notes that in such religiously motivated journeys, two movements can be distinguished: "pilgrimage, a movement toward the Center, and travel, a movement in the opposite direction, toward the Other, located beyond the boundaries of the cosmos, in the surrounding chaos" (Cohen 1992, 50). The Center and the "Other," though opposites, also possess a common trait: both are liminal (Turner 1974, 81-2). Eliade notes that the Center is "pregnant with order," possessing a creative, cosmicizing potential, while the Other dwells in "the chaos on the margins of the cosmicized world," and is completely devoid of stability (Eliade 1971, 9). The pilgrim, it is often argued, must go through a temporal structure unlike that of his home life, allowing her or him to

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<sup>21</sup> If Turner had been writing after 1981, he would doubtless have included Medjugorje in this list.

experience a transformation of sorts: “beginning in a familiar place, going to a Far Place, and returning to a Familiar Place, theoretically changed” (Turner 1974, 195).

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#### PRAYERFUL PREPARATION FOR PILGRIMAGE

Coleman notes that behaviours and attitudes developed away from shrines “inevitably loom large in pilgrims’ interpretation and appropriation of sacred shrines” (Coleman 2004, 47). This is no secret to pilgrims, who often prepare their minds, hearts, and souls months ahead of time so that they may approach the shrine in what they deem is the most appropriate (or useful) manner. In order to be able to fulfill their motivations, many in the group told me that they had spent months preparing for the journey. For some, a regimen of exercise and healthy eating was a priority, mainly because of stories they had heard about the difficult climb of the Križevac. This included, for at least four pilgrims, daily walks and bi-weekly hikes. For some, the preparation consisted mainly of religious education. Marie-Paule, for instance, judges that a well-informed head makes for a ready and open heart. She explains,

During the few weeks before the pilgrimage, I read a few books on Mary, which prepared my heart. I wanted to be disposed to receive as much as possible. It rejoiced me to know that I was coming in order to meet Mary. Even if I didn’t meet her in person, in an apparition – it’s in the heart that these things occur (*personal communication*).

For Céline, the preparation for the pilgrimage was mostly contemplative and knowledge-based. Having followed Saint Ignatius’ “Spiritual Exercises of Everyday Life,” Céline meditated on texts daily, and took university-level courses. Samuel and Gabriel’s spiritual preparation included visiting a ninety-year-old nun “blessed with the gift of



prophecy and tongues” – a visit they had made before their first pilgrimage to Medjugorje together (Samuel, *addressing the group*). Father Maurice notes that those who prepared in such a way for the pilgrimage “will live the pilgrimage in a different way than those who didn’t give themselves time to prepare their interior” (*personal communication*). In this manner, the pilgrimage shrine comes to be a site for the interplay of a variety of purposefully, decisively and tenaciously imported perceptions and understandings (cf. Crumrine and Morinis 1991, 10).

#### TRAVEL ITINERARY

In the months of preparatory fieldwork leading up to my fieldwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I was in regular contact with Father Maurice, one of the two accompanying priests, as well as with a host of pilgrims who had already journeyed to Medjugorje. Father Maurice and I drove to Montréal together, where we met with the remainder of the pilgrims at Trudeau International airport (formerly Dorval International). Four hours after our arrival at the airport, we took the redeye flight to Split (in Croatia) following a brief stopover in England via Heathrow International Airport and Gatwick Airport. From Split, we traveled the remaining three hours by chartered bus to Medjugorje. While in Medjugorje, the pilgrimage group I was accompanying shared (mostly) double-occupancy rooms in the same pension and participated in a combination of pre-organized corporate activities, private free time, and individually-organized small group activities. Two weeks and some days following our arrival in Medjugorje, the group



travelled by bus to Split, where we took the plane to Gatwick International Airport (England). After sleeping at a hotel overnight, we were given a guided tour of the City of London, after which we were taken to Heathrow International Airport, four hours before the redeye flight back to Montréal. After arrival, pilgrims said their final goodbyes, and went on to their respective addresses. I followed a number of the group to their home in Ontario, where I remained for ten days following our arrival and from where I conducted further field research.

## CHAPTER 3:

### VENTURING OUT TO MEET GOD

The Lord likes it when we make efforts to go towards Him, even when we're sick. He's happy with the efforts we make.

*(Suzie, personal communication).*

Addressing the majority of the many thousands of pilgrims who had come to Medjugorje in the hopes that God might enter their lives and better them, the Franciscan priest who gave the homily during our group's third mass in Medjugorje invited us to reflect on "What we, Man, must do for God." Reasoning that since God is already constantly doing things for us, the priest extended us the following invitation: "Tonight, ask yourself the question: 'What do I do for God? Do I do something? Could I do more? Could I, here, in Medjugorje, begin to do more for God, for the celestial Kingdom?" His answer to the question was a stern warning about the dangers of depending on deeds, exploits, and accomplishments. He then explained that

The fundamental duty of Man is to receive with faith, to permit God to work. That divine grace may act. This seems simple. Like something that's passive, perfectly easy. But only at first sight, since this is very difficult. We have become an active people, of works. There is too much action. There is too little contemplation. We pray too little. We reflect too little. And we stop to think about our interior life too little. This is how we arrive at not being satiated by life. We get bored. We become indifferent. We lose the sense of life. We come to an emptiness that is not fecund, that is dead (Homily during Mass).

This homily struck a chord with a number of pilgrims in our group, who referred to it on multiple occasions afterwards, voicing that their reason for being on pilgrimage was to learn how to “meet God halfway” by venturing out in His direction. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an exploration of some of the ways that pilgrims endeavour to go forth towards God during their time in Medjugorje.

#### PILGRIMAGE ENDEAVOURS

Serious pilgrims engage in a series of rituals that they hope will strengthen their spiritual commitment. Most of the activities making up the daily routines of the pilgrims are familiar, standardized activities (cf. Jurkovitch and Gesler 1997, 461). These may include attending masses, saying the rosary, visiting the Stations of the Cross, going to confession, fasting, and visiting sacred sites. Many of the rituals practiced during pilgrimage, however, are exotic for the pilgrim, or at least not part of their normal religious or devotional practice when at home. Some climb over sharp rocks barefoot or on their knees, others cry over the tombs of saints, while still others meditate before the Holy Sacrament. “Many pilgrimages specify what a pilgrim must see, hear, touch, and taste,” notes Morinis.

Austerities like fasting, self-mutilation, fire-walking, hook-swinging, and the like, which are common features of pilgrimage, also concern direct experience. It is valid to conceptualize pilgrimages as cultural channels along which individuals pass, carrying out actions (often specified) in pursuit of predictable experiences. (Morinis 1992, 21)

Eade and Sallnow explain that offerings to God by pilgrims, which include spiritual exercises, bodily privations or pecuniary deprivations,



all redound ultimately to his or her credit, either materially or spirituality. While the clergy might inveigh against the this-worldly attitude of pilgrims desirous of immediate material favours, their stress on the redemptive rather than on the miraculous power of the shrine amounts merely to a redirection of the transactional ethic, not to its rejection" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 25).

In this sense, Bowman notes that though the practice of granting indulgences for deeds done survives, Catholic pilgrimage is mainly inspirational; participants go on pilgrimage "to be renewed in their faith so that they can subsequently re-engage their ordinary lives with rejuvenated energy and a revived sense of purpose" (Bowman 1991, 112).

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#### PILGRIMAGE AS BODY TECHNIQUE

Writing in the late 1940s, Marcel Mauss recognized that at the bottom of all mystical states were body techniques, "necessarily biological means of entering into 'communication with God'" (1979 [1950], 122). Bowie notes that the majority of religious traditions "recognize the importance of bodily postures and external environment in creating receptivity to an inner space in which dialogue with the supernatural self or Other can take place." Highlighting that "the 'soul' has no material substance or locus," Bowie writes that religion "does not exist in some disembodied realm," and concludes that religious experience is consequently "dependent upon, but also transcends the body" (Bowie 2003, 55). In the study of the corporeality of belief, we therefore must seek to "incorporate the insight of the body as a libidinal surface, field of forces, threshold of transcendence" (Braidotti 1989, 99; in Young 1994, 8).

Pilgrimage is an important “body technique” (cf. Mauss 1950) used by the believer to make her or himself more receptive to this inner space of dialogue. The pilgrimage, for Alan Morinis, is found “wherever journeying and some embodiment of an ideal intersect” (1992, 3); the essence of the journey is, Morinis highlights, movement (1992, 15). This physical journey, this “kinetic ritual” (Turner & Turner 1978, xiii) through time and space, according to Coleman and Elsner, can also have metaphorical resonances on many levels (1995, 6).

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#### BELIEF AS BODY TECHNIQUE

The most common perspective on embodiment in the literature of the social sciences has been that of the “body as text,” the “symbolic body,” which focuses on the representational nature of the body as a conduit of social meaning (Reischer and Koo 2004, 298). The body, “as both bounded system and as complex structure,” writes Golden, “serves as a readily available ‘natural symbol’ of society and of social relations” (2004, 404). Douglas explains that the social body “constrains the way the physical body is perceived; the physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (1973, 93; in *ibid*). Reischer and Koo write that with or without our intention, “our bodies transmit a dizzying array of complex information about ourselves,” adding that “we and other members of our culture tend to be expert at reading those culturally specific meanings almost instantaneously” (2004, 300). Douglas underlines the human



inclination to reproduce social situations in symbolic form by deeply appealing to bodily symbols in every workable dimension (1973, vii; in Golden 2004, 404). Because of this view that social situations are reproduced or 'replicated' through the body, the latter "is viewed metaphorically as a text that can be 'read' as a symbol or signifier of the social world that it inhabits" (Reischer and Koo 2004, 300).

Roth and Bowen, borrowing from Merleau-Ponty (1945), explain that from our material inclusion in the world, we acquire knowledge and practical mastery of our surroundings (2001, 461). Through an understanding of the body as a religiously socialized (*habitus*) entity, the body can be understood as the means of expression and instrument of religious culture, mediating as it does the possibility of a shared religious experience (Bowie 2003, 55). Deidre Sklar explains at length the notion of embodied belief and practice:

Movement embodies socially constructed cultural knowledge in which corporeality, emotion, and abstraction are intertwined. When a person kneels in church, for example, he is not just doing and feeling something in his body. He is worshipping the divinity Jesus Christ in the context of a social ritual. I need to know something about that divinity and about the cosmology and social ethos in which Jesus Christ has a place to understand the person's experience of kneeling. It would be useful to know, for example, that Christianity works hierarchically, with human beings in a lower position than Jesus Christ, the master. Kneeling before Christ and his priests, therefore, refracts in physical space the hierarchy of persons in socio-religious space. To get at the symbolic ideal embedded in movement, one has to move into words. The abstract symbols embodied in movement are not necessarily evident in the movement itself. [...] When corporeal participation is accompanied by emotional, even numinous, experience, the symbolic words are not only accepted but are felt to be true. Abstract symbols and immediate, substantial experience are then bound. The symbols of the liturgy give definition and propositional meaning to the worshipper's actions and feelings, while his participation gives materiality, witness and immediacy to the symbols (1994, 13).



If our bodies reveal themselves to be the mediators between the intimacy of Self and the externality of the world (Ricoeur 1990, 372), they can be understood as “the hinges between that which we experience as inner and outer worlds” (*ibid*), and thus, as “medium[s] of interpretation for spiritual experience” (Bowie 2003, 50). In this way, the relationship between symbols and actions in religious performance is made visible. As Young notes, “the body is not simply inscribed into its discourses; it takes up its discourses.” She explains, “postures and gestures of the body are perceived and experienced as manifestations or representations of states of mind. In consequence, they have moral status. We are held to our bodies as to a promise (Young 1994, 5). Using the same example as Sklar, Rappaport observes that in kneeling, the performer does not merely send a message of submission in ephemeral words, but rather “*indicates* that the subordinated self is neither a fabrication of insubstantial words nor some insubstantial essence or soul that cannot be located in time or space.” Rappaport continues, explaining that by drawing themselves into the formal postures to which canonical words give symbolic value, “the performers give bodily form to symbols they represent. They give substance to symbols as the symbols give them form. The canonical and indexical come together in the *substance* of the *formal* posture” (Rappaport 1992, 255).

“Kneeling in church,” Sklar explains, “[the] body becomes a declaration of the acceptance of the credo... to comply with the corporeal conventions of the... Catholic

Church is to embody, if not believe in, its doctrines (1994, 13). While belief is a subjectively known inward state, acceptance is

a public act visible to both witnesses and the performers themselves. Acceptance is thus a fundamental social act forming the basis for public social orders as unknowable and volatile belief cannot. Acceptance not only is not belief; it does not even imply belief. Although the act of participation may make the private beliefs of individuals congruent with their public acts, this does not always happen. Participants may have their doubts, but doubt does not vitiate the acceptance. Some theologians even suggest that acceptance may be more profound than belief, for in the act of participation performers may transcend their doubts by accepting in defiance of them. To say that acceptance is intrinsic to performance is not to claim that the performer will abide by whatever rules or norm he or she has accepted" (Rappaport 1992, 253).

In much the same manner, Belzen writes that "it is because he carries, in his body, the *habitus* of an Indian Hindu that a believer thinks, reacts, feels and behaves as an Indian Hindu, in fact *is* an Indian Hindu, and not because he would know the specifics of the doctrine, the ethical rules or the rituals." Belzen highlights that the believer usually is unaware of these specifics. He takes *bevindelijke* Calvinists as a second example:

because the believer *embodies* the *bevindelijke* spirituality, he can *live* it, recognize it and be recognized by it, not because he *knows* it. Not being individual, the *habitus* is itself structured by social practices: its dispositions are durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions. It is in social practices that the *habitus* can be observed at work: being (re)produced and itself producing conduct" (Belzen 1999, 248).

Belzen explains that believers are seldom able to explain on a cognitive level why they act as they do in rituals, and are often at a loss to explain the 'official' rationales for certain conduct. For this reason, though Roman Catholics perform perfectly in accordance with the expectations of their religious subculture, "often with a competence and to an extent that a foreigner will never learn to manage," they often



cannot account for their behaviour during Mass (Belzen 1999, 247). Fiona Bowie writes that for the researcher, attention to bodily techniques

is one potentially fruitful way to approach the transmission of a religious culture. Deportment, gaze, specific gestures and responses, all have a biological, a psychological and a social component, and are consciously and unconsciously transmitted and imitated or resisted as part of religious socialisation. Bodily techniques can be extended to include the semiotics of external performance — how we dress and ornament ourselves, how we speak and what we say, to whom and in what circumstances (2003, 54).

With this in mind, we can appreciate that “[b]eliefs are not rendered from outside as abstract symbolic systems but from inside as modes of experience” (Young 1994, 3).

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#### BELIEF: THE BODY INSCRIBED

Julie Cheville warns us about the risk of overly depending on the symbolic, at the expense of other standpoints, and advocates for a more holistic approach:

In the same way that situated cognitionists have investigated symbol use as a social practice that both reproduces culture and mediates thought, a framework for embodiment, if it is to confront the mind–body divide, must represent the human body as at once an object of culture and a subject of cognition (Cheville 2005, 90).

In his groundbreaking *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu writes that all social action is “governed by a hazy logic of approximation” (1977, 82). Bourdieu explains that this logic is operated by the *habitus*, which he defines as “the socially informed body, history turned into nature, or society embodied” (*ibid*). Csordas refers to the *habitus* as “the socially informed body” (1990). For Csordas, the body is not “an object to be studied in relation to culture” but rather “the existential ground of culture” (*ibid*, 5).



Because the *habitus* is shared by members of the same social groups, it is subjective but not individual, and results in an immediate adhesion (*doxa*) to the world (van Wolputte 2004, 257). This adhesion to the world, understood as “an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors” (*ibid*, 91), is echoed by Michel Foucault (1979), who conceived the body as a locus of control upon which power relations are inscribed, writes that people come to ‘inhabit’ their bodies in response to cultural inscription, surveillance and discipline. In other words, for Bourdieu, the self is *embodied* in its shell, a mnemonic device in which the basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the *habitus*, are imprinted and encoded in the ever-renewed course of socialization. Roth and Bowen’s study of the first months of gruelling fieldwork undertaken by field ecologists is an admirable example of bodily-based theories, methods, and descriptions (cf. Sklar 1994, 20) at work as they seek to illustrate the notion of *habitus*:

enduring the physical and emotional demands of often solitary fieldwork leaves its mark not only on the actual bodies of ecologists but also on their minds. That is, the formation of “new” ecologists involves not only appropriating the observational and theoretical discourses of a discipline but also considerable physical disciplining in the field. This physical training, we argue, produces the very understandings that distinguish field ecologists from other ecologists and from members of other scientific disciplines. Thus, becoming an ecologist involves more than the acquisition of skills and conceptual knowledge and more than an enculturation to a set of enacted and interpretive practices—the physical (i.e., field-based) context in which these are learned is crucial (Roth and Bowen 2001, 460).

Sklar highlights Bourdieu’s differentiation between learning and socialization, noting that the *habitus* is inculcated as much, if not more, by *experience* as by explicit *teaching* (1994, 11). The human proclivity “to imitate actions and attitudes of people

in positions of authority, or of individuals in whom one has confidence and whom one wishes to emulate" (Shilling 1993, 12) results in the fact that though actions may be biological, the elements of individual choice or coercion involved are psychologically grounded (Bowie 2003, 58).

The human body is not simply a physical, organic unit, but also socially structured: "an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society" (Shilling 1993, 12). Bourdieu writes that the 'embodying' of cultural forms is central to the process whereby these forms come to be taken on as "imperative, 'natural' and, therefore, axiomatic" (1977, 78). It is the marginality of the body that makes it so potent a site of cultural learning, since this makes it vulnerable to manipulation and immune to discursive questioning (*ibid*). Meaning-making and conceptualization are based on a preconceptual ordering of bodily experience; sensorial organization gives meaning to perceptual experiences by arranging them into patterns that Mark Johnson calls 'embodied schema' (Johnson 1987, in Sklar 1994, 12). "Movement is a corporeal way of knowing," writes Bourdieu. "It is as loaded with significance, with who people take themselves to be, as verbal media.... One knows oneself and is known by others as much through the accumulated habits of the body as through the verbalizations that people exchange" (Bourdieu 1977, paraphrased by Sklar 1994, 11). To put it another way, since the body is part of and open to the world, and thus susceptible to



conditioning by the material and cultural conditions of the world, it is socialized; since language, memory, perception, and cognition and the other practical skills of everyday life are developmentally embodied in its neurophysiology, musculature, and anatomy, its biological and cultural differences are constitutive (Roth and Bowen 2001, 461).

#### THE PARISH OF SAINT JAMES PRAYER PROGRAM

The parish of Saint James has a very dynamic prayer program, designed to inspire the pilgrim and help ensure that her or his pilgrimage be prayerful and powerful, and that the five recommendations of the *Gospa* be undertaken (cf. INTRODUCTION). Every day begins with a Mass in Croatian at 7:30am, followed by Masses in the common languages of the pilgrims (Masses in Italian, French, English, and German are said daily, in addition to various offices in other tongues). A time of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Adoration Chapel follows in the afternoon. Opportunity for pilgrims and locals to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available from around 4:30pm and as pilgrim priests make themselves available, posting the language in which they prefer to hear confession on the doors of the many confessionals, or in front of a pair of chairs outside, if the thirty-odd confessionals prove to be full. The daily evening program takes place from 6:00pm to 9:30pm. The program begins with a tradition started from the very first days of the apparitions: a set of common prayers (the Creed, Seven Our Fathers, Hail Mary's and Glory Be's) that the children were said to have prayed with the *Gospa*. Following these prayers are the Joyful and the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary,



except for Thursdays, when the Joyful and the Luminous Mysteries are meditated upon. At 6:40pm, a few minutes of silence are held, as this is the time the apparitions are said to be occurring. Mass in Croatian begins at 7:00pm, following the sung litanies of the Virgin. Every day with the exception of Fridays, the blessing of objects of piety is held immediately following the Mass. Following this, the Glorious Mysteries are recited on the rosary at the end of the evening program every day except Thursdays and Fridays. The Mass is followed by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Wednesdays and Saturdays, adoration and prayer before the Cross on Fridays, and prayers for health of body and soul on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

While in Medjugorje, the group I was accompanying followed a timetable set by the pilgrimage organizing company, whose schedule was set in such a way as to avoid as many conflicts with that of the parish's prayer program. The following schedule details a "typical" day in Medjugorje:

7:00-7:15am	Wake-up call
7:30-8:00am	Breakfast
8:00-11:00am	Group activity
11:00-12:15am	French Mass at the church
12:30-1:00am	Lunch at the pension
1:30-4:00pm	Group activity
4:00-10:30pm	Return to pension; individually-organized activities
6:00-7:00pm	Rosaries for the Parish Prayer Program
7:00-8:30pm	High Mass for the Parish Prayer Program
8:30-9:00pm	Special prayers during the Parish Prayer Program
9:00-10:30pm	Supper in individually-organized small groups (in town)
10:30pm	Return to pension, lights out soon thereafter.

Because of the large size of the group, the importance of respecting the schedule was made abundantly clear, and pilgrims were generally careful to avoid making the remainder of the group wait. Because pilgrims were so respectful of the schedule, the group never once missed an opportunity for an activity, and only arrived (slightly) late on two occasions.

Through reading magazines, books, websites, and also through word of mouth, the pilgrims were very knowledgeable about most the activities on offer, and they constantly spoke with great anticipation about the pre-organized corporate activities in which they were to participate. These activities included:

- The Way of the Cross while climbing the Križevac (a mountain with a cross at its peak)
- The recitation of rosaries on the Podbrdo (the site of the first apparitions)
- A guided tour of Medjugorje
- A guided tour of the Cenacolo (a religious community whose purpose is to help drug addicts)
- A guided tour of the Oasis of Peace religious community
- A guided tour of the Village of the Mother (an orphanage)
- A visit to the Blue Cross (the site of many later apparitions)
- A conference given by the Community of the Beatitudes at their convent
- A group visit of Father Slavko's Tomb
- A visit to Vicka's house (the most charismatic seer)
- A public apparition (on the second day of each month, the seer Mirjana has an apparition in public)
- The Renewal of our Baptismal promises
- The healing of the throat in the church of Saint Blaise, Dubrovnik
- The Laying on of Hands
- A conference given by Father Jozo (the parish priest at the time of the first apparitions)

- A daytrip to Dubrovnik
- A daytrip to Mostar<sup>22</sup>

The schedule was introduced to the group by Father Maurice on the first morning we spent in Medjugorje. He explained,

You'll be able to go at your own speed. You can go to the church whenever you like, you can go to the Adoration chapel whenever you like, you can pray in your room whenever you like, you can go sit in front of the church whenever you want. However, we will organize some activities for our little group, together. Something extra. (Father Maurice, *addressing the group*)

During these activities, and in the course of the everyday schedule, the pilgrims, their guides, and their spiritual guides seized many opportunities to sanctify the group and its endeavours. Most informed me that because this is the case, the parish prayer program is much more intensely spiritual and full of prayer than everyday life at home, and they recognize that for their pilgrimage to be "successful," this must be the case (see CHAPTER 2: "DEFINING 'PILGRIMAGE': MULTIPLE MOTIVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS"). While Gabriel stresses that "it's not magic, in Medjugorje. It necessitates an investment of the heart. Even a physical investment. We're humans, and this is part of our human reality" (*personal communication*), Father Maurice stresses the importance of "investing some time in doing nothing in order to leave our bodies available to the action of the Lord" (*personal communication*).

#### EVERYDAY DEVOTIONS

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<sup>22</sup> This list only contains the activities in which the entire group participated together.



During the group's stay in Bosnia, the pilgrims engaged in a number of popular Roman Catholic devotions. These served primarily (but not solely, as will be explored in Chapter 4) as preparatory exercises meant to make the practitioner better attuned to God. On the first morning in Medjugorje, Father Maurice informed the group that every morning, he would hand out the day's Gospel reading, explaining that this was a priority for him. When initially setting out, Father Maurice had underlined that "being given something is important" and that the photocopied Gospel readings of the day were intended "as a prayer – not only for reading, but also to be chewed, to be shared. This helps us digest it, and to go get what is nice about it, what is great about it" (*personal communication*). When I asked him why he had specifically chosen to follow the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical calendar, Father Maurice explained that he did so in order for the group to be "in solidarity with the entire Church, who, throughout the world, meditate on the same Word of God" (*personal communication*). Every day, this same passage from the Gospels is read during the French Mass every morning. During the parish program's International Mass every night, the Gospel is typically read in at least eight languages (and sometimes up to twelve times). This had an important impact on many of the pilgrims, who shared that this was a sign of the Church in action. Jacques, for instance, volunteered, "the Gospel being read in eleven languages: that impressed me! I'd never seen that!" (*personal communication*). Other opportunities to share the Word of God were seized by other pilgrims. Joseph-Marie, for instance, had brought a deck of "Little Breads" (cards cut in the shape of a loaf with biblical verse printed on them) that had been printed by

the Myriam Bethlehem religious community. Many pilgrims pondered these and the Gospel readings carefully, investing them with great significance. Often, pilgrims would share the passage they had picked with each other, and would meditate them carefully.

Prior to the pilgrimage, Father Maurice related to me that during his last pilgrimage to Medjugorje, "it felt like there hadn't been any praying, only recitations of rosaries." For this reason, he reasoned that he and Father Patrice "must let people pray at their own times, according to their own needs, and such" (*personal communication*). For this reason, he informed me that he was not intending on "engaging in the recitation of rosaries and more rosaries." On numerous occasions, Father Maurice sought to highlight the dangers of "unbalanced" devotions to Mary, whom he insists is "a Sacrament of the presence of Jesus in our world" (*personal communication*). "There's someone hidden who reveals Himself in Medjugorje," he tells the group, "it's Jesus. The hidden child of Medjugorje is Jesus. Mary is there only to bring us to Jesus. She isn't there for herself." Acknowledging the importance of establishing the feeling of a *Marian* pilgrimage, Father Maurice concluded the first sharing session at the airport with, "I propose that we pray a decade on the rosary. Just to ask Mary to embark with us. To tell Mary, 'We're going to meet you'." However, Father Maurice followed this with a caveat,

On this trip, we go to discover the Lord. We're not going to discover Mary – Mary is always there in order to bring us towards the Lord. Even if we're going to hear a lot about the Virgin, even if we hear a lot about this woman who's marked the story of humanity, it will always be to conduct us towards her Son, Jesus, who will point us towards the Father, so that we may have life.



Father Patrice, on the other hand, is a Marian cleric. Having served with Marie-Jeunesse, a mixed-gender religious community made up of youth who make vows to the Virgin and consecrate their lives to Her, Father Patrice's spiritual guidance continually highlights the role of Mary in the Gospels, in the Roman Catholic faith, and in our everyday lives. At this prayer session at the airport chapel, Father Patrice led the group in prayer saying, "Our first thought to Mary is to thank Her for having invited us to this land. And to greet us here through all of those we will meet during these days; their presence is telling of the generosity, the fidelity, the goodness of our Mary, who visits Her people. Who visits us, Her children." As the bus was approaching the village of Medjugorje, Father Patrice thanked the Virgin for guiding us there safely, and welcomed us to "this land that Mary chose to make her privileged land, her land of pilgrimage." Wishing the group a good night's sleep upon arrival, Father Patrice voiced, "I'm sure Mary will already have secrets to share with you tomorrow." Though most pilgrims in our group were very familiar with Marian devotions such as the recitation of rosaries, very few were accustomed to reciting daily the full rosary (consisting of three chaplets<sup>23</sup>) which forms an integral part of the parish program. Céline, whose main exposure to the rosary has been through her husband's CD-accompanied recitation of it on long car trips,

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<sup>23</sup> Although a full rosary now consists of four full chaplets (because of John Paul II's addition of the Luminous Mysteries), and although the Franciscans in charge of the shrine did adjust their weekly schedule to include this fourth set of Mysteries, they have chosen to maintain the tradition of three chaplets daily.



was astounded by the length of the nightly prayer program, "I can't believe it! Two rosaries and a Mass!" When I asked her if she had ever experienced the benefits of a rosary, she responded, "Not a whole rosary. No. Maybe a decade. But then I'm gone. No way. A whole rosary! Wow!" (*personal communication*). For those who managed to "get into it," however, the long hours of reciting the rosary seemed to fly by. "I wasn't realizing how quickly the time was passing! I was there since 5:30, and it was 9:30!" (*Christiane, personal communication*).

For the many pilgrims who, during their stay in Medjugorje, aim to take in as much as possible, the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is made available by the Franciscans each afternoon and one night per week. Many in our group took advantage of both opportunities, and some even took part in the all-night Adoration.<sup>24</sup> Suzie relates her experience during the evening Adoration,

"I was sitting in the back, but just in front of the Holy Sacrament. I could see the whole dome. It was like a fire that took over us. And I could see the people who went down the hill on each side, and it made me think of a flock of sheep who assemble to come see their shepherd. Someone else here had the same image in mind. It was beautiful (*personal communication*).

As easy as it may sound, Adoration can be a gruelling activity, since it involves spending hours on end "doing" nothing aside from meditating. Boredom, a sense of loneliness,

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<sup>24</sup> For those not aware of what the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament consists, it is simply the presentation of the consecrated Host (bread), which is normally placed into an ostensory. Through this devotion, the faithful "see" the Real Presence of Christ in the bread.

and fatigue are often very quick in coming, especially for people used to a constant hustle-and-bustle. For those who manage to combat these foes, however, the devotion can bring a host of benefits. "I really love Adoration. I grow through that a lot. I've learned a lot about myself through that, and about others, and about life," shares Murielle (*personal communication*).

#### SPECIAL DEVOTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Aside from the everyday and commonplace Roman Catholic devotions, our group engaged in a number of distinctive devotions. One such was the renewal of our Baptismal promises. Father Maurice addressed the group, inviting us to reflect on the meaning of Baptism, "To be baptized is to be recognized as member of a church, but it's much more than that. It's to be plunged in Jesus, dying and resurrecting. It's to be marked by the seal of hope. To live with Jesus now and forever. Plunged in His Death and Resurrection." For the members of our group, Baptism is an important Sacrament, and, like the other Sacraments, is believed to "function" in a very real, physical sense. When Pilgrim X was telling me about her son's suicide attempt following the death of his father (her husband), for instance, her first words of comfort after he had let go the rifle he had been holding to his head were, "At your Baptism, you received a strength, which is the strength of the Holy Spirit." Father Maurice explained that the renewal of our Baptismal engagements is "a demonstration of our will to walk with God, in His presence." When Father Maurice explained that this gesture would be done with water



taken from the source at the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Basilica, in Québec, a number of pilgrims voiced their surprise. For many, this source seemed to be a somewhat carnivalesque, surprising choice, a surprise they voiced with boisterous laughter and jokes. When Father Maurice related why Samuel had brought it to Medjugorje, however, they unanimously agreed that it had been an excellent idea. “‘Sainte-Anne’s water!’ I was telling Samuel, ‘what are we going to do with this water? It’s Saint Anne’s water!’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘She’s the Holy Virgin’s mother!’ She is Mary’s mother. She gave her ‘Yes’ before Mary did!” Following a short time of open prayers where our Baptismal promises were renewed, each member of the group was given an unction with the water. Tellingly, when I enquired about the meaning of the action they had freely undertaken, each of the pilgrims was clear that this was not a second Baptism, and that the water did not hold any special properties aside from its important symbolic value.

Great numbers of pilgrims elect to take the coach ride down to the nearby town of Siroki Brijeg in order to hear a discourse by Father Jozo Zovko, who was the parish priest of Medjugorje at the time of the first apparitions. While in this village, pilgrims typically attend Mass and visit the Franciscan seminary and gallery. A visit to the Community of the Beatitudes, complete with the Consecration to Mary, is another popular activity.<sup>25</sup> A visit to the Village of the Mother is yet another important activity,

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<sup>25</sup> The Consecration to Mary that our group repeated read: “I choose you today, Mary, in the presence of the Celestial Court, as my mother and my queen. I deliver to you, in all submission and love, my body and



where pilgrims get to share memorates and belief narratives, hear about some of the miracles of war-torn Medjugorje, and learn about the possibility of having an impact on the future of others through the sponsorship and godparenting of orphans. These activities, however, are considered as secondary to the main exercises: the ascent of Apparition Hill and the ascent of the Križevac.

## THE ASCENT OF MOUNTAINS

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### APPARITION HILL

Though the visionaries 'carry' the visions with them (cf. INTRODUCTION: "THE SACRED TRACE OF MEDJUGORJE: APPARITIONS"), the place of the *Gospa's* first apparitions on Mount Crnica is by far the most frequently visited site in Medjugorje. Usually referred to as Apparition Hill, this prominence rises several hundred meters above the hamlet of Podbrdo, which also often lends its name to the site. A Rosary for Peace is offered on this hill by the parishioners every Sunday afternoon, though few groups of pilgrims attend, preferring the guidance of their own priests / spiritual guides in their own languages to the Croatian-speaking Franciscans. Following breakfast, our group of pilgrims walked from their pensions to the foot of the hill. Instructions were given out by the group's guide, which included the injunction to remain silent while on

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my soul, my interior and exterior belongings, and the value of my good works themselves, past present and future. Dispose of me and of all that belongs to me, without exception, according to your desire, to the greater Glory of God, in time and eternity. Amen."

the mount, guided by only the low voice of their prayer guide; silence is understood to privilege prayerfulness and a meditative atmosphere.

The first few meters of the hill are paved, which makes the ascent very easy. Cemented stones make up another short portion, followed by smoothly arranged rocks. It is only once the pilgrims reach the last of this artificial pathway (which, for good reason, coincides with the last of the souvenir merchants) that their composition changes. The members of the group are transformed from curious tourists engrossed in purchasing knick-knacks and conversing with their traveling partners to the serious prayerful and contemplative pilgrims whose objective is the encounter with the sacred. The great majority of the pilgrims brought their rosaries along, and at this point, these were taken out of their cases. In the hope that they might be of use, some pilgrims had brought extra rosaries, which they distributed gladly to the few who had either forgotten theirs or did not think they would be used on the hill.

Although the participants had read in the information brochure that they would need a good pair of shoes, many failed to bring them. Many had also been warned by friends who had undertaken the pilgrimage before about the difficulty of the ascent, yet few of the first-timers to Medjugorje anticipated the difficulty of the trail. For this reason, most arrived at the first of the prayer stations tense, anxious and winded. Many began to doubt their ability to follow the group, and feared injuring themselves on the jagged stones which project out of the earth like barbs, knives, and spears, perfectly

arranged to slash, pierce, or skewer the hasty and the reckless. Since so many pilgrims take a stone as a souvenir, Bax notes, the mountain "has come to look more and more like a crater" (1990, 69). At this point, those few pilgrims unable to advance further because of serious physical limitations turned back, while those wilful enough to tackle the remainder of the hill in spite of the limitations of their bodies solicited the assistance of the younger and stronger members of the group, who were delighted to be of service.

The prayer stations, which are large bronze sculptures depicting the Joyous and the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, are arranged in a circuit; the Joyous Mysteries lead up to the site of the first apparitions, while the Glorious Mysteries lead to the foot of the hill. The group advanced from one station to the next in single file, beading their rosaries while they made their way to the next station. At every stop, the spiritual guide proffered a prayer appropriate to the station, and a different pilgrim was asked to lead the group in the recitation of the next decade.<sup>26</sup> This task was assumed with the greatest solemnity. The leader carefully enunciated, with the correct emphases and at a pace she or he believed would help the other group members intensify their prayer.

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<sup>26</sup> A note for those not familiar with the (Roman Catholic) common rosary. The rosary is made up of four sets of Mysteries (these are the Glorious Mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries, the Joyous Mysteries, and the Sorrowful Mysteries), which correspond to four times around the chaplet. Each set of Mysteries is made up of five decades (groups of ten beads), which are divided by two spaces and a single bead. Before each decade is begun, the Mystery to be contemplated is presented. The string of ten beads when ten Hail Mary's are voiced is the counted-out time when the Mystery is to be reflected upon.



About two hundred meters following the last station of the Joyous Mysteries is the site where the first apparitions took place. A large exposed space, the rocky ground has been trodden down by the feet of millions of pilgrims, and stones have been arranged so as to form a sort of platform. In the middle of this platform is a "life-sized" white plaster statue of the *Gospa* of Medjugorje placed atop a tall pedestal, and surrounded by a short cast-iron fence. Off to the side of the platform is a sculpture of the crucified Christ, protected from the sun and rain by a small peaked roof. A handful of pilgrims congregated around the cross, touching Jesus' feet, while the majority slowly made their way through the crowds in order to gaze at the statue. Donated by a Korean woman who reported a miraculous healing occurring at this site, the statue stands on the very spot where the children began to have apparitions in 1981.

Having arrived on this platform surrounding the statue of the *Gospa*, some pilgrims elected to stand, while others sat directly on the rough stony ground. Still others made their way to the far side of the platform, where they sat on knee-high boulders. In this uncomfortable position, the members of the group pondered in silence the mystery of the apparitions. Joseph-Marie kneeled directly in front of the statue of the Holy Virgin and, reaching out as far behind the gate as possible, collected some earth, which he placed into a plastic pill jar. Many others got on their knees in front of the statue, with open hands, signalling that they were accepting to be touched by the Holy Virgin. Others simply sat in silent meditation. The area surrounding the statue of

the *Gospa* is not typically conducive to prayer because of the large groups ever-present. For this reason, our group stayed only as long as we needed to see the site, catch our breath, say a few prayers, deliver our various messages to the foot of the statue, and regroup.

The return to the hamlet of Podbrdo was conducted in much the same manner as the ascent, this time accompanied by the recitation of the Glorious Mysteries. The pace of the walking was significantly slower on the descent, however. The steep gradient is treacherous, and pilgrims feared falls as they began to feel their bodies tire. Having seen the site of the apparitions, pilgrims' steps were no longer impatient, but rather thoughtful. Pilgrims beaded their rosaries, hoping to absorb as much of the charisma of the place as they could.

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#### THE KRIŽEVAC

Perceived by cynics as being in competition with Mount Crnica, the Križevac stands a few hundred metres from Saint James church. Forming an angle with Mount Crnica, Mount Križevac is over 500 meters over sea level, and is topped by a large reinforced concrete cross, which was constructed in 1933 to commemorate the 1900th anniversary of the Passion of Jesus. Embedded in this cross are relics received from Rome, which include a piece of the "True Cross," on which Jesus Christ is said to have been crucified. The meandering path leading up to the concrete cross is dotted with bronze carvings of the Stations of the Cross. Observant pilgrims note that Our Lady is

present in each of these, accompanying both Jesus and the pilgrim on the Way of the Cross. In an apparition on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1984, the *Gospa* is purported to have told the children that great graces would be granted to those who prayed in front of it. Since that day, the parish of Saint James organizes a Way of the Cross on the Križevac every Friday afternoon.

The ascent of the Križevac is normally only done after the visit to the site of the first apparitions on Mount Crnica, which was seen by our guides as a testing ground of sorts. The pilgrims who were unable to take on the rugged terrain of Mount Crnica, as well as those who proved to be too great a concern during the first visit were advised that it might be best if they not attempt the Križevac. Most of these pilgrims were content to bow out, and not one of them insisted on attempting the climb. The Križevac's gradient is steeper than that of the Crnica, though the terrain is easier to manoeuvre. Because of the width of the trail, assisting the older or weaker pilgrims up the mountain is much easier.

Our pilgrim group planned the climb of the Križevac three days in advance. Leaving our pensions, we assembled at the tomb of Father Slavko Barbaric, one of the leading proponents of the Medjugorje shrine. The visit of Father Barbaric's tomb and the ascent of the Križevac are perceived as going hand in hand, since the Franciscan priest died of a heart attack some meters from the summit (legend has it that he died in front of the stele representing Christ's death, and that it occurred at 3:00pm on a Friday, coinciding



with the timing of Jesus' death). The tomb is located behind Saint James church, on the way to the mountain. The visit was short, as was expected, owing to the throng of other pilgrims who constantly arrived to recite rosaries and hold times of silent prayers. The one-kilometre walk to the foot of the mountain was quickly over, and our local guide introduced us to the mountain, and its history. Following this, our guide shared some of the narratives relating to the mountain,

There have been a few apparitions at the foot of the cross up there. The Virgin sometimes invited the seers to go meet her there, and she appeared to them late at nights, sometimes in difficult weather conditions, which made them make little sacrifices. Sometimes it was raining, or late at night. There have also occurred some miracles – or supernatural feats – which have occurred around this cross. At times, it has happened that the cross disappeared, leaving the form of the Virgin in its place. Or the cross shone with an extraordinary light. Father Jozo, for example, witnessed that in the beginning of August, one day, the Virgin was there in place of the cross, and the Virgin seemed to be nearing the church. Afterwards, when the Virgin returned to her place, they saw three letters coming out of the arm of the cross: MIR, in large red letters which inscribed themselves in the sky between the two hills. MIR signifies 'Peace.' This message came out of the arm of the cross. In August 1984, the Virgin stated that the construction of the cross was already in God's plan. Later, she gave a Message where she said: 'One receives special graces while praying in front of the cross.'

Concluding her introduction, our guide wished us a good ascent, upon which the group immediately began the climb.

Our group's way up the mountain was slow and meditative. We stopped at every station, and Father Patrice guided us in a reading of the plaques. Between the stations, most pilgrims beaded their rosaries in private prayer. Arriving at the summit, pilgrims eagerly climbed the last steps in order to touch the concrete cross (to which the mount owes its name), signifying their triumph over the mountain. As I had noted with other

pilgrim groups in prior pilgrimages, few in our group climbed on the curious mound of stones directly beside of the cross. Made up of stones, pebbles, and boulders definitely not native to the area, these have been accumulated by pilgrims who contribute to the immense project that is the mound by throwing in their own small token, and thus journeying in their “wishful imaginations” to the distant time when these began to be brought there (cf. Rountree 2002, 484).

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#### THE HAUT-LIEU

Mountains are one of those features of the landscape that seems to have special potential for sacredness in nearly all cultural traditions (Nolan 1991, 33). Mount Crnica and Mount Križevac, like many other sacred mountains, are liminal in a number of ways. Firstly, they are liminal in the sense of being “halfway” between civilization and the wilderness, at the edge of the village (cf. Bax 1990, 66). These mountains are also liminal in the sense of being “halfway” between Heaven and Earth, not only because of their height, but also because Mary is said to have appeared there. As Diane shares, visiting these mountains “touches our hearts, because we really know that the Holy Virgin has appeared there. To go meet her where she’s really come... She really went there. So we come to talk to her. We know that we’re close to her, that she appears there” (*personal communication*). For Gabriel, on the other hand, it is clear that the ascent of the Križevac and the Crnica is primarily symbolic, and that the space of the mountain is liminal because it is *literally* “halfway” between Heaven and Earth – at least in the psychological



sense. He explains, "The ascent signifies that we want to get closer. The mountain is symbolic. We climb *towards*. God is there, above us, in Heaven." Though he appreciates the fact that the symbolism is imperfect, since "God is not above, He is in all of my being," Gabriel recognizes the climb's emblematic potency. For many of the pilgrims, he explains, the ascent becomes a prayer: "I want to climb towards You, God. I want to get closer to You in order to hear You better. In order to commune with You better" (*personal communication*).

For many pilgrims, the ascent of mountains is a sacred act because the pilgrim symbolically leaves behind his/her home life in search of God, much in the same way as pilgrims do when they first elect to leave on pilgrimage. "The haut-lieu," Father Maurice explains,

is the site we find when we have left our habits, when we have left our everyday to be able to reserve ourselves to something else. When Moses climbed the Mount of Horeb, that's where he signed the Covenant between God and his people. He went on the mountain. He went on Mount Nebo as well, and that's where he contemplated the Promised Land (*personal communication*).

Referring to the Križevac as a haut-lieu in the double sense of both "high place" and "space of the heart," Gabriel relates that the ascent "can be a very rich experience, but at the same time, full of surprises, full of the unexpected... and sometimes full of suffering as well." He shares that "to climb a mountain is to learn to forget oneself, to accept... to go to the ends of one's energies, investing efforts at the level of the heart, in order to come closer to He who is waiting for me, He who, finally, is seeking me." The



pains, fatigues and the strains of the climb are not empty, Gabriel asserts; these allow the pilgrim “to be seduced by a witness, by a look, by a comportment, an attitude, a word, a witness of faith, by a moment of recollection”; these allow the pilgrim to open his heart, eyes, and ears to the experience he wishes to live. When, climbing on the Križevac, Gabriel lost his bearings and went off the trail. He reports having realized then ‘that the Lord had allowed that to make me understand that there are some *ÉGAREMENTS* in my life, and even through my *ÉGAREMENTS*, the Lord is there to show me the way. I had made a prayer of it.” He adds that when he arrived on the summit, he lived one of the stronger spiritual experiences of his life. He meditated on becoming lost on the mountain, and he understood that through this experience, “God wanted to tell me ‘I have always been with you and I’m always with you, and I find you again. And this great combat you’re fighting in your life, I’ll win it with you. You won’t fight alone.’ And it was worth it. It was worth going.” For Diane, the physical exertion of the climb is an important aspect of the experience.

I was happy this morning, because it was rocky, and we were climbing, I was out of breath, and I was telling myself: ‘My God! I’m out of shape!’ I was out of breath, and the rocks weren’t easy to climb. I felt I was happy that it was difficult... When you exert yourself for God or for Mary, you’re happy, because you tell yourself that you are making efforts to go meet her. You feel like you’ll have graces because we have difficulties. And we’ll have graces because the Holy Virgin is happy. I was happy that it was rocky and that there was difficulty. Because when it’s too easy, we forget. But there, we work, and we’re hot, and I was happy, because we’re doing it for the Holy Virgin. I’m sure, sure, sure, that we have graces at that time (*personal communication*).

Céline is of the same mind. She observes, “I realized that the day that we’ll build steps [on Apparition Hill or on the Križevac], it will become touristic. It will no longer be

religious. I think it's important that we keep it that way. It's very important that we keep it that way" (Céline, *personal communication*).

Father Maurice does not hesitate to read a rich symbolism in pilgrims' actions. On our first pilgrimage to Medjugorje together, I had organized a climb in the middle of the night. Father Maurice recounted to our group that

People went, got up at 3:00AM, in order to be able to climb during the darkness in order to see the sunrise. I understand in that that there's something symbolic. I, who didn't do it, I had that in my heart while they were living it. It's another march. "I walk through the darkness of my life." This ascent of the mountain is a little like this aspect of my life, where I'm climbing in the darkness, towards the light. I hope that one day, at one stage in my life, that I will be able to climb and contemplate the interior spectacle that is mine. The spectacle of God in my life. But you live that with your body. You live that with your body.

Through the ascent of the Križevac, according to Father Maurice, the other pilgrims and myself were performing an important ritual whose function, like that of all ritual, was to affect our lives through enactment (cf. Alexander 1997, 154). Michel, who had attended a workshop prior to leaving for Medjugorje, recalled that a monk had spoken about youths who "liked climbing the Križevac at night because they expect something more special might happen" (*personal communication*). Such a performance, as Father Maurice's retelling of this story and Michel's reference to another group's experience reveal, is itself "an act of interpretation, one that receives close public scrutiny and, thus, provides an opportunity for demonstrating conformity or making provocative statements" (Loewe 2003, 438). Upon our return to the village that morning, I remember that many of the other pilgrims, who were too old, too tired or too scared to



join us in our climb, felt the compulsion to be in our presence, to encourage us, congratulate us, and perhaps feel themselves some of what the experience had operated in our hearts.

When I asked Jules what he considered was the best activity of the pilgrimage, he simply replied, "the ascent of the Križevac. That's special. That's very special" (*personal communication*). When I asked him to describe why, it was clear that the involvement of the others inspired him,

I found that people were so courageous! When you see people walking with so much difficulty on flat land, and then they're there, climbing a mountain! The courage and the faith! When you look at that, you think, 'Even if your neck hurts a little, stop complaining. Help others! Bless the Lord!' That's what it brought me: to stop complaining and do what I have to do (*personal communication*).

A detail which made this easier for him was helping the older women manoeuvre around the rocks. "I was happy to do it. They did need it... and I felt useful, since some who would have found the run a long one! And now, they've done their trip, and they're all happy. It's marvellous" (*personal communication*). While climbing Apparition Hill, likewise, Jules was conscientious and looking to serve. Having brought a walking stick, Jules took note of Joseph-Marie's struggling up the difficult terrain, so he offered it to his friend, explaining that he had brought it simply in case someone would need it. Louise agreed with Jules' assessment of the Križevac being one of the best activities of the pilgrimage. For her, however, it was not the opportunity to be of service and the courage of the other pilgrims that was significant. Rather, the climb of the Križevac was



the time and space in which she managed to detach herself from the painful memories of the past.

I asked the Lord at the different Stations to come detach me from my past. I gave Him my past. I told Him to take it. And that He could be a helper in removing whatever is not good in my life, so that I may be able to walk with Him, without any afterthoughts, whether they be good or bad. So that He may make it all new. Afterwards, when I came down the mountain, I felt light (*addressing the group*).

Monique's lesson while climbing the Crnica was of a more temporal nature. "I learned a lot by doing Apparition Hill," she shares, "walking step by step. Well. Rock by rock by stone! I didn't look up, I looked down, and I was able to climb it" (*personal communication*). Feeling that this lesson can be expanded to the remainder of her life, Monique looks forward to applying it in other areas. Gabriel explains why the haut-lieu might be so powerfully transformative,

During my march towards the haut-lieu, I will allow myself to be seduced by a witness, by a look, by a comportment, by an attitude, by a word, by a witness of faith, or by a moment of recollection... God, for whom we are unique, will reveal Himself according to each one's needs, in the measure, of course, where there will be an opening of the heart, and where each will allow himself to surpass what is exterior, to surpass what one's eyes can see, in order to be able to stop at what one's eyes can contemplate (*personal communication*).

"As a mountain," writes Medjugorje's Father Barbaric, the Križevac "is an invitation to set forth and go up." He continues, explaining that on the mountain, pilgrims may experience the call and a great opening of his heart, "under those 'conditions so well-prepared'" (Barbaric 1990).

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## UNABLE TO CLIMB THE MOUNTAINS

Because of the symbolic value of the haut-lieu, pilgrims carefully prepare their hearts, minds, and bodies for a meeting with God before arriving at the foot of the mountain. Preparation is of the essence in such a climb; as discussed earlier (CHAPTER 2: "PRAYERFUL PREPARATION FOR PILGRIMAGE"), many pilgrims change their diets and adopt a regimen of physical exercise months prior to the pilgrimage in order to be able to participate fully. However, in spite of this, many of the pilgrims in our group felt physically unable to attempt the climb when the time arrived. "It saddened me a lot, to not be able to go to the hill and to the mountain," shares Marie-Paule (*personal communication*). For Monique (who climbed the Crnica but not the Križevac), the feeling was much the same. "It was very hard for me to accept not being able to participate" (*personal communication*).

In spite of their setback, each of those who elected to remain behind emphasized that this "failure" was a fruitful one. "Through this," Monique volunteers, "the Lord made me understand, 'Monique, once and for all, will you accept your limits?' That's what the trip has given me, as well. Accepting my limits" (*personal communication*). For Marie-Paule, the fact of not climbing the mountain was also difficult to accept. From the reactions of those who climbed the mountain, Marie-Paule reasons that the experience "must have been very, very intense. Maybe people can't put words to what they lived because it was so strong. But it's certainly important, and it will surely change a lot of things in their hearts" (*personal communication*). However, while the remainder of the

group was on the Križevac, she, “in Communion with the others... felt united to them. I tried to carry them as much as possible in my prayer so that they would receive a lot of graces and benedictions,” she explains (*personal communication*). “I was there when the first people arrived from the Križevac,” she remembers,

They were all glowing. It was nice to see them, I was proud of their success. I was proud of those people because they had succeeded... Each of the people I spoke with VÉCU [experienced] it differently, and it was good to hear them. It consoles me. Instead of living this as a failure, I hear their witnessing and it soothes me. I think that they brought me in their hearts (*personal communication*).

For Odile, who was the only pilgrim in the group who knew she would not attempt the climb before arriving at the village, the advantage of not having been able to climb was a simple one: to keep her memory of the mountains intact. “I’ve climbed the Križevac before... I was young then. I climbed it in 1985 –in the middle of the night... I went on Apparition Hill then too. It was only a little trail then, with posts as markers. Now, it’s not the same anymore” (*personal communication*). A repeat of the same climb would have, for Odile, been counter-productive, since the sacred site as she remembers it is a richer place than what, according to her, it has become since the advent of the commercialism of the space.

## SACRIFICE

Preston points out that modern tourism may have a negative effect on the penitential dimension of pilgrimages. He claims that some individuals attribute the decline of spiritual magnetism at some pilgrimage sites “to the ‘softness’ of an increasing number of ‘tourist pilgrims’.” He explains, “Accustomed to urban comforts...



tourists are typically reluctant to undergo the hardships of long journeys on foot or the routine penances once expected of all pilgrims." Preston is quick to add that the opposite may also prove to be the case, "as tourism and pilgrimage are forged together, amplified, and orchestrated to reinforce nationalistic/ethnic identities" (Preston 1992, 36). As the examples above illustrate (and more follow), extensive touristic development has not occurred at Medjugorje, likely at least partly because of the distance, cost, time, and effort involved in making the journey to the village (for Croatian, Bosnian, and International faithful alike). For this reason, the penitential aspect of the Medjugorje pilgrimage is still very important.

"Man," notes Vlahos, "is the only animal who declines to eat when hungry and who can willingly forgo the pleasures of the flesh. The only animal capable of renunciation, of starving the body to feed the soul" (Vlahos 1979, 163). The notion of sacrifice<sup>27</sup> is indeed immensely important in Roman Catholic thought and practice. In the

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<sup>27</sup> John Dunnill defines "sacrifice" as "those varied aspects of religious behaviour that have the following seven characteristics: Action: A sacrifice is a thing done, and therefore necessarily external and material (this is the heart of Protestant mistrust). Transcendence: A sacrifice is a ritual action mediating relations with a power of another order, in some sense 'divine' or 'sacred.' Exchange: In sacrifice something is handed over to the god, with some sense of something else received – some physical, social, or spiritual benefit or 'blessing.' Ritual: The action is ritualized, that is, requires some index of difference, either in the materials used, or the personnel, or the mode of sacrificing, or in the understanding of what occurs: abnormal things are done, or normal things done differently. Transformation: Both as action and as exchange, a successful sacrifice is understood to involve a change (whether in the god, or the material, or the sacrificer) through access to transcendent power. Solidarity: The actions and materials used are always closely related to the life circumstances (the habitat, the economy, concerns) of the sacrificers, which by being brought into relation with the divinity unite the god also to their life (for this reason, sacrifices are necessarily opaque to some extent to those who stand outside these particular circumstances). Cosmology: While individual sacrifices may be routine or trivial, the system or set of practices (insofar as

context of pilgrimage, for instance, Preston notes that extrinsic hardships often take the form of penances. He writes that pilgrims are often "expected to demonstrate acts of contrition for sins or to purify themselves through elaborate devotions, including self-flagellation, crawling on one's knees during a specific phase of the journey, or licking the ground while approaching the sanctuary" (1992, 36). While the miracle discourse "directs attention to the possibility of a dramatic healing of physical infirmity," the sacrificial discourse "refines and sanctifies physical suffering, and by extension all forms of suffering, by focusing on the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ through the crucifixion" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 17). Eade and Sallnow note that "the dialectic between bodily suffering voluntarily inflicted or endured and bodily suffering miraculously relieved and cured is a feature of pilgrimage in many religious traditions" (1991, 21). They observe that "in whatever coin a devotee chooses to make his or her offerings," (and these may include spiritual exercises, bodily privations or pecuniary deprivations),

they all redound ultimately to his or her credit, either materially or spirituality. While the clergy might inveigh against the this-worldly attitude of pilgrims desirous of immediate material favours, their stress on the redemptive rather than on the miraculous power of the shrine amounts merely to a redirection of the transactional ethic, not to its rejection" (1991, 25).

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they can be perceived as a whole) may be understood to represent the totality of life (biological, social, existential) for the sacrificing group" (Dunnill 2003, 81)



The heart of such sacrifice, according to John Dunnill, is “in the communicative and transformative process of embodied praise, within an economy of grace” (Dunnill 2003, 92).

In spite of the fact that many of the pilgrims making up our group readily engaged in a host of various activities requiring them to make sacrifices, the idea of “sacrifice,” along with the word itself, is completely unappealing to most, even revolting for some. When I asked Jules to offer a definition of the term, he responded, “Sacrifices? I wonder if I’ve ever made any. [...] Having to eat onions and coming here, I can’t count those as sacrifices, since it’s me who’s too capricious. I’ve learned to endorse my weaknesses, so I have to suffer the consequences” (*personal communication*). Gabriel, in like manner, preferred using the term “to fast.” He explains, “I’m not going to believe in fasting for fasting’s sake. I’m not going to believe in fasting for the sake of eating bread and water. Fasting is a meeting point between Man and God, through the physical reality we’re living.” Defining fasting as “to accept to die to myself in certain parts of my life in order to be reborn to something bigger,” Gabriel emphasizes that “fasting” is not the making of sacrifices, since “that would be masochistic.” Instead, fasting is “the most beautiful gesture of an opening to life, an opening to others. The most beautiful gesture of opening to God” (*personal communication*). When I invited Jacques to share his thoughts on sacrifice, he accentuated the fact that Jesus “does not want there to be suffering in life,” and when it occurs, “there is a reason for it.” “The events I’ve had to



suffer through," he explains, "it's not Jesus who occasioned them; they happened, just like that" (*personal communication*).<sup>28</sup>

Despite their hesitations about the notion of "sacrifice," every pilgrim with whom I broached the subject of physical discomfort highlighted the positive consequence of suffering. Explaining that in the context of Medjugorje, the true experience of pilgrimage only begins once the pilgrim sets foot in the village, Gabriel highlights that the necessary travel "is more of an obligatory exercise; it's a pain we must go through in order to reach a land we want to reach." He explains, "it's tiring to go from Montréal to Medjugorje... It's tiring to think of going, and it's even more tiring to think of coming back, because we have to FAIRE LE DEUIL [mourn our departure] a site that we have learned to love" (*personal communication*). "The two days of travelling to come to this pilgrimage," Marie-Paule shares, "I found that very difficult. I had told myself: it's the first one and the last one. But the more we enter into it, those two days are erased. And I feel that that's important" (*personal communication*). Marie-Paule's most treasured discovery at the half-way point of the pilgrimage was the fact that spending four hours in a row in prayer is not only *possible* for her to do, but fruitful. "I'm very happy with this. I don't find the time long. It's going very well. And I find that this nourishes my faith a lot. It confirms things" (*addressing the group*). Shortly before our departure from the village,

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<sup>28</sup> These perceptions of the notion of "sacrifice" are to be expected in a culture still experiencing the backlash against the abuses of a state church prior to Québec's Silent Revolution.

during an interview, Marie-Paule expanded on her daily experience in church, “praying, for three or four hours in a row, in church is not something that’s regular for us. We don’t do that at home. But I feel that that isn’t tiring, to spend three or four hours with Mary and God. It’s a lot shorter than I was expecting.” She conveys a sense of wonder and astonishment when she refers to the thousands of people who spend these long hours standing every night during the pilgrimage,<sup>29</sup> and confesses that seeing these people’s “great faith and great thirst for God” inspired her in her own faith (*personal communication*). It seems that discomfort, although not perceived as a sacrifice, is seen as part and parcel of the pilgrimage experience, and pilgrims accept it readily. At the foot of Medjugorje’s Blue Cross, for instance, most of the pilgrims in the group made a full genuflexion in front of the cross, placing both their knees in the wet red mud of the hill, knowing all the while that we were not returning to the pension for them to change until six hours later. What is more, I did not hear one pilgrim mention the caked-on mud that covered most pilgrims’ knees at any point in the pilgrimage. It is clear that for the pilgrims, despite their reservations about “sacrifice,” suffering is perceived as a means for the believer to “be brought closer to God” (Suzie, *personal communication*).

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<sup>29</sup> Outside the church there is seating for approximately four thousand individuals, but these people have to follow the mass and the rosary with simply an audio track, since the church has no ground-floor windows. Inside the church, there is only seating for approximately half of the nine hundred people who insist on *seeing* the parish’s daily evening program.

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## THE PHYSICAL LIMITS OF THE SELF

During our pilgrimage, pilgrims faced the question of the physical thresholds of the body and the psychological limits of the self in a much more palpable manner than they typically do in their everyday lives at home. Through the various activities, including the long days of traveling, these limits were constantly being pushed, and at times, even exceeded. Sharing some of the questions he asked himself prior to undertaking the pilgrimage, Gabriel wondered about his breaking point and that of his fellow pilgrims,

Does my body allow me to get through such and such an experience? Does my body allow me to fast? Does my body allow me to get up at three in the morning? Does my body accept that I impose on it certain restrictions, like climbing the Križevac every day, or to climb it without stopping, or will my body command me to do it only once during the pilgrimage? Will my body permit me to go to the Križevac, or only to the little Mount of the Apparitions? Will my body permit me to set foot from one stone to another? (*personal communication*)

The same questions were in Odile's mind before she made the decision to come on the pilgrimage. "I wasn't sure if I should come," she states, explaining, "that's why I signed up at the last minute. Especially because of my back. I wasn't sure if it would take it" (*addressing the group*). "I'd heard about [Medjugorje] for a long time," Suzie volunteers, "but I felt it was too physically demanding for me, so when my friends talked to me about it, I told them that it was too far." Suzie relates that when she saw the inscription sheets, however, "I already began to feel like I was leaving" (*personal communication*). When prompted to address the issue of restriction, Gabriel responded, "We're more and more conscious of the importance of respecting our own rhythm, in a physical sense, in



an emotional sense, and in an intellectual sense. We're more conscious of the need to respect our being in what we're experiencing" (*personal communication*).

During the pilgrimage itself, the question of one's physical, psychological, and emotional limits relentlessly occupied the minds of the pilgrims, and pilgrims were concerned about each other's thresholds as well. Murielle compared the ascent of the Križevac to her pilgrimage to Compostela:

All along [the road to Compostela], I never knew what I was going to go through. Leaving in the morning, I never knew. I had some hard times, I experienced all sorts of things, telling myself, 'What am I doing here? It makes no sense!' My feet hurt, I had blisters all over, some nails fell completely off – it was incredible! And then, I was telling myself, 'This is sadistic!' (Murielle, *personal communication*).

Jacques admits that one of the elements which appealed to him most during the pilgrimage was the ascent of the Križevac because it allowed him to see that despite the fact that people have physical limits, "they still make the effort of climbing there" (*personal communication*). One detail that particularly marked Jacques was Father Patrice's demonstration of an iron will during the climb. The seventy-year-old priest's large stature made the scramble up the mountain an extremely difficult feat for him to accomplish, and though pilgrims were concerned with his well-being, Father Patrice focussed on the goal and managed the difficult ascent. Yves, who long aspired to become a priest, took special care of our spiritual guide, wiping his face, massaging his shoulders, steadying him while he was climbing, and bringing him water, while I ended up carrying Father Patrice's backpack. Just as those standing for four hours at a time in

order to be present during the evening program had inspired Marie-Paule and edified her in her faith, those willing to push the limits of their own minds and bodies aroused a sense of wonder in Jacques and strengthened his faith. "Father Patrice was suffering; the climb exerted a lot of strength from him. And seeing the other man wiping his face, while letting him, in all humility, do this! That's going to one's limits! That spoke to me" (*personal communication*).

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#### ABANDONMENT: THE SELF AS SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

Since taking a risk is also a way of abandoning oneself to Divine Providence, many pilgrims understand their departure in terms of an offering and as surpassing one's limits. "To go on pilgrimage is to take a risk," shares Gabriel, "the risk of discovery. The risk of letting oneself be bothered. The risk of letting oneself be unsettled. The risk of touching, or of letting oneself be touched by, God" Gabriel continues, "to accept to go on pilgrimage is to accept to do violence to oneself, to accept taking the risk. But I think it's a good risk: the risk of getting more" (*personal communication*). After Jules had shared with me his sincere aversion for onions, I joked about the fact that in Medjugorje, "there could have been only onions, in every plate. Fields of onions everywhere!" At this, he had responded, "It's a chance to take. Actually, it's a big risk to take. But it's not for nothing that I brought my peanut butter!" (*personal communication*). Though he was only half-serious, Jules was underscoring the tendency to hedge against risk which is even prevalent during pilgrimage. For instance, though

Claire shares the philosophy that “the Lord gives us only what we can accept,” and that “Mother Mary... is a mom, and will rock me through all of life’s changes,” she admits to suffering from the fear that the Virgin will set her life in disarray by asking her to convert.<sup>30</sup> Feeling that her spiritual life lacks intensity and depth, Claire asked the Virgin for detachment from material things and from insecurity. “However,” Claire shares, “I don’t want her to ask too much of me. I want her to ask just enough” (*addressing the group*)

If the notion of “sacrifice” is tainted according to many of my informants, the idea of abandoning oneself to God’s will is most definitely not. Some pilgrims, such as Claire, are scared of the change that the Lord wants to bring about in their lives. Claire, like many others in our group, recognizes that she wishes she could want to abandon herself to God [this conceptually difficult idea is easier to imagine than it is to write]. Other pilgrims, however, in accord with the homily quoted at the beginning of this Chapter (see “PILGRIMAGE ENDEAVOURS”), actively seek this action of God in their lives. Torn between two job offers, Diane admits that her desire is to take the most demanding job which, she admits, will doubtless have adverse side effects on her interior life, especially when the four hours of daily transit to and from work are taken

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<sup>30</sup> In this context, Roman Catholic pilgrims’ use of the word “convert” relays a change of heart that is understood to result in a life [re]dedicated to God. In this sense, life is seen as a series of never-ending conversions, re-conversions, and falls from grace. This worldview, though not unknown to Protestants, is paradigmatic of Roman Catholic thought.



into account. "I've given this to Him, and I've told Him I wanted to do His will," she shares.

Deep down inside me, I still want to go over there... But I told Him, 'Do You want me to take this job, and go home at 5:00pm, or do You want me to stay [close to home]? I give this to You. You settle this. And I give this to Him with joy, since I know He'll give me what's best for me. So I offer this to Him. It's helping me, here, to accept this, if this is His will" (Diane, *addressing the group*).

During the pilgrimage, Christiane was undergoing much the same dilemma, although she chose to be proactive in the decision by asking God to eliminate the obstructions to living according to His will, instead of waiting and hoping that there might be an easier way. "I've asked God for more freedom," Christiane shares with the group, "Freedom to detach myself from all that is stopping me from being really His." Through prayer and meditation, Christiane explained that she has made progress during the pilgrimage, "I feel it's coming... I feel I'm more free than ever to listen right now" (*addressing the group*). Murielle reveals that this opening to God's will is taking place for her as well. "On the Križevac, I felt that I was ready to give away everything, everything, everything: my past, my faults, everything! [...] To leave all my old things there, like Jesus did at the Resurrection, and be clad with a new vestment." Murielle acknowledges that though she gratefully accepts "this new vestment," this clean slate, she recognizes that "though it's good to have a new vestment, I have to maintain it, and I have to keep it beautiful." Moreover, Murielle concedes that once this "Resurrection Gown" is sullied again (since, as she explains, this is an inescapable consequence of being born with Original Sin), she will have to clean it by going to confession. She shares, "and that's what I'll have to do

regularly, in order to not lose this joy, and to feel so close to Jesus" (*addressing the group*).

The role of confession and of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is indeed an important aspect of most Roman Catholic pilgrimages, and no less is true in the case of Medjugorje. For Jules, the experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation was the highlight of his pilgrimage. Following a morning Mass presided by Father Maurice, the group had met shortly thereafter to share the highlights of the pilgrimage. At one point, Jules left the room, because, as he explained to the group later that evening,

the Homily stirred up my camp quite a bit. This afternoon, I don't know if you noticed, but [...] I'm a pretty emotive guy. I try to hide myself as much as possible, but it happens that I'm unable to, then – you know. When I left the room, I went to get some air, because I don't have wipers in my eyes... I went to Confession. Father Maurice said that he'd try to do something with me. It's been a nice day. Yup. I thank the Good Lord."

On one of the last days of the pilgrimage, when I invited Jules to list the highlights of his pilgrimage, he related the following:

My most beautiful day was Sunday, when Father Maurice did his Mass at noon. He says things well, Father Maurice. He's profound. He always says something somewhere which gets you. And on Sunday, I felt he was hammering hard. It meant something to me. He has a way of saying things in a way that you don't feel any guiltier than another for having done something that's not alright (or less alright, or whatever). I see myself as a human in the same way as you and the other, at the same level. We have different strengths, but we each have our richness, our value. He has the gift of making that come out and make you trust in God. For instance, 'Your errors, your problems, and all that, everyone has done some wrongs, and we were forgiven before we did them. The Lord died for that.' That's what we never stop to think about. Well. It's something I never stop to think about. [...] I went to Confession with Father Maurice on Sunday. During the week, I'd gone to another, but I had the impression that I wasn't forgiven. In the end, when I spoke to Father Maurice, I found out it was really over, since there was nothing to forgive. I don't want to say I don't sin. But what was getting to me was something I can't do anything about anymore [...]. I'll now be



able to live happily. Every day, for fifteen years, and many times a day, this had been bothering me. I always had it in mind... But now, I'll be able to live with that. That's what happened on Sunday, and it was the nicest day since I came here. It's not because I didn't see anything else. I saw a lot of things, and I had fun. But that really will last with me. [...] And it's not because I've never tried! I've been speaking to priests about it for a long time! Maybe it's because this is a corner of the world which is more apt for that. That's possible. The law of these things, I don't know it (Jules, *personal communication*).

Though all pilgrims in our group recognized the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a necessary element in a fruitful life of faith, a great many explained that they were hesitant to participate in it for reasons they categorized as poor.<sup>31</sup> In addition to confession, which involves the acknowledgement of one's sins, the abandonment of one's worries and problems to God is another element these pilgrims recognize as being part of a life of faith. Joseph-Marie argues that it is always best to give our problems to God, since "it's only then that we find peace." He explains that "God loves us so much that He only wants good for us," and for this reason, "whenever we're troubled, it's for the best. When things are happening, sometimes they all go sideways... but afterwards, when you think about it, you realize it's for the best [since] grace passes through this." Recounting the aftermath of his son's suicide, Joseph-Marie explained to the group that through the sense of loss and the emotions of grief, pain, anguish, and sorrow felt by all who were acquainted with his son was born a love so great that it could not have been bought – "the fruit was too great to be bought!" (Joseph-Marie, *addressing the group*). Many of the parents on our pilgrimage felt that circumventing the pains of "possessing"

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<sup>31</sup> These reasons included an unwillingness to recognize one's problems, the embarrassment of voicing one's difficulties and delinquency, and a disinclination to change.



their children is a necessary yet difficult way to get closer to God and allow them to do the same. Christiane explains,

Sometimes, it's difficult to let go of our children. We would so much love for them to be happy and all that. But we're not necessarily the right people to make them happy. We have to let them go. To really let them live their lives. So [here, in Medjugorje], I'm going to really try to give my son to Mary, and to Jesus, and if that's a fruit for me, then it will be a real grace that I'll have received here. To be able to really let him go and to just be there to listen to him, to trust him, to greet him in his life projects. Even if these are really not the projects I would have chosen for him. God has plans for him, and that's it: I have to let him act. With Mary, maybe it's a little bit like that" (*personal communication*).

"When I leave [Medjugorje], I think I will leave my children here," shares Marie-Paule.

"At home," she explains, "I worry and this is worth nothing." She clarifies that she will do this by trying to be present with them when they need her, simply accepting what they are living and praying for them. "I tried to give the best of myself," she tells the group, "and now they have their road to make for themselves. They're autonomous, and they can make their own road. This belongs to them" (Marie-Paule, *addressing the group*).

Jacques explains that for him, sacrifice had always had a negative sense, "like being a victim or being victimized." Having matured in his faith, however, he explains that he has finally come to understand that "sacrifice is to live my day-to-day life, and accept what is happening to me. To offer it: that's my sacrifice." Jacques explains that the purpose of this practice does not solely impact his own life, but that of the people around him, since they may feel, in spite of the difficulties he may be facing, that he has not revolted against God or against the world. "I simply tell myself that if I accept what is

happening to me in the most joyous way possible, accepting it, then bravo. That's my sacrifice" (*personal communication*).

## SUMMARY

Pilgrims venture out to meet God in a number of ways. In the course of a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, pilgrims attempt to make themselves better able to "hear, see, touch, taste, smell, and feel" God in numerous ways. These include, among a plethora of others, "risking" to meet God by opening up one's mind, soul, and body to the action of God; listening to the Biblical Word of God, the Messages of the *Gospa*, and to saintly individuals, receiving the Sacraments, and gazing at God present in the Consecrated Host. These also include prayer, thought, and meditation, visiting sacred sites, collecting sacred objects, surpassing oneself and one's body, abiding by "sacred time," and joining the Communion of Saints in prayer. Some pilgrims make use of symbols and rituals, interpret them, and learn from them. Some pilgrims help others, some contribute to the humanization and sacralisation of a physical or psychological space or place, some share advice, experiences and stories, while others, in Jacques' words, attempt to fill up by emptying themselves (*personal communication*).

## CHAPTER 4:

### HOW GOD SPEAKS BACK

When I came here, I had no expectations. I told myself:  
"I want God to make me know His Will, and  
I want to always be listening, and to understand his Will"  
(Joseph-Marie, *addressing the group*).

#### HEARING, SEEING, TOUCHING, TASTING, SMELLING, AND FEELING GOD

Coleman and Elsner highlight that the "importance of physical confirmations of faith should not be underestimated in a branch of Christianity that stresses the sacramental means of achieving grace" (1998, 56). In this chapter, I explore how, during our pilgrimage to Medjugorje, the pilgrims hoped for, expected, or witnessed God the Father, Christ, the Child Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary make themselves heard in their lives and in the lives of those around them. According to the memorates<sup>32</sup> I collected from pilgrims and present here, the Heavenly is seen as being recognized, known, present, or represented through all six senses, and in multiple ways. Indeed, the

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<sup>32</sup> By referring to pilgrims' accounts as stories, belief narratives, memorates, or speech acts, I do not intend to limit the action of God. Perhaps, for example, God inspires the form of the speech act. Perhaps God formed the reality that inspired the speech act. Or perhaps God caused the illusion that inspired the speech act, leaving the teller to formulate her or his own interpretation.



pilgrims describe multitudinous ways in which they expect, hope for, pray for, and at times witness glimpses of Heaven through individuals, through friendships, through crowds, through signs, through marvels, through nature, and through our minds and bodies. This perspective is in line with the Gospels, where, as Peter Harrison notes (2006, 493), events typically identified as miracles are variously described as “signs” (semeia), “wonders” (terata), “mighty works” (dunameis), and, on occasion, simply “works” (erga).<sup>33</sup>

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH SIGNS

In pilgrims’ conception of how God communicates with humankind, the “sign” takes a place of honour. This is the case at least partly because the “sign” is a tremendously broad category that can encompass an immense breadth of such communications. For Rosella, a sign is normally “something religious. Something that hits us. Something mysterious” (*personal communication*). A sign can also be an element of the everyday. “An event, a look, a smile, a homily, a time of silence, a drawing, a stone on the ground can speak to people,” Gabriel explains. “God is a polyglot.” Signs are such because though they point to another reality (e.g. the presence of God in the world), they do not *operate* or *function* in any other way than as indicators of something

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<sup>33</sup> If the stories, memorates, and belief narratives of this chapter are presented in “separate” sections, this is only the case because presenting these in any other way would have been lead to a confusing and cumbersome list or an awkward framework.

else. At times, for instance, the sign can signal God's engagement in the world. "The actions of God," Gabriel notes, "are often preceded by a physical sign." Gabriel continues, "in the Charismatic movement, the action of God and healings are often preceded by signs at the level of the body." Conversely, Gabriel explains, "In the Bible, when the Lord is doing a physical healing, it's always to say that he's working the interior" (*personal communication*).

A number of pilgrims during our journey mentioned Prince Edward Island's Father Melvin, a Marian priest who claims to receive Messages from the Virgin. One story that came up on several occasions because it was a very recent occurrence concerned the face of Jesus which appeared miraculously on the lower portion of the Cross, next to the tabernacle in Father Melvin's shrine.<sup>34</sup> Although this occurrence could be considered a miracle in itself, it is interpreted by its tellers in such a way as to be instead an index of the sanctity of Father Melvin and the Messages he receives from the Virgin, in much the same way as the veil upon which the face of the Virgin had purportedly printed itself the year before. In this case, the sign is understood primarily as an index of something more. Sometimes, a sign can serve to edify us in our faith and strengthen our beliefs. Sharing an experience he had while driving his car one day, Gabriel explains, "God knows that I am human, and that to understand, I need signs. He

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<sup>34</sup> For the article in Prince Edwards Island's "The Guardian" Newspaper, see [www.theguardian.pe.ca/index.cfm?sid=19490&sc=98](http://www.theguardian.pe.ca/index.cfm?sid=19490&sc=98); for the shrine's Website, see [www.geocities.com/ourladyofpei](http://www.geocities.com/ourladyofpei).

permitted that a sign be given me, so that I might turn myself towards Him" (Gabriel, *personal communication*).

At times, signs can serve to indicate to us that we are on the right track. Murielle, who walked the road to Santiago de Compostela and visited the shrine of Saint James there, was astounded to see a statue of Saint James in the parish church at Medjugorje. "I said: 'What is he doing here?' I had no idea that the parish was named after him. And he's in the choir!" Murielle interpreted this correspondence as being a sign from God that her pilgrimage to Medjugorje "is really the continuation of my road [...] And when they say he's the patron saint of pilgrims, I can understand why! I wonder if he made it all the way here!" (*personal communication*). Another example of a sign confirming a decision relates to Jacques' experience with his job. After Jacques had a major stroke, his doctor recommended that he take some time off work. While he was away, Jacques began feeling apprehensive about whether or not his job would still be there for him when he got back. On the day he finally decided to take an extra month to recuperate, Jacques received a call from the President of his Council<sup>31f</sup>, who informed him that the council had unanimously voted that he could take the time he needed and his job would be waiting for him. "I said, 'Lord, if I wanted a sign that was more evident than that, it's impossible. I got the message. I'll take it easy'" (*personal communication*).

Some pilgrims agree with Jacques' thesis that these signs are given by God because they have faith. For others, however, the primary purpose of the sign is to elicit



faith (cf. Harrison 2006, 493). Whatever the sign that is given or allowed by God, and for whatever reason, the pilgrim's task, especially throughout the pilgrimage (but also in everyday life) is thought to be *awareness*. "You have to see them, these little signs," Jacques shares, "since that's how you know God [is trying to tell you something]. But you must be able to discern them, because not every one of these signs is obvious. And here, I have the chance to be able to discern this." When I asked Jacques why he thought so many pilgrims were sharing memorates about receiving signs while on pilgrimage, he discounted the idea that it was linked to sacred space, simply answering, "It's because I'm more conscious of it. I'm here for that" (*personal communication*).

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH NATURE

Unlike the sign, which is conceptualized as being granted in "real time" (this is even the case when the sign involves a stable, unchanging element such as a statue), nature is framed as being "fixed." Unlike the sign, moreover, which is thought to guide and instruct, the purpose of nature is simply to inspire and edify the pilgrim's faith. For the pilgrims, nature is a first-rate space in which to encounter God since, as Murielle shares, "you're close to God, in Nature; Nature is God" (*personal communication*). Leading the group in prayer while in transit through fields covered in yellow rape seed flowers in London, England, Father Patrice prayed, "We want to thank you Lord, for the sight of this exceptional natural landscape. For these flowers which fill our eyes in order to fill our hearts." Likewise taking advantage of the natural theatre presented to the pilgrim

while travelling by bus (this time returning to Medjugorje from Siroki Brijeg), Father Maurice sought to inspire us with the following prayer,

“Let us answer ‘Blessed be the Lord.’ For our brother the sun, blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

For the moon and the stars, blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

For the oceans and the waters, blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

For the trees of the forest, and the marvels of Creation, Blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

For the forces of nature which help our lives and allow us to live, Blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

For the birds in the sky, and the animals, Blessed be, Lord.

*ALL: Blessed be, Lord.*

May all glory be given to the Lord All-Mighty, Creator. To His Son, Jesus, the Saviour of All, the All-Intimate. To the Spirit that inhabits us and makes us greet the Word forever and ever.

*ALL: Amen!*

*(Father Maurice, leading the group in prayer).*

During one of the group’s sharing sessions, Louise attempted to communicate the beauty of the Kravice (a waterfall near Medjugorje), which she and three other pilgrims had visited that day. “It was very beautiful! [...] That gave me joy. It filled me. It’s as if the Lord had come to meet me through that.” The shrine organizers are well aware of the transformative and edifying power of nature, as our local guide’s introduction to the garden at the Village of the Mother makes clear:

In the north-west corner of the Village, there is a garden dedicated to Saint Francis. Father Slavko, inspired by the Virgin, who said ‘go to nature and discover there the Creator-God,’ wanted to create a natural setting that could serve as a place of rest. When he had the idea of creating the garden in this site, he was told that it was impossible, since it was an abandoned terrain where people came to deposit their garbage. As in all his works, he was very persevering and, step by step, with the help of youths from the parish, of pilgrims, and youths from the Cenacolo, after so much work and cleaning, this park really became beautiful.



During a Sunday evening program's Mass, Jacques and Michel were sitting together.<sup>35</sup>

Since the Franciscans recite the offices of the Mass in Latin and Croatian, and since Jacques and Michel had forgotten their radio and thus could not hear the simultaneous translation of the Croatian into French, the two men were only half-listening. At one point, Michel whispered a comment in Jacques' ear, upon which the thirty year-old<sup>36</sup> stranger sitting in front of them shushed them. Instead of being annoyed for having been silenced, Jacques was filled with a sense of wonderment and awe, "He tells us to shut up in order to hear Mass! That speaks to me! That's how the Lord speaks to you – through things like that... Many things happen through others" (*personal communication*). Though this experience was retold by Jacques on at least three occasions during the pilgrimage, his major epiphany occurred at the summit of the Križevac, when he was approached by a young Croat who asked him if they could pray together, holding hands. "I told myself," Jacques shares, "'Why is this happening to me? Why did he speak to me? How is it that we communicated?' We held each other's hand, and I said, 'Wow!' [...] It really touched me." As our group was about to leave, this young

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<sup>35</sup> In this story, though both Jacques and Michel are present and witnessed the happening, only one of the two is touched by its occurrence.

<sup>36</sup> Youth are perceived as a hope for the Church and for humanity.



man offered Jacques an image of Jesus, with a prayer printed on the back, in French. The fact that this image was in his language struck Jacques with a sense of wonder, "Why in French? Why did he give me that in French? I can't say it's a *message*, but there are coincidences that make you ask yourself questions." The fact that it occurred at the summit of the Križevac also made Jacques marvel at the delicacy of God, "What an experience! At the summit! Why there? [...] That struck me. It still strikes me" (Jacques, *personal communication*).

Most (if not all) of the pilgrims, at least at one point during the pilgrimage, shared a story about how God had communicated with them through another person. For some, this communication could be as "ordinary" as being inspired by a saintly person. Gabriel, for instance, remembers how he felt every time he saw Pope John Paul on television, "I was touched in my interior by the sight of this man, used up by fatigue, used up by age, used up by illness, who decided to go to the end, to not give up. A crazy man of God" (*personal communication*). The canonization of saints by the Roman Catholic Church serves much this same purpose; for instance, next to Saint James' church in Medjugorje is the statue of the patron saint of confessors, Father Leopold Mandić, a Croat born in Montenegro in the mid-1800s. Our local guide explained that a number of miracles occurred during his confessions, and that these did not cease after his death; when, during the Second World War, his church was bombarded, "the entire building was destroyed except his confessional, which remained intact," recounted our

guide, who was unsurprised by the astonished “Wows!” from the pilgrims. The saint’s statue was placed there by the Franciscans to remind pilgrims of the efficacy of Confession.

For some, this interaction with God through a person took the form of a speech. On our group’s last night in Medjugorje, for instance, Céline recalled that at the airport, in Montréal, “when we were all gathered, someone said that ‘when someone comes here, it’s because Mary is calling them.’ That struck a chord with me. The Lord speaks through people a lot” (*addressing the group*). Even while conducting research, I was myself struck by what I interpreted as an instance of God speaking to me through another person. The “coincidence” in question happened over the space of a day. In the morning, during a group sharing session, I had volunteered an account about how I had met the same priest by chance in three different countries in the space of a year, and then, having moved to St. John’s from Moncton, discovered that this priest was in charge of the parish near my house. Having shared that this experience had given me the feeling of being pursued by God, I was astounded later that day to bump into the priest who had accompanied me as spiritual director during my first trip to Medjugorje.

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#### SEEING THE SEER

Individuals through whom pilgrims expect to communicate with God are, of course, the seers of Medjugorje. Though the pilgrims are not unanimous in their belief in the veracity of the apparitions, all at least allow for the possibility, probability, or certainty,

that these may be authentic. The seers of Medjugorje, for the majority of pilgrims, are simply messengers through whom the Virgin communicates with humanity.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, though the pilgrims spent close to \$3000 and invested much time order to get to the village where these six individuals who see apparitions of Mary, the majority of pilgrims do not even know the seers' names. In spite of this, the general mood of the group when making our way to one of the seers' houses was exuberant and animated. Arriving at the house, where more than a thousand had already gathered to see Vicka on her balcony, the members of our group made efforts to get as close as possible. Some climbed the four-foot fence from the road to join the crowds in the garden, others climbed the olive tree in the garden to be able to see over the heads of the crowds, while still others pushed and shoved their way through the crowds in order to get through. For many in the group, these efforts were definitely worth it. "I experienced many emotions... visiting Vicka," shares Christiane, "I really felt Mary's presence seeing her" (*addressing the group*).

For some in our group, simply seeing the seer was unsatisfactory. One pilgrim made her way first into the courtyard, then pushed her way into the garden, to finally arrive at the bottom of the patio's steps, where the seer's guards blocked access to the

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<sup>37</sup> A study focusing on how Roman Catholic pilgrims to Medjugorje's perception of the seers develops and changes over time, would be very informative; I suspect that the perception changed drastically, for instance, when the Medjugorje apparitions began to be seen as "Messages from Heaven" (from 1986 onwards) instead of as "Visions of Heaven" of the early 1980s.



higher levels. After having patiently waited and spoken to the guards for almost an hour, Pilgrim X was finally allowed to accede to the patio. Diane, who was standing next to me when Pilgrim X was allowed in, playfully gave the play-by-play, pretending that my recorder was a microphone, "She climbs up. She charges! She wants to climb, she wants to climb! [...] She got in! She got it! She got in! She succeeded! I would never have been able to do that! She succeeded!" Although many in the group were inspired by Pilgrim X's courage and determination, and expressed admiration for her, a good number were uncomfortable with the idea of such fandom. Céline intimates her feelings about the group's struggle to get closer,

The laying on of hands, I tell myself that the apostles did it and for this reason, we can too. But to go touch the visionaries, and to have the impression that we have to do these things, I'm not comfortable with that... I don't want to stop at exterior things. You know, things like 'my faith has to be displayed' or something like that. For me, that's not it. For me, it has to come from within (*personal communication*).

Other pilgrims joked about whether or not the sacred would "rub off" when they touched the seer, a contagious magic of sorts (Frazer 1994).

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#### PUBLIC APPARITIONS AND MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN

Mirjana is one of the three seers who has received all ten secrets from the Virgin, and thus no longer has daily apparitions (see "INTRODUCTION"); instead, the Virgin appears to her on the second day of each month. This apparition is normally open to the public, and is an immensely popular attraction – the week preceding the apparition, the tourist population of Medjugorje almost doubles, and begins dissipating shortly thereafter. That

Mirjana's apparition should be public is no surprise, since the mission with which she is said to have been charged by the Virgin is to pray for the faithless and work to convert the "heathen."<sup>38</sup> For many, the public apparition is the highlight of their pilgrimage. Although Mirjana is not as charismatic and convivial as Vicka, the determination of the crowds to get close and touch her is evident. In order to be able to enter the arena-sized building where these public apparitions are held, for example, pilgrims must present themselves at the door five full hours before the scheduled apparition. The thousands of others crowd around the perimeter of the building to watch Mirjana having the apparition on one of the two large screens mounted on the sides of the edifice. During the apparition, the seer sometimes reports that the Virgin prays over the people, blesses the religious objects that each has brought with them, delivers messages from Heaven, or secrets to Mirjana.<sup>39</sup>

Though not open to the public, the apparitions presently considered as being the most important are the Messages given to Marija on the twenty-fifth day of each month. These are shared regularly amongst pilgrims, and about half of our group have subscribed to a monthly email newsletter that contains the messages. The impact of these Messages on those who subscribe is difficult to gauge. For some, the Messages are

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<sup>38</sup> This loaded word is common usage in Medjugorje.

<sup>39</sup> This practice is discussed by Christian, who notes that during the immensely popular apparitions at Ezkioga, in Spain, during the 1930s, "believers began to give the seers large numbers of medals, rosaries, and crucifixes to be blessed" (1996, 270).

a source of inspiration. Jacques recounts getting a Message that was the source of an important epiphany in his life. Paraphrasing the Message, he shared that "If you don't pray for your own self, if you don't have interior peace inside you to start with, your efficacy will be lessened." He recalls,

I liked that word, 'lessened.' She didn't say 'Not at all.' She said, 'lessened.' You're not as efficient when you don't have interior peace in your heart. It starts there. And that's how I realized that that's what I was coming to get here. And this peace, I have never acquired it. I always have to seek it, every day. I think I have it today, and tomorrow, I could lose it" (*personal communication*).

For others, the Messages are not simply interpreted as being inspiration, but life-affirming and life-changing. For some pilgrims, they could also be argued to be life-forming, a way of life in itself. "When I receive the Messages, many of them touch me profoundly. I sometimes have goose bumps," shares Jean. Robert, who receives both the Messages of the Second and the Messages of the Twenty-Fifth via email, reports,

It's great. I love that. Every time one of the dates approaches, I look forward to reading it. I look forward to reading, since it's interesting. After that, I copy them. What's also interesting is that on the fifteenth, I get the interpretation of the Messages by the Franciscans. I have all that. I take everything, and I have stuff about this thick [shows six inches with his fingers]. References are fantastic (*personal communication*).

Jean relates that one of the reasons why he decided to venture out to Medjugorje was for the Virgin Mary to teach him how to share these messages with others. For Jean, as for a number of other pilgrims, these Messages are integral his self-understanding. He relates, "I have a lot of difficulty when people tell me, 'What are those ridiculous stories! I don't believe in that.' It hurts me. It hurts me in my most profound self" (*personal communication*).



## GOD SPEAKS THROUGH US

If many insist that God speaks through others, a number of pilgrims stress that He may also choose to speak through us. Claire addressed the group, saying that she undertook the pilgrimage to Medjugorje in order to be able to revive her spiritual life and her heart so that she might be able to love her children better and spark in them a keener interest in God. "It's through loving them more, in a freer way, in a disinterested way, without expecting anything, loving them only to love them," she concludes, "that I will transmit God to them, through love. Through little gestures." Christiane also came on in the pilgrimage in the hopes that she could learn how to convey her faith to others. "Not to talk to them about Jesus and Mary," she explains, "but that through my whole being, through my attitude, through seeing me live, that people would see that Jesus exists and that He's there" (*personal communication*). For Jacques, the same is very much true. Desiring to be an instrument of Jesus, Jacques aspires for his "interior peace, joy and love to be able to shine forth" (*addressing the group*). At times, God is thought to extend His action through us beyond inspiring others or "shining forth" his love. Pilgrim X, for instance, "heard" God inform her that she had the gift of healing. "Something happened in my hands," she relates. "Right here. A sort of force or something... I feel it during Mass as well. And I've felt it more and more during the past few days." Though she believes herself blessed with a divine power, Pilgrim X is apprehensive about sharing her gift. "What do I do with this? Pass off as a crazy person? Or something like that? I have to watch it, since they'll put me in psychiatry!" (*personal communication*).

## PETITIONS AND LETTERS TO MARY

The day before we left for our pilgrimage, Father Maurice and I were invited for supper by a couple with whom we had gone to Medjugorje two years prior. After supper, as we were leaving the house, the couple shouted from their doorstep:

CARMEL: You'll pray for us?

FATHER MAURICE: I leave with your intentions!

CARMEL: She's [Mary] a witness. Even if you forget, she won't!

BENOIT: Have a great pilgrimage!

GABRIEL: It'll be as if you're coming with us!

BENOIT: Our hearts will be there with you!

CARMEL: In our hearts, it's sure we'll be there!

BENOIT: Think about us!

A very important element of the pilgrimage for most of our group was the pilgrim's duty to act as messenger for her/his friends, family, parish, and country. "I told my friends and family, 'I'll bring you all with me. I'll present you to Mary'," says Joseph-Marie (*personal communication*). "I have a lot of petitions that I've brought with me," Marie-Paule excitedly reports, "I'm happy to go towards her and to bring to her all the people who have placed their trust in me, and whom I'm taking with me" (*personal communication*). As Father Patrice explains, "many of our suitcases are filled with intentions brought for people who wanted to come but couldn't, and who said, 'I can't go, but I'd like you to bring my intentions for prayers, what we'll offer the Lord'" (*addressing the group*).

This courier duty can take the form of a letter delivery service, paying for a Holy Mass to be offered for the intentions of someone back home, or even performing a

simple prayer at a specific time and/or place in the parish for someone's intentions.

"When I left home, there are many people who gave me things for me to bring here, and this time, I have the impression that I was chosen to carry the parish," Joseph-Marie informs the group. "I give thanks because I really feel a peace inside me. I feel that when I offer people, it's marvellous. There's like a force that I hadn't before. And I feel like I when offer people, it's like a liberation. Maybe I was chosen for that, and I say 'Thank you' and I hope that I'll find the grace to do it." The pilgrim's duty as messenger is approached with the gravest solemnity because it is believed that it can have real, tangible, transformative effects on those who are not able to participate in the pilgrimage. "I have brought with me those that are in need of prayer. There will be miracles produced here," Claire boldly informs the group. Addressing the group in the form of a prayer to the Virgin, Diane invited the group to join her in her appeal,

My sister-in-law is suffering enormously. It's a cancer that's finishing. When I left, I called her to tell her I was bringing her here, and she told me: 'Diane, I don't eat at all anymore. I don't keep anything in.' I'm bringing her to Mommy Mary, so she helps her through this, and help her husband through this as well. She's so terrific! We don't want her to leave, but if she must leave, make it so that it passes well. Thank you, Mommy Mary."

An important part of the couriering task of the pilgrim is paperwork. The practice of paying for a Mass to be said is a very well-known custom in Medjugorje (as in the majority of Roman Catholic parishes), and the Franciscans in charge of the shrine make efforts to ensure that pilgrims' requests are expeditiously fulfilled. At the Information Centre, which is open from 9:00am to 5:00pm every day, pilgrims may request a Mass for someone's intentions for the price of \$15 CDN. At the Information Centre there is



also a bin where letters addressed to the Virgin can be placed (these are then brought to one of the seers, who "presents" them to Mary; once this is done, the parish subsequently burns them). No one in our group chose to use this bin, preferring instead to leave their many hundreds of hand-written letters either on the hill or in the hands of Vicka's body guards. Though it would be possible for a non-pilgrim to send requests for Masses or letters to Mary, by mail or even electronically (Medjugorje's official Website has links to the parish office, where individuals can pay for Masses to be said with a credit card), the dozens of request that many pilgrims bring with them attest to the fact that these electronic or mail methods are not as satisfying as delivering a request in person.

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH COMMUNITAS

"A pilgrimage," Father Maurice states, "is before anything else the experience of a fraternal communion... It's an experience on a cultural<sup>40</sup> level, and at the level of the community." This fraternal communion is, for Father Maurice, definitely not of the order critics of the Turners believe he was suggesting in their early work,<sup>41</sup> but rather a small-

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<sup>40</sup> Father Maurice's use of the term "cultural" is interesting here (it is not a recognized word in the French language either), since it points to the fact of social embodiment.

<sup>41</sup> The *communitas* character of pilgrimages has come under fire from scholars who have emphasized the multiple group context of modern pilgrimage shrines. First and foremost, pilgrimage "serves to link geographically dispersed peoples by giving travelers the possibility to perceive a common religious identity which transcends parochial assumptions and concerns" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 205). However, pilgrimage does not only serve to link geographically dispersed peoples from the same tradition; it brings together people from different denominations, and, at times, different faiths altogether. During a

group-oriented ideal. Gabriel, likewise, often expresses an acute sensitivity to the proximity between pilgrims, and notes the multitudinous consequences of such close contact. In order to better illustrate this point, Gabriel chose the most intimate setting typical of group pilgrimages: the accommodations.

When you become roommates, there is a certain level of intimacy that is established. I give that person the permission to enter into what is personal to me, to touch a more intimate part of me, which is my body. You lie in the next bed over, because you're not always dressed in dresses or in whatever, because you'll see me without my curls, because I look foolish in the mornings, because you'll see me with my hair in a mess, because you'll hear me snore or fart, or whatever" (*personal communication*).

In pilgrimage, ritual participants symbolically exit one social "space" or state but are yet to enter a new one: they are figuratively poised over the threshold, between two social worlds (Badone and Roseman 2004, 3). In this liminoid space and time (as opposed to liminal, since it is voluntary [Turner & Turner 1978, 254]), "the cultural guidelines of secular conduct are [often] erased or obscured. Something weird and numinous replaces them" (Turner & Turner 1982, 202). In pilgrimage there is often the release from mundane structure, a certain homogenization of status between participants. For this reason, pilgrimages have the quality of *communitas*, which "becomes articulated in some measure with the environing social structure through their social organization" (Turner 1974, 167). Where *communitas* exists, Turner and Turner write that

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pilgrimage, people of different traditions at times worship together. Because this is the case, pilgrimage has lately come to be perceived as "a fragmented, ambiguous, ideological battleground" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 199).



there is a direct, total confrontation of human identities which is rather more than the casual camaraderie of ordinary social life...the participants undergo a levelling process. The distinctions of their previous status, sex, dress, and role disappear, and as they share common trials and eat and sleep in common, a group unity is experienced, a kind of generic bond outside the constraints of social structure (1982, 205).

The "accidental communities of memory" (Malkki 1997: 91-2) fostered during pilgrimages are very strong; pilgrims create very tight bonds with other members of their group, and long-lasting friendships are often generated. *Communitas* is not easily institutionalized; participants can only reproduce an environment that encourages such sensations. For this reason, as Nancy Frey highlights, pilgrims often feel the need to go on repeat journeys, or to reproduce pilgrimage conditions on retreats or periodic reunions (1998) [see "REPEAT CUSTOMERS TO MEDJUGORJE"].

Father Maurice perceives this sense of *communitas* as an excellent opportunity for deepening the faith: "if we manage to form a small church, a domestic church, we'll get to share, we'll get interior messages" (*personal communication*). Gabriel, of the same mind, explains that during the pilgrimage, "I allow myself to be carried by the presence of the other, by the communion of the other, I allow myself to be carried by the community" (*personal communication*). This is made possible, as Marie-Paule explains, because "inside, we have a same thirst. We have a spiritual kinship that is so precious" (*personal communication*). Pilgrims very often mentioned the special attributes they perceived in our group. These included the feeling that we had always been together (Joseph-Marie, *addressing the group*), a freedom of expression (Murielle, *addressing the group*), a completely non-judgemental atmosphere (Jules, *personal*



*communication*), and a climate of trust and confidence (Father Maurice, *personal communication*), among a list of other notable qualities.

#### SHARING DURING PILGRIMAGE

A very important consequence of *Communitas* for our group (and, I suspect, for most pilgrimage groups) was the fact that because of the sense of trust and kinship fostered, participants felt comfortable sharing elements of their lives which they ordinarily would not dream of sharing with anyone. During breakfasts and lunches, which were provided at the pension, the pilgrims shared their thoughts on what they had experienced to this point on the trip, what they hoped to experience in the coming days, and shared details about themselves and their motivations. During our frequent group meetings, which were introduced by Father Maurice as a time where pilgrims could express what was happening in their hearts, their hopes for the trip, and the feelings and emotions animating each person, pilgrims spoke volumes about what they had experienced. It was made clear that whoever was interested was free to join the discussion, and pilgrims spoke primarily about their innermost aspirations and difficulties, the progress they were making, and the problems with which they were faced. Many were candid, revealing their deepest desires, ambitions, misdeeds, and transgressions.

Recognizing that some in the group will speak of their faith and share it without reservation, revealing their human suffering, while others will omit the details that they consider private (*personal communication*), Father Maurice understands the practice of

“opening up” as a natural stage in many people’s spiritual development. He explains that this process of opening occurs when the need to share what animates each person begins to outweigh the embarrassment of admitting to one’s faults or desires, and for this reason, Father Maurice continually encouraged deep sharing. Although, like the Muchongolo dances studied by Niehaus and Stadler (2004, 364), the stakes of losing were not so high that it is from a utilitarian standpoint irrational for individuals to engage in it at all, much of the sharing which occurred during our pilgrimage was a form of “deep play,” transcending the calculus of sociological loss and gain and becoming a matter of life and death (Geertz 1973).

Memorates, belief narratives, and folk beliefs communicated during the many sharing sessions, in private conversations between two or more pilgrims, in the course of the corporate activities of the group and during group prayers are understood to serve many purposes. However, the primary goal of these exchanges (at least at the conscious level) is to edify the believer in her/his faith. Diane explains that in such interpersonal exchanges, the atmosphere is conducive to effective prayers. “When we say ‘When there are two or three of you together’,” Diane explains, quoting Jesus’ words, “it’s so much easier” (Diane, *personal communication*). An example of the power of prayer as a united group is Diane’s invitation to the group to hold hands while reciting the *Pater noster* at the foot of the Peace Cross on Apparition Hill, thus capitalizing on the sense of *communitas* existing in the group in order to pray more effectively. A number

of pilgrims afterwards reported having “felt something” during this time of united prayer.

Louise was the first of the pilgrims to decide to “share deep” (a wink to Clifford Geertz) with the group. On the day we were to visit Vicka, Louise told us about negative feelings towards her deceased husband that had begun to stir in her heart. By speaking about it with some of the other members of the group, she came to understand that she still resented him, seven years after his death, for not having allowed them the opportunity to share their faith lives together. “I see couples living their faith together here,” she shares. “I didn’t have that. We were in business, and we were always working. Communication between my husband and I, there wasn’t much of it – it was always about the business. I regret that. It pains me to think about it.” Realizing that she needed to live in the present moment and that these memories were in the past, Louise was taken aback that these feelings would surface, seven years later. “Still today,” she relates, “I had a little moment of interior suffering.” “I would’ve liked to live my spirituality as a couple,” she explains, “but we were very far from one another. With the business, it stopped me from living the couple’s life... Having a business... made us drift apart. I didn’t know my husband, and I lived for 23 years with him.” Louise invited the group’s input, and, crying, asked God to heal the old wound and fill her with the Holy Spirit.



Pilgrim X, for her part, shared with me one of the most troubling events of her life, an event she had only shared with a handful of individuals before. One month following her husband's death, Pilgrim X was cooking supper when she suddenly realized that there was no longer any noise coming from the garage. Running downstairs, to open the garage door, she found her youngest son sitting on the floor, with a rifle to his head. "When I opened the door," she remembers, "he turned around and I said, 'Oh no, son, don't do that!'" Her oldest son, who had followed her into the garage, begged his brother, "Don't do it, this thing. You're hurting, eh? We're hurting too. And imagine how much we'd be hurting too if you did that. Dad doesn't want this." When she finally managed to approach close enough to be able to take the rifle from her son, the teenager threw himself into her arms, crying and shaking. Pilgrim X shares that she lived with the fear of losing him for years afterwards.

Another pilgrim shared with me that she had been hospitalized in 200X, after she found herself in such a clinically depressed state that she was no longer able to do anything. "Just preparing a meal for myself was an enormous weight. Enormous! I wasn't able to wash my clothes, I wasn't able to do anything! And I was afraid of staying that way!" Soon after having been released, she attempted to commit suicide by ingesting a month's worth of antipsychotic drugs. "What I remember is that I had gone to bed, and had asked all the Saints, the Virgin, Jesus, and all of them (since I believed a lot at the time), to protect me and to protect my children. I couldn't stay like that,

unable to cook for myself!" Miraculously, Pilgrim X was found in the washroom by her sister a few hours later, who took her to the hospital, where they brought her back to life.

Though the content of these stories does not necessarily relate to how God inspires and intervenes in the lives of the pilgrims who tell them, the retelling of such narratives is seen as an act of faith in itself, a performance believed to be divinely inspired. Indeed, following the narration of each of these stories, tellers explained that they did not know why they had told their story, and explained that the telling had been inspired by the Virgin or by God. In short, God is believed to inspire people to share their lives with others, benefiting the teller by making it possible for the teller to reveal her/his innermost secrets, and benefiting the listener through edification.

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH CROWDS

In large gatherings such as at Mass or at the meetings with the seers, the more enthusiastic pilgrims push, shove, and ram their way through the crowds. On a number of occasions, pilgrims voiced their displeasure with "these Italians," who, in Medjugorje, are by far the majority of pilgrims and whose religious zeal is magnified by their numbers and resented by the Canadians. "To see the amount of people! There's people and people and people! It's like in Rome. There's people, there's people and more people. Places like this are incredible. They come from everywhere and push and push!" (Céline,

*personal communication*). During one of the more heated discussions about “the Italians,” I attempted to take the edge off by offering my own experience of the crowds:

It’s true that it’s not always pleasant. Crowds push, and people want to see more than you, and, you know, they want to pass in front. But for someone like me, who’s chased parties and mosh pits and large crowds around the world, I see it more like a grace, to be able to live this experience, because it’s something you don’t get to experience normally. It’s like being at a rock concert, where *everyone* seems to be wanting to be in front, and *everyone* seems to be trying to push you out of the way. You have to hold your own, push and shove, just to stay in place. I had the same experience during a World Youth Day, where people were doing just about anything to see and be close to John Paul II. But at the same time, you have to force yourself to realize that you were quite lucky to be in a place where there are people who believe enough to want to do all that’s possible in order to see, to touch. Like Zachariah – I called a few of you by that name this morning, those who were climbed up the tree. We don’t have that at home. And what this does, it helps make the moment special. It helps you really realize that what everyone is so desperate to see is actually really special.

To my surprise, the group was in complete agreement, and the discussion immediately turned to how God speaks through these hordes of people. “I really like this time of pilgrimage,” Marie-Paule volunteers, “since there are many of us praying together.” She shares, “I feel a great communion in spite of the fact that many people are of different languages, of different nationalities... It’s nice to pray Mary and Jesus together, in a number of tongues. It gives a lot of hope to see as many youths, as well, since there are not this many youths in my church.” Rosella agrees: “it’s marvellous to see people of all sorts of nationalities, and that everyone prays and all that, and share and all that. And to see youths as well, in their twenties and even younger. You rarely see that at home. It’s beautiful.” Rosella relates that pilgrimages can fulfill the need to come and see other people who have faith. She explains that during a particular Mass, she was touched by



the number of people attending, since it helped her realize that she is not “the only one who prays.”

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH MARVELS

During his first pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Gabriel experienced a change of heart. Not yet convinced of the truth of the apparitions, he reasoned, “believing in God is one thing, but apparitions is another!” While his group was reciting the Rosary, he and his friend were chatting about what they were observing in the landscape when,

all of a sudden, we were thunderstruck by the odour of a perfume which came and paralyzed us, but in the good way.<sup>42</sup> So we stopped walking, and I remained surprised. ‘What is happening?’ I looked all around, to see if there was anything which could have perfumed the air. A woman passing who was wearing perfume, or who was carrying roses, or whatever. But there was nothing of all that, there was just us two. And Michel, who was with me, was also seized in the same way. We looked at each other, without saying a word, stupefied. And all of a sudden, a great joy overcame me. Something happened in my heart which expressed itself in my body as well. A great joy, a great state of well-being that I found absolutely remarkable. I understood that the Virgin was coming to give me a wink (*personal communication*).

This experience deeply shook Gabriel. He explained he felt it even more deeply because he had been privileged to have the same experience once before. He recounts:

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Margry notes that pilgrims visiting the tomb of Padre Pio “regard the mysterious flowery odour (roses, violets or incense) that many smell by his tomb as a sign of his continual presence. Such odours are also [believed to be] a sign of [a saint’s] spiritual closeness and succour.” Writing on the cult of Padre Pio, Margry explains, “at regular intervals his devotees all over the world smell this odour, which can also be given out by objects. Once when Pio’s intercession was invoked during a pregnancy in France, and the birth ultimately went well after ten months, during the delivery there was ‘a lovely smell of violets, but no flowers could be seen’. People have also testified that while sitting in their car or riding a scooter, at the moment of his beatification in 1999 they suddenly became aware of the odour of flowers” (Margry 2002, 94-5).

I had lived it at an old person's and a handicapped person's home, where I was going to bring Communion while I was a parish priest. A good old woman who lived with her daughter of 45, who suffered from a deficit at the level of the intellect, and who reported that when she prayed – and she prayed a rosary every day – she was surprised and seduced by the perfume of roses which came into the house. Even before entering the house – it was winter, or the end of autumn, I was thunderstruck by that perfume, and I had understood in my heart that this was because the Lord wanted to give me a wink, and that the Lord wanted me to help those people. All of a sudden, these people asked me to illuminate them on a phenomenon they were experiencing, but just as I entered the house, I experienced it myself (*personal communication*).

The very moment that the odour came to him in Medjugorje, Gabriel notes, "it was engraved in my heart that Medjugorje is true." Gabriel underscores that his belief is now unshakeable, "If someone were to come and tell me, including any official voice, that it isn't true, I would still keep believing... I can no longer doubt that Medjugorje is a sacred land, a blessed land where God comes to meet His people in a special way" (*personal communication*).

Some marvels are part of the very story of Medjugorje. Thousands, for instance, reported seeing the words "MIR MIR MIR" (Croatian for "Peace") appear in the sky, stretching from the peak of Mount Križevac to the bell tower of the church. Another marvel relates to the protection of the village during the most recent war:

ROBERT: We've heard all sorts of stories about bombs which did not explode, and-

OUR LOCAL GUIDE: Yes. There are such stories which seem to be true. I saw pictures of a bomb that fell on Main Street in Medjugorje and which did not explode.

ALL: Wow!

ROBERT: I read about that as well – that there were bombs which would not have exploded. In the documentation, the Virgin speaks about the fact that she protected Medjugorje.

Marvels, for many pilgrims, are expected occurrences in Medjugorje. When we entered the chapel of the Oasis of Peace community, where an unusually hairy statue of a



crucified Christ is located, for instance, Rosella asked if the hair on it had grown on its own.

ROSELLA: The hair! [...] Is the crucifix special?

OUR LOCAL GUIDE: I don't know who made it, but I read that they had a crucifix like that in every house of their community.

ROSELLA: They made it like that?

OUR LOCAL GUIDE: It's doubtless someone in the community who makes them like that.

On another occasion, as I was taking pictures of the sunset with my new camera, a man approached me and asked, "Why do you take pictures of the sun?" When I replied, "Because it's beautiful," he asked, "Do you see something?" After casually explaining that the colours in the sky were gorgeous, his response surprised me, "I don't see it." Only then did I realize that for him, it was more immediately possible that I was taking pictures of the sun because I was witnessing a miracle than because the sun was a pretty shade of pink. One of our spiritual guides, Father Maurice, addressed the issue of the marvel one evening, during a prayer session devoted to healing, saying, "I am convinced that tonight, the Lord will act." Father Maurice qualified this, explaining, "This is not because we're good, not because we're better than others, and not because we're here [in Medjugorje], but just because He loves us and because we're taking the decision, tonight, of opening our hearts and allowing Him to act."

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## VISIONS

Appropriately, one of the most commonly referred-to marvels at the Marian apparition centre of Medjugorje are visions. The most important of these, at least in



terms of numbers of individuals reporting having seen it, is the "dance of the sun." Diane recounts her experience of it, "someone looked in the sky and screamed out, so we all looked at the sky and there was the sun turning and turning and turning... and the clouds shone of different colours." On this occasion, Diane reports that about three quarters of those present reported seeing it. "It opened my heart... It's sad to say that we're touched by events like that, but those events are there to give us faith." Diane thanked the Virgin for having given her the gift of the sight of this marvel, "Now that you have given it to me, you no longer have to give me any more. Give it to others. I now know you're there." Diane reasons that it is now up to her to augment her faith and to act in consequence of this (*personal communication*). Rosella's experience of the dance of the sun is very similar. During a Way of the Cross, on a somewhat cloudy day, the sun stopped being brilliant all of a sudden, and she was able to see the Host in the sun, with the Virgin in its centre. She told the others in her group, but no one else was able to see it. Shortly thereafter, during this same Way of the Cross, Rosella also saw Pope John Paul II and Sister Lucy, of Fatima. "I wanted to photograph this, but I was stuck in awe. And others didn't see. And just before then, in the clouds, I saw (and I photographed it, but it didn't take) God the Father, who was blessing me. And that's not imagination. I saw it" (*personal communication*).

Two other commonly reported visions in the context of Medjugorje are apparitions of the Holy Virgin and apparitions of Christ. Murielle interpreted her vision

of Christ carrying His Cross, looking intently at her as an invitation to take up her cross and carry it (*personal communication*). In similar fashion, Céline shares a vision she had during one of the group's prayer sessions, when Father Maurice laid his hand upon her (see "The Imposition of Hands," this chapter). "I experienced something I had never experienced before," she begins. "Just from one eye, I saw – There was a cross at the back, and there was a luminous Christ. The resurrected Christ. At the foot of the Cross, there were people." Looking at Father Maurice, Céline explains, "it was in your hand. It was in your hand, when you placed your hand on me, it filled me so much with joy that I spent the rest of my day in that" (*addressing the group*).

What some would consider as being coincidences, serendipitous happenstances, and strange twists of fate are often, in the context of Medjugorje, read as marvels. Joseph-Marie, during a prayer meeting of the group, told us about an experience he had had with his last pilgrimage group:

When we went on a trip to Prague, the priest who was with us lost his stole, but didn't tell us. After that, he got lost in the city of Prague. So we started to pray Saint Anthony to find the Father. When we found him, he told him, 'We prayed to find you again.' After that, he lost his cane, and we said, 'We'll pray Saint Anthony.' After that, a girl came, and said, 'You wouldn't happen to have lost a cane, sir?' The third time, he told us he's lost his stole while we were praying in the church of Saint Anthony, we went to an opera. And we said, 'He'll bring it back to you. You'll get your stole back.' When we came back out, an old Czech was outside, with the stole [across her hands]. So we said, 'So, Father?' That's Saint Anthony for you.

Our local guide highlights the 19<sup>th</sup> century consecration of the parish of Medjugorje to Saint James, the patron saint of pilgrims, which predated the beginning of the apparitions by one century.

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH OUR MINDS

While God may choose to speak through marvels, which are perceived as being factors external to us in at least some ways, many pilgrims also relate stories where God chose to act on their very interiors. For Michel, “interior things” are the sought-after experiences of the true pilgrim. The “exterior things,” for him, are simply delicacies (*addressing the group*). “What’s important in Medjugorje,” relates Gabriel, “is what each receives in his heart” (*personal communication*). For Louise, the revelation she had during her pilgrimage came as a surprise. “I never thought that I would return to my past by coming here; I hadn’t spoken about my prior marriage in a long time, and now, it’s developed.” Unable to make sense of why these feelings and memories from her past are resurfacing, she shared her experience with her pilgrimage roommate, whose analysis of the situation made sense to Louise: “It’s because He wants to heal you. There’s something inside, where you’re not healed.” For this reason, during the climbing of the Križevac, Louise offered her difficulties to God, “so that He may heal my interior” (*addressing the group*). “Pilgrimage involves a movement into sacred space, symbolically, socially, and physically. In this respect, pilgrimage can restore one’s relationships with aspects of the sacred, illustrating how pilgrimage is an inherently



healing (whole-ing) process" (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xx). Healing, according to these authors, "encompasses not just physical ailments but also life problems, spiritual loss, social alienation, and the fragmentation of self" (*ibid*, xxviii). While discussing the topic of resurfacing memories, Father Maurice explained to the group, "Sometimes, we are ill in our memories - in memories which come back to the surface and aggress us constantly; things we did, or things someone else did to us, or bad experiences we lived and which are there pursuing us and which we have a difficult time getting rid of." Relating the issue to concrete problems expressed by members of our group, Father Maurice encouraged the group, emphasizing how wonderful the healing of these psychological ills can be. "Sometimes, it's things like cigarettes. The taste of nicotine... Sometimes, it's a difficulty with alcohol. For others, it's simply bad habits, things that always surface: we don't feel loved, we feel rejected, we feel that we hurt others, or we feel that we hurt ourselves" (*addressing the group*).

As Father Maurice's example of the taste of nicotine demonstrates, the problems experienced by pilgrims are not limited to the psychological realm. On a number of occasions, pilgrims highlighted the idea that "physical healing comes through the spiritual" (Suzie, *personal communication*). Having been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis over thirty years ago, Suzie's visits to other people with Multiple Sclerosis convinced her that "for the many who are very, very, revolted and who put their sickness on the back of God, it's worse. It's the Lord who gives me my strength... The

proof is that I'm still walking" (*personal communication*). Rosella is of the same mind.

"Your heart must be healed before you can heal the physical" (*personal communication*).

## GOD SPEAKS THROUGH OUR BODIES

### HEALING THE BODY TO STRENGTHEN THE MIND

If most pilgrims agree that God's action on the mind can influence the state of our bodies, much the same can be said of the opposite as well: God's action on the body can be understood to uphold faith and enrich spirituality. Indeed, as Simon Coleman underlines, the "healing" that is offered to and sought by pilgrims includes the realms of the social, psychological, spiritual, physical, and even material 'well-being' (2005, 94). David Hufford notes that Roman Catholic healing traditions are "complex, richly varied," and "as vigorous [now] as they are ancient" (Hufford 1985, 207). Lena Gemzöe notes that in the cult of Mary and the saints, vows for the curing of illnesses and healing of parts of the body is common. The largest category of vows, made predominantly by women, she explains, "includes vows concerned with the life and health of oneself or one's family" (2005, 29-30). The healing power of Mary is believed to be particularly strong in Medjugorje because the Virgin has appeared at the site (cf. Gemzöe 2005, 40).

Although the Medjugorje pilgrimage does not (yet?) have the rich tradition of miraculous physical healings as the shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré in Québec City, the Manoir St-Joseph in Montréal, or the Marian shrine at Lourdes, the topic of physical healing is nonetheless an important part of the pilgrimage experience. During a daytrip



to the city of Dubrovnik, in Croatia, our group celebrated a Mass in the church consecrated to the patron saint of the city, Saint Blaise. Following the Mass, each pilgrim's throat was blessed, with crossed candles, by the priests.<sup>43</sup> On another occasion, the group assembled for an evening of prayers for healing, introduced with the following words from Father Maurice:

'Here are the signs which will accompany those who will believe. In my names, they will banish evil spirits. They will speak a new tongue. They will take serpents in their hands, and if they drink a deadly poison, it will do them no harm. They will lay hands upon the sick, and the sick will be healed.' The Lord accompanied the disciples, and confirmed the Word with signs which accompanied it. We were speaking of a healing meeting tonight. That's not an invention. It gets its origin in the Scriptures. The Lord healed. He sent his disciples to lay their hands on the sick, saying, 'Heal them. And those who will believe will be able to see incredible things realized.' Things such as speaking a new tongue. Speaking the language of love is really a new language. If drinking a deadly poison will do them no harm, this means that if we let the Lord act in our lives, in our whole being (not just in our heart), but in our whole being – and if we really abandon ourselves to Him, a little like in the prayer we said this morning, the prayer of Charles de Foucault, extraordinary things – impossible, even – can happen. To drink a deadly poison and to not be hurt by it is impossible. But with Jesus, when we turn towards Him, when we abandon ourselves to Him, when we trust Him, and when we tell Him, 'I act as a child with you, I throw myself in your arms, I allow myself to be spoiled by you,' then the impossible is realized. 'They will lay their hands on the sick and they will be healed.' [...] That's what we want to experience tonight. We will take the Lord to His Word (Father Maurice, *addressing the group*).

One pilgrim, among others, underscored the importance of thanking God for the miracle not of a healed body, but rather of a still-functioning body, having lived for over thirty years with Multiple Sclerosis. Suzie relates, "I give thanks to the Lord because I am still walking today. I don't know any others who are still walking after thirty years. I live in

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<sup>43</sup> While in prison, Saint Blaise is said to have miraculously cured a boy who had a fishbone in his throat and who was in danger of choking to death. For this reason, the faithful often seek his intercession when ill, and most especially when stricken with throat troubles ([www.newadvent.org/cathen/02592a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02592a.htm)).



hope. For me, this is providence. I trust in the Lord a lot" (*personal communication*).

Suzie explains that in the moments when she is experiencing pain, she is not always able to thank the Lord for it. When Suzie spilled boiling water on her right foot some years ago, however, she remembers being very thankful for it having hurt her stronger leg: "If it had been my left leg, I could not have walked again – It's my left leg which is more affected and weak."

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#### HEALING THE WHOLE SELF

Prior to undertaking the pilgrimage, I invited Father Maurice to address the issue of what each pilgrim might be expecting from the trip. "People will arrive on the pilgrimage with some baggage," he began. "Not everyone will be conscious of it, but I think we must be careful to be more conscious of it, to try to discern where each person is at in his spiritual pilgrimage in Medjugorje." The best way to do this, Father Maurice explained, is to find "which dimension of this person is the one with which this person is living his pilgrimage? Is he on the physical dimension? Is she attached to the physical plane? Has she arrived at the social dimension? Is he curious about this people who has come from the four horizons of the world, or is she rather arrived at the spiritual dimension?" Echoing Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), Father Maurice emphasizes the personal, social, and political bodies: "I'm a physical being. At work, we often talk about the bio-psycho-socio-spiritual dimension. Four important dimensions. I am a man, and have a body, that's the 'biological' dimension. I'm a being who has an intelligence –

that's the 'psychological' dimension. I'm a relational being, that's the 'social' dimension, and I'm also a spiritual being. Four elements. When I meet someone and I'm noting in their file, I must take into account those four elements, which form a whole. And I must situate the spiritual dimension vis-à-vis the other dimensions" (Father Maurice, *personal communication*). Pilgrimage, according to Winkelman and Dubisch, is a "'multimedia therapy' that combines many different kinds of healing processes that are not normally found within a single healing tradition or activity." Echoing Scheper-Hughes and Lock, these authors write that pilgrimage is a form of biopsychosocial and spiritual healing that addresses many levels of the human need for healing and 'wholing' the person" (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xxxvi).

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#### BODIES AS PRIMERS

A number of pilgrims shared the idea that our bodies can be used by God as avenues for spiritual inspiration and fulfillment. Gabriel, whose journeys to Medjugorje never gave him the opportunity to see the relatively common dance of the sun, reasons coldly on the matter: "Do I give a shit about the dance of the sun? I've gone three times and I've never seen it. But people need it... Their bodies touched the action of God. They touched this proximity of God... People allow themselves to be touched by it. Their bodies become the primer" (*personal communication*). As already mentioned, Gabriel underwent the experience of a different marvel while in Medjugorje: the perfume of the Holy Virgin (see "GOD SPEAKS THROUGH MARVELS," this chapter). "The Lord used my

body," Gabriel begins, "of course He used my body – He didn't have the choice – I wasn't listening to Him! I'd been there a few days already, and I was much more preoccupied by seeing the landscape... than I was preoccupied by His callings." Gabriel admits that at that point in his life, he could not even have imagined that he was important enough to God for Him to reach him in those ways. "God needed to communicate strongly, using my heart. And in this way, my body became an important site where I could reach God." Gabriel is thankful that today, he receives God's callings internally. "At times, there are still moments when my body comes into the equation, but I normally feel them more at the level of my heart" (*personal communication*).

#### GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE BODIES OF OTHERS

The bodies of others are also seen as ways that can be used by God to come into contact with us. At the end of the group's very first prayer session, at the airport chapel, each member of the group was invited to trace the sign of the cross on each other member's forehead. "It'll be a way of telling each other: 'My brother or sister in faith: I accompany you in my prayer; I accompany you in my prayerful heart,'" Father Maurice explained to me prior to inviting the group to perform this ritual. "It'll be a way of saying we're that forming a Church together. And it'll be a way of wishing each other a good trip, a good pilgrimage (Father Maurice, *personal communication*). Following a general blessing from Father Patrice, each member of the group turned to her or his neighbours to tract the sign the cross of their foreheads. As the members of the group began to bless other



pilgrims they have not yet met, the atmosphere became light – akin to that of a party.

The tracing of the sign of the cross by the other pilgrims on that first evening often came up in discussions, with a number of people reporting that they were deeply touched by it and that they felt God's presence in a special way.

#### THE IMPOSITION OF HANDS

The imposition of hands has a special place in Christian practice. The ritual is scripturally based (Acts 14-19), and practiced during a great number of the important rites of Roman Catholicism. These include the practice's theological aspect in the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Holy Orders, and its ceremonial aspect in the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, in various blessings, in exorcisms, in the reconciliation of public penitents, and in the reception of schismatics, heretics, and apostates into the Church (Morrisroe 1910). In spite of the extensive use of the practice, however, very little is known about it by the majority of the lay Roman Catholic population, who commonly perceive the practice as a custom reserved to the Pentecostal churches or the Roman Catholic Charismatic movement.

One evening, four pilgrims happened to meet Vicka, the most charismatic of the six seers, while out walking and shopping for religious items. They asked the seer to pray for them, and she offered the imposition of hands to each of the pilgrims. The foursome excitedly accepted, following which they returned to the pension to meet with the remainder of the group, overjoyed with what had just occurred. One of their number

was jubilant, thanking the Lord for "So many graces!" Midway through our time in Medjugorje, Father Maurice organized a renewal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, with the imposition of hands. As the sun was setting that evening, the group formed a circle, seated on the patio chairs of the pension where we were staying. Following a series of prayers of intercession, Michel was invited to join the priest as he went around the circle. As the priest, from inside the circle, laid his hands on the heads of the pilgrims, Michel laid his hands on their shoulders, from outside the circle. The other pilgrims were invited to orient their hands towards the person presently being prayed for, in this way also laying their hands, at a distance. Father Maurice invited the pilgrims to do so "not by depending on the power of your merits, but on the power of your Baptism" (*addressing the group*).

The choice of Michel as an aid to the imposition of hands during our group's renewal of the gift of the Holy Spirit was not accidental. On at least two occasions prior, Michel had voiced his reservations about the laying on of hands, and he and Claire, his wife, had stated that they would not attend the prayer session if there would be the imposition of hands. A few years prior, Michel had received the imposition of hands by someone who was not blessed by the charisma of peace, and had experienced something he could only describe as the reception of evil spirits within him. This had scared both him and Claire, and they recognized the dangers of the practice. When Father Maurice invited Michel to aid him in the imposition of hands, this set Claire at

ease, since she trusted her husband. Murielle explains, "You need interior peace to be able to give some good to another. You have to be well inside. You need to believe inside. If it's a person who does not have that peace, [bad things can happen]" (*personal communication*). Surprised at this explanation, I referred to a priest we had met a prior pilgrimage, a priest known for his gift for the imposition of hands, but who cannot be said to be at peace with himself or the world around him. Murielle's reply was so obvious that I remember feeling almost embarrassed to have asked the question in the first place: this priest is *a priest*.<sup>44</sup> Later, when I asked Michel why he had felt comfortable performing the imposition of hands, he simply replied, "It's not me who was doing this. It was Father Maurice. I was simply an accomplice. I was asking the Holy Spirit that Father Maurice might be able to – you know!"

#### THE REST IN THE SPIRIT

Closely related to the practice of the imposition of hands is the rest in the Spirit, a gift of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Like the imposition of hands, the rest in the Spirit is not thought of as a common occurrence, and it is perceived as being supernatural, mystical. Early on in the pilgrimage, for instance, Jacques and Michel were walking in a crowd, when they came upon a group of Italians

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<sup>44</sup> On a number of occasions during the pilgrimage, I was struck by how priests are perceived as belonging to a "special" class, and how, in pilgrim's accounts, these individuals are perceived as being unable to do spiritual ill in the same ways as lay people might. I leave the expansion of this discussion for another paper.



whose priest was practicing the imposition of hands. When one in this group fell in the rest of the spirit, a number of those around became agitated, some of them shouting. The reaction of the priest and of the other members of the group so puzzled the pair that they quickly made their way back to where our group was gathered in order to report what they had just seen: "I think we've just witnessed a miracle!" Jacques animatedly began. After describing the scene to us, Jacques reported that "They kept screaming: 'Mira! Mira!'," interpreting this word to mean "miracle." "Yeah. That's it. Mira!" Michel added, continuing, "There are many things like this that happen. And the great majority of miracles, you don't see them." The fact that in Italian, "mira" is not the word for "miracle" but rather for "look" did little to douse the pair's enthusiasm.

In the context of the pilgrimage to Medjugorje (as in many other contexts), the rest in the Spirit is often a direct result of the imposition of hands. The only member of our group to have experienced the rest in the Spirit during our pilgrimage (at least, to my knowledge), was Murielle. As Father Maurice imposed his hands upon the other members of the group during our renewal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Murielle remembers placing herself in the other pilgrim's shoes by singing to herself, "Father God, I abandon myself to you. Do of me what you want," repeating it as the priest reached each person. When her turn came, she remembers being very calm.

"Suddenly," she relates, "I felt a sort of luminous force, and I could see a blinding light."

She continues,

I then I felt I wasn't in control. I wasn't in control of my body anymore. Nothing. No control. After that, I don't know anymore. I started to hear others slowly, but wasn't able to respond. Tranquilly, I started hearing others. I started hearing the others tranquilly, but wasn't able to answer. Slowly, slowly. I then tried to move my arms... It's a good thing. It's a great feeling, what is produced inside you.. Everything was moving so fast around me. And I felt weak, weak, weak... I was so weak! I wasn't even able to respond... Christiane came to see me. She touched me and said, 'I know what you're going through, I've experienced it. Let it be.' I felt it went by so fast! (Murielle, *personal communication*)

Having never received the Holy Spirit before, Murielle's most vivid description of what it could be like had come from one of her best friends, when a charismatic priest visited her church in Ontario. Just as the priest was placing his hands on her friend's head, "Bang! She falls over the pew! She was looking at me with eyes wide open, and she was no longer moving. I was like, 'She had a heart attack!' [...] I was like, 'Are you alright?' And she wasn't answering... Suddenly, I understood." Troubled about what had happened to her, her friend visited a doctor the very next day, and, without telling him where she had gone, explained that she had fallen, was momentarily completely paralyzed, and had lost all notion of time. The doctor had simply explained that she had "gotten an enormous shock" that had caused her blood pressure to fall radically. "She told me after," Murielle shares, "It's true. I received the Spirit.' Wow! " (*personal communication*).

Murielle shares that when first introduced to the practice, she thought, "Come on, people! This makes no sense! Don't try and make me believe in this stuff!" "These kinds of things, she explains, "kept me at bay. When I saw that, sometimes, I would actually get up and leave. 'Come on!' I'd tell myself! 'They shouldn't try to make me

swallow this!" When a priest we both know was doing the imposition of hands some months before, Murielle remembers, seeing people falling on the ground in the rest of the Spirit, telling herself, "Oh my God! Not him too!" When her turn came, she resisted it, not wanting to fall. This time around, however, she had not resisted, welcoming the experience as a gift of God. Wondering about whether there has been research on the bodies of individuals experiencing the rest in the Spirit, Murielle shares, "I won't go around screaming about it or anything," she shares, but it's incredible" (Murielle, *personal communication*).

#### POWER AND TRANSFERENCE

The discussions of the group surrounding the imposition of hands and the rest in the Spirit opened up a topic that a number of pilgrims thought very interesting, but that few were willing to comment upon: the transfer of "energy" [for lack of a better term] from one individual to the next. The five pilgrims in our group that had also been amongst our last pilgrimage group remembered how our accompanying priest, one evening, had been recognized as having a special charism for the imposition of hands by a group of Italians, who, for over an hour, had queued in order to have him lay his hands upon them. Our accompanying priest had performed a number of marvels during this time, including having diagnosed a baby's illness from a soother a woman had presented to him saying simply, "El bambino!" "When he gave her back her soother," Pilgrim X remembers, "it was impossible how she loved him!" Along with the four others, I



remember how drained our accompanying priest had been. We had carried him away, with him thanking us, "Thank goodness you got me out of there. I couldn't take it anymore. I was going to collapse. It takes so much energy from me!" (Pilgrim X, *personal communication*). Another in our group remember how "empty" of energy our priest had become in the space of that short hour. "The more it went on, the more emptied he was. But people were falling like flies!" (Pilgrim X, *addressing the group*).

#### SUMMARY

Confirmations of faith in the context of a pilgrimage to Medjugorje are multiple and set in a highly developed and intricate framework. Pilgrims indeed hope for, expect, witness, recognize, present, and represent the presence of the sacred through all their senses, and in multiple ways. Glimpses of the sacred are caught through signs, nature, individuals (especially seers, saints, and priests), and through the experience of being an agent of God's work (such as the pilgrim's duty to act as a messenger). Other channels in which God is believed to allow herself to be known include *communitas*, crowds, miracles, wonders, visions, twists of fate, and other marvels, our minds, our bodies and the bodies of others.

## CONCLUSION

### WHEN GOD IS MUTE

While on pilgrimage, participants can be so filled with the expectation of coming into contact with the sacred that they may forget the other purposes of their pilgrimage. This can contribute to the pilgrim's experiencing what, in these circles, is referred to as a "desert of the soul," where the pilgrim feels abandoned by God and where God does not feel "present" to the pilgrim. A seasoned pilgrim, Father Maurice is well aware of the burden of the pilgrim whose expectation of encountering God through good works, signs, marvels, nature, healings, special individuals such as saints, seers and priests, or *communitas*, is disappointed. For this reason, in the very same breath in which he enjoins the group to hope and pray to be touched during one of our prayer sessions, he states, "Happy are you if you don't have great shocks [while in Medjugorje], since this confirms that faith was already there. There was already a fertile ground where the Holy Spirit inhabited" (*addressing the group*). On another occasion, Father Maurice enjoined and encouraged the group to appreciate the pilgrimage in spite of a felt lack of God's presence,

Noise does not make any good, and good does not make any noise. The Lord acts softly, secretly. It never hurts, and it's always there... Aspire to receive only one thing during this

pilgrimage: to be renewed in the gift of love. And if you leave from here with your hearts full of hope, and renewed in love, without any drums or trumpet sounds, without having shivers in your limbs or tremolo in the bottom throat, happy are you since you will return home with an ordinary testimony. Like a simple faith experience such as sweeping the floor or vacuuming while singing a religious song. An experience such as that of making a pie or of strolling through the woods while having one's heart turned toward God. When we return home, that's how it should happen. (Father Maurice, *addressing the group*).

On yet another occasion, our accompanying priest underscored the fact that many had pointed out a desire for God's action and presence in their lives. "That is no small thing," he began. "That's already an action of God at work." Asserting that the most beautiful gift God can possibly give is the thirst and hunger we can have for Him, Father Maurice articulated that "God is not distracted – he knows our needs before we even voice them" (*addressing the group*).

In spite of our spiritual guides' many warnings and attempts to refocus participants' energies, the onus of making the journey "worth" the time, effort, and money invested weighed heavily on many in the group, who, at different times, voiced their concerns and difficulties. For instance, Jules, whose light-hearted attitude normally gave an air of celebration to the group's discussions, shared his concern that, mid-way through the pilgrimage, he was still suffering through a "desert of the soul." Recognizing his impatience, Jules voiced his thoughts about the experience he was undergoing, confident that he was not alone in feeling this way. "When the Lord loves someone, he brings them to the desert, and these can seem endless," he explained. "Probably a lot longer than what most of us might be experiencing today." Jules reasoned that though this "desert of the soul" might be difficult, it may nonetheless be for the best, since "She



[the Virgin Mary] would not like us to get out of here all flipped, and scaring people when we go back home" (*addressing the group*). The next day, Jules was still "in the desert," and the fact that many of the pilgrims were sharing how their relationships with God were being confirmed and strengthened weighed heavily on him "Some have told me that I have to abandon myself," he began,

But it's not coming at all. And I feel I've abandoned myself a lot. Nothing's happening. Nothing. I abandoned my work – I had some stuff to do at home, but I told myself: 'I'll go anyways, there are more days than weeks in a year.' And I'm still hoping. There's still almost a week left. I feel well in this group. People are bringing testimonies that are rich. It's really something! But as for me, I would love to sense God's presence in me, and I don't have it. I don't know if there's a recipe for it" (*addressing the group*).

At this, Samuel gave Jules some encouragement, "Although you don't sense God's presence in you, we can see it!"

## SUCCESS

While on pilgrimage, participants continually strove to make themselves better able to "hear, see, touch, taste, smell, and feel" God. Individuals opened up their minds, souls, and bodies to the action of God, pondered on Scripture, the Messages of the *Gospa*, and words from saintly individuals, participated in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and spent hours gazing at God present in the Consecrated Host. Pilgrims also prayed, meditated, visited sacred sites, collected sacred objects, and pushed the limits of their bodies. They made use of symbols and rituals, did good works, shared advice, their experiences and stories, and contributed to the humanization and sacralisation of the space of pilgrimage.

Though not every pilgrim could boast of having made contact with God, every member of our group reported being thoroughly happy with the progress they had made in their faith lives. As Victor Turner notes, "the plain truth is that pilgrimage does not ensure a major change in religious state – and seldom in secular status – though it may make one a better person, fortified by the graces merited by the hardships and self-sacrifice of the journey (1992, 37). Each pilgrim left Medjugorje with a different "gift from God."

Jacques, who joined the pilgrimage to reconsider his interior life and to take a time of rest, gladly reported having "made a good bit of road in that" and being able to feel peace and joy to a larger extent (*addressing the group*). Monique was blessed with an augmented faith, a sense of abandonment (*addressing the group*), renewed energy, and a sense of serenity and interior peace (*personal communication*). Murielle reported having had a "heart to heart" with God through sharpened senses and a newfound trust in God's will (*personal communication*). Christiane, who came to Medjugorje in order to enhance her life of prayer, reported a serenity she could not remember ever feeling before, which she attributes to pilgrimage's seving to make her faith become her very reason for living (*personal communication*). Marie-Paule, whose wish was to leave Medjugorje with a small piece of the sacred to be able to let that bear fruit at home [in Preston's words, to ingest and carry home the trace of this tradition, to then anchor or implant it in her home community (1990, 22)], returned to her village with a sense of

community and communion with the other pilgrims "From now on," she gladly informed the group, "when I'll have difficulties, I'll be able to tell myself: I'm not alone. There's the gang that's with me" (*addressing the group*). For her part, Suzie found a renewed courage that will help her through both "the days of grace and days where there's nothing" (*addressing the group*). Jules, who joined the group because he could not think of a reason not to, finally found forgiveness for a incident that had occurred over a decade prior (*addressing the group*). And I, having undertaken the pilgrimage this time primarily as an occasion to conduct fieldwork, rediscovered the reasons why I had first wanted to make this pilgrimage the subject of my research: a thirst for God and a fascination for the readiness of individuals to invest themselves in the hope of coming into contact with the sacred and becoming better people.



## APPENDIX A

### **Participation Information and Consent**

#### ***The Body/ies of the Faithful: A Corporeal Ethnography of Canadians on a Roman Catholic Marian Pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia***

As a full-time Masters student at Memorial University of Newfoundland studying Religious Studies, I, Sébastien Després, am researching Roman Catholic belief and vernacular approaches to a theology of the body in the context of a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. This research will be used primarily to meet the thesis requirement of my Masters degree, but may also be used for publication and presentation. I intend to take video footage of the interviews I conduct and to deposit copies of these at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), along with other printed materials, photographs, video, and copies of such collected in conjunction with this research. I will analyse the interviews and reflect on meanings (contextual, cultural, or otherwise) contained within. Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee for Ethics in Human Research has approved the proposal for this research; if you have any questions or concerns about the research that you might not be comfortable sharing with me, these may be discussed confidentially with Dr. Jennifer Porter, my thesis supervisor. She can be reached at (709)737-2469 or at [jporter@mun.ca](mailto:jporter@mun.ca). Should you feel more comfortable doing so, these may be addressed with the Chairperson of Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or (709)737-8368.

#### **In conjunction with his research, I give Sébastien Després permission to:**

- ☐ Take photographs of me
- ☐ Take audio recordings, and/or video footage of me
- ☐ Make copies of photographs, video, or audio recordings from my personal collection
- ☐ Deposit the recordings of these interviews & the photographs obtained in conjunction with Sébastien's research in Memorial University's Folklore and Language Archive
- ☐ Use my name in communication of this research (*if no, I understand that my name or identifying information will not be disclosed with any direct quotation*)

*Initial if you would like to review for accuracy direct*

#### **Preferred Pseudonym:**

*quotations attributed to you in written publication:*

I agree to participate in this (series) of recorded interview(s), which will be used by Sébastien Després for his research and dissemination (including but not limited to public talks, conference presentations, published papers and books). I understand that I may choose to *not* answer any question(s) asked. I am aware that I can withdraw my participation in this study at any time by informing Sébastien verbally or in writing. I grant him permission to use this material at his discretion for all academic purposes.

Full Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Questions concerning this research may be directed to:**

Sébastien Després, CP 1005, Cocagne, NB. E4R 1N6. [sadsprs@mta.ca](mailto:sadsprs@mta.ca). (709)685-1485.

## **Consentement & Information pour les Participants**

### *The Body/ies of the Faithful: A Corporeal Ethnography of Canadians on a Roman Catholic Marian Pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia*

À titre d'étudiant en Maîtrise en sciences religieuses à Memorial University of Newfoundland, je, Sébastien Després, prépare un travail de thèse qui explore la foi Catholique en conjonction avec des approches vernaculaires sur une théologie du corps dans le contexte d'un pèlerinage à Medjugorje. Cette recherche pourra aussi être utilisée à fin de publication et de présentation. Je vise à enregistrer les entrevues conduites et à déposer des copies de celles-ci aux archives de Folklore et de Langue de Memorial University (MUNFLA), avec d'autres matériaux, photographies, vidéo recueillis en conjonction avec cette recherche. J'analyserai ensuite les entrevues et je refléterai sur leurs sens (contextuel, culturel, ou autre). La proposition pour cette recherche est approuvée par le comité interdisciplinaire pour éthique en recherche humaine de Memorial University; si vous avez des questions ou des appréhensions au sujet de cette recherche, ceux-ci peuvent être discutés en toute confidentialité avec Dr. Jennifer Porter, ma superviseure, au (709)737-2469 ou à [jporter@mun.ca](mailto:jporter@mun.ca). Ceux-ci peuvent aussi être adressés au responsable du comité interdisciplinaire pour éthique en recherche humaine de Memorial University à [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) ou par téléphone au (709)737-8368.

#### **En conjonction avec son travail de recherche, je donne à Sébastien Després la permission de: (SVP indiquez par un « X »)**

- ☐ Prendre des photos de moi
- ☐ Prendre des enregistrements audio et/ou des enregistrements vidéo de moi
- ☐ Faire des copies de photos, vidéos, ou enregistrements audio de ma collection personnelle
- ☐ Déposer les enregistrements de ces entrevues et les photos obtenues en conjonction avec la recherche de Sébastien aux archives de Folklore et de Langue de Memorial University
- ☐ Utiliser mon nom en communication avec cette recherche (*sinon, je comprends que mon nom et toute information qui pourrait m'identifier ne sera pas révélé en me citant*).

*Initialement si vous voulez vérifier pour exactitude les extraits*

**Pseudonyme Préféré:** \_\_\_\_\_

*de conversation qui vous sont attribués en publication écrite:* \_\_\_\_\_

J'accepte de participer dans cette série d'entrevues enregistrées, qui sera utilisée par Sébastien Després pour sa recherche et dissémination (incluant sans limitation à des prestations publiques, présentations de conférence, travaux publiés, et livres). Je comprends que je peux choisir de *ne pas* répondre n'importe quelle question demandée. Je suis au courant que je peux retirer ma participation dans cette étude n'importe quand en informant Sébastien verbalement ou par écrit. Je lui donne permission d'utiliser ce matériel à sa discrétion pour tout travail académique.

Nom (imprimé) \_\_\_\_\_ Téléphone \_\_\_\_\_

Adresse \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Vos questions au sujet de ce travail de recherche peuvent être dirigées à:**  
Sébastien Després, CP 1005, Cocagne, NB. E4R 1N6. [sadsprs@mta.ca](mailto:sadsprs@mta.ca). (709)685-1485.



## APPENDIX B

### *The Body/ies of the Faithful: A Corporeal Ethnography of Canadians on a Roman Catholic Marian Pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia*

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