

Medjugore, Signs and Wonders

An article by Francis Frangipane has recently gone into circulation. It is a very balanced and well constructed article. The main purpose was to argue the need to put the word of the Bible before signs and wonders and to see the latter in the context of the former. He made a number of useful points and used some interesting concepts. It was of a quality one would expect from him no more than one would expect from him and it is not my purpose here to criticise this work.

However, there are some points which arise from what he said which do need attention. In pursuing his objective he, inevitably, made comments which were subservient to it and, not being of main concern, were not developed. But some of these do require further consideration.

Extra-biblical Phenomona

FP defines manifestations 'which have no pattern in the Bible' as extra-biblical. In these he includes the quaking of Quakers and the rolling of Holy Rollers. He then includes the claimed visitations of the mother of Jesus at Medjugore (in the former Yugoslavia) as belonging to the same category. This is surely a slip of thought.

Medjugore Patterns in the Bible?

A pattern consists of elements which can be regarded as representative of something and which are repeated in recognisable ways.

In fact, there are several well known instances in the Bible which constitute a pattern into which Medjugore fits very well. Visitations of angels abound, but there are other instances: Samuel appeared to Saul, albeit illegally (1 Samuel 28:8 - 20); Jacob had an encounter with a heavenly being (some would say divine) (Genesis 32. 23 - 33); there was a (probably divine) appearance to Joshua (Joshua 5. 13 - 15). Of course, we know of the appearance to Jesus himself of Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17. 1 - 8f) and there are many other examples one could quote.

Do these constitute a pattern into which the (claimed) appearances at Medjugore fit? Surely they do. The visions at Medjugore are different in only two respects: they concern a female rather than a male figure; and they have been repeated every night without fail over twenty-two years. Otherwise, and these are surely not grounds for exclusion, the Medjugore events fit into the biblical pattern extremely well.

True, as patterns go, are identical, but many have repetitions which include nonidentical elements. This is evident when we compare such biblical events as mentioned above. All have similarities of one kind or another but none can be said to be identical.

Medjugore, Quakers and Rollers.

The events at Medjugore cannot, therefore, properly be compared with extra-biblical charismatic-type events relating to such as Quakers and Rollers. Of course, Francis Frangipane was simply looking for some examples, and unfortunately picked on Medjugore. But, since the latter can be seen quite clearly to fit within the biblical category, it does demand further attention. Clearly, this kind of categorisation is permissive rather than conclusive of its genuineness: everything that looks like something biblical is not necessarily genuine.

At least because of its influence on very large numbers of people, not to say that God may be 'reaching to these people through this manifestation,' the Medjugore phenomenon warrants some further consideration.

Divine Or Demonic Origin?

FP says 'I personally do not believe that this was (is?) Mary'. He does not say why but, as we have noted, thinks that God may be using it. But that is not really enough. It is either of satanic or of divine origin. One or the other. Ought we not to make an assessment of which?

Is there a possibility of satanic origin? That is doubtful when one considers the messages, and I have read many of

them, which have been coming out of Medjugore since 1981. Jesus once asked 'How can Satan drive out Satan?' because a kingdom or house cannot stand if divided against itself. Moreover, he added, very significantly, that, if Satan were to oppose himself, his end would have come (Mark 3. 23 - 26f).

Now, it may well be that Satan's end is near, but it has clearly not arrived at the moment. Moreover, the essence of the conflict between God and Satan is, to coin a phrase, a struggle for the hearts and minds of God's people. In that conflict the major weapon is a composite of words, concepts and ideas - a major weapon on both sides.

So what are the words (and fruits) coming out of Medjugore? Principally, and repeatedly over the past twenty-two years: love, peace and prayer - and not just any prayer, but sustain, repeated, serious, two, three hours of prayer every day; the establishments of prayer groups and a renewal by thousands of their life in Christ. Now, does that sound like a message from Satan? Hardly. For as yet, his kingdom has not fallen. Certainly he is a crafty strategist, but he would hardly take the risk of repeating these messages every day for so long! And to what end?

So phenomena at Medjugore is unlikely to be satanic in origin. That leaves a divine source. FP doubts it is Mary. But who else, then? Has God sent some angelic spirit to give such words of truth, over so long a period, by deceiving his people with a spirit instructed to claim to be the mother of Jesus but which it is not? That seems implausible, to put it at its lowest.

Hence, whether we like it or not, (but why do we not?) Mary seems the likeliest probability.

Now, although a lifelong Catholic, (albeit with strong Pentecostal symptoms) I am not what Catholics would call a 'Marianist' i.e. someone with a special devotion to Mary. And I have always been somewhat shy of the idea of 'to Jesus through Mary' - not because it cannot happen, because it can and has for many people, but there is always the risk getting 'stuck' on or at Mary. But maybe that implies that I think God cannot look after those who sincerely seek him.

However, we also have to take a wider view than Medjugore itself. It has been argued here that the (claimed) appearances there are not extra-biblical and that is not surrendered. But suppose they were, for arguments sake. While the Bible contains only truth, not all truth is contained within the Bible. How could it be when John's gospels says that the world could not contain even everything which the disciples knew of Jesus alone (John 21. 25)? Being extra-biblical, as WP acknowledges, is not in itself a cause for condemnation. So...?

In order to accept that the appearances at Medjugore are genuine, one has to consider them within the wider framework of Marian appearances. Medjugore is only the latest in a long cycle of (claimed) appearances of Mary. Most non-Catholics will not be aware of even those in the modern era, which amount to at least eight major visitations, from Guadalupe in Mexico in 1531, through Bernadette Soubirous in 1858 at Lourdes in France, and Knock in Ireland in 1879, to Fatima in Spain, in 1917 (which led Catholics world-wide to pray over decades for the downfall of communism and the USSR). Not one is identical to another but there is a very strong pattern of similarities (which space here does not permit of description).

In every instance there have been signs and wonders over succeeding decades or centuries of continuing evangelistic and healing associations. Far too many to delineate here, but far too many to pass-off as 'bunkum' and, for reasons similar to those given above, too marked by the work of the Spirit to judge satanic in origin.

I have never been to Medjugore. Perhaps I should have. But, in FP's terms, I could have been found 'running after signs' when the 'Toronto Blessing' hit the north east of England at Sunderland some years ago. I hope I did not do it at the expense of the God's word. But I could not accept the condemnations which some other Christians were making of it of it without investigation. I did get the 'shakes' as a result, although I could never see any real spiritual growth as a consequence.

There is, perhaps, too much suspicion among Christians of Christians in sectors other than one's own (not that Francis Frangipane is guilty of this). God is too big even for the Bible, and certainly for our limited minds to comprehend. And it is surely an irresponsible Christian who thinks he knows the limits to the ways in which God acts among his people, or who thinks he can impose such limits.

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