

Vatican disciplines ex-spiritual director to Medjugorje visionaries

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Sep. 5, 2008

The Vatican has authorized "severe cautionary and disciplinary measures" against a priest who served as spiritual director to the visionaries in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has written to Bishop Ratko Peric of Mostar-Duvno, whose diocese covers Medjugorje, to inform him that they are investigating the case of Franciscan Father Tomislav Vlastic.

The congregation has asked the bishop, for the good of the faithful, to inform the community of the canonical status of the Bosnian priest, whose actions automatically provoked Vatican sanctions.

In a statement posted on the Web site of the Diocese of Mostar-Duvno, Peric explained that Vlastic has been reported to the congregation "for the diffusion of dubious doctrine, manipulation of consciences, suspicious mysticism, disobedience toward legitimately issued orders" and charges that he violated the Sixth Commandment.

The doctrinal congregation said in the letter, also posted on the Web site, that the priest had been disciplined after he stubbornly refused to cooperate with the inquiry, instead "justifying himself by citing his zealous activity" in initiating religious communities and building churches in the Medjugorje area.

A decree confirming action against Vlastic was signed by Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the doctrinal congregation, and Father Jose Rodriguez Carballo, the minister general of the Order of Friars Minor, earlier this year.

It confined Vlastic to a Franciscan monastery in Italy and banned him from contact with the Queen of Peace community, which he founded, or with his lawyers without permission from his superior.

He is banned from making public appearances, preaching and hearing confessions, and he will be required to make a solemn profession of the Catholic faith. The Vatican has warned Vlastic that he will be excommunicated if he violates any of the prohibitions.

"Vlastic is forewarned that, in the case of stubbornness, a juridical penal process will begin with the aim of still harsher sanctions, not excluding dismissal, having in mind the suspicion of heresy and schism, as well as scandalous acts *contra sextum* (meaning against the Sixth Commandment) aggravated by mystical motivations," Peric wrote.

In Rome Sept. 5, a Franciscan official told Catholic News Service it is true that "disciplinary measures have been taken" against Vlastic "but he is still a friar of our order; he has not been dismissed from the Franciscans or the clerical state."

Passionist Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican press office, also confirmed the content of

Peric's letter, including the fact that the doctrinal congregation had suspended the Franciscan's priestly faculties.

Vlasic was a central figure in promoting the apparitions at the unofficial shrine in Medjugorje.

In 1984 he wrote to Pope John Paul II to say that he was the one "who through divine providence guides the seers of Medjugorje."

Four years later -- after it was revealed that he fathered a child with a nun -- he moved to Parma, Italy, where he set up the coed Queen of Peace religious community dedicated to the Medjugorje apparitions.

Vlasic is the second spiritual adviser to the visionaries to be suspended from his ministry. Peric confirmed the suspension of the faculties of the other priest, Father Jozo Zovko, in 2004.

The Medjugorje phenomenon began June 25, 1981, when six children told a priest they had seen Mary on a hillside near their town. Since then, Mary is said to have appeared to the six more than 40,000 times and imparted hundreds of messages.

But three church commissions failed to find evidence to support their claims, and the bishops of the former Yugoslavia declared in 1991 that "it cannot be affirmed that these matters concern supernatural apparitions or revelations."

In 1985 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect of the doctrinal congregation and now Pope Benedict XVI, banned official, diocesan or parish-sponsored pilgrimages to the shrine. However, individual Catholics are still free to visit and have a priest with them.

(Contributing to this story was Cindy Wooden in Vatican City.)

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