

Traces of the Virgin Mary

Tatiana
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Ed.



in Post- Communist Europe

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Photo: *Virgin Mary and religious statues
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Traces of the Virgin Mary in Post-Communist Europe

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04 The Reception of Recent Marian Apparitions in the Czech Republic in the Field of Popular Religiosity – Two Examples

Vojtěch Tutr

Marian apparitions have emerged throughout the history of the Catholic Church. However, they have never been given a lot of attention and have never met with so much public acceptance as has been seen since the latter half of the 19th century.¹ The development of mass communication and increasing population mobility have partly contributed to this phenomenon. These apparitions have a new function – providing public messages. The Virgin Mary is no longer speaking only to the visionary; she is pronouncing prophecies and messages to all believers, laying claims to the hierarchy.

This article deals with a comparative analysis of two examples of ‘popular religiosity’ in the Czech Republic as a spontaneous religious activity produced and operated by their charismatic leaders and opinion-makers: the so-called *Věrité*² centre founded by František Mráček and *Mariánské nakladatelství* [MANA, Marian publishers]³ founded by František Press in Brno.⁴ Both cases are based on modern Marian apparitions, which they contextualise into the current global situation and in the Czech Republic as well. This is accompanied by the trend of modernisation and the era of mass communication. Apocalyptic, chiliastic and millennial tones presented in both interpreters of modern Marian apparitions are also explored. The ‘end of time’ as a typical theme for popular religiosity is transformed and adapted to the context of modern society and western culture in the manner of actualised manifestation of the ‘end of time’ by predicted WWII, nuclear or

- 1 Take a look, however sceptically, at the statistics of visitors to places of pilgrimage. In Fatima, over 300,000 people gathered at the jubilee in 1928, and over 4.5 million pilgrims visit Lourdes annually (Petri and Beinert 1996: 599–600). In Medjugorje, over one million communions are given according to statistics on www.medjugorje.org (accessed on April 15, 2019).
- 2 See the website on <http://www.verite.cz/> (accessed on September 15, 2019).
- 3 See the website on <https://marianskenakladatelstvi.estranky.cz/> (accessed on September 15, 2019).
- 4 The chapter analyses material on both movements collected at the end of the millennium, up to 2010.

ecological catastrophes, globalisation or total control by means of information technologies. Marian devotion plays a central role in both analysed cases, and is crucial for understanding her portraying as a Loving Mother and hope of the mankind, but also as a guardian of the world coming as the (last) ‘living warning’ before the expected global catastrophe.

Modern Marian Apparitions as a Formative Element of Religious Movements

A modern Marian apparition is considered to be a set of dozens to hundreds of apparitions,⁵ going as far back as the apparition on Rue du Back in Paris in 1830 until today. The apparitions pertaining to this group are as follows: those whose authenticity is not unanimously agreed on, not even by the supporters of the apparition; those which are officially approved⁶ as authentic; and those where a massive devotion movement connected to the apparition is tolerated by the Church.⁷ The data on the number of apparitions in this period can therefore vary significantly depending on the author.⁸

Comparing the lists of authoritative apparitions created by different known or unknown authors, however, will lead us to the fact that the following apparitions possess immense popularity among its supporters: Paris 1830, La Salette 1846, Lourdes 1854, Pontmain 1871, Pellevoisin 1876, Knock 1876, Caserta (apparition to Mary Valtorta) 1916–1953, Fatima 1917, Amsterdam 1945–1959, Montechiari 1947–1976, Tre Fontane 1947, Garabandal 1961–1965, Bayside

- 5 In this contribution, we will not distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘assumed’ apparitions, since discussion on this topic goes beyond the extent and subject of this contribution. Methodologically, we will consider the apparitions as being authentic or real, which are as such considered by their favourers.
- 6 Pope Pius X determined that the approval of Marian apparitions by the Church can only be valid as an allowance ‘nihil obstat’ (see Laurentin 1996: 509).
- 7 For example, this is the case of Medjugorje, Herzegovina, today.
- 8 According to Hierzenberger and Nedomansky 1993: 553, there are 106 mentioned apparitions in the 19th century and 427 apparitions in the 20th century (Beneš 2003: 128).

1968–1995, Milano (*interior locution* of Stefano Gobbi) 1972–1997, Medjugorje from 1981 until today, and Litmanová 1990–1995, at least within a Central European context.

Marian apparitions have always emerged throughout the history of the Catholic Church. However, they have never been given a lot of attention and have never met with so much public acceptance as has been seen since the latter half of the 19th century.⁹ The development of mass communication and increasing population mobility have partly contributed to this phenomenon. These apparitions have a new function – providing *public messages*. The Virgin Mary is no longer speaking only to the visionary; she is pronouncing prophecies and messages to all believers, laying claims to the hierarchy.¹⁰

Modern Marian apparitions are a strong impulse for official devotion, however, they are more so for unofficial devotion. On the basis of the apparition in Paris, for example, the ‘Miraculous Medal’ was given the stamp of approval by the Archbishop of Paris, de Quelen; the apparition in Lourdes stimulates the development of spiritual care for the pilgrims; the apparition in Fatima and consequent speculations on the visions, which are contained in the three mysteries, force official representatives to take a stand, which is repeatedly impugned over and over.¹¹ However, crowds of pilgrims can be seen heading to Medjugorje, Litmanová or Oława,

9 Take a look, however sceptically, at the statistics of visitors to places of pilgrimage. In Fatima, over 300,000 people gathered at the jubilee in 1928, and over 4.5 million pilgrims visit Lourdes annually (Petri and Beinert 1996: 599–600). In Medjugorje, over one million communions are given according to statistics on www.medjugorje.org (accessed on April 15, 2019).

10 Such is, for example, the claim on the Pope said during the apparition in Fatima to consecrate Russia to the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*.

11 As it happens constantly at <http://www.fatima.org/> (accessed on April 15, 2019).

12 Apparition in Oława, Poland or, more precisely, membership in *Stowarzyszenie Ducha Świętego* was interdicted by the Church. See <http://www.kuria.gliwice.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty/index.php?numer=2&art=189> (accessed on April 15, 2019). It is one of the strictest condemnations of association established on the basis of an assumed apparition in the history of the Church in the last century.

i.e. places which are not officially approved as places of apparition or which have even been officially refused.¹² Therefore, as a result of both assumed and real apparitions, movements on different levels of formalisation and officialisation are being formed.

For the purposes of this paper, let us distinguish three types of movements that depend on the degree of being regulated by ‘religious specialists’:

- (1) *Official movement* – founded and led by the members of the clergy as part of their pastoral duties. The structure of the movement is officially centralistic, its leader is a priest, and eventually the administration of the movement is entrusted to some religious order (*Rosary brotherhoods, Knighthood of the Immaculate, Apostolate of Fatima*);
- (2) *Officialised movement* – arises spontaneously, in some cases, a priest's activities outside of his pastoral duties. The control of thought orientation of the movement is not as strong as in the case of the official movement, since there is mostly no intervention in the movement direction from the superior positions, especially if it does not deviate from any certain framework;
- (3) *Non-official movement* – founded and led by lay people without any specialised religious education and commission. This group can be further divided into popular and folk movements. The first one has one or more non-anonymous opinion leaders, usually a person with a high degree of formal education, but in a field other than theology. These leaders are propagators of some idea or message for which they acquire supporters by means of publication or promoting activities and, in order to do this, they find subjects outside the church framework (Staples 1979: 264).

On the other hand, the folk movement may, but does not necessarily have non-anonymous founders and opinion leaders. If they exist, they are rather anonymous and do not have any decisive influence on the consequent direction and spreading of the movement. These movements are not formalised and do not have any

leading subject. Messages of this kind are spread by oral transmission or in copies, therefore, any data which could identify whether they have anything in common with the apparition or have ever been articulated are lacking.

Popular Religiosity as the Background of the Marian Movement

The term 'popular' or 'folk religiosity' is used for a wide spectrum of phenomena (Vrijhof and Waardenburg 1979). For the purpose of this contribution, we shall consider popular religiosity as that segment of religious phenomena and beliefs which is not, in the framework of a certain cultural orbit, directly influenced, demanded and controlled by religious specialists (theologians, clergy).¹³ Popular or folk religiosity is mostly defined as *oppositum* to the church, official, scholars or clerical religiosity.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this definition has its own weak points: the church is composed of believers – God's people – thus, church religiosity is, in a certain sense, popular as well; clerics – the people who create official religiosity have participated (and still participate) in popular religiosity, too.

In addition, the borderline between both areas is flexible and penetrable (Bouritius 1979: 154ff.) This can be said not only about the themes which are used in popular and official religiosity. Certain elements of popular religiosity can become officialised over time, and in contrast, official elements can also be popularised.¹⁵ Religious specialists use popular or folk religiosity elements in order to reach a wider audience. This fact is remarkable in its connec-

13 'Popular religiosity comprises all those attitudes and acts of behaviour that, although not prescribed and controlled by religious institutions, are yet religious in nature' (Roebroeck 1979: 168).

14 *Oppositum official* – 'popular religiosity' is used by Jacques Le Goff (1985) and this division is adopted by his followers (Gurevič 1996; Molitor and Smolinsky 1994: 121–138; Scribner and Johnson 1996: 2–3, etc.)

15 Typical element living its own life in folk piety is the veneration of saints and, especially, of the Virgin Mary.

tion to spirituality, which is related to places or content of Marian apparitions. It can be said that popular or folk religiosity in these cases is no longer a rival to official practice and has become, however, an ally in the effort to deepen pastoral work.

The Characteristics of Popular Movements – Some Examples

For popular religiosity movements, the founder and the propagator are typical. While traditional folk religions can be found mainly in rural areas which are not greatly affected by modernisation, popular religiosity is typically propagated in towns. The reason for this is that the message of the latter movements is often transmitted personally at meetings with the propagator, as well as in groups which are developed and organised more so in cities than in the countryside.¹⁶ We would like to demonstrate typical elements of these movements connected to the reception of Marian apparitions in two examples, focusing on following aspects: (1) the person of the founder, (2) the moment of foundation, (3) the character of the activities (pilgrimages, publication, etc.), (4) the message to the world (to believers and non-believers), (5) the points which can be problematic from the perspective of official religiosity, (6) the picture of the Virgin Mary in the texts of the movement.

Vérité Centre

The Founder

The first example we would like to describe is the 'Vérité' centre, which was established by František Mráček, PhD, who still leads the centre today. Mráček was born in 1934, graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University in Prague,

16 For example, activities of F. Mráček, as well as those of I. A. Benda and his movement *Vesmírní lidé* [Space People]; see its web page http://www.vesmirmi-lide.cz/default_cz.htm (accessed on September 15, 2019) or movements connected with publication activities of Dr. Raymond A. Moody.

with a specialisation in theoretical physics. Later, he finished his studies of precise mechanics and optics at the Czech Technical University in Prague. Upon completion of his studies, he worked as a mechanical engineer. Mráček was successful in experiments describing some aspects of image transformation on the retina. This helped to understand how the image is transformed by the human eye. More than 30 of his discoveries were patented. Mráček constructed new optic elements which improved camera, TV, illumination and laser systems.

Mráček was educated in the Catholic faith, however, in his opinion, he became a committed believer only during adulthood. After a few formative experiences, he became an active Catholic believer involved in dissident dissemination of religious materials in the 1970s and 1980s setting-up and screening of films with religious themes and dissemination of printed materials with religious and scientific aspects.¹⁷ He focused on determinism and the free will of mankind, as well as on the influence of physical action on the psyche. Mráček is interested in parapsychological phenomena as well. His precise and technical education along with his strong religious experience and a deep belief result in his perception of specific treatment of religious facts. They are rationally synthesised rather than analysed. Some examples will be demonstrated later.

Moment of foundation

In 1984, Mráček went to Medjugorje as a doubter, where alleged apparitions had been previously taking place for several years. Mráček's experience with visionaries convinced him so much that he became an enthusiastic propagator of the messages that the Medjugorje visionaries published regularly. At the beginning, Mráček did this work illegally at home, and after the fall of Com-

¹⁷ See <http://verite.cz/index2.php?sekce=produkty&menu=produkty> (accessed on April 15, 2019).

munism, he established the 'Vérité' publishing house, which issues *Medjugorje News* as well as the *Regina* magazine and books about the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, etc. The publishers have become a centre that organises pilgrimages to Medjugorje, gathers and publishes information not only about apparitions, but also about issues such as paranormal phenomena, interpretation of prophecies, etc.

The establishment of the 'Vérité' centre as a base for Mráček's existing promotional activities was therefore a graduating process. Mráček soon recruited a group of co-workers who were involved in the activities of 'Vérité', namely translations, organisation of pilgrimages etc. However, these people were not opinion leaders. The texts and films issued by 'Vérité' (except for the translations) have almost entirely been created by František Mráček. This can be said especially about the interpretation and typology of the apparitions and the unique, authentic apparitions' methodology.

Character of Activities

The current activities of 'Vérité' concentrate on the dissemination of information regarding the Medjugorje apparition, as well as on organising pilgrimages to Medjugorje. 'Vérité' also established a branch running all year long for that purpose directly on its premises. The branch offers accommodation, guides and translation services. 7-9-day long pilgrimages are organised once or twice per month. 'Vérité' can also arrange a stay in the Cenacolo detoxification community.¹⁸ This community works in several places around Europe, but its spirituality is bound to Medjugorje.

'Vérité' issues the *Medjugorje News* monthly, as well as the rather broader-oriented *Regina* magazine, which is issued ten times per year. Furthermore, 'Vérité' has issued several books mainly on the apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Other books attempt to confirm

¹⁸ See the web site <http://www.komunita-cenacolo.cz/> (accessed on September 15, 2019).

the existence of the purgatory with the help of various visionaries and communicators with the souls of the departed, and portray the life of Jesus as it was described in the visions of Catherine Emmerich.

‘Vérité’ organises conferences on devotion to the Virgin Mary, which are attended by respected theologians such as René Laurentin.

Message of ‘Vérité’

An enhancing feature of the Virgin Mary, as it is noted in the documents published by ‘Vérité’ is peacekeeping and turning to God. Our Lady is introduced as a loving Mother or Queen of Peace. However, a shadow of threat can appear on her gracious face as well: ‘No one else but her can better and effectively convince the contemporary world, permanently endangered by destruction, that peace is the greatest and most necessary good for it.’¹⁹

The Virgin Mary suggests or asks for simple acts of belief in her messages and appeals – for prayer, fasting, reconciliation. These appeals are sometimes accompanied by indicating the urgency of the situation in the world: ‘Understand that now you can do much in a way that you will do few things, but every day. Now is the time of grace, as Our Lady in Medjugorje says constantly. Thanks to daily minuteness you will save a lot for yourselves and for your beloved, children and grandchildren. Don't wait for future disasters!’²⁰ The messages of Medjugorje apparition are set in the context developed by the spiritual leader of the ‘Vérité’ centre, F. Mráček. According to him, we are living in times when Satan's activities have reached their peak.²¹ The mission of the believers

19 See http://verite.cz/index2.php?sekce=obsah_poselstvi&menu=poselstvi (accessed on June 6, 2008).

20 Mráček F., Zápavy a duchovní stav světa [Floods and the Spiritual State of the World]. In: *Regina* 2002(10): 17.

21 Mráček, F., Některé aspekty nepravých zjevení [Some Aspects of False Revelations]. In: *Regina* 1998(3): 8.

is therefore to assist the forces of Good in their fight against Evil on Earth. A great purification of the world is inevitable regarding the spiritual state of the present mankind. Nevertheless, we can greatly influence how the course of the purification will be: ‘According to Our Lady of Fatima, if we had prayed and fasted, World War II would never have happened. We didn't listen to the Holy Mary and that is why the war came.’²²

At the web page of ‘Vérité’ the Virgin Mary is often pictured as a loving mother who cares about her children. In one of the first messages of the Medjugorje apparition, one can read: ‘Dear children! Be compassionate with me. Pray, pray, pray!!!’²³ The messages continue in this style even today, e.g.: ‘Dear children! I encourage you in this graceful time of the holy feast to open your hearts for the gifts which God wants to give you. Don't be closed, but say YES to God through prayers and renunciation, and he will give you in abundance. As the land opens itself for the seed in spring and produces hundred times more, so does your Heavenly Father who gives you plenitude. I am with you and I love you tenderly, my children. Thank you that you have accepted my appeal.’²⁴ The contemporary world is, however, characteristic by moral decadence of mankind, according to Mráček: ‘...if the demoralisation of humanity doesn't stop...’, ‘...if society morally decays...’²⁵ ‘These natural disasters, rise of new diseases, narcotism, criminality, starvation, wars – everything is related to the moral decay of the world.’²⁶

Classical church piety and sacraments are sufficient, he says, for the salvation of a person. However, in view of the serious

22 Rozhovor s P. Amorthem o působení zlého ducha [Interview with P. Amorth about the Evil Spirit]. In: *Regina* 2003(1): 16.

23 Message from April 19, 1984 (<http://verite.cz/index2.php?sekce=poselstvi-1984&menu=poselstvi>, accessed on June 20, 2008).

24 Message from February 25, 2006, *ibid.*

25 Mráček, F., Nastane mír ve světě? [Will there be Peace in the World?]. In: *Regina* 2002(10): 16.

26 Mráček, F., Zápavy a duchovní stav světa [Floods and the Spiritual State of the World]. In: *Regina* 2002(10): 17.

situation, it is necessary to make use of every opportunity which can improve the position of mankind in the world. And this is exactly what the Marian apparitions offer.²⁷

Mráček sometimes complains, that visionaries, just like the apostles, often do not find sympathy for their messages: '...I believe (...) that people who would like to spread Medjugorje messages find a lack of understanding and enthusiasm in their dioceses. This was the same in Jesus' and apostolic times.'²⁸ Such expressions compare the situation of visionaries and messengers of the apparitions to the situation of the Early Church. According to Mráček, it is necessary to be *especially chosen* to receive Him: 'Only those who the Risen Christ wants to show himself to can perceive him by their senses. Others can never achieve it. (...) The same situation is in the case of the authentic apparitions of Our Lady, for example, in Lourdes (1858), Fatima (1917) or at present in Medjugorje, Herzegovina (since June 24, 1987 till today)'.²⁹

Relationship to the Church and its Doctrine

F. Mráček is anxious to be in line with the Church's teaching and emphasises his loyalty to its hierarchy. One of the basic conditions of any apparition's authenticity, he says, is to be in conformity with the Church's tradition.³⁰

Mráček uses unofficial opinions of some Church representatives, such as the well-known favourer of Marian apparitions, the theologian René Laurentin, as well as pope John Paul II, in controversy with the opponents of the apparitions.³¹

- 27 'A vigorous impulse, in other words, an extraordinary grace of God, is needed for change to come. And Marian apparitions are the largest source of extraordinary graces of God today', Mráček, F., *Některé aspekty nepravých zjevení* [Some Aspects of False Revelations] and '...Marian apparitions are irreplaceable'. In: *Regina* 1998(3): 8.
- 28 *Zajímavosti a diskuze* [Interesting Facts and Discussion]. In: *Regina* 2001(6): 7.
- 29 Vik, L., *Naše víra* [Our Faith]. In: *Regina* 2007(6): 12.
- 30 'One of the criteria is a contradiction with the Church doctrine or the Bible. Once I find it, the apparition is clearly unauthentic' (Kořínek, Mráček and Tutr 2006: 135), see also extensive section on apparitions on www.verite.cz (accessed on April 15, 2019).

In this context, Mráček's interpretations of various apparition statements about the last days of the world can be seen as problematic.³²

Mráček begins with a methodological remark on understanding the information related to the future development of the world. Exactly how the future will be may be judged by taking into account different pieces of information – the progress of science and technology, developments in the fields of ecology, political and social developments. He uses the Prophecy of the Popes,³³ the visions of Catharina Emmerich, the Fatima message, the messages from Don Gobbi, the apparition to St Hildegard, the apparition to Holzhauser,³⁴ to St Francis, the prophetic dream of St Don Bosco, or the apparitions in Garabandal and Medjugorje. Mráček interprets also the book of Revelation of the Biblical prophets Isaiah and Daniel. He says it is also important to observe how the world develops and which prophecies are fulfilled.

A summary of his opinions can be read in the articles 'With the Virgin Mary to the Year of Jubilee' and 'Prophecies on Present Times and their Explanation'.³⁵ These articles were written at the

- 31 For example, Mráček, F., *Nový přístup k hodnocení zjevení* [New Approach to evaluation of revelation], at http://verite.cz/index2.php?sekce=NOVY_PRISTUP&menu=zjeveni_nabozenske (accessed on June 24, 2008), or Mráček, F., *Stručný souhrn poznatků a rad z minulých století ohledně zjevení* [A Brief Summary of Past Century Knowledge and Advice on Revelation], at http://verite.cz/index2.php?sekce=Strucny_souhrn&menu=zjeveni_nabozenske (accessed on June 24, 2008), Mráček, F., *Jaké je stanovisko církevních osobností k medjugorským zjevením?* [What is the Position of the Church Personalities on the Apparitions of Medjugorje?] <http://verite.cz/index2.php?menu=dotazy&sekce=zobrazit&soubor=obsah/dotazy/cirkev.php> (accessed on June 24, 2008).
- 32 The whole complex of Mráček's ideas, related to the eschatological expectation and its development is outlined on Věrité's website www.verite.cz. Further articles with this subject are published in: *Medjugorje News* 1999, 12(3) and 2000(7), further in: *Regina* 1999(6; 7; 8); 2000(1; 4; 7; 8) and 2001(1).
- 33 Prophecy of St Malachy, bishop of Ireland. He briefly characterised all the popes from Celestin II (1143) until the end of the world in the time of Peter II – 112 popes altogether. Some scholars deny the prophecy as a forgery from the 16th century.
- 34 Venerable Bartholomew Holzhauser, German priest living in the 17th century.
- 35 First published in: *Regina* 2000(1), second in: 2001(1).

turn of the millennium, when there were some revival of prophecies regarding the final days of the world and eschatological expectations were aroused, as is obviously apparent in the articles.

Mráček says that in the 'Year of Jubilee' (December 25, 1999 – January 1, 2001), a new spiritual revival in the Church was expected. In this time, good people were to be encouraged and strengthened to live in the final epoch of mankind. Mráček expresses his expectations in the articles that there will be changes encouraging mankind to have better contact with God, the contact which was lost thanks to the spreading of negative phenomena. This was mainly because of the 'throw-away lifestyle' supported by increasing globalisation. The decline of spiritual life prepares the situation for the Antichrist to come. This development cannot be changed as it is a part of God's plan. It can only be reduced by God's intervention.³⁶

In the article 'Prophecy on present time and their explanation', taken from the cycle of Ancient prophecy, one can read that the apocalypse is coming. This is happening because 'people possess weapons of mass destruction, and so one person can destroy the entire world...'.³⁷ Based on the prophecy about Women's triumph over the Antichrist and Don Gobbi's prophecy,³⁸ it was assumed that 'new historical events' are near. They were expected at the end of 1990s, approximately in 1998. Mráček conveyed this opinion in public lectures. This development, according to his statement, may now take longer, even decades. For example, the political changes in the Eastern Europe began in 1989, however, the fall of Communism was completed only after the Soviet Union disin-

36 Mráček, F., Dávná proroctví [Ancient Prophecies]. In: *Regina* 2000(8): 16.

37 *Regina* 2001(1).

38 Mráček says that misunderstanding of Don Gobbi's prophecy arose from a mistake in translation when the statement 'because of the Great Jubilee of 2000 my Immaculate Heart wins' was translated as 'by the Great Jubilee of 2000 my Immaculate Heart wins'. Therefore, the victory will happen after 2000 and not necessarily in this particular year, according to Mráček.

tegrated in 1991. Similarly, the breakthrough to better times has already begun. Nevertheless, the Victory of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary* has not yet fully arrived. We can grasp this fact completely only by the coming of the new pope.³⁹ When the changes did not come by the end of 1999, the expectations were shifted to 2000. But the Antichrist is supposed to be active for three and a half years, as was predicted in the Old Testament and confirmed by the apparition to Don Gobbi on December 31st, 1992, and no such person appeared either in 1994 (if the Victory was to come in 1998) nor in 1996 (Victory in 2000).⁴⁰

'Further information from forgotten prophecies'⁴¹ thus led Mráček to different interpretations. The messages of Don Gobbi from the end of 1980s speak about the fall of Communism and the importance of the forthcoming epoch. However, evil continued to fight for human hearts in a changed shape, which was mainly regarded as globalisation. The powers of Good have so far been successful because the message of *Our Lady in Medjugorje* from August 25, 2000, says, that '...there are plenty of those who are close to her and carry in an extraordinary way the Victory of Her Immaculate Heart in their souls. And further on 25/10/2000, she speaks about the coming revival.'⁴² And Mráček implies that: 'With the approaching end of the year 2000, it is obvious, that Victory of the Immaculate Heart of Mary means consolidation of peoples' pure faith in their hearts and in the Church's structure...'⁴³ Mráček expresses his hope that despite the activities of liberal theologians and dignitaries the next pope (at that time

39 Mráček, F., Zvítězilo Neposkvrněné Srdce Panny Marie? [Did the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady Won?] In: *Regina* 2001(2): 18.

40 The Antichrist would appear somewhere in the Middle East and perhaps bring about an end to the permanent conflict in Palestine: 'It is probable that the most dramatic events will happen in Israel which, according to prophecies, should be the centre of the Antichrist power', In: *Regina* 1999(8): 18.

41 Mráček F., *Regina* 2001(1).

42 Mráček, F., Dávná proroctví [Ancient Prophecies]. In: *Regina* 2001(1): 16.

43 Ibid.

Benedict XVI) will continue the work of John Paul II. The Church will come through this fight internally refreshed till the time of the last pope who is believed to be Peter II. The picture of the third angel in the book of Revelation, which warns against Beast adoration, refers to him. In his times, the Antichrist will come and attack the Church for three and a half years. Only then will a new era of God's peace arise.

A spiritual renewal is thus, according to this interpretation, coming to the Church and not to the world. This means that 'more and more people will change their minds, authentic theology will be preached in the Church, and the pope shall have the power in his own hands.' On the other hand, 'one can see the activity of Evil outside the Church, in the world, through the decrease of the Church members. This situation will last for some time and will intensify for around 20–30 years. At the end of this time, the Antichrist will come and perhaps new persecution of the Church will arise. However, the Immaculate Heart of Mary shall inevitably win and will bring a new epoch, the age of the Holy Spirit (similar to the age of The Father – The times of the Old Testament, the age of The Son – The times of the New Testament), when the Holy Spirit will operate in the world directly as it was during Pentecost.'⁴⁴

It must be said that Mráček attempts to be critical about the various predictions of eschatological events. He tries to distinguish between the prophecies which are plausible and those which are not. He is aware that authentic information of these kinds of events are mostly said vaguely and do not contain precise figures.⁴⁵ It is up to the interpreters on how they use this information. In the article 'How the predictions are being fulfilled in the present years', Mráček says that only around 1% of the predictions have been fulfilled. Despite this we should seek for a trustful prognosis and use it for the renewal of our spiritual life.

⁴⁴ The information is drawn from a personal discussion with F. Mráček in autumn 2005.

⁴⁵ Mráček, F., *Regina* 1999(3).

As an answer to the disturbing news, Mráček suggests making a pledge to do minute acts of prayer or good will, or alternatively to read or view some information about Medjugorje: '(...) Thanks to daily minutes, you are going to save a lot for yourselves, your beloved ones, your children and grandchildren. Don't wait for other catastrophes!'⁴⁶ Prayers, fasting and turning to God can reduce disasters contained in the 7th–10th Medjugorje mysteries, entrusted to the visionaries by Our Lady. These mysteries are to be publicised by Petar Ljubičić, former priest of Medjugorje, three days before the events come. 'However, Our Lady said that these events need not have come; only the world had to change its mind. When she *provokes* enough people to do it, disasters can be changed or called off. That is what Our Lady wishes. If mankind doesn't change, these catastrophes will be caused by themselves' (Kořínek et al. 2006).

The most realistic prophecy interpreted by Mráček, who is convinced about its authenticity, is the prophecy of the Victory of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. As mentioned above, it was predicted by Don Gobbi for the year 2000. Mráček admits that he had expected a visible victory by that year. The hope that we would stand before this event is apparent in the article 'The last time' of the cycle of Ancient prophecy, published in *Regina* magazine in January 2000. Nevertheless, at the end of 2000, when apparently no changes happened, Mráček was pressured to reassess his position. In his latest interpretations, Mráček says that these can happen within 25–30 years.

It can be said that the eschatological thinking and explications of Mráček are moderate compared to other groups; he is critical about his sources, trying to use rational arguments and avoids extremes. He takes for granted the teaching of the Church under the leadership of the present pope, believe it will always be orthodox.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Mráček, F., *Regina* 2002(10): 17.

The content of *Regina* magazine, which is quite chiliastic, urgent and prophetic, was changed to rather moderate and mainstream after reassessment of the predictions on the last years before the 'new era of humanity.

'Marian Publishers'

The Founder

The second case study as an example of popular religiosity will be the publishing house 'Marian Publishers' founded by František Press. He was originally an architect by profession and was born in 1932. He was brought up in a Catholic family, however, according to his autobiography, he fell away from his faith. He began returning to it only in 1968, when he, just like many others, was shaken by the rising national submission. He gradually began devoting himself to the Virgin Mary. He was influenced by a book by Louis Grignion de Montfort 'On True Devotion to Our Lady'. The statement: 'If the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, as it is certain, is to come to the world, it will be only an inevitable effect of our knowing and reign of Our Most Blessed Lady, who delivered him to the world for the first time and will cause that he, full of glory, will come again'. This stirred up chaos and new searching in him. After reading other books on Marian apparitions, he was able to read Guy le Rumeur's *Marian Apocalypse* in 1977. This book evokes in him the conviction that we are living in the final times, and that Marian apparitions represent proof of it and they are a call to repent. The messages from a set of modern apparitions beginning in Paris in 1830 are interpreted by him as an apocalyptic call, as a last warning before the end of the world (Pressová and Chlupová 2006).

In 1983, while reading the message from the apparition in Escorial, he was touched by the sentence: 'Tell this to all my people', and he became a propagator of the Marian apparition messages, especially those which speak about the end of history. His first published book, still secretly in the times of religious oppression, was a selection of Marian messages. He gradually lengthened the

book and published another one. He often visited the Slovak places of apparitions in Turzovka and Litmanová.

Founding Moment

In 1990, he founded 'Marian Publishers' in Brno (Moravia) and since then has dedicated himself to independent publisher activities. These are oriented primarily on spreading the messages of the Virgin Mary, which as the *Mediatrix* of all graces, advises mankind that the only way to a peaceful resolution of all the world's problems is a general turning back to God, conversion, prayer and repentance. In the messages, there is a strong emphasis on the closeness of the second coming of her Son Jesus Christ, which each one of us needs to prepare for. From 1995–2004, he also published two periodicals *Na konci časů* (NKC), [At the End of Times] and *Nové srdce* [New Heart]. The last issue of the former was published in June 2004, when he was bedridden with illness.⁴⁸

Character of its Activities

'Marian Publishers', unlike 'Vérité', has never offered any other activities. Its only aim was to spread the Marian apparition messages and to issue publications which are to spread a critical attitude towards evolution and promote creationism. His founder, F. Press has published fifteen original books and various translations since the founding of 'Marian Publishers'.

As a highlight of his works, F. Press considers the publication *Zvony nad Evropou* [Bells over Europe] a discourse on the meaning of history, which he wrote and published when he was seriously ill. The book attempts to present, in a complex synthesis, scientific evidence about the indefensibility of evolutionism and legitimacy

47 This is not accepted by some conservative circles which use supposed mystery of the Fatima apparition. It can be seen, for example, on the website www.fatima.org (accessed on September 15, 2019).

48 See 'Zakladatel, A je tu mana!', at <http://www.marianskenakladatelstvi.estranky.cz/stranka/press> (accessed on June 16, 2008).

of creationism and to point out the reality of the eschatological consummation of history.

As written in the necrology on the web pages of the publishers, 'he had been struggling with the malign illness for five years, while at the same time dedicating all his suffering to Our Lady'.⁴⁹ He died on August 6, 2004, which led to a temporary crisis in publishing activities. After some time, the issuing of the main bulletin and 'mouthpiece' of the Press' ideas *NKC* ceased. With his death, however, 'Marian Publishers' did not cease to exist. Its operation was taken over by Press' daughters, even though they could hardly substitute their opinionated leader, and the titles published since his death have been mainly the books intended for publishing by F. Press.

Message to the World

The Virgin Mary, in Press' view, acts purely as an apocalyptic prophetess. Press interprets all the apparitions in this manner and is interested only in this aspect.

Even though we can consider F. Press a sincerely devoted Catholic, a man of high intellect and cultural scope, the messages interpreted by him evoke a rather depressive image of the world, which is entirely demoralised and corrupted. And so, the approaching catastrophes are an inevitable and logical consequence of God's justice. The prophetess of these horrors is 'the kind mother' Mary, who says on the cover of one of the issues of the magazine *NK*: 'If my people are not willing to submit, I will be forced to give a free hand to my Son. His arm is too heavy for me to hold it anymore.'⁵⁰ As the bulletin *NKC* was meant as a messenger of the upcoming arrival, which was expected by the editor by the year 2000, the urgency of these articles intensified as this year was approaching. For instance, in one of the 1996 issues, we can

49 Ibid.

50 *NKC* 2004 (36): 1, it is a quotation of La Sallete apparition message.

read: 'Our Lady has reminded us a couple of times that by the Year of Jubilee 2000, all the purifying changes in our country would be accomplished. Jesus, in his second glorious coming, will come back to mankind, who will have already been spiritually purified and completely freed from all followers of Evil. (...) Accordingly, there will be some very dramatic years ahead of us.'⁵¹ In the issue no. 10 of 1997, we can read: 'If we converted, the scourge will not fall. Eventual punishment is consequently ready, indeed, but it depends on us. (...) However, the situation is serious: We have not converted yet, we don't venerate Our Lady adequately, we don't devote ourselves to Her. How many churches is the first Marian Saturday observed in?'⁵²

It is interesting that in the same way as F. Mráček, the floods striking the Czech Republic in 1997 represented a reminder of the catastrophes, which are a preparation for the purifying punishments of the entire world: 'God is helping also our nation in this way: recent floods are his great warning and a huge act of his Mercy, so that he doesn't need to let his Justice strike, which would be unbearable for many of us.'⁵³

What is the cause of such a state, according to Press? It is that we live in the (20th) century, which is the century of Satan. What happens and culminates, according to the Fatima apparition, is 'a pertinacious battle between the forces of Good led by the Woman clothed with the Sun and the forces of Evil, represented by the red Dragon, symbolic representative of Satan himself'.⁵⁴ In the same issue, a list of events of the previous 150 years, which had led to the spiritual destruction of Europe and of the Western civilisation, is published. The article concludes with the statement: 'Even from this brief enumeration of warning facts, we clearly sense

51 Press, F., Velká očista [A Great Purgatory]. In: *NKC* 1996(5): 2.

52 Press, F., Ruská otázka [The Russian Question]. In: *NKC* 1997(10): 1.

53 Press, F., Milosrdenství a spravedlnost [Mercy and Justice]. In: *NKC* 1997(15): 1.

54 Ibid.

the intellectual intentions inspired by the infernal forces in order to gradually liquidate the spiritual and cultural background of Christian Europe, whether this pressure is made by American elite groups or by the supporters of socialism, communism, anarchism, promoters of pornography, drugs, rock, homosexuality, or by the New Age and theosophical societal ideologists. All these trends, no matter how diverse they are, are led by a unified effort to unsettle the ancient Christian social order and to establish an anti-culture and anti-civilisation, a sort of sinister civilisation of death, as this greatest of Satan's work was in his times concisely defined by John Paul II. To this very aim, all the forces are mobilised, which is primarily achieved by means of mass media and computer technology'.⁵⁵

And further on: 'Satan's term, limited by the end of the millennium, is becoming shorter each month, week and day. Globalists must therefore act promptly'.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, after 2000, he switched to themes linked to conservative ideas, national sentiment and Marian lyrical poetry. References to eschatology were more general and essentially corresponded to the teaching of the Church, without running to extremes by stating exact dates of the end of the world or by exalted apocalyptic calls.

As an example of the change of style and theme after 2000, we can mention the book *Po Mariině chodníčku* [On the path of Mary] which was published by the founder's daughter Lucie. The book contains meditations over different aspects of devotion to Mary. As an initial image various field flowers are used. For instance, 'Daisy on the path of Mary resembles the Holy Virgin with her seven beauties'.⁵⁷ These seven beauties, which the Virgin Mary capti-

55 Press, F., Duchovní destrukce Evropy [Spiritual destruction of Europe]. In: *NKC* 1998(16): 2–3.

56 Press, F., Babylon a nový Jeruzalém [Babylon and new Jerusalem]. In: *NKC* 1999(25): 3.

57 'Daisy' in Czech means 'a flower of seven beauties'.

vates with the Holy Trinity, the whole Heavens, are her faith, hope, love, wisdom, braveness, humility and purity...' (Pressová 2007: 15). Or an extract from the article on national sovereignty published in the magazine *Nové srdce* [New Heart]: 'With Havel's⁵⁸ words is this vision contra-posted to figures of renegades diligently exposing for foreign bread, the ones, who have always apologised to the Germans for the fact that there is a nation like Czechia in the world. What Neruda sacrificed by his daily work, success and career is buried by Havel with a firm face. And the situation plays up to him; 'after all, through the efforts of many current renegades, we are finding ourselves in the situation, which we could call the second national revival, where the allurements of foreign globalists, earnest for world ruling, are much more cunning this time'.⁵⁹

Relationship to the Church

Press' relationship to the Church is much more critical than Mráček's. It begins with noteless remarks about scepticism towards apparitions and ends up with accusations of collaborating with Satan.

There are allusions in his texts about the hierarchy not wanting to recognise all the apparitions, while lay people, perceiving by heart, bear these messages further on. For instance, he admits that he became fond of the place of apparitions in Turzovka, even though 'the Church hierarchy refuses any allusion to the apparitions of Our Lady' (Pressová and Chlupová 2006: 21).

The Church is struck even on its highest posts: "And finally, there is the third beast with two horns, resembling the horns of the lamb; it represents the freemasonry infiltrated into the Church, which means priestly freemasonry spread among the

58 Václav Havel (1936–2011), was a Czech playwright, essayist, dissident and politician. He was the tenth and last President of Czechoslovakia (1989–92). He then became the first President of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

59 Press, F., O národní suverenitě [On National Sovereignty]. In: *Nové srdce* 2001(4).

members of hierarchy (of course, including the Czech one). And Our Lady points out: 'This infiltration of freemasons into the heart of the Church was foretold to you by me already in Fatima, where I announced to you that even Satan would get to the top of the Church'".⁶⁰

John Paul II is excluded from these reproaches by Press against the hierarchy, as he would be abandoned by priests and bishops. 'Disobedience of the Pope, leading to division within the Church, is an evidential sign that the last times of the painful purification of mankind have arrived. Every time more bishops, usually along with their sheep, stand against the Pope and his authority of the Vicar of Christ'.⁶¹ He who belongs to the traitors, who on the outside agrees with the Pope, yet does practically the opposite of what the Pope commands is, according to Press, the Czech Church hierarchy as well.

Comparison of Both Groups

Although both leaders of these groups are typologically very similar, there are significant differences. The first one, F. Mráček, does not hesitate to launch his own research on spiritual phenomena, take his own stand, develop his own typology of the apparitions and actively cooperate on developing the message which runs from visionaries to listeners. F. Press is a rather classical interpreter of the apparition. His active role depends on choosing the reference framework for the messages of the apparitions and therefore determines the perspective which the apparition is seen through and the meaning of the apparition. Mráček is ready to speculate, compare different apparitions and, in particular, investigate their authenticity. His attitude to particular apparitions is relatively critical; however, we can have reservations about the criteria he uses.

60 Press, F., *Doba vrcholí* [The Time Culminates]. In: *NKC* 1998(16): 1.

61 Press, F., *Spolu s papežem* [Together with the Pope]. In: *NKC* 1999(24): 1.

For Press, there is only one purpose of modern Marian apparitions: preparation for the Apocalypse. As his daughter says: '(...) his only wish and meaning of his life was his desire for consummation of history' (Ibid.: 55). This is a dominating element of all his thoughts. He sacrifices any criticism of the apparitions. His ideal is an attitude without prejudices, without intellectual distance and criticism, an attitude which he admires, as his diary witnesses, a countryman from Kysuce, where he often visited the place of apparition in Turzovka.

Remarkable differences can be found in the apparitions they are dealing with. The focus of Mráček's attention is Medjugorje; all other apparitions are accepted cautiously and only additionally. Press pays little attention to Medjugorje and his sources are primarily the messages of Fatima, La Sallete, Garabandal and Amsterdam. These are the ones which Mráček quotes with some standoffishness.

A further distinction is in how they depict the Virgin Mary. For Mráček, she is the Queen of Peace, who nevertheless does not lack any hardness or tragic features, as was pointed out in the chapter about the 'Vérité' centre. For Press, the Virgin Mary is a prophetess of the future regeneration of the world. This event will be very painful for most of the world because certain disasters will play their role. For Press, it is not a reason to be sad. On the contrary, Press bids farewell to the old bad world with a smile. 'So, we are saying goodbye to you, Old World, and there is no reason for tears indeed, although many of us are left in it for possibly almost all their lives'.⁶²

Other ideas are different as well, which are associated with the theme of Marian apparitions. While we can say that Mráček is a part of the Catholic mainstream, since he does not sympathise with extreme or conservative opinions, Press considers himself a

62 Press, F., *Sbohem starý světe* [Goodbye, Old World]. In: *NKC* 2000(33): 1.

non-conformist. He is an opponent of globalisation, a nationalist and creationist. He establishes contacts with the American creationist centre CESHE – CRS and promotes the ideas that come out of this institution (Ibid.: 38).

Press does not trust mainstream piety where Mráček can be placed. Although Press does not strictly stand against the majority of believers and the clergy, we can sometimes read remarks on the few faithful who are devoted to the Virgin Mary and preach the close coming end of the present world, or about the unsatisfactory state of the contemporary Christian book offer. He writes, for example, about the literature on graced souls: 'I believed that other publishers would take this task. They didn't, therefore, these titles can't be found on the book market, bookstores are overwhelmed by religious, often heretic trash' (Ibid.: 44). Press believes that the Catholic Church is infiltrated by God's enemies. While Mráček says with satisfaction that the present and previous popes are successful in their clashes with radical reformists and conservative traditionalists, Press feels the need for purification of the Catholic doctrine: 'First of all, it is necessary to rehabilitate, or to reconstruct if you like, the true Catholic faith, to clear it from all the heresy and deviation and build it on a solid eschatological base' (Ibid.: 66).

We can hear a nationalistic tone in Press' statements against globalism: 'So the nations will be the foundation stones of the civilisation of love. They will neither disappear nor melt in a kind of meta-society of the worldwide political rule or domination, because they are called by God to contribute to the diversity in unity. What would we be without national culture? And what would Europe be without national cultures?' (Ibid.: 51). And further: 'It was necessary to point out that globalist efforts are relentlessly advancing and suppressing the free world more and more. Globalist efforts: they are precisely the most important evidence about progress to totalitarian world's rule culminating with the rule of the Antichrist' (Ibid.: 65).

There is an interesting difference in how both apparition propagators dealt with the fact that, until today, the world's purification, which was expected by both of them around the year 2000, did not occur. Mráček corrected and reinterpreted his predictions and shifted them 25 years further. Nevertheless, he insists on the reliability of his sources. On the contrary, Press resigned himself to further predictions and leaves his missionary activities disappointed and terminally ill. A record from his diary in 2002 appears rather sorrowful and sentimental: 'During those twelve years, our generation got old, propagators fell away one by one, those oldest died and nobody replaced them. While the situation inevitably moves towards its ends, there is almost no living soul which would be able to overtake this propagator's task and become at least a small apostle of Mary' (Ibid.: 66). And further: 'The year 2000 became the year of the decisive turning point: the promises of Don Gobbi failed: Jesus Christ didn't come; the Heart of the Blessed Mary didn't win. The last devotees fell away.' He indirectly admits that his approach was wrong: 'It is necessary to reassess everything, remove all the naiveties which we Marian devotees often gave space to from the eschatological concept, and base it on an intellectual analysis of the situation' (Ibid.: 67).

This turn is apparent in the bulletin *NKC*. After 2000, the dramatic tone of the articles changes and the content of the bulletin becomes wider. Although the end of the world is still a central topic, the authors avoid any specific predictions and the intensity of eschatological themes presented is comparable to the classical teaching of the Church.

What is common for both of these leaders is the apocalyptic sense of the Marian apparitions, the close coming of the end of the world, which will be accompanied by catastrophes of some kind and suffering of the people. However, these events launch a purgative process after which mankind will live in accordance with God. A further common point of the leaders is the possibility to reduce these events by piety, that is, turning to God and prayer.

Conclusions

These elements are common to movements coming out of modern Marian apparitions. What is the reason for interpreting modern Marian apparitions as apocalyptic? Is it rather because the apparitions attract a type of personality longing for a 'sensation' who is willing to choose and emphasise exactly those parts referring to the end of times? Are the modern Marian apparitions apocalyptic indeed? Was the expectation of enormous changes present in society more dramatic before 2000 and the interpreters of the apparitions merely satisfied with the general expectations and with those of their own? As we could see, in both cases, the apocalyptic vision did not come true. No matter what the reasons for such a failure are, it seems that the predictions of a close end of the world represent elements of popular religiosity in the framework of western culture. Marian apparitions provide a convenient background with their urgency for spreading these moods, as well as for apocalyptic interpretations of their messages.

Another nodal point is the reference to globalisation as an instrument of Satan's rule over the unified world. However, in the case of Mráček, we can find these allusions just marginally and directed to the future; therefore, in current times, this reign has not yet come into being. Mráček even expresses a balanced opinion about the Czech Republic entering the EU.⁶³ In the case of Press, by the end of the 20th century, global rule is almost a reality: 'Now we are coming to the most essential issue: the destruction of an existing, yet still Christian society and the establishment of non-limited global world ruling'. Further on: 'The big obstacle to the unification are above all the nations, they are the ones which the globalists want to decompose and substitute through the administration of many local regions, directly linked to the central government in Brussels'.⁶⁴

63 Mráček, F., Víra a vstup do EU [Faith and Entry into EU]. In: *Zprávy z Medžugorje* 2003(5): 3.

64 Press, F., Doba už nemá přirozené řešení [Our Time has not Natural Solution Anymore]. In: *NKC* 1998(18): 2.

We have attempted to show through two specific cases the forms that popular religiosity can acquire based on the reception of Marian apparitions. We have described the themes they have in common as well as to those where they differ. The main issue in both cases is the expectation of the end of the current world order. This element was certainly activated by the approaching end of the millennium. Even though this stimulation of thoughts on the end of the world is now out of play, we can expect that its role will be taken over by some global threat in the future, as it has happened a few times in the latter half of the 20th century. The role of God's scourge has been gradually taken over by WWII, a nuclear catastrophe, ecological catastrophe, world globalisation and the fear of total control by means of information technologies. The last element is in the thoughts of the opinionated leaders of folk and popular religiosity, which are still active, and with the growing development of this field, will probably have a role in the future as well.

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01 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

Traces of the Mary in Post-Communist Europe

The Virgin Mary as such cannot be examined scientifically. We can, however, examine her 'apparitions' in the world, as well as the innumerable variants of Marian devotion and cult. This volume focuses on her manifestations in the post-Communist region with some geographical spillovers. It is either because post-Communist transformation concerned not only the former socialist countries, but also had an impact on the entire European region and was part of the overall post-modern and post-Communist reconfiguration of the European area. Another factor is that Marian worship is not controlled by political borders of present-day nation states. It has a wider transnational potential and impact. Nevertheless, we focused our viewfinder primarily on the post-Communist region, as we believe that thanks to its geographical and symbolic location and economic position in Europe, as well as its historical roots and traditions and common Communist history and heritage, it not only shows different traits of modernity compared to 'Western Europe', but we also face specific features and forms of worshipping of the Virgin Mary. We therefore decided to present in this volume the traces of the Virgin Mary by means of more in-depth analyses from selected countries of the post-socialist region.

By means of this publication, we can observe how the Virgin Mary is manifested in the faces of seers and pilgrims and how audio-visual means are becoming a direct part of Marian apparitions in Germany in the modern era (H. Knoblauch and S. Petschke); how she speaks through the mouth of a blind Roma woman and pacifies the ethnic and religious tensions between various groups in Romania (L. Peti); how she attributes meaning to meaningless places on the map by reallocating her presence through the geographical and time distribution of Marian dedications in Slovakia (J. Majo); how, after the fall of Communism, she revitalises the old places of her cult with new power, bringing together traditional

and non-traditional forms of worship in the secular Czech Lands (M. Holubová); how her messages are spread on the websites of new non-traditional Marian movements and how their apocalyptic warnings are being updated and localised into the specific national environment in Czechia (V. Tutr); how she addresses the readers of Marian literature differently on the shelves of bookstores in Slovakia and Austria (R. Kečka); but also how the Virgin Mary absorbs ultra-modern millennial and spiritualistic concepts of Mother Earth and Mother of the Universe, becoming the speaker of the great unified Hungarian nation (J. Kis-Halas); how she is becoming the re-discovered herald of Serbian national identity (A. Pavičević); how she absorbs the local forms of faith and folk Christianity in modern era and is thus the manifestation of grass-root Christianity and local religious culture in Bulgaria (V. Baeva and A. Georgieva); and how the path from a private to an officially recognised apparition depends not only on the Virgin Mary and the seer, but also on the overall constellation of the audience and the ability to offer a *religious ready-made event* (T. Zachar Podolinská and L. Peti).

This publication observes the current diversity of the forms of Marian devotion in post-Communist countries through different national and geographically defined contours and, in particular, the ability of the Virgin Mary to satisfy the hunger for modern spirituality and authentic religiousness, give voice to unofficial and popular religions, revitalise and redefine old places of cult and add new ones, appease war conflicts, speak out on behalf of nations and marginalised ethnic groups, and guard national and conservative values. The post-modern and post-Communist Mary thus restores ruptured traditions with love, and enchants the violently atheised European region with new miracles and apparitions, regardless of whether top Church and state representatives like it or not.

02 KIS-HALAS, Judit

Sacred Sites Reinterpreted: New Age Phenomena at a Hungarian Marian Shrine

Marian shrines were always the sites of miraculous healings and spectacular apparitions. Nowadays, they have also become the crystallisation points of the New Age phenomena. Several studies have already pointed out this trend with regard to popular pilgrimage destinations. As far as the Hungarian Marian shrines are concerned, none of them have been systematically examined from this perspective. This chapter aims to provide a deeper insight of how a Marian shrine is being re-orchestrated as a specific 'power place' in the context of alternative spiritualities, such as New Age religiosity or ethno-paganism at one Marian shrine at Máriagyűd.

From the wide-ranging New Age phenomena and religious practices that the author observed during the past decades at Máriagyűd, she chose the prominent example of an esoteric group called *Magyar MAGok* [Hungarian Seeds], which deals with diverse religious and healing activities. Their programmes include shamanic drumming sessions, tours to 'sacred sites' in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin (mostly Romania), weekend meditations, esoteric workshops, readings on the history and culture of the ancient Hungarians, such as direct kinship between the Hungarians and the Huns, or the identification of the Ancient Hungarians with the Scythians, or the Hungarian origins of the Christian Father God. In accordance with the millennial narrative, they use the elements of the alternative history of the Hungarians as well as other motifs which recall UFO-religions and ET-spiritualities, and last but not least, the idea of healing and cleansing as the basic means leading to universal well-being. The description of their unique rituals and other religious practices is followed by an analysis of the discourse on the contested authority of the shrine.

The author of the chapter focuses on the role of the Virgin Mary within their discourse. She found it interesting that Mary

is connected with the so-called *Boldogasszony* (literally [Blessed Woman]), which is a special Hungarian denomination of the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, the alleged goddess of the ancient Hungarians. 'Boldogasszony' has been used as a synonym for the Blessed Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages (cf. Madas 2002). The quest for a lost epic and a missing mythology of the Hungarians, which was inspired by national romanticism, resulted in the term gaining an ethnic taste by the end of the 19th century. 'Boldogasszony' was the most emblematic female figure of the pantheon in the re-invented Ancient Hungarian religion – the Mother Goddess (Kálmány 1885). With regard to its contemporary use, 'Boldogasszony' is also interpreted as the Hungarian equivalent of the Goddess (Bowman 2009), and is also considered Mother Earth (Gaia) and the galactic patroness of all Hungarians *par excellence*. The author put the manifold interpretations of the Virgin Mary's figure in the centre of attention, highlighting the Catholic Church's standpoint on the emergence of New Age spirituality at Catholic devotional places.

03 HOLUBOVÁ, Markéta

Manifestations of Marian Devotion in the Czech Republic – the Past and Present

According to the author of the chapter, Marian devotion in the Czech Republic should be seen not only in the light of recent highly secularised climate of Czech society. For the current dislike for official Catholicism and de-Christianisation of Czech society, we have to go back in history. In the 19th century, Czechs became liberals, nationalists or socialists. At the same time, religion ceased to play its former role and was assigned only the role of an occasionally sought-after, yet unnecessary 'folklore' anachronism, typical for village population. Religious identity was substituted primarily by national identity, as well as by class identity and a 'scientific' worldview. The rise of the Communist dictatorship after 1948 bolstered these trends and used them – mostly unmod-

ified – for its own benefit. The non-religious and anti-religious components were accentuated, while the forms of 'implicit religiosity' stayed preserved and Church organisations were forced to face systematic repression. The years 1989 and 1990 brought about radical changes in the political and spiritual history of the Czech Republic. Religion lost its principal enemy – Communism. Innumerable forms of religiosity appeared, from versions of classical and modern Christianity to the spiritual schools of the Far East.

In this context, it is very interesting that the worshiping of the Virgin Mary has remained virtually unchanged. Just like in the past, emphasis is placed today on spirituality and emotional experience, thereby fulfilling the main conditions for survival in the modern era *de facto*. In addition to the traditional forms of cult and pilgrimage rituals, there are also new forms of religiosity brought about by the 21st century, especially in abundantly visited places of pilgrimage. Due to the widespread use of the internet and e-mail communication, after centuries of pilgrimage tradition, there is for the first time no need to receive the written *votum* personally or even in representation. After 1989, visits to Czech and foreign places of pilgrimage began to appear in the catalogues of many travelling agencies. Also, bike pilgrimages represent a very popular form among young people.

On the other hand, it can be also mentioned, that despite the strong Marian tradition, the general public and as well as the religious discourse on Marian devotion connected to private apparitions in the Czech Republic is at a certain point 'marginal'. This can have two principal reasons. Firstly, the import of apparitions is caused by the absence of such apparitions at home. Secondly, the import of greater movements and groups represents a reaction to the delay of the Communist era and a smaller membership of believers.

04 TUTR, Vojtěch

The Reception of Recent Marian Apparitions in the Czech Republic in the Field of Popular Religiosity – Two Examples

Marian apparitions have always emerged throughout the history of the Catholic Church. However, they have never been given a lot of attention and have never met with so much public acceptance as has been seen since the latter half of the 19th century. The development of *mass communication* and increasing population *mobility* have partly contributed to this phenomenon. These apparitions have a new function – providing *public messages*. The Virgin Mary is no longer speaking only to the visionary; she is pronouncing prophecies and messages to all believers, laying claims to the hierarchy.

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two examples of ‘popular religiosity’ in the Czech Republic as a spontaneous religious activity produced and operated by their charismatic leaders and opinion-makers: *Vérité* centre founded by František Mráček and *Mariánské nakladatelství* [MANA, Marian publishers] founded by František Press in Brno. Both cases are based on modern Marian apparitions and are contextualised in the current global situation and in the Czech Republic. According to the author, this goes hand in hand with the trend of modernisation and the era of mass communication.

Marian devotion plays a central role in both studied cases and is crucial for understanding the portraying her as the *Loving Mother* and *Hope of the Mankind*, as well as the *Guardian of the World* coming as the (last) *Living Warning* before the expected global catastrophe. The apocalyptic, chiliastic and millennial tone presented by both interpreters of modern Marian apparitions is being explored as well. The main issue in both cases is the expectation of the *end of the current world* order. This element was certainly activated by the approaching end of the millennium. Even though this stimulation of thoughts on the end of the world is now out of play, the charismatic leaders flexibly postponed their prediction in this re-

gard and, according to them, we should expect some global threat in the future, the outbreak of WWII, nuclear or ecological catastrophes, globalisation or total control by means of information technologies.

Another nodal point is the reference to *globalisation* as an instrument of Satan's rule over the unified world. According to the author, both studied cases are examples of modern adaptation of Christianity to the post-modern religious landscape of post-socialist Czech Republic and represent a form of *popular religiosity* which is transformed and adapted to the context of modern society and ‘Western culture’.

05 KEČKA, Roman

Contemporary Models of Marian Discourse in Slovakia

According to the 2001 census, the majority of Slovakia's population statistically follows the Catholic confession of Roman or Byzantine rites. In both rites, the Marian devotion has a considerable place in religious reflection and spirituality. This study explores the religious discourse of the Marian devotion as it appears in available books and booklets on this topic. The main focus of the chapter is a comparison of the Marian discourse in Slovakia (representing a post-socialist country) and the Marian discourse in neighbouring Austria (representing a ‘Western’ country with no socialist history). For this purpose, a sample of Mariological reflections and spiritual texts was created based on their availability in all Catholic bookstores in the capital of Slovakia (Bratislava) and the capital of Austria (Vienna). The reason for this choice is that these bookstores offer books that mirror the living intellectual and religious brainstorming and reflect Christianity, in particular the pattern of the Marian discourse of the recent decades in both countries. The study comments on the absence of modern Marian literature in Slovak bookstores. The author also analyses the Marian vocabulary and topics in the both samples. The author distinguishes three existing models of the Marian discourse in

Slovakia, all of traditional origin, portraying Mary as an unselfish and patient mother, Mary loving conditionally and restraining God's anger; Mary leading the legions against Satan and crushing his head. All three models are based on the traditional images of Mary and, within the Christian communities, are not understood as contradictory, but complementary.

Compared to Western Christianity, the Marian discourse in Slovakia lacks two recurrent models: (1) the progressive 20th/21st century model, and (2) the traditionalist and fundamentalist model. The first model has created a Marian vocabulary and contents representing a self-confident, social and communicative model of Mary. This model presents an alternative to the old models combining mild or triumphant vocabulary with mild or triumphant contents. The second model which is absent among Slovak believers is the Marian discourse of the traditionalist and fundamentalist groups of each age tolerated by official Church structures. These traditionalist and fundamentalist groups return to the old Marian vocabulary and contents that is triumphant, militant and – in this modern version – has an offensive character. This form of discourse, created as a reaction to progressive Christian groups – did not emerge in Slovakia, since there were no progressive Christian movements.

Based on the research of the author, the Slovak Marian reflection and spirituality result from traditional beliefs, having no affinity to Western progressive and traditionalist models. In this regard, it can be stated that Slovakia's isolation from the European spiritual development, which has caused traditional devotion to be fixed in its forms, is, paradoxically, continuing also after the fall of Communism in the era of religious freedom. The comparative discursive analysis of Mariological literature in Slovakia and its Western neighbour – Austria has showed that the Slovak religious landscape is far more traditional (but not traditionalist) than the current trends in the 'Western' religious discourse.

06 MAJO, Juraj

Marian Dedications within the Current Cultural Space of Slovakia

Cultural geography (as the main field in geography with no connection to religion) is strongly influenced by constructivist approaches today. Geographer Doreen Massey wrote in 2010 (Massey 2010: 107) that space is always being made and always, therefore, in a sense, unfinished. The 'always' is rather that there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction, or not, potential links which may never be established. Loose ends and ongoing stories. With these ideas she perfectly outlined the relationship of space, time, and social world. In the field of religious identity and its expression it indicates not just variability of its representations but can also work as a hub to the local projections of identity interactions and how this space is formed within local actors and local circumstances.

All interactions within the various scales forms two paradigms of how place and space can be analysed – as politics and poetics of space. If the cult of the Virgin Mary prevails within the Catholic religious practice, then the poetics and politics of space can have vast forms of expression and impacts. This chapter attempts to outline the spatiality of this cult represented in dedications of sacred buildings, and open up questions on forming such distributions and regional specificities in Slovakia.

Research on the spatial aspects of dedications of sacred buildings provide interesting intersections of relations between sacred and profane as well as various levels of research resulting in a relationship between the 'politics' and 'poetics' of place. This chapter introduces such relationship within cultural geography. Although this approach is fully applicable in local or regional research, we have outlined the spatial aspects of the cult of the Virgin Mary as embodied in the dedication of sacred buildings, introducing the differences in the types of such dedication within regional and denominational aspects (such as Roman and Byzantine Catholics).

The link between time and space is observed in living as well as obliterated dedications, which helps us understand in a very broad sense the dynamics of construction and maintenance of sacred space and the projections of initiatives at various levels of political administration with an impact on the poetics of space and community.

Research on the spatial distribution of dedications in Slovakia is still a little explored field, even though the extensive data sources are relatively high in quality and quantity and enable the interpretation of different relations in various scales. In the context of important dedications, it is the Marian ones that have a significant position in church life and are the most common ones, reflecting the intensity of the worship of the Virgin Mary within the Slovak environment. The research also indicates that the importance and popularity of Marian dedications are accompanied by great diversity with growth over time. It also reflects on the background based on social changes, such as the extinction of the Kingdom of Hungary, the declaration of Our Lady of Sorrows as the patron of Slovakia, etc.

07 KNOBLAUCH, Hubert – PETSCHKE, Sabine

Vision and Video. Marian Apparition, Spirituality and Popular Religion

The chapter demonstrates that *spirituality* and *popular religiosity* are built into the Marian apparitions, thus turning them into a contemporary 'modern' phenomenon. The study refers to a series of apparitions which happened during 1999 in Marpingen, a German village close to the Western border with France. This village was the setting for a series of Marian apparitions back in the 19th century. These earlier apparitions have recently been subjected to a very thorough study by British historian David Blackbourn (1993). Whereas Blackbourn based his analysis on written documents mostly stored in archives, the authors had not only access to written documents, newspapers and books, but also the

exceptional chance to collect video-tape records from the event, and they could also rely on audio-taped statements by the seers. These data, supported by ethnographic field data, are subject to a fine-grained video-analysis provided in the chapter.

In Marpingen, it was Marion who began to have visions on May 17 and 20 near the chapel (built by the above-mentioned association) where the earlier apparitions had happened. Thereafter, the three women together had various apparitions near the chapel, mostly in the company of an increasing number of pilgrims. The sixth apparitions on June 13, 1999, was already witnessed by about 4,000 visitors, and on the ninth day of the apparitions, on July 18, 12,000 visitors turned up. The final apparitions were said to be attended by 30,000. As a hundred years before, the incident not only attracted masses, there was also some turmoil accompanying the apparitions: television stations turned up and reported critically on the event, the Church prohibited any proclamation by the seers, the seers were threatened and, finally, the village administration and the chapel association got into a conflict.

The authors pointed out that when talking about the apparition, we must be aware of the fact that this notion refers not only to a subjective experience by the seers. In order to become an apparition, it needs to be communicated. The communication of the apparition does not only draw on the verbalisation by which the apparition is being reported, i.e. reconstructed. In addition, the apparition is also being performed by the body of the seers who form part of the setting which includes the visitors in relation to the seers and the spatial constellations of other objects. Thus, the authors interpret apparition as a *communicative performance of religious action*.

However, the verbalisation of the cited vision is not, as in other cases, reconstructed *after* the vision. On the contrary, the seer (Marion) talks into a dictograph which is held by another visionary – Judith – while having the vision. In this way, the apparition is turned into a *live report*. It may be no accident that this kind of

live report is not directly addressed to the live audience. Rather, it is recorded so to be accessible to a larger media audience via audio tapes, transcripts of the visions and a number of books based on these reports. According to Auslander (1999: 39ff.), it is the '*technological and aesthetic contamination* of live performance'. The authors noted that the media are not only added to the event but are imparted in the event to such a degree that they transform it into something different. Thus, the use of the dictograph results in a format of the 'live report' on the inner visions. The microphone allows coordinating the actions of the seers with those of the crowd – a phenomenon that was virtually impossible at earlier apparitions.

According to the authors, the Marian movement is not only a static remnant of earlier periods but also a form of modern expression against rationality and secularism. The Marian apparition in question, according to the authors, is an example for the modernity of this form of religion by exhibiting the essential features of popular religion. It is not that religion has changed its contents: it is still the realm of the transcendent as the subject matter of religion. However, this subject matter is not an element of cognitive or moral belief; it is something to be experienced subjectively, the reasserting subject being the major instance and locus of religiosity. This way, the analysis of Marian apparitions is a case for the thesis of the modernity of religion and a case that demonstrates what is modern about religion.

08 PAVIĆEVIĆ, Aleksandra

Travelling through the Battle Fields. The Cult of the Bogorodica in Serbian Tradition and Contemporary Times

The chapter deals with the role of the Virgin Mary in the nation-state building process in Serbia. The beginning of the process of religious revival in Serbia coincided with the beginning of the social, economic and political crisis in the former Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, which took place at the beginning

of the 1990s. There was an urgent need to find *new collective identity*, since the earlier had been reduced to rubble. At the *individual level*, this process primarily implied increased participation in rites within the life cycle of an individual (baptism, wedding, and funeral), followed by popularisation of the practice of celebrating family's patron saint days and, only in the end and on the smallest scale, by an increase in the number of believers taking an active part in regular church services.

On the *collective level*, the traditional closeness of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serb people and the state was the basic paradigm of such restructuring. The attempt to establish continuity with the tradition of the medieval Serb state, which implied active participation of the Church in both social and political matters, as well as the grafting of this relationship in the secular state and civil society in Serbia at the end of the second millennium, turned out to be a multi-tiered issue (Jevtić 1997).

At mass celebrations, as well as at revolutionary street protest rallies (which were plentiful in the capital during the last dozen years or so) and at celebrations of the town's patron saint days and various festivities, the image of the 'Bogorodica' [Gr. 'Theotokos', i.e. The Mother of God]; appears. Leading the processional walks of the towns, it emerges as a symbol which manages to mobilise the nation with its fullness and multi-layered meaning. The main thesis of the chapter is to explain the historical roots of her cult and her embeddedness in the national history and identity in Serbia.

The cult of the 'Bogorodica' has always had greater importance on the macro than on the micro level. This is corroborated by the fact that a relatively small number of families celebrated some of the 'Bogorodica' holidays as their Patron St Day, while a large number of monasteries and churches, as well as village Patron St Days were dedicated to one of them (Grujić 1985: 436). On the other hand, some authors believe that, with the acceptance of Christianity, it was the cult of the 'Bogorodica' which was the most developed

among the Serb population, because her main and most widely recognisable epithet *Baba*, connected to giving birth, was directly associated with the powerful female pagan divinities such as the Great Mother, Grandmother etc. (Petrović 2001: 55; Čajkanović 1994a: 339). In the folk perception, the 'Presveta Bogorodica' [The Most Holy Mother of God] is unambiguously connected to the phenomenon and process of birth-giving and, that is why, barren women most frequently addressed the 'Bogorodica' for assistance.

The observance of the image of the 'Bogorodica' was specifically connected with the so-called *miracle icons*, that is, her paintings linked to some miraculous event, either locally or generally. This was most frequently related to the icons which were famous for discharging myrrh, as well as icons which would 'cry' in certain situations, as well as those that changed the place of residence in a miraculous manner.

The use of icons in wars, either those of conquest or defensive, appears to be a widely spread practice in the Orthodox world. It was noted that Serb noblemen carried standards with images of various saints to wars, and that the cities were frequently placed under the protection of certain icons. The author shows how, travelling through towns and battlefields, throughout the decades and centuries, the 'Bogorodica' appeared through its holy image at the end of the second millennium as the protectress, advocate, Pointer of the Way and foster mother of those who were, possibly more than ever, in need of miracles and waymarks.

09 BAEVA, Vihra – GEORGIEVA, Albena

The Worship of Mary in the Region of Asenovgrad

(Central Southern Bulgaria): Sites, Rituals and Narratives

The chapter presents Marian worship in one of its specific local manifestations – the cult to the Virgin in the region of Asenovgrad, Central Southern Bulgaria. The fact that it is the most representative example of the vital and well-developed Marian cult with in present-day Bulgaria, as well as authors' long-term fieldwork

in the region (started 1996), influenced the choice of Asenovgrad as the focus of their attention. The methodological framework is based on the concept of local religion (Christian 1989: 3), reformulated by the authors into the concepts of *local religiosity* and *local religious culture*. The local Marian cult in Asenovgrad region is used as an example of how to understand this local and cultural embeddedness of religiosity, presented via (1) devotional sites and the images belonging to them (in this case, miracle-working icons of the Virgin); (2) local feasts and ritual practices; and (3) local and personal religious narratives. The authors regard places, rituals and narratives as basic elements which complement, influence and support each another, constituting a complex system of local religious culture. Following this pattern, the authors pinpointed for their analysis the three most important places of Marian worship in the region: the Dormition of Mary Monastery of Bachkovo, the Annunciation of Mary Church in Asenovgrad, and the Dormition of Mary Church in Gorni Voden. Besides the contextual information, the authors also focused on a more intimate, individual dimension of Marian worship, exploring the presence of the Virgin in personal narratives about miraculous recoveries, dreams, visions, etc. and delineating the connection between individual experience and cultural background. According to the authors, the local worship of Mary in Asenovgrad region is a brilliant example of the ways in which local religiosity exists and develops in the intersection of universal religion and local traditions, folklore and cultural specificities. On the local level, the general Christian figure of the Virgin acquires characteristic features, associated with her motherly aspect and her quality of a divine patroness and immediate helper in every need. Her intercession is achieved by means of sacred intermediaries that have the power to connect the common devotee with the celestial power: holy places, miracle-working icons, springs and caves. Apart from the well-known Marian feasts, idiosyncratic local holidays are observed, too, and the related ritual actions span from the canonical to the folkloric

and ‘magical’. Specific symbols, such as the apple, the water, and the fish, come to the fore as a material representation of Mary’s sacred power and assistance. Local and personal narratives add a private, sometimes even intimate aspect to the Marian devotion, binding the universal sacred figure of the Virgin with the history and geography of the local community, as well as with the individual life trajectories of the believers.

10 ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana

‘From Periphery to the Centre’: Private Apparition of the Virgin Mary (An In-depth Qualitative Analysis of the Apparition’s Narrative with Field Journal Notes)

The overall research dataset used for the purposes of this chapter is part of ongoing research of the author on Roma folk beliefs (2006–2007), as well as on the activities of both traditional and non-traditional religious movements among the Roma in Slovakia (2003–2004, 2010–2011).

In the framework of the previous outputs from this research, the author attempted to create, with some generalisation, a typology of the elements of traditional rural *Romani Christianity* in Slovakia, elucidating the phenomena of the cultural and ethnic reinterpretation of mainstream Christianity into a Roma cultural context (Podolinská 2009). In particular, she pointed out the phenomenon of *inculturation* in which the ‘White’ Virgin Mary is culturally and ethnically ‘transcribed’ and ‘translated’ into the ‘Chocolate Mary’ that physically, mentally and spiritually fits better and corresponds to the hopes and needs of particular ‘peripheral’ ethnic community.

As Viktor Turner (1974) pointed out that what is interesting about apparitions is that they occur on the *periphery* not only from the geographical point of view (peripheries of cities, rural areas) but also at peripheral levels of society: the seers are mostly children or (illiterate) women from a socially deprived background. This chapter offers an in-depth qualitative analysis of a narrative

on private Marian apparitions of one Romani woman living in a segregated Roma settlement in Šariš region, Eastern Slovakia. The seer perfectly fits into the ‘periphery’ concept: she is an illiterate woman from a socially deprived settlement and is a member of the ethnically stigmatised community of *Cigáni* [Gypsies]. Her visions are private ones, and since they started to appear, she started her struggle for collective and public recognition. The story of her apparition thus contains the well-known part of the path of other ‘successful visionaries’ – ‘from periphery to centre’ (i.e. from marginal private/individual apparition to the central public/mass recognition). As far as visions are ‘cultural products’ (Christian 1998) produced in the process of communication (Knoblauch 2009; Knoblauch and Schnettler 2018), they are not only embedded in a particular cultural context but also in the language and aesthetic taste. For every apparition, the crucial point is to achieve collective consensus and to attract masses. This is the way from private/individual apparition to public/collective acknowledgement. This is the way from ‘periphery to the centre’. In the described case, however, the seer was able to achieve recognition only within her own family. The response of the local Roma community to her apparitions was mostly negative. Quite interesting about this case is that, according to her, she has support from the side of non-Roma local religious authorities. Based on the author’s qualitative analysis, the struggle for *collective consensus* and *ethnic code* are the most important themes of the analysed narrative on apparition.

According to the author, the peripheral and deprived life situation of the seer is embedded in her visions. In her narrative, the attempt to achieve ‘centrality’ in a marginal position is central and the recognition theme is more frequent than the description of the apparition itself. In order to offer the reader a holistic picture of research situation, the author uses not only the qualitative analysis and thematic coding, but also the perspective of multi-vocal ethnography (Tobin 1988; Clegg 2017). The interview is thus embedded in the synchronous context of field journal notes

of the author, as well as in the diachronic context of her recent memories. The qualitative analysis also includes a wider context of the thematic search of media reports on local apparitions among Roma households in Eastern Slovakia.

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The Marian Apparition of Seuca/Szőkefalva in the Context of Religious and Ethnical Interferences

Seuca became a known place for pilgrimage due to a blind Gypsy woman's public visions about the Virgin Mary in the first years of the new millennium. The author presents both the history of the ethnical and confessional co-existence in the village and the economic and social problems which affected the whole community. Then, the attitudes towards the apparition of the different denominations are highlighted by also presenting the way the seer attempts to question the different denominational opinions. The legitimating strategies of a Gypsy woman significantly influenced the aspects of the vision of the Virgin Mary from Seuca. In the history of Seuca, we find the practice of ethnic groups making well-defined boundaries between them, functioning as important parts of the communities. The artificial change of the ethnic structure during the Communist dictatorship changed the patterns of relations between the ethnic groups and made ethnic coexistence more problematic. The local parish that tried to expropriate the Marian apparitions has successfully integrated their messages into the ideology of ethnic reconciliation. The traditional ontological systems of religion in the communities still work and the frequent crossing of the ethnic and denominational boundaries have also promoted the strategies of the Church. In addition, the apparitions in Seuca earned the village a distinguished reputation in the region where enormous changes have taken place and where people have been forced to develop more complex strategies, or ways of life, without any pre-existing concrete models.

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