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# Applying Movement Success Models to Marian Apparition Movements

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Over the centuries the Virgin Mary has retained more than a passing importance within the Christian tradition. To many, she serves as a prominent part of their faith, spawning thousands of apparitions, devotional rites, shrines, and churches in her honor. Across time, a storied tradition of Marian devotion has developed, presenting a major source of belief to millions that spans cultures and expressions of faith.

Mary continues to remain a central figure in the lives of many faithful. The enigma surrounding her attracts the attention of both the devoted and the secular. Nor has interest waned in modern time, *Time* magazine ran a cover story on her in 1991, thousands still visit shrines dedicated to her yearly, and in 2007 the Vatican excommunicated several nuns from a breakaway Marian devotional group “Army of Mary.” Interest in the Virgin Mary spans religious and the secular groups; for a host of reasons, people are drawn to the mystery surrounding her. While she remains a popular figure to the devoted, to many she remains a mystery and others are even hostile towards her (Cunneen 1996). Scholars and historians continue to debate how precisely to perceive Mary; as a historical figure? As a mythical figure? Did she really exist? Do we perceive her solely as she is referenced in the New Testament? How did she come to exist as a divine figure? Throughout history and into modern times, there has been no unified perspective surrounding the life and devotion of Mary. Various adorations from groups have given rise to popular belief about her (Hamington 1995).

The vast majority of the literature on apparitions is apologetic and devotional in nature. That is to say it revolves around theological discussions that either support or refute the existence of such a phenomenon. However, the focus here will be limited to the

scholarly literature on Marian worship and apparitions as interest focuses on studying Marian apparitions as social movements. While this body of literature is notably smaller (Christian 1998, Coyle n.d., David and Boles 2003, Goode 1992, Zimdars-Swartz 1991), it still incorporates the evolving image of Mary as well as the faithful that follow her. The discussion that follows examines the history of Marian worship, the creation of the Cult of Mary and the subsequent apparitions that followed, the fluctuation and response from the Catholic Church, and a survey of scholarly theories exploring how and why apparitions develop.

## **Literature Review Chapter**

### **History of Marian Worship**

Before any in-depth analysis of the Marian tradition is undertaken, it is first necessary to investigate how the tradition developed and what Mary meant to the early Christians. In asking what Mary meant to early Christians, we open the door to understanding what she means to the devoted today. Through the past we come to understand the present. As it stands, there exists no singular image of Mary – she remains a complex and powerful image to millions. The Marian tradition can be considered a “complex weaving of theological, logic, medieval Christian devotion, psychology, sexual morality, and politics.” However, little of this is based upon the “facts” known of Mary’s life; most comes from extra-Biblical traditions that have evolved over time (Hamington 1995: 10).

Examining strictly Biblical text, very little about Mary exists. Appearing only in the gospels, Acts, Revelations, and in the letters of Paul, the New Testament provides little on Mary, theologically or historically (Ruether 1977). The first reference presented of Mary appears in the New Testament with Paul’s letter to the Galatians, where he describes Jesus as having been “made of a woman,” but never mentions her by name (Warner 1976: 3, Ruether 1977). Her main presence in the gospels comes from the infancy narratives, where she is treated with differing importance, as well as mentions of her in relation to descriptions of Jesus’ historical mission (Warner 1976). Matthew treats the virgin birth somewhat ambivalently, while Mary serves as a central figure in the infancy narrative of Luke (Ruether 1977).

So how was the image of Mary formulated if the Christian holy text tells us very little about her? A portion of the literature on Mary focuses on the relationship between indigenous goddess worship and the Virgin Mary, citing this transition as a source of the attributes now associated with Mary. Scholars ascribe much of the devotion towards Mary as being co-opted from prior goddess worship (Benko 2003, Greeley 1977 Hamington 1995, Ruether 1977, Warner 1976). This is to say that part of the Marian tradition pre-date not only formal Christianity, but the life of Mary herself. Some scholars, such as Stephen Benko (2003), go as far as to link Marian piety as a direct continuation of goddess worship. Such are the similarities between goddess worship and Marian devotion, that scholar Andrew Greeley cites how “one can almost go as far as to say that if Mary had not come along, the pagans might have had to invent her” (1977: 73).

Strains of local pagan cults were adopted and translated into the formulation and honoring of Mary. Following this theoretical line of thinking, an examination of early Christian belief uncovers many similarities between indigenous goddess worship and budding Marian devotion (Greeley 1977 Ruether 1977). As the early Christian church began to develop, whatever was deemed pertinent from native religions was appointed as Christian, thus “local deities were transformed into Mary (Greeley 1977: 82). This overlap did not appear to alarm early Christians either, as they appeared neither disturbed nor distressed by the similarities between Mary and the likes of Juno and Diana. In fact, this served as assistance in gaining converts into the new religion, as persons were not stepping into entirely foreign religious practices, but instead were following familiar strains of worship to new deities (Greeley 1977).

Another common strand between Mary and goddess worship, is Mary's emergence as a symbol of both war and peace, much like the goddess Athena before her. In a representation lasting into modern times, Mary's name and blessings have been invoked as a protector during war as well as symbol of peace. This was most evident during the crusades, as she was called upon as an intervening force in assisting towards victory in battle (Warner 1976).

While there appear to be traces of Greek goddess worship within the Marian tradition, there are also signs that the symbol of Mary is partially a transformation of goddess depictions from ancient Near East religions. This is evident in the similarities between Mary and the Egyptian goddess Isis (Ruether 1977). Traditional paintings of baby Jesus situated on the lap of the Virgin Mary are borrowed imagery from statues of Isis holding the god king, Horus. As Christianity began to overtake the religion of Isis, much of her power and attraction lived on in the devotion of Mary (Ruether 1977). Again, this served a twofold purpose of winning converts, as well as building on the budding new religion of Christianity.

Another powerful attribute that has a shared affinity between goddess worship and the Marian tradition divinity is the notion of virginity. Depending on the culture, the idea of virginity has retained varying levels of importance. Greek worship placed great significance on the virginity of their goddesses – this was their defining attribute and source of power, along with providing them the ability to compete with men. On the other hand, Hebrew culture devalued virginity, as any form of barrenness was considered a curse; fertility was a sign of God's favoritism. Gnosticism also exalted virginity, while early mainstream Christianity rejected the practice until the middle of the fourth century,

when the ideas of Gnosticism and Greek mythology fused into an accepted Christian ideology and practice on the level of popular piety (Ruether 1977).

Mary's virginity is based strictly on sparse biblical accounts, which have been debated by theologians and the official Church, but still hold great significance (Ruther 1977, Warner 1976). The resurrection, considered the keystone of Christian salvation, has its foundation embedded in two complementary, momentous assumptions: "the virgin birth as the essential sign of godhead and virginity itself as the essential sign of goodness" (Warner 1976: 24). Both assumptions assert the importance of virginity that relates back directly to Mary and her divinity, as well as demonstrate how her virginity is among the foundational blocks of the Christian faith. In fact, "Mary has always been the paragon of virginity. In 325 CE, the Council of Nicaea exhorted all women follow her example: 'The Lord looked upon the whole of creation, and he saw no-one equal to Mary. Therefore he chose her for his mother. If therefore a girl wants to be a virgin, she should resemble Mary'" (Warner 1976: 68).

As Christianity began to further establish itself as a religion, so did devotion to Mary. Scholars and historians have devoted much time to exploring how and where Mary emerged as a devotional figure in Christianity. Differing theories exist that have attempted to explain the sudden appearance of the Mary cult in the fifth century (Carroll 1986). Further, it is unclear when canvassing early Church history how "precisely Mary emerged as the new symbol of the feminine component of God" (Greeley 1977: 81). As early as the second century, Christian writers, most notably the Christian apologist Justin Martyr followed by the theologians Tertullian and Irenaeus, were referencing Mary as the "new Eve." It was then that early Christians increasingly began to identify Jesus as the

new Adam and Mary as his Eve, creating for the first time a concrete feminine space in the conceptualization of the Christian deity (Ruether 1977).

As the third century progressed, drawings of the Virgin began to appear on Catacombs. Then, in the late third and early fourth century direct and explicit devotion began to materialize (Greeley 1977). By the end of the fifth century, widespread devotion to Mary had developed, increasing dramatically during the sixth and seventh centuries (Carroll 1986). According to several scholars, devotion to Mary reached its apex in Western Christianity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Carroll 1986, Greeley 1977, Hirin 1957, Laurentin 1965, Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

While Mary began to fade in importance within the Protestant tradition, she continued to develop as a rich devotional figure for the Catholic faithful. In fact, devotion to Mary serves as one of the more notable differences between Protestantism and Catholicism (Ruether 1977). Devotion to Mary remains one of the most popular devotional practices within the Catholic tradition, where she serves not simply as a passive figure but as an active intercessor on both the individual and collective level (Skrbis 2005). Nor is Catholic devotion based primarily on the sparse scriptural accounts provided about her; instead textual knowledge and piety comes primarily through the works of Jesus, alongside the adaptation, as described above, from outside spiritual practices (Greeley 1977).

Mary's image also shifted as Catholicism progressed. One of the more notable shifts happened in the 1300's as the Virgin was remade from detached queen in heaven to a "peasant mother with child" – an image that would come to comfort the masses over the

centuries. In motherhood, Mary became glorified, with this new image serving as a model for women to embody in humility at all times and men to submit before (Warner 1976).

From a feminist perspective, Mary's emergence in the Catholic Church as queen of heaven served as a patriarchal force that for centuries maintained the status quo for those in high positions of power. The dichotomous images of Mary as both queen and virgin created an unattainable role model for women, serving as a legitimating force in the Catholic Church's role in the subordination of women. Additionally, the role of Mary as queen and mother of Jesus has been used as a controlling force to validate the authority of the Church on earth, dissuading any discussion of women's role. According to Marina Warner (1976):

Politics and piety interacted, and the nexus of circumstances that fostered the cult of Mary in the West can be deciphered vividly from the archeological palimpsests of the early Christian Rome. The more the papacy gained control of the city, the more veneration of the mother of the emperor of heaven, but whose right the Church ruled, increased. (p. 106)

This materialization of papal authority and idealized female behavior would set the stage for centuries to come regarding women's image within the Catholic Church.

### **The Emergence of the Cult of Mary and Marian Apparitions**

Pilgrimage remains an important part of scholarly analysis in the examination of religious movements across time and culture. Moreover, pilgrimage remains a defining attribute in Marian devotion, as will be explored later. It is among the oldest spiritual exercises in the Christian tradition, while at the same time a universal experience that crosses religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries (Coyle n.d., Davis and Boles 2003). In analyzing Victor Turner's (1978) work, Davis and Boles found that "pilgrims' existential, normative, and ideological bonds make these experiences countercultural phenomena" (2003: 373). In this sense, pilgrims, while reaffirming their faith, push the

boundaries of normal religious experience. This oftentimes places them in conflict with the Church; since the laity's interaction with the divine is often met with ambivalence, if not hostility by the Church, representing unbounded spiritual energy and potential.

Tensions between Church Officials and pilgrims will likely continue because of officials' refusal to recognize symbols already verified by the laity (Coyle n.d.). Further, pilgrims are not a passive audience – they actively create and make the charismatic occurrence through interaction, symbolization, and interpretation of what is taking place around them (Coyle, n.d., Davis and Boles 2003). Pilgrims approach holy sites with a certain amount of preexisting knowledge (prompts and signs to look for) that create cues in directing a desired outcome.

Religious sites serve as sacred symbols that represent reflections of individuals' world-views and their notions of order (David and Boles 2003, Lofland 1982).

Pilgrimage sites are typically defined as locales where perceived miraculous events have taken place or may in the future. In this sense, they come to represent a “tear in the veil” separating the heavens from earth (Coyle n.d.). They come to be places, whether supported by the official hierarchy or not, where the lay can actively engage in their faith outside the Church setting. In doing so, they extend the sacred to encompass mundane space.

Pilgrimage remains a strong presence in the Cult of Mary. In order to understand the evolution of pilgrimage sites, in their relation to Marian apparitions, it is first necessary to examine the background of the Cult of Mary. The Cult of Mary's development in the West has been traced to the iconoclast heresy taking place during the mid 700's. In 753 Constantine V called for a council that “denounced all icons in the

Christian cult and declared all who continued to use them outlaws” (Warner 1976: 108). Fearing for their lives, but refusing to abandon their faith, an influx of both ecclesiastical and lay fugitives fled the Byzantine Empire to the West where they could comfortably practice their traditions. In Rome and Sicily, in particular, the tide of religious refugees brought with them an “excitable strain of piety that had until the Iconoclasm been the unrestrained character of Greek worship of the Virgin and saints” (Warner 1976: 108). It is here that we begin to see the flourishing of the cult of Mary, especially in the West, where Marian devotion grew alongside the development of the Papal state.

Realizing the power of this particular strand of devotion, Marian worship served a twofold purpose of reifying the orthodoxy of Virgin images in conjunction with legitimating the Papal power. Thus, in its early form, the veneration of Mary as queen in heaven reinforced the papacy’s authority while appealing to popular devotional practices among the lay. The accompanying popes thereafter – Gregory III, Paul I, and Paschal I all followed in displaying their particular love and devotion for the Virgin, contributing to the formation of the Cult of Mary (Warner 1976). This spread as far as England, where during the pre-Conquest England (500-1066) there was an exceptionally developed Marian following. By the tenth century there was a wide array of churches and monasteries dedicated to Mary, the ongoing composition of various liturgical prayers, the celebration of Marian feasts, and various relics dedicated to her presence (Clayton 1990).

Another well-known theory accounting for the historical origins of the Cult comes from Geoffery Ashe, (1976), who views the minimal Biblical justification for such popular Marian devotion as reason to look elsewhere for support. Ashe hypothesized that prior to the fifth century there must have been an independent Marian Church that was

later assimilated into the official Church. He points to a group called the Collyridians as the source of the outside Marian church, despite there being very little evidence to support Ashe's claim directly, other scholars believe in some indirect manner that independently-based Marian worship was at some point absorbed into the Church (Warner 1976).

While Ashe's theory highlights the historical origins of the cult of Mary, this is but one of many theories across the disciplines that seek to explain the advent of the Cult. As noted earlier, many scholars point to the feminine traditions within Christianity as the result of the cross-over from goddess worship. Along these same lines, other feminist explanations point out how the cult of Mary has flourished over the centuries most often in countries where women are relegated to the domestic realm – "it is this very cult of the Virgin's 'femininity' expressed by her sweetness, submissiveness, and passivity that permits her to survive, a goddess in a patriarchal society" (Warner 1976: 191). Along these lines, the formation of the Cult served the purpose of solidifying women's subservient role, making it attractive to those seeking patriarchal control, while at the same time appealing to the very women it controlled, as it brought with it the only means of feminine worship.

Shifting from the feminist viewpoint, we see structuralist and psychological theories for the Cult of Mary. From a structuralist perspective, the immense gap between God and Mary serves as a structural reflection of a society in which "power is concentrated in the hands of a small group (usually all males) and in which the social distance between these rulers and the ruled is large" (Leach 1969: 99). In this sense, intense Marian devotion becomes a means by the disenfranchised to seize power of their

faith. Mary thus becomes patron of the powerless, attracted to her attributes of peace, equality, and justice. On the psychological side, one of the most well known theories for the development of the Cult of Mary comes from Carl Jung. Jung's hypothesis contends that worship devoted to the Virgin Mary is derived "ultimately from one or more of the archetypes buried in the unconscious of all human beings" (1970: 44). Here, the conscious image of Mary has been shaped largely by an unconscious archetype – most notably the mother archetype.

The most apparent and popular reflection of the Cult of Mary is her numerous apparitions to the faithful. Like general devotion to Mary, apparitions have long since been a prominent feature of Catholicism (Berryman 2001). Understanding the cult of Mary is the key to "unlocking the evolution of Marian images and, subsequently, their implications for modern Catholics" (Hamington 1005: 9). In many regards, visionaries and reported apparitions have comprised the Cult of Mary, bearing responsibility for its devotional practices, uniqueness, and ongoing popularity. Apparitions work to bestow exceptional power to those involved. According to Marina Warner (1976);

Both visions and apparitions conferred extraordinary graces on the visionaries and through them on the members of the Church to which they belonged. For in a vision heaven and earth collided in a piece of time and space and suspended both of them...a vision designated a new saint, in communication with the supernatural, while an apparition sanctified that portion of the terrestrial sphere where it took place with lasting salvific effect. (P 300-301)

Much of the body of scholarly analysis of the Cult of Mary has grown around examinations of apparitions and apparitional sites. This withstanding, it is not easy to capture accounts of apparitions, as they are complex phenomena that can be approached from various sides (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Apparitions of the Virgin Mary typically

involve important communication, miraculous signs, ordinary seers among the lay, along with suffering-based ideology (Davis and Boles 2003).

Following other scholars, anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner cite how “Marian apparitions point to the hidden, nonhierarchical domain of the Church and stress the power of the weak; the community; the rare and unprecedented, as against the regular, ordained, and normative (1978: 212). Thus, while Mary had been used for centuries as a powerful force in the legitimation of Church power, the evolution of the Cult of Mary provided the opposite – it became an opportunity for the lay to seize control of their faith, to become interactive with the Divine on a very intimate and personal level. Religious devotees “crave tangible evidence of mystery,” whether present in relics or apparitions (Cunneen 1996). Further, apparition claims are interesting in regard to how they work to spread the range of the sacred – what Mircea Eliade calls “hierophany” or “the act of manifestation of the sacred in mundane reality” (1959: 11). The Cult of Mary has provided this element in its devotion to apparitions.

This also highlights the desire to communicate with the divine in the absence of Church officials. Since the Church holds no definitive position on what precisely takes place during an apparition, they remain open for interpretation or potential exploitation, contributing to the differential ways in which they are greeted by Church officials. It is only after accounting for the environment within which apparitions occurred, examining the seers, and identifying surrounding individuals that the wider meaning of apparitions can be understood (Coyle n.d., Cunneen 1996). Public knowledge of apparitions becomes a distinctively social product – one that is created through a complex interaction among visionaries, the official Church, interpreters and the audience (Badone 2007,

Christian 1998). Through this lens, it becomes clear that while apparitions do evolve from the seer, they are created in large part by the social interactions that take place among all the actors. Interaction among these various groups “may involve fundamental challenges to the religious authorities who claim the right to authenticate religious visions” (Christian 1998: 107). Additionally, it is important to view how not just the lives of the seers, but the lives of family and friends surrounding them are often profoundly affected by the events, as apparitions usually became a source of local pride, the community itself battling the skepticism and critiques accompanying apparitions (Blackbourn 1994).

Apparitions oftentimes work to endow a sense of chosen upon the visionary, as well as the collective of faithful, attributing to the dedicated following that tends to congregate around an apparitional event (Skrbis 2005). Consequently, as discussed earlier, interaction among these various groups may involve deep-seated challenges to religious officials who assert a singular right to the authentication of religious visions and interaction (Christian 1998). In many regards, apparitions fill a deep need the Church can only hope to direct, but ultimately are beyond controlling. “What theologians ignore, ordinary people will provide: Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugore will probably always be with us” (Shinners 1989: 181). It is important not to underestimate the power which apparitions bestow, manifesting a sense of collective pride.

Despite a variation in locale and content over the years, certain attributes of Marian apparitions have remained consistent over the years. A segment of the literature on apparitions is devoted to an examination of common patterns that have emerged over time. Here, the timeless quality of many apparitional themes is examined. These patterns

are in no small part related to the not just the formation, but the continuation of the Cult of Mary. Modern apparitions have followed Marian piety from the Middle Ages with concurrent themes of the Virgin's "exceptional powers" in times of crisis and her loyalty to those who place themselves in her care (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Another common trend over time reveals apparitions to most commonly occur in countries experiencing economic deprivation, where they serve as an intervening source of hope and comfort in the lives of the disempowered (Coyle n.d.).

Gender has also played a consistent role in apparitions. Prior to the 1400's, the typical visionary was most often an adult male, generally a priest. However, around 1400, a shift was detected, with visionaries increasingly being among the laity – most often young females (Blackbourn 1994). While the shift in the gender of visionaries was apparent and continual, it was not until the 1960's and 70's that a rise in the credibility of female visionaries was detected. Previous to then, this cohort was typically met with great skepticism. Women visionaries gained a following very gradually and usually at a great cost, in some cases only after years of private visions that remained a secret (Badone 2007, Christian 1998). In many regards, it can be viewed as the "culmination of a slow, cumulative process, dating back at least to the massive involvement of religious females in social work, teaching, and mission activity" (Christian 1998:114). Oftentimes the seers, particularly the adults, could be categorized as vulnerable and weak. This pattern has held through the centuries and remains a distinctive attribute among modern apparitions. Following this logic, among the generally poor, overworked, and powerless, visions offered subversive possibilities to the laity (Blackbourn 1994: 12). Apparitions

serve the twofold function of enabling a unique power in one's faith, while also providing hope to difficult circumstances.

Another common theme running through Marian apparitions is the apocalyptic tone they very often take on. Although not originating in America, contemporary Catholic American apocalypticism has drawn itself predominantly from Marian apparitions (Coyle n.d., Matter 2001). "The millennial dreams of contemporary apocalyptic movements in America, when carefully surveyed, reveals an overwhelmingly feminine presence" in the Catholic realm (Cuneo 1997, Palmer 1997: 159). While the catalyst for the end-times has varied, the imminent threat of worldly destruction has remained a strong theme in revelations. This highlights a different side of Mary, distinct from the benevolent figure most are familiar with, instead revealing a contrasting side that is a "stern, reproachful, and vengeful" persona (Cuneo 1997: 191). Modern apparitions consistently see existing society as corrupted by change. Believers in apocalyptic messages typically "wax the nostalgic for the stability, comfort, and predictability of tradition, especially Catholic tradition" (Shinners 1989: 196).

Perry and Echeverria (1989) have also discussed several features they found to be indicative of apparitions. In general, apparitions often share: a common background (they tend to manifest in regions of conflict), the identity of visionaries (many were impoverished, experiencing ill-health, and poorly educated), the vision itself (the Virgin is described in a consistent manner), similar messages (shared meaning and apocalyptic nature), involve miracles (unusual phenomenon reported around apparitions), similar reactions (met with skepticism by Church while being embraced by faithful), and shared ecclesiastical action (Official inquiry by Church that leads to endorsement or denial).

David Blackbourn (1993) finds similar patterns in addition to Perry and Echeverria's work. Here, the locale of the apparition is highlighted, noting how they almost always begin as a distinctively local event, received by a close circle of friends and family. If the initial response is positive, a wider audience of pilgrims and the curious typically begin to take note of the apparitions. According to Blackbourn, most apparitions do not make it past this point, remaining local, unofficial cults in the face of opposition from clergy and local tension. A very few that are accepted develop into a dedicated following. As will be discussed later, parts of this theory may be contested.

While remaining a widespread worship-practice among the devoted across culture and time, apparitions have been differentially received by Church officials. When examining apparitions over the centuries, patterns emerge indicative of the time-frame in which the apparition occurred. Different centuries have witnessed varying types of common apparitions and responses. Again, by examining apparitions across the centuries, it becomes evident their importance to not just the Cult of Mary, but Catholicism itself. The Virgin Mary is the most frequently reported religious apparition, with church historians estimating over twenty-one thousand documented apparitions since the fourth century (Davis and Boles 2003, Horsfall 2000, Skrbis 2005). Despite their numerous occurrences, scholarly studies of apparitions are relatively rare, making studies that do exist valuable insight into what occurs (Christian 1998, Coyle n.d., Davis and Boles 2003, Goode 1992, Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Some of the earliest fully-recorded accounts of apparitions come from Book Seven of Caesarius of Heisterbach's "The Dialogue of Miracles," a thirteenth century collection of medieval miracle stories (Zimdars-Swartz 1991, Christian 1998).

As discussed above, despite documentation of a few early apparitions, the majority of scholarly analysis of visions is from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Apparitions occurring during the nineteenth century were remarkable in their shift from private revelations to becoming serial appearances revealed at regular, often monthly, intervals (Horsfall 2000). In this vein, “Marian apparitions were among the great collective dramas of the nineteenth century,” particularly in Europe, where they often came as a great comfort to areas experiencing severe economic hardship, and served as one of the strongest indicators of the religious revival that marked this century (Blackbourn 1994: 3). Apparitions of this time were also successful in rallying European Catholics behind Pope Pius XI and popular receptiveness, both by the lay and the Church, was heightened “because the Virgin’s words seemed to provide an explanation of hard times” (Blackbourn 1994: 28, Cunneen 1996). Also notable among nineteenth century apparitions was the fact that most involved either children or women as seers, predominantly being from rural and/or poor backgrounds. Economic vulnerability, loneliness, and ill-health all held reverberating themes among female seers and “widespread acceptance of the apparitions by the community and the authorities played a significant part in feminizing the Church in the nineteenth century” (Cunneen 1996: 246).

Many of the same trends from the nineteenth century transferred over into the twentieth century. Women still constituted the majority of visionaries, with most experiencing ill health and having low levels of education. The tone of revelations became even more apocalyptic during this time, particularly among older girls and women, who often delivered messages from the Virgin that were angry and “lashing the mighty for their sins and warning of a terrible reckoning” (Blackbourn 1994: 13).

Further, recipients of apparitions during this period can be noted for the “ordinariness and powerlessness” they presented in the face of receiving revelations from the Virgin (Matter 2000). Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of twentieth century apparitions is the ways in which they have remained, if not grown in popularity well into modern times. Despite a fluctuation in reporting of cases over the years, apparition sites have remained consistently popular pilgrimages. Some sites, such as Lourdes, have even reported an increase in visitors over time. In 1950, an estimated 1.5 million people visited the site, whereas in 1970 this number had jumped to 3.25 million (Turner and Turner 1982). On a global scale, since 1980, more manifestations of Mary have been reported globally than all of the combined period between 1830 and 1930. Nearly fifty apparitions have been reported between 1980 and 1996, revealing just how popular this to faithful of the Virgin (Pelikan 1997). Further, it is unlikely that apparitions will fade as the twenty-first century progresses, with scholars such as Davis and Boles (2003) positing:

The current resurgence of apparitions is likely to continue well into the twenty-first century as people are faced with the challenge of maintaining faith while make sense of new wars, economic recessions, the continuing spread of HIV and AIDS, and the globalization of terror. (P. 397)

The problems facing the world may shift from communism to terrorism, from abortion to economic woes, but the need for divine intervention and hope shall remain an important player in the lives of the faithful. The Cult of Mary shows little signs of diminishing within the Catholicism.

### **The Church and Apparitions: Fluctuation and Response**

While the occurrence of Marian apparitions has remained a widespread and popular part of devotional worship over the centuries, there have been fluctuations in the number and types. This is in many regards tied to the Church’s reception of such events,

revealing a pattern of Church decrees and fluctuations in apparition reporting. Further, periods of social unrest serve as another indicator of variability in the reporting of visions. History has repeatedly witnessed heightened appeals to Mary during times of civil crisis. One, of many, examples of this took place in seventh century Europe which, having been devastated by the Thirty Years War, saw Catholic theologians appeal to Mary for understanding of suffering taking place. Through private spirituality, they encouraged acceptance of their suffering as insignificant as compared to the suffering witnessed by Mary and Jesus (Cunneen 1996)

Until the eighteenth century, the Church held no official status on apparitions when Pope Benedict XIV released an official decree, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*, in an effort to control how and where the lay directed their devotional worship. In the decree, it was announced that approval of private revelations may be given only after close investigation and determination by Church officials (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). This, however, left open what may actually constitute an apparition. In an interview with Church leaders, Sara Horsfall (2003) gathered this definition for what constitutes an apparition by the Catholic Church:

An apparition is considered authentic if there is no personal or political agenda, in commercial gain, if it does not lead to a celebrity status for the individuals involved, and if it fits with the traditional beliefs. Further, it must not cause division among the Church, should renew the community life, lead to conversion of hearts, promote the reawakening and stimulation of faith. (P. 377)

Even with this definition, there is room left for interpretation for what not only constitutes an apparition, but if an apparition fits with Church doctrine. In other words, some of the debate for what constitutes an apparition has a good deal to do with how it may or may not fit with Church teaching. Additionally, this may have little influence on whether or not the lay participates in an apparitional devotion.

During then nineteenth century, Mary served as the dividing line between Protestant and Catholic worship. This century became known as the Marian century for European Catholics, further exasperating Protestant mistrust of Marian worship, deeming them to be “non-biblical and near idolatrous” (Cunneen 1996: 227). During this time, Pope Pius XI encouraged greater devotion to Mary as a means of counteracting secular threats of the time. In other words, this was a defensive stance taken on by the Church. To foster this devotion, Pius XI declared in *Ineffabilis Deus* Mary to be the savior of mankind, preserved from all sin. This stunned the Protestants, Anglicans, and Eastern Orthodox, as they viewed it as a denial of Mary’s humanity and an assertion of power by the Pope (Cunneen 1996). Despite this heightened rift, a focus on Mary was not a new form of devotion, as a distinct focus on Mary by theologians within the Spain, Italy, and France regions had caused friction since the early seventh century among Catholics and Protestants. Scholars also point to this decree by the Catholic hierarchy as an attempt to regain Mary from the laity, particularly among poor women and children who were reaching out to her, and had made her a prominent public figure (Cunneen 1996, Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Becoming known for its intense Marian devotion, the nineteenth century witnessed three of the most well-known of all Marian apparitions – those at Paris, LaSalette, and Lourdes, further contributing to the focus on Mary (Carroll 1986).

Not only did *Ineffabilis Deus* provoke a further rift between Protestants and Catholics, it also changed Catholicism’s relation to the Virgin. The Immaculate Conception, which posits that Mary was born without any sin, even during conception, became dogma. Previous to then, the Immaculate Conception had been celebrated as a feast and since it was not dogma, it was left up to individual Catholics to believe in or

not. In this regard, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is official Church doctrine based largely on nonbiblical tradition (Hamington 1995). By announcing *Ineffabilis Deus*, the Church directed even more devotion and attention towards Mary, contributing to flourishing apparitions and piety.

The Church's increasing devotion to Mary was also substantiated by women's particular affinity for the Virgin. In the nineteenth century, women increasingly began to reassess their roles within Christianity. Educated women in England began questioning patriarchal understanding of God. Meanwhile, in America, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had written the "Women's Bible" and an 1885 essay entitled "Has Christianity Benefited Women," pointing out how at least the Catholic church had the Virgin, whereas Protestants had completely eliminated the feminine element. Stanton viewed Mary as a necessary feminine presence in both sacred and public space, as well as a means of improving women's status and sense of self. There was also a new found appreciation of art among educated Protestants of the time that brought with it previous centuries of Marian imagery embedded within Catholic art. All of these factors combined emboldened many Anglo-American women to embark on an exploration of Marian symbols, subsequently reifying Catholic devotion to her as well (Cunneen 1996, Ruether 1977). Indeed, "in retrospect, what is most extraordinary about the role of Mary in the nineteenth century is that she again succeeded in crossing lines of faith, class, and society" (Cunneen 1996: 267).

The twentieth century continued to witness the popularity of Mary, in no small part due to the Church's role. Pilgrimages and homage to the Virgin remains a central part of Catholic faith (Coyle n.d.). Particularly in the past decade the importance of

apparitions of the Virgin has become more established, with the serious press, as well as tabloid journals, suddenly becoming filled with stories of Mary, her cult, and her followers (Matter 2001). The time between 1850 and 1950 is often referred to as the “golden age of Mary” due to the two official decrees published by the Catholic Church specifically related to Mary, alongside the numerous apparitions of the Virgin reported (Hamington 1995 Matter 2001). In the span of ten years between 1948 and 1958 there were over 126 Marian congresses held in various cities around the world. The surge in apparitions continued well into the twentieth century, intensified by the formation of various Marian lay organizations. “The Militia of the Immaculate Conception” (1917), “The Legion of Mary” (1921), and the “Blue Army” (1974) are among some of the most popular. It should also be noted that the Vatican approved of the majority of lay organizations, tolerating their Marian doctrinal specificity (Carroll 1986).

By 1950, many viewed devotion to Mary and its support by the Church as reaching its pinnacle. An official proclamation by Pope Pius XII was announced that year, declaring the Virgin’s bodily assumption, as well as declaring 1950 to be the Marian Year (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). This prompted Carl Jung (1973) to hail this as one of the most significant events in the whole scope of Roman Catholic history, in effect working to mollify the “austerity of this transcendence, rendering this Deity gentler and more accessible” (Pelikan 1997: 206). The encouragement of the belief that special graces can be obtained through daily devotion to the Virgin gives considerable impetus to a core belief that remains central to Roman Catholic interests. Stated differently, by this point in time belief that Mary can alter the lives of the laity through prayer had become a powerful, central force in Catholic thought (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). This belief continued

through the 1950's. By the end of the decade it was estimated that over one thousand scholarly books had been published about the Virgin each year, not including the thousands of devotional books and pamphlets also being distributed (Laurentin 1965).

This continued popularity and encouragement was not to last. The flowering of visions reported between 1930 and 1960 eventually attracted the attention of Officials at the Vatican, prompting them to respond with efforts at controlling what essentially amounted to a take-over of Marian worship by the laity. Alfred Ottaviani, then advisor to the Holy See, published the doctrine "Proceed, Christians, with More Prudence" in the early 1960's. In this doctrine, distributed to dioceses all over the world, he urged Catholics to distance themselves from apparitional claims, instead opting to practice their faith on proven, official doctrine and tradition of the Church. This signified that perhaps the most important element in apparitions was not whether they truly took place or not but that they were being taken seriously by the faithful, raising issues of control by the Church hierarchy (Christian 1984).

Then came Vatican II (1962-1965), considered the most important religious event of the twentieth century. During this time, the Church continued its shift away from Mary; citing less of a need for Marian devotion. In this manner, Vatican II ran fundamentally counter to the ongoing Marian popularity (Carroll 1986, Hamington 1995, Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Pope John XXIII would follow Alfred Ottaviani in placing a decree warning Catholics against placing Mary before Jesus. It came to be seen that "the essentially nonbiblical nature of Mariology put it in conflict with the Biblical renewal" put forth by the Council (Hamington 1995: 21). Further, the formal declaration on Mary put out by Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium*, had a restraining effect on Marian extremists;

urging moderation, at most, in Marian worship. In its revised form, the veneration of Mary came to be seen primarily as an aid to the adoration of Jesus; said differently – devotion to Mary must remain subordinate to the worship of God (Carroll 1986). This decree caused a drastic drop in Catholic preaching on Mary (Hamington 1995, Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Despite the discouragement of Marian worship during Vatican II, and the corresponding drop in devotion, this trend would reverse itself with election of Pope John Paul II, who would come to be known as the “Marian Pope” (Matter 2001, Zimdars-Swartz 1991). He would visit several Marian shrines and attributed his survival of an assassination attempt to the Virgin’s protection. He remained throughout his rule a strong supporter of the Cult of Mary. He often linked anti-Communist philosophy to Marian piety, with scholars attributing this line of thinking to the increasingly political tone of apparitions during the twentieth century. Pope John Paul II would be much more favorable to the phenomenon of apparitions than any of his predecessors with this movement, reaching its apex in 1997 when he proclaimed Mary “Co-Redemptrix with Christ,” a role that places her as a constant intercessor and advocate in heaven. In many regards, the consequence of such moves placed the Catholic Church on a path that diverged from the reformist position established by Second Vatican Council. This trend has held true into the twenty-first century, with the number of apparitions having been, once again, on the increase since John Paul II’s rule (Matter 2001).

### **Different Interpretations for the Marian Apparitions**

Given the widespread occurrence of apparitions across time and culture, differing theories exist for their continuation, how they are to be explained, and their effect. While

theological examinations of apparitions attempt to discern whether apparitions actually occur, in the social sciences and humanities, scholarly analyses explore the phenomenon of apparitions and revelations. Scholarly explanations of apparitions range from the anthropological (Apolito 1998, Bax 1995, Turner and Turner 1978), sociological (Berryman 2001, Mestrovic 1991), historical (Blackbourn 1994, Christian 1981, Harris 2000), phenomenological (Perry and Echeverria, 1998, Zimdars-Swartz 1991), feminist (Warner 1976, Ruether 1977), economic (Vukonic 1996), to psychoanalytic (Carroll 1986). Here, some of the major theories will be explored in greater detail.

One of the more popular theories that exist for apparitions involves examining the phenomenon through socio-political lenses (Christian 1981, Manuel 2007, Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Using this lens, Zlatko Skrbis (2005) provides an exploration of apparitions from the perspective of nationalist movements. The existing literature on nationalism makes multiple references connecting nationalist struggles to enlistment of the Virgin. Skrbis' theory goes a step further in positing that apparitions *enable* nationalist discourse on an entirely new plane. Apparitions create an environment in which nationalist movements can develop and flourish. According to Skrbis, it is evident how nationalist movements have used Marian apparitions to their own ends, suggesting an "increasingly politicized myth" (2005: 447). In this manner, apparitional messages uphold the beliefs of a nation that makes the divine appear to be corroborating with a nationalist agenda. Instances of this can be observed in Northern Ireland, Spain, Guadalupe, and Medjugorje.

Theoretically, Skrbis argues that "apparitions of Mary presuppose the existence of the very same principles that underpins nationalist imagining *the idea of*

*election/choseness* and an associated perception of divinely ordained specialness” (2005: 445). Further, since the locations of apparitions are often undergoing periods of civil unrest or economic degradation, these messages work to divinely sanction a region, helping to raise its morale. In this sense, apparitions work to instill nations with a sense of symbolic and chosen capital, imbuing meaning in action; working in such a way that “nationalism and apparitions successfully reciprocate one another” (Skrbis 2005: 458).

Paul Manuel (2007) highlights the important role that religion plays in the political life of a nation. Using the apparitions at Fatima as an example, Manuel points out how the events there serve as an illustration of the influence religion bears on the political climate of a country. Manuel’s central thesis contends that apparitions of Mary impact the political life of a country to a large degree. Fatima provides the perfect example of this, as this one event had momentous impact of the political landscape of Portugal. “Popular sectors believe the Virgin Mary was sent to the Portuguese with messages from God, in a sense turning the traditional, absolute ‘divine right of the Kind’ model on its head,” and thus giving power to a small rural community (Manuel 2007: 15).

In the post-1789 period, apparitions have been “most likely to occur in settings where there is a general atmosphere of anticlericalism, political instability, and war” (Manuel 2007: 3). Religion becomes an intercessor against the powerlessness of civil unrest, providing an attestation of better times to those suffering – even if it is in a lifetime to come. Such apparitions serve as legitimation of the presence of a “divine anger” aimed at secular authorities. Therefore, Manuel’s theory suggests that popular religiosity; in this case apparitions should be taken more seriously and not viewed simply

from a theological standpoint, as their political influence is central and of importance to how they should be understood.

Sandra Zimdars-Swartz (1991) provides another socio-political explanation of apparitions that focuses on the apocalyptic nature many Marian revelations take on. The rise in twentieth century apparitions can be attributed to the increase in social and political tensions from Communism, nuclear war, and economic hardship. Spikes in apparitions are apparent during times of cultural stress, in which Mary becomes seen as an intermediate between God and humans, attempting to head off the impending doom of civilization unless God's word and ways are heeded. Marian apparitions have produced a "transcultural apocalyptic ideology," so that visitations of Mary serve the same function as Protestant's biblical prophecy and end-times scenarios: a lens for true believers to discern what the last days are and when they will arrive. Wars, famine, persecution, epidemics, and other calamities come to be viewed as "chastisements for sin and admonitions to reform or conversion" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 249). However, future catastrophes are not inevitable – if the Virgin's messages are observed, then the future will be altered. In this sense, apparitions take on great importance, as they come to be seen as a last-ditch attempt by Mary to have humans alter their ways.

Vasquez and Marguardt's (2000) theory explores apparitions from a postmodern standpoint. Using the apparition in Clearwater Florida as their example, Vasquez and Marguardt's central thesis maintains that apparitions are not solely the result of apocalyptic anxiety, nor are they simply a knee-jerk reaction against secularization, but instead apparitions provide an example of the "global becoming local." Their theory provides a chance of transcending the "totalizing and theological bent of modernist

approaches,” without failing to remain critical. The apparition in Clearwater provides an example of a global phenomenon becoming fully immersed and integrated into a local community. This helps to highlight “the complex relation between the local and the global and the role religion plays in mediating this relation” (Vasquez and Marguardt 2000: 120).

According to Vasquez and Marguardt’s theory, the resurgence of religion, in this case the presence of apparitions, serves as a form of resistance “to the rationalization of the world under neoliberal capitalism,” thus providing a continual search for the divine in the midst of the ever-increasing mundane (Vasquez and Marguardt 2000: 121). Further, following Weberian thought, scientific rationality, which was thought to liberate has instead emptied society of meaning and led to the objectification of humans. Certain patterns present in apparition cases, as is evident with Clearwater, support this hypothesis, highlighting many revelations call for a return to simpler times. Thus, deprived of its norms of “reciprocity, authenticity, and rational debate”, the public square becomes the domain of either “specialists without spirit” or of “religious fanatics threatening to escape modernity by taking us back to pre-modern times” (Vasquez and Marguardt 2000: 122).

What makes many modern day apparitions interesting is that while appearing as a form of protest against modernity, they at the same time employ the tools of secularization for their own capital in spreading their messages and gaining support. Clearwater provides an excellent example of this, as its messages of protest against modernity have been juxtaposed with a cosmopolitan space where pilgrims from all over the world meet, spread messages, and exchange stories of miraculous healing. Vasquez

and Marguardt reveal how pilgrims at Clearwater “are drawing from a global script to construct their local sacred space and to make sense of their personal experiences” (2000: 132). While apparitions are inherently local occurrences, technology has allowed them to simultaneously become global events, reaffirming faith to a differentiated population and becoming a spiritual beacon.

Switching gears from the socio-political viewpoint, sociological and phenomenological theories also attempt to explain the phenomenon of Marian apparitions. Using the sociological perspective, Edward Berryman (2001) attempts to analyze the mystical spirit of apparitions without explaining away all their meaning. From this framework, there is an effort to perceive apparitions “as is” – not assuming their divinity or downplaying the experience to simply the by-product of social and psychological processes. Berryman uses the apparitions at Medjugorje as an example through an analysis of videotapes taken of the three young visionaries as they experience an apparitional event.

From these observations, Berryman reaches the conclusion that the visionaries tend to take on, or metamorphose into the Virgin Mary, embodying the “aesthetic and plastic features of the Virgin Mary, her moral qualities and historical role, and her religious function.” The visionaries, in immobile kneeling positions, entranced in prayer, become living icons. Their entering into a trance-like state becomes a “passage from human beings to devotional object” (2001: 603). This reveals how visionaries, while remaining *in* contemporary life, manage to not be *about* contemporary life – most often remaining detached from the culture around them (in this case of Fatima, Western culture). In this sense, the Virgin Mary, along with subsequent apparitions of her, come to

represent a humanization of the divine. This is due partially to her role as the divine figure “closest” to human beings. From this perspective, apparitions represent a need for the divine to remain attached and active within human nature.

From a phenomenological standpoint, Maurice Hamington (1995) offers an understanding of apparitions using Peter Berger’s model. With this model, religious imagery and devotion to Mary is viewed as a social construction, which reflects the “values and wishes of the dominant group in society, rather than representing a factual, historical reality” (Hamington 1995: 24). Hamington also applies Berger’s concept of reification to Mary, citing how she came to be objectified to mythic proportions in the early church through a process of reification, first on a popular level by the faithful who adored her and later on a dogmatic level by the official Church. Marian apparitions have continued to work on loop-back effect, with the “continuing phenomenon of apparitions serving to further legitimize Mary as an ongoing powerful religious force (Hamington 1995: 25). In this sense, apparitions represent how powerful a social construction Mary is, revealing how she is now defined by the apparitions she first popularized as a religious phenomenon. Additionally, as a social construction, Mary remains open for debate and control, as well as a “re-negotiation” of religious imagery. Since there is little objective data to base the Cult of Mary on, she remains open to however society constructs her, which may differ across cultures (Hamington 1995).

Another sociological approach to Marian apparitions studies them from the perspective of collective behavior (Locher 2002). Using this perspective, religious appearances are subdivided into three categories: images, miracles and apparitions. Defining each reveals a progressive from the individual into the collective. Additionally,

Smelser's Value-Added Theory and Turner and Killian's Emergent Norm Theory provide supportive insight into the types of people and actions taken towards such a phenomenon.

An image may be aptly categorized as any episode in which a “group of individuals come to believe that the likeness of a holy figure, such as Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or an angel has spontaneously appeared on the surface of an ordinary object” (Locher 2002: 132). Events centered around images typically follow a similar pattern: an individual notices the image, identifies it as a religious figure, interprets as a miracle, and informs others of the image. It is not how the phenomenon developed, but *what* it developed into that makes it of substance – usually it is determined to be the result of naturally occurring phenomenon such as rust, dirt, or mold. While somewhat visually ambiguous, images are more open for interpretation and do not require group involvement.

Similar to images, miracles are tangible physical objects that display some extraordinary attributes. They are often easily located and viewable, and typically include religious paintings or statues that cry, bleed, or move. While images can be interpreted in a variety of ways, miracles appear more straightforward – there is no doubt that there are tear-like streaks on the face of a statue. The only question is whether or not one believes these tears are real or manufactured.

Fundamentally different from both images and miracles are apparitions. Here, events center on the appearance of some divine figure. A more collective event, participants are faced with either believing or disbelieving the claims of one individual. Thus, as a result, the events surrounding an apparition center on the credibility of the seer – if the participants deem to be dishonest or insane, then the event loses all meaning.

Locher applies Smelser's Value-Added theory and Turner and Killian's classification schema to instances of religious images to explain these instances of collective behavior. Smelser's theory can be used to describe conditions necessary for collective behavior to occur, while Turner and Killian's theory illustrates the motivations of the participants in collective behavior. Below will be a brief summary of each of these theories as they apply to miraculous appearances.

The first component of Value-Added theory is *structural conduciveness*, which refers to any social and/or physical factors that contribute to collective behavior. In the case of apparitions, this is often a shared religious orientation of the region. "The more religiosity exists in a particular area, the more people there are who are willing to believe in such an image" (Locher 2002: 139). In fact, the degree of religious belief in an area may be the most important factor of social conduciveness for this type of collective behavior. The second component is *structural strain*, which includes any form of social crisis/stress experienced by the community at large. This may be in the form of war, civil unrest, economic depravity, or high crime rate. The third component deals with *generalized belief*. Here, what sort of collective behavior will occur and the type of characteristics it will retain.

Related to this is Turner and Killian's classification schema, which helps to discern the motivations and perceptions of the participants. The first type of participant is the *devout believer* – people that are deeply religious and assuredly believe the event to be over divine origin. The second type is *devout skeptics* or persons of deep religious conviction that express some desire to believe the events, but are unsure upon first sight. Next there are *doubting participants*, consisting of individuals who are more interested in

the image/apparition itself than the religious meaning attached to it. Lastly, there are the *nonbelievers*, persons who do not believe the event is a miracle and actively avoid it at all costs.

Switching perspectives, Michael Carroll (1986), coming from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, offers a Freudian account for why apparitions occur. Castration anxiety, coupled with higher levels of the “father-ineffective” dynamic has given rise to an emphasis on Marian devotion and apparitions. While this theory has been labeled more problematic and flawed it is still worth taking note of.

Carroll’s summary of Freud finds that regions in which higher rates of apparitions occur, also experience correspondingly higher rates of father’s being typically absent due to work, leading to heightened sexuality (among men – *machismo*) along with higher levels of son’s sexual attachment to their mother. According to Freud, devotional practices in religion are a result of a compromised solution to allow some sort of discharge of built up psychic energy that develops as a result of our unconscious desires (Carroll 1986: 55). This leads to Carroll’s hypothesis, that apparitions and the cult of Mary flourishes in instances where there are father-ineffective families. Since there is created a stronger sexual desire for the mother, Mary serves as an outlet for such emotions. This leads to basically three mechanisms at play in apparitions: sexual attachment, identification, and castration anxiety.

Carroll’s analysis differentiates, on a general level, between illusions and hallucinations. Illusions represent a “misperception of a physical stimulus whose existence can be verified by independent observers;” whereas a hallucination is where the subject must perceive a stimulus and believe it really exists. Further, the “independent

observers must be unable to detect a stimulus of some sort that corresponds, however loosely, to that perceived by the subject” (Carroll 1986: 117). It is the latter that is the focus on Carroll’s analysis, as are most documented cases in general.

Sexual sublimation also plays a role in creating an environment in which apparitions manifest. Nearly eighty percent of Carroll’s observed recipients of apparitions were sexually mature adults with no obvious sexual partner. These hallucinations become a means of releasing sexual energy when no other outlet exists. This is also where the bottled sexual tension also comes into play, as “various Marian hallucinations might have been shaped not simply by oedipal desires and by desires formed during childhood (Carroll 1986: 146).

Oftentimes these different theories of apparitions apply their model to one apparitional event at a time, observing the phenomenon and then applying a theoretical answer to it. This reveals a gap in the research, as focusing on one case at a time runs the risk of missing overlap and patterns among varying apparitions that occur in different places. While providing valuable insight into the phenomenon of apparitions, they fail to capture larger, overarching themes that string together apparitions into a cohesive movement that largely constitutes the Cult of Mary.

## **Theory Chapter**

### **General Review of Marian Theories**

While over twenty-one thousand apparitions have been recorded since the fourth century, the vast majority of these cases go unnoticed and undocumented – particularly through scholarly analysis. The analyses that do exist help to uncover trends indicative of Marian apparitions. Most often, these analyses center on explaining the why and when, rather than how apparitions develop. This is central to extrapolating on the importance of Rodney Stark’s theory of revelations, as it moves towards incorporating how apparitions develop into the working knowledge of such a phenomenon.

Analyses are most often case studies of one specific Marian apparition, deriving a theoretical explanation from this particular case and generalizing as much as possible, although most often it is limited to the case at hand. These case studies work to develop trends in theory that are limited to a particular apparition. This can be seen with nationalist theories of apparitions, which most often use Medjugorje as an example. This reveals a gap in the research – theories that are able to incorporate Marian apparitions as a whole into the analysis would further research in this area.

Despite the exclusiveness of most case studies, overall trends in apparitions can be detected through an analysis of multiple case studies. Apparitions tend to happen in small communities that are economically depressed and are most often experiencing some form of social or cultural strife. This is an example of structural conduciveness, as apparitions often work towards creating social cohesion within the community, creating a sense of local pride. Visionaries are most often female, usually young, with minimal amounts of education, and very often experiencing some sort of ill health.

Further, some analyses of apparitions have worked to identify overall trends common to the phenomenon. Perry and Echeverria's (1989) work plays an important role in discussing several features indicative of apparitions. Their research highlights common characteristics apparitions tend to manifest. As discussed in the literature review, apparitions often share a common background (they tend to manifest in regions of conflict), the identity of visionaries (female, young, impoverished, experiencing ill-health, and poorly educated), the vision itself (the Virgin is described in a consistent manner), similar messages (shared meaning and apocalyptic nature), involve miracles (unusual phenomenon reported around apparitions), similar reactions (met with skepticism by Church while being embraced by faithful), and shared ecclesiastical action (Official inquiry by Church that leads to endorsement or denial). These attributes are prominent in Marian apparitions, helping to identify patterns common to this occurrence, and highlighting how independent episodes across time and culture are in the end not that independent of one another. This also underscores the ways in which Marian apparitions are not simply manifestations of devotion, but are a coherent group – a sect within Catholicism that has raised worship of Mary to a new dimension.

What is missing from these case studies is a broad scale incorporation of Marian apparitions, allowing for overall trends to be detected, as well as providing an analysis that attempts to explain the how and not simply the why apparitions occur. This adds an important element in understanding apparitions – how they develop. Existing studies of apparitions also fail to fully incorporate the role of the visionary, missing the important reasons for how and why individuals attempt to develop a rapport with the divine.

## **Rodney Stark's Theory of Revelations**

A review of the literature on Marian apparitions reveals several theories that have been developed in order to understand Marian apparitions, mostly centering on why apparitions develop without much time devoted to how they develop. While these theories provide valuable insight, they often are applied singularly to one apparition case or they fail to capture reoccurring themes that appear particular to Marian apparitions. In moving towards a more accurate representation of this phenomenon, Rodney Stark's *A Theory of Revelations* (1999) may be applied to Marian apparitions to provide a fuller understanding of this movement within Catholicism.

Stark's theory provides a developmental model of revelations based upon their importance in developing religious milieu. While most scholars have settled on the psychopathological interpretations for the how and why of revelators, Stark's model diverges from this path, instead explaining how otherwise "sane and sober" individuals can receive revelations. This model is constructed out of the perceived failings of Freudian and psychopathology models to accurately capture the normality embedded within many well-documented cases of apparitions.

Stark posits that "normal people" can, in fact, interact with the divine making it wholly "inappropriate to rule out the possibility that revelations actually occur" (1999: 288). It cannot know if revelations are possible, it is simply beyond the scope of science to prove or disprove. To chalk someone up as a fraud or psychotic does little in the long run to explain both why individuals receive revelations and how it is they become accepted as divine by others.

To explain this premise, Stark bases his theory in the historical cases of Joseph Smith, Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses – individuals who started major religious movements based upon revelatory experience. For these individuals, prayer serves as a “springboard” for revelations and enables divine contact. While many discount these individuals as psychotics, frauds, or both, millions have and still do look to them as having been in close conversation with the divine. It thus becomes necessary to understand the process that transformed these experiences from perceived revelations to sustained movements.

Very often leaders of religious movements are credited with having charisma, which is in regarded as the attribute as necessary to be a successful leader. Moreover, charisma holds great explanatory power in answering why individuals are able to move from sole revelatory experience to a group leader. The word itself, of Greek origin meaning “divine gift,” has been formulated most famously by Max Weber as a means of identifying legitimately-sanctioned religious power. Over time, the concept has taken on a life of its own – lending support to the idea the charisma is in of itself a mysterious religious power held by a very select few.

However, it is on this point that Stark diverges considerably from conventional wisdom as to how charisma is attributed. In essence, following Stark’s reasoning, charisma, as a name, explains nothing – it is a tautological argument. As an explanatory mechanism, charisma tells us very little about what actually *contributes* to a leader’s power. In this sense, ascribing a religious leader’s authority from God to charisma is the same as saying “John Paul II is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church because he is the pope;” both are simply names, and “*name explains nothing*” (304). Weber is guilty of

making a tautological argument in the sense that he never provides an explanation of what is the mysterious power of charisma besides through the definition of itself.

This is not to conclude religious leaders possess no unique qualities. It is quite fair to say they possess an enhanced ability to extend connections – a distinct magnetism – with others that are exceptional. Further, it may be the other side of this connection where charisma can be more accurately defined: the followers of a religious group. In this sense, charisma exists more in the spirit of followers than as an actual attribute of the group leader. Charisma becomes the myth members of the inner-circle relay out to less-situated members that enhances group following. Thus, charisma becomes an awe and mythical respect possessed by the group and not the leader. In other words, charisma may simply be a case of beauty being in the eyes of the beholder.

While it is important to discern what characteristics religious leaders may possess, it is equally important to understand what first generates revelations and how these revelations come to be sustained. First, is the issue of the initial generation of revelations. What societal influences contribute to the production of revelations? Why do some become popular while others go unnoticed? It has frequently been documented through history that crises in faith coincide with social or natural crises. In fact, it could be said that social/natural crises *equal* faith crises. As an individual's world shifts, for whatever reason, this generates faith questions about existence. In seeking an explanation, often individuals turn to supernatural sources. However, it may be that even established religious traditions are unable to provide acceptable answers for crisis. In response to such failure, "societies frequently have burst forth with new ones [spiritual solutions] – often based on the revelations of one individual" (Stark 1999: 295). Going along with

Anthony F.C. Wallace's theory that all religions are born of some manifestation of crisis, we see that times of societal crisis not only generate new religious thought, but also serve as the springboard for novel ideology.

If new religious revelations and movements are ripened by social crisis, it is important to understand who creates the base for such followings in its initial stage. Who, in the beginning stages of revelations is mostly likely to help create a stable group? Oftentimes, individuals who have received revelations may be reluctant to reveal such experience, particularly those that take on a heretical nature. Usually some form of encouragement is needed to reveal divine messages and relieve individual worry that he/she is not simply experiencing a psychotic illness. Generally, approval is first sought from family members and/or outside individuals who have an established trust. Then, "if members of your immediate social network can be converted, they constitute a ready-made religious movement" (Stark 1999: 297).

Accordingly, Stark emphasizes that revelations cannot evolve into sustained movements if only coming from a "lone prophet" – an important note to remember. Rather, revelations must be rooted in a preexisting, tightly-formulated network that includes a high level of social solidarity. This accounts for why new religious movements based upon revelations can typically be classified as a "family affair." Here, not only is family usually where revelations are first relayed, but family members provide encouragement for additional revelations to be revealed, leading to a pattern of divine interaction. As revelations are encouraged to continue over time, new interactions often become increasingly heretical. This takes place mostly because of the establishment of a

credible relationship between founder and followers, granting the founder confidence in his/her abilities.

To understand the varying interactions and productions of revelations, Stark introduces twelve components that help delineate the stages. Each module highlights a different dimension in which all actors (both founders and followers) play a pivotal role in the evolution of revelations into movements. Through the development of these twelve components, a fuller understanding of the evolution of revelations and ensuing movements can be gained.

In order to fully understand Stark's model, it is necessary to give a brief description of each section. These components will constitute the framework of my research, as cases of Marian apparitions will be applied to the existing model and subsequently provide an avenue for expanding the model. The twelve facets are as follows:

*(1) Revelations will tend to occur when (a) there exists a supportive cultural tradition of communications with the divine and (b) the recipient of the revelation(s) has direct contact with a role model, with someone who has had such communications.*

The definition of revelation exists on the assumption that communication with the divine is indeed possible. This formalization rests upon confirmation by the religious culture, and reporting of similar encounters. In other words, the existence of a similar experience is fundamental for future revelations to occur and be reported as it fosters an environment in which divine communication is indeed possible. Previous instances of such encounters serve as reinforcement for other individuals to relay their own such communications.

*(2) Many, common, ordinary, even mundane mental phenomena can be experienced as contact with the divine.*

Very often the attraction to revelations stems from their (potential) occurrence in daily activities. Even what is categorized as “ordinary” religious activity, e.g. prayer, holds the potential of the extraordinary. While these practices normally do not produce such outcomes, the instances in which they are reported can serve as a revival for conventional faith and practice.

*(3) Most episodes involving contact with the divine will merely confirm the conventional religious culture, even when the contact includes specific communications, or revelations.*

Typically, reported revelations speak within the confines of the orthodoxy. Reasons for this may be due to a deeply held religious commitment to the conventional faith or a lack of needed creativity to conceive an entirely new culture. This may be also due to an institutional desire to suppress such revelations that appear as heretical.

*(4) Certain individuals will have the capacity to perceive revelations, whether this be an openness or sensitivity to real communications or consists of unusual creativity enabling them to create profound revelations and then to externalize the source of this new culture.*

The main emphasis, in this case, is on the individual receiving revelations. As described above, individuals in possession of certain amounts of creativity and openness are most likely to be the recipient of revelations. However, what this denotes is that a certain aesthetic marker must be held. Later, it will be explored that the opposite possibility can hold true. It may be the case that ordinary persons, with no particular

capabilities or sensitivities, are just as likely to be the recipient of revelations as others possessing certain amounts of creativity.

*(5) Novel (heretical) revelations will most likely come to persons of deep religious concerns who perceive shortcomings in the conventional faith(s).*

*(6) The probability that individuals will perceive shortcomings in the conventional faith(s) increases during periods of social crisis.*

Here, heresy and crisis are contingent upon one another. Frequently in human history, crises produced by natural or social disasters have been translated into crises of faith” (295). Perceived failures of religious traditions and/or society can stimulate new spiritual innovations. This may be especially prominent when religion is unable to produce sufficient narration of the occurring disaster/crisis or remains unavailing to the situation, leading to only possible supernatural explanations. Stark additionally points out that a crisis needs not beset society as a whole to provoke the preceding descriptions. This is of particular interest in explaining the high incidence of revelations and movements among minorities, notably women.

*(7) During periods of social crisis, the number of persons who receive novel revelations and the number willing to accept such revelations is maximized.*

Building upon the previous two propositions concerning crisis, an environment conducive to revelations and their subsequent acceptance is created during these times. It is important to note social crises are not an absolute in facilitating revelations; they may only be maximized during these periods.

*(8) An individual's confidence in the validity of his or her revelations is reinforced to the extent that others accept their revelations.*

*(9) A recipient's ability to convince others is proportionate to the extent to which he or she is a respected member of an intense primary group.*

Now the focus has shifted to the social network surrounding the individual. "Revelations cannot be sustained and transformed into successful new religions by lonely prophets, but are invariably rooted in preexisting networks having a high level of social solidarity" (Stark 297). Revelations, particularly those potentially received as heretical, may only be reluctantly divulged, therefore, an immediate social group that is accepting of these claims is vital. Further, it may even be that the cardinal factor in the development of religious movements is indeed the family unit. "Moreover, if members of your immediate social network can be converted, they constitute a ready-made religious movement" (Ibid.).

*(10) The greater the reinforcement received, the more likely a person is to have further revelations.*

On a basic level, behavior that is accepted and/or rewarded will usually be repetitive while behavior received negatively tends to cease. Studies of successful religious founders have revealed a distinct pattern of revelations; initial revelations tended to be of a much more conventional nature while as time progressed they increasingly took a heretical tone. This may not hold true across all religious movements, as will be later explored.

*(11) The greater the amount of reinforcement received and the more revelations a person produces, the more novel (heretical) subsequent revelations will become.*

After acceptance of initial revelations takes place, a relationship of credibility begins between the founder and followers. As this relationship substantiates, bolder

innovations begin to evolve. Interaction between the founder and followers plays a substantial, yet inconspicuous, role in illustrating revelations. Noteworthy, though, is that the encouragement of (continual) heretical revelations does not occur indefinitely. “Indeed, as movements grow and develop more ramified organizational structures, pressures build up against further revelations, for *organizations* are best served by *completed* faith” (303). Most movements cannot withstand constant revisions of faith and doctrine.

*(12) As they become successful, religious movements founded on revelations will attempt to curtail revelations or to at least prevent novel (heretical) revelations.*

As discussed in the above model, as the religious movement progresses, the need for ongoing, innovative revelations decreases. This can be attributed to Max Weber’s conception of the routinization of charisma. After the origination of the movement, it may be decided that all necessary truths have been imparted and the need for revelations ended or the charismatic power attributed to a person has now shifted to the authority of position or office.

## Methodology Chapter

In this study, Marian apparitions were examined and applied to Rodney Stark's Theory of Revelation, and works to expand upon this theory through the inclusion of a new sect – the Cult of Mary. The purpose of such an analysis is to expand Stark's theory beyond its current incarnation, in order to examine Marian apparitions in a new light.

For this research, fourteen apparition cases were examined and subsequently integrated into the larger study. This material consisted of secondary data sources derived from books, journal articles, and case studies of Marian apparitions. There were several factors that contributed to what constituted an applicable case. To date, the best existing comprehensive source is provided by Matter and Gordon (2000) who have compiled a listing of reported apparitions from 1975-2000. Although this does not include older, historical cases, (i.e. Lourdes, Guadalupe) it does present newer cases that at this point may be lesser known. Matter and Gordon's listing has been compiled alongside data from the University of Dayton (2008) to create a more comprehensive listing of Marian apparitions used for this project.

The use of the term *cases* refers to instances where some sort of contact (either visual or auditory) with the Virgin Mary was alleged and a subsequent following of devoted individuals ensued. As described above, any form of contact with the Virgin Mary – through messages, visual contact, or both constituted what was described as an *apparition* or *revelation*; these two terms were used interchangeably. Cases usually involved some form of longitudinal study of the apparition, which did not necessarily derive from one source, but instead was sometimes pieced together from a variety of sources. This approach also allowed for a wider understanding of the case itself, as

different sources presented a wide range of angles from which the phenomenon was approached.

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

The most important criteria for the inclusion of an apparition cases was that it had been documented through scholarly analysis. This interim is to ensure reliability in the analysis, as well as an attempt to remain as objective as possible. Most of the major cases of Marian apparitions have been scrupulously documented by various religious studies scholars, sociologists, and anthropologists. This set of studies provided an excellent source for gaining a multi-angled perspective on these apparitional events. Further, it allowed for an analysis of apparitions not limited to one event, unlike most of the current research. Newspaper and media accounts were used as a means of tracking and locating ongoing cases, as well as a starting point for investigating what scholarly sources were available. Primarily, media outlets were used as a means of discovering cases (particularly new cases), as many of these apparitions take place in remote places. Cases also involved some form of group following to constitute a movement. This usually indicated the apparitions were serial and a dedicated following of the faithful forms around the apparition site, as well as the visionary, transforming the area into an informal shrine.

The inclusion of a case was not influenced by whether or not the apparitions received official recognition by the Catholic Church. In fact, the majority of cases used had received either no judgment by the Church or were denied official status. These cases challenge existing theories that propose an apparition needs official recognition in order to be sustained.

## **Analyses Excluded**

Excluded from the analysis were sources derived from devotional or apologetic material, as these sources were written with confessional rather than analytic goals. While devotional material dominates the literature, it does not present the necessary information to apply to Stark's model. This includes information presented by independent sources as well as literature on apparitional cases presented by the Catholic Church.

Further, cases were not considered that involved some form of apparition that lacked any group following and/or died out very quickly. The framework did not include such cases where purported appearances of Mary that followings did not develop into movements or where no documentation was found. Examples of the exclusion include instances of Mary's face appearing on sandwiches and cooking pans. Although these instances were considered divine by some, no subsequent movement or congregation followed; therefore cases such as this were irrelevant to the proposed analysis. It should also be noted that official Vatican confirmation or denial of reported apparitions is irrelevant as this does not have a bearing on whether these cases were documented and/or if groups formed around the site or person.

Some twenty-first century cases that have only been documented in the popular press also were excluded from the analysis. These cases, while reported by outside individuals, failed to provide the detail necessary in order to conduct an in-depth analysis. Much of this may be due to the ongoing and recent nature of the apparitions. It should be noted that the popular press will be utilized in the capacity of helping to identify cases and using these sources to look for scholarly analysis of the event.

## **Methodological Design**

The analytical procedures utilized in this study may be aptly characterized as a content analysis, aimed at synthesizing, characterizing, and examining Marian apparitions. This form of analysis allowed for an overview of apparitions in such a way that trends were detected and was used because it is the most available and accurate measure of capturing the key components of revelations through Stark's model. Additionally, content analysis provides a convenient means of analyzing a large amount of data through unobtrusive means and no funding. It also provides the ability to analyze globally, since in this instance it is not possible to conduct first-hand observation and analysis of every apparition, and it allows for the inclusion of historical cases.

Latent coding was used, with the coding corresponding to the twelve points constructed in Stark's model. The coding for this analysis was each of the twelve components comprised in Stark's theory. Cases were applied against each code in order to serve the twofold purpose of both aligning with and expanding the existing theory. Some of the coding was combined (two points into one) due to similarity in the codes. This was to avoid repetition in the analysis. The coding is as follows:

1. Revelations will tend to occur when (a) there exists a supportive cultural tradition of communications with the divine and (b) the recipient of the revelation(s) has direct contact with a role model, with someone who has had such communications.
2. Many common, ordinary even mundane mental phenomenon can be experienced as contact with the divine.
3. Most episodes involving contact with the divine will merely confirm the conventional religious culture, even when the contact includes a specific communication or revelation.
4. Certain individuals will have the capacity to perceive revelations, whether this be an openness or sensitivity to real communications or consists of unusual creativity enabling them to create profound revelations and then to externalize the source of this new culture.
5. Novel (heretical) revelations will most likely come to person of deep religious concerns who perceive shortcomings in the conventional faith(s).

6. The probability that individuals will perceive shortcomings in the conventional faith(s) increases during periods of social crisis.
7. During periods of social crisis the number of persons who receive novel revelations and the number willing to accept such revelations is maximized.
8. An individual's confidence in the validity of his or her revelations is reinforced to the extent that others accept these revelations.
9. A recipient's ability to convince others is proportionate to the extent to which he or she is respected member of an intense primary group.
10. The greater the reinforcement received, the more likely a person is to have further revelations.
11. The greater the amount of reinforcement received and the more revelations a person produces, the more novel (heretical, deviant) subsequent revelations will become.
12. As they become successful, religious movements founded on revelations will attempt to curtail revelations or to at least prevent novel (heretical) revelations.

### **Sampling**

As mentioned previously, fourteen cases that fit the described criteria were included in the study. Here, the most applicable form of sampling was non-probability sampling, as the data collected was random. Since this is a qualitative study, it was not possible to obtain information on all possible cases, nor was it advantageous to acquire a random sample of the population, making it necessary to use this form of sampling. With this comes the issue of not knowing whether or not the sample obtained is entirely representative of the population at large, providing a limitation to the study

The sampling for this study was a combination of discriminate and convenience sampling in the terms of how cases were chosen. The use of convenience sampling involved cases that provided enough information and detail that could be obtained. Cases with limited access to data were excluded. Overall, discriminate sampling guided this research, as cases will be chosen and excluded on a deliberate basis. Both of these methods involve nonrandom sampling. Since this is a qualitative study, it is not possible

to obtain information on all possible cases, nor is it advantageous to acquire a random sample of the general population since this is not a common phenomenon, making it necessary to use this form of sampling.

The breakdown of the sampling was as follows: the target population was Catholics (either producer of revelation or devotee) involved in apparitions of Mary; the sampling unit consists of individuals who claim to have either been witness to or participated in the worship of a Marian apparition; the sampling frame included historical and contemporary cases of Marian apparitions. The sampling frame was limited to apparitions of Mary – other perceived divine contact (Jesus, saints, etc.) was not included in this research.

### **Limitations**

As with any research methodology, there comes a set of limitations. Any research that attempts to assimilate data in new ways presents a precedent for future research to follow that will refine the initial research. One of the major limitations for this study was the reliance on available scholarly data documenting Marian apparitions. Since data of this kind was relatively rare, the cases to be analyzed were limited to what was available. The sampling utilized also came with its own set of limitations. Most notably, the use of discriminate and convenient sampling limits how the results of the study far can be generalized. It is difficult to discern if the entire population has been accurately captured, or if the results were only specific to the accessed population. However, in some regards this is not entirely applicable to this research. The results of this study could be generalized only to Marian apparitions and not other religious populations.

## **Case Summary**

### **Fatima**

In Fatima, Portugal, three young children, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta, reported a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1917 that would remain a source of focus and attention for years to come. Lucia dos Santos would be the only one of the three children to reach adulthood, as well as being the apparent leader of the group. Her memoirs would provide insight into what happened during the apparitions and remains a popular devotional material. The youngest of seven children, Lucia recalls being cuddled and the center of attention during the first six years of her life, a stark contrast from what would take place after the announcement of her visions. Coming from a devout Catholic family, Lucia displayed strong religious convictions from an early age, even receiving First Communion four years early.

When she turned seven, her special status within her family began to fade, as she was sent out to care for the family's sheep. Choosing three other girls to be her companion, the following year in 1915, the girls would have a series of extraordinary experiences. As they were praying the rosary after lunch, they reported witnessing a figure poised in the air above the trees, almost transparent by the light. Lucia, deciding to keep the incident quiet, was disregarded by her peers who returned home that evening to tell their families. The news spread quickly around the town, but was dismissed as childish nonsense by most, including Lucia's mother.

Not long after these events, Lucia's cousins, Francisco and Jacinta, would also begin tending their families' sheep alongside Lucia. Although not disclosed until many

years later, in 1916, Lucia and her cousins describe appearances from an angel that fed them communion. After Lucia's prior dismissals, the children decided to keep this experience to themselves.

In 1917, Lucia's family fell on hard times. Although young, Lucia seemed to recognize the hardships and the precarious economic situation her family faced. It is noted that in the midst of such hardship, Lucia seemed to develop a way of finding religious meaning amidst personal adversity and sharing these experiences in near-secrecy to a few friends – setting a pattern that would come to define the apparitions at Fatima. It was on May 13, 1917 that the six appearances of the Virgin began for the three children. Originally agreeing to keep the matter to themselves, Jacinta broke the agreement by returning to town and telling her mother that they had seen “Our Lady” at the Cova da Iria – a woman surrounded by a dazzling light who had told them to recite the Rosary every day. The next morning word of the event spread quickly through the village. Lucia, angry at Jacinta for telling, was mocked by her mother and sisters. Her distress was heightened the next day by a crowd from neighboring villages that had gathered and wanted to accompany her and her cousins back to the apparition site. Thus began a patterned response to the experiences by Lucia and her cousins. This included: the children's approach to an oak tree, recitation of the rosary, Lucia's sudden announcement of the Virgin's arrival, her presumed conversation with her while kneeling, and then Lucia announcing the Virgin's departure. Many people present at these events would describe hearing a buzzing sound and thunder, as well as a small cloud over the oak tree. During this time, Jacinta and Francisco would kneel beside Lucia, but remain silent. These events culminated on October 13, 1917, when about

seventy-five thousand gathered to be witness to the last appearance in hopes of seeing a miracle Lucia had predicted. Many attending that day, including professional journalists, would recall seeing the sun tremble and dance and saw a variety of colors radiating from the sun. The crowd, soaked by an earlier rain, also reported suddenly becoming dry.

As with the knowledge of her first visions, the series of Marian apparitions brought about rejection by Lucia's immediate neighbors as well as by her family. Her mother, concerned about gossip, was determined to make Lucia deny everything. Discussed in great detail in her later memoirs, Lucia recounts the repeated quizzing and pressing for information from local priests, bishops, and even the village mayor who had the children imprisoned for a period of time. During the summer of the apparitions, rumors circulated that the apparitions were the deceit of the devil. In 1918, a flu epidemic struck the area and both Jacinta and Francisco became ill and confined to the bed. Unable to escape physically, the strain of attention and scrutiny became even worse for them. The following year, Francisco died and in 1920 Jacinta passed away as well, leaving Lucia the sole survivor of the apparitions. Lucia, continuing to live under constant scrutiny, entered the College of the Sisters of St. Dorothy at Vilar do Porto in 1921 where she would become a sister in 1925 and remain for the rest of her life.

One of the focal points of the apparitions at Fatima that contributed to its ongoing popularity surrounded the supposed three secrets revealed to the children. Much of the information on the secrets and their subsequent exposure would be learned through Lucia's three memoirs, written at the request of the local bishop and locutions from the Virgin Lucia between 1935 and 1941. In these, she discussed the Virgin's foretelling that

Jacinta and Francisco would be taken early to heaven and that Lucia was to remain because Jesus wanted to continue to make use of her.

Her third memoir, published in 1941, contained what Lucia believed to be a sign from God to relinquish the first two of the three secrets disclosed to her and her cousins. The first secret was a vision of hell that the Virgin showed to them, vivid and descriptive, which greatly scared the three children. The second secret concerned devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In this vision, the Virgin told the children that in order to save the poor sinners, God wished that there be established a worldly devotion to the Immaculate Heart. If done, souls will be saved and wars will cease. However, if it were not done, worse wars would occur and people would be punished. This secret also contained a call for the consecration of Russia. The third secret Lucia refused to disclose until she was ordered to do so in 1943. After writing it down in detail, it was sent sealed to the Pope where it has been kept hidden and undisclosed to the public.

Later, the publication of the devotional accounts of the apparitions by Lucia, alongside the revelations of the first two secrets gave rise to a growing conviction by many Catholics that the messages conveyed by the Virgin at Fatima directly related to events taking place in the twentieth century. Believers understood the second secret to be a prophecy of the end of World War I and the subsequent beginning of World War II since people had not stopped offending God. The Virgin's statements concerning Russia were taken very seriously and viewed in the context of the unfolding of the Cold War. During the 1950s there was a growing sentiment that the devotional practices advised at Fatima could serve as a powerful weapon against the growing menace of Russia. It is clear that the prophetic nature of the second part of the secret at Fatima contributed to its

ongoing popularity and the unrevealed third secret made it a source of continual curiosity for Catholics (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

### **Kibeho, Rwanda**

The first known claim of an apparition on the African continent took place on November 28, 1981 in Kibeho, Rwanda (Haar 2003). Students at the secondary school were at lunch, when one of the students, Alphonsine Mumuerke, who was in charge of preparing for the daily services, reports that she heard a voice calling to her who identified herself as “Lady of the Word.” After a brief conversation, the voice told Alphonsine that her companions needed to have more faith. She later told her friends of her experience, but she was met with skepticism and teased. Several reoccurrences of the apparition followed and Alphonsine was challenged to put in a request for the Virgin to appear to others as a test.

On January 12, 1982, Anathalie Mukamazimpka fell into same ecstasy as Alphonsine, followed in July by two more young boys, one of whom was not a Christian, and four other girls. This brought a flood of excitement and consternation to the village. There were to be eight principle seers, each of whom was questioned and interrogated, both separately and together. One of the more notable attributes of all the seers was their ability to be overtaken by intense ecstatic trances during which they seemingly lost all contact with the world. During these times, the seers were often “tested” through pricks with knife tips, lit matches applied to the hand and flashlights waved straight in their eyes with no response.

During the apparitions, the Virgin would announce her next return, and on those dates the number of pilgrims increased notably. The events became so popular that Radio

Rwandaise installed a loudspeaker system and broadcast the events live on the radio. The central theme of the Kibeho apparitions drew attention to people's lack of attention to the "things of heaven" (Swann 1996: 230). Also notable among the apparitions was the frequent reporting of solar phenomena surrounding the events. Often there were reports of the sun changing colors and lines becoming visible both in and around it. Miraculous healings also took place and contributed to the steady stream of pilgrims to the area.

Among the messages delivered by the Virgin were ominous warnings. These warnings often came while the seers were in a trance or lay in an inexplicable coma for up to two or three days. On August 15, 1982, after coming out a trance, five of the principle seers fell to the ground trembling and crying. They described receiving intense visions of terror for the Virgin, all reporting seeing a "scene of torrents of blood, bodies abandoned without burial, trees on fire, great abysses opening up, an appalling monster, and decapitated heads everywhere" (Swann 1996: 232). This description greatly frightened the twenty-five thousand pilgrims present and would be repeated several more times over the years, and followed by the Virgin urging the seers to leave Rwanda. Four years later, the wars between the Hutus and the Tutsis erupted with the slaughter of thousands and a very similar scene played out across the country.

After some time, the priests took over control of the apparitions, in effect domesticating the events. By doing so they took full control of the process, making sure the apparitions were received at a set time, at a certain place and under certain conditions (Haar 2003). As far as the official Church is concerned, no final decision on the divinity of the appearances has been determined. Two commissions of inquiry have been conducted to examine the authenticity of the events at Kibeho. As of 1994, no decision

had been reached, but the Church “encouraged a public devotional cult at the place of the presumed apparitions” (Haar 2003: 422).

### **Lourdes – Bernadette Soubirous**

As one of the more historically well-known and popular sites of Marian Apparitions, the popular pilgrimage site at Lourdes was motivated through the experiences of a 14-year old girl named Bernadette (Marie Bernarde) Soubirous. Born in Lourdes on January 7, 1844, Bernadette was the eldest child in a family that contended with much poverty, misfortune, and ill health.

Bernadette’s initial experience occurred on February 11, 1858, market day at Tarbes, while gathering bones on the riverbank with a friend and her sister. She described hearing a loud rustling coming from the bushes above the grotto. When she looked up she saw something white, with the shape of a young girl, and immediately knelt down to pray. The image said nothing, only smiled at her, and then vanished. She described this image as *aquero*, which means “the one.” When her companions returned, she recounted what she saw, but they had seen nothing. She would also attempt to tell her mother and aunt, but would be dismissed as having a dream and her experience as being only an illusion. Days later, she would recount her experience to Lourdes Police Commissioner Jean Dominique Jacomet, perhaps the first person to believe her story, and the one who provided the first written account.

A few days later upon returning from High Mass with several other girls, the *aquero* would appear again as they stopped to pray the rosary at the grotto. Bernadette attempted to tell two other people of her experience, but would again be dismissed as seeing an illusion. Two days later, a well known resident of Lourdes, Madame Millet,

approached Bernadette, asking for an account of her experience; both made plans to return to the grotto together. There, while praying and saying the rosary together, the *aquero* would appear to Bernadette, while Millet was unable to see or interact with the apparition. This time the image spoke to Bernadette, instructing her “to have the grace to go to see her [*aquero*] for fifteen days” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 48).

During this time, Bernadette consistently referred to the apparition as *aquero*, describing it as a young girl “being about her own age, wearing a white dress with a blue waistband and carrying a rosary on her arm” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991:48). It is unclear exactly when, and by whom, it was concluded that the image was that of the Virgin; however, it appears at least partially to have been through the facilitation of others.

What was clear was that Bernadette intended to follow through with the instructions given. Each morning she arose to go to the grotto from February 18<sup>th</sup> to March 4<sup>th</sup>, all the while being accompanied by an ever-growing crowd of intrigued followers. Quickly, she began being treated as a saint, with many attempting to kiss and touch her. During this time, the most notable apparitions occurred on February 25<sup>th</sup>, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>.

On February 25<sup>th</sup> as Bernadette knelt praying, she would suddenly begin crawling on her hands and knees, stopping at a spot and digging into the ground until she unearthed muddy water, drinking and covering her face with it. Later that day, people would return to that spot and begin digging, uncovering a spring. They began collecting the water, believing it held special powers, and shortly thereafter word began to spread of miraculous healing.

Simultaneously during this time, a cousin of Bernadette's, Antoine Clarens, provided one of the first lengthy accounts of the occurrences at the grotto. During the course of the dictation he asked Bernadette if she had been bestowed any specific mission. Although her answer was no, days later, on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the presence of an estimated sixteen hundred people gathered at the grotto, Bernadette reportedly received her mission. The *aquero* directed her, "to go to the priests and tell them that a chapel should be built there and that people should come there in procession" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 51). Upon making a formal request to the clergy, she was met with controversy and skepticism.

On the last day of this period, March 4<sup>th</sup>, an estimated five to twenty thousand persons joined Bernadette at the grotto. She followed the same pattern as the previous days, but as she left, she reached out and hugged Eugenie Troy, a partially blind child. A short time later it would be reported that the child miraculously healed from his affliction. Other reports of healing would surface as more and more people began to glorify her.

Weeks later, while praying at the grotto, she asked *aquero* to identify herself; receiving the answer: "I am the Immaculate Conception" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 55). This title would fuel the controversy between followers and the clergy. Local government officials attempted to dissuade travel to the grotto with no success. By this time the site had become a pilgrimage, with other reportings of apparitions surfacing.

Through the spring and summer of 1858, development of "public access" to the grotto would increase as a chapel was built, in addition to a shrine at the spring. A few years later, Bernadette joined a religious order in Nevers, where she remained for the rest of her life. After much debate between devotees to Lourdes and local government and

church officials, on June 18, 1862, “Bishop Laurence issued a letter officially declaring the apparition worthy of the assent of the Faithful and sanctioning the cult of the ‘Immaculate Mother of God’ at the Lourdes grotto” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 66). Bernadette would later be beatified by the Catholic Church on June 14, 1925 and canonized on December 8 1933.

### **Mary Ann Van Hoof**

Born Anna Maria Bieber on July 31, 1909 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mary Anne Van Hoof was one of seven children to immigrant parents. She was raised under conditions of hardship not uncommon to farm families and would later recount living under the fear of her abusive father.

After briefly moving around, she married Godfred Van Hoof and settled down to raise a family in Necedah, Wisconsin. He was responsible for reintroducing Catholicism back into her life after she was raised by non-practicing Catholic parents.

Van Hoof’s first apparition took place on November 12, 1949, as she lay bed-ridden with a kidney ailment and heart pain. Unable to sleep from anxiety over her inability as a mom and wife, she began to pray to the Virgin and Jesus for guidance in fulfilling her familial responsibilities. Suddenly, she heard a noise from the hallway and looked up to see a “figure, taller than her daughter and wearing a veil, that began to approach her” before disappearing (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 42). She initially told no one of her experience in fear of being branded as delusional. A month later she told her family, at which time her husband interpreted the figure to be that of the Virgin Mary, coming to her not for personal reasons but to expose the “wickedness of the world” (43).

Her second experience, on Good Friday April 7, 1950, also manifested during a period of physical suffering, during which she would receive a mandate to instruct the parish priest and people to pray the rosary every evening at eight o'clock when the Virgin would reappear to her.

She received her next revelation on May 28<sup>th</sup> at which time she saw a "blue midst over four ash trees in the farmyard," since known as the "Sacred Spot" (36). She was then instructed to pray and fast for fifteen days to atone for her previous instructions not being kept. Her revelations at this point adopted a posture of redemptive suffering, translating her suffering into a larger context of spiritual reparations. During one such apparition during this time she foretold developing the stigmata as penance for others and was hospitalized for observance by the Bishop. Despite never manifesting the stigmata, her followers remained undeterred as more and more were drawn to her messages of spiritual suffering.

By Trinity Sunday, June 4, Van Hoof's revelations had extended into the public realm, swelling from a crowd of twenty-eight to a crowd of fifteen hundred in only three weeks. People began to approach her for healing, pilgrimage to her farm, and constant recollection of her visions. At some points, the crowds were recorded to have exceeded one hundred thousand, even with mixed reaction from clergy and official statements released by Bishop Treacy dissuading interest in Van Hoof's experience that went as far as banning at certain points additional masses on feast days. The local priest, Father S. R. Lengowski, an initial supporter of Van Hoof, eventually was transferred to another parish over seventy miles away, a move that was blamed by many on his involvement with Van Hoof.

Over time, most of Van Hoof's revelations contained apocalyptic scenarios. America, threatened by "enemies of God," could be saved through improved morality, stricter faith practices (penance, daily rosary recitations), and a return to austere Catholic doctrine.

Despite an official condemnation of Mary Ann Van Hoof's apparitions by the Catholic Church in 1955, with interdicts in 1970 and 1975, a dedicated following remained in tact. This group formed a close community that associated itself with the Old Catholic Church of North America, even after Van Hoof's death in 1984.

### **Our Lady of the Roses – Veronica Lueken, Bayside, NY.**

On June 5, 1968 Veronica Lueken, a mother of five and housewife from Queens, New York sat in her car praying for assassinated Senator Robert Kennedy, when she felt overcome by a smell of roses. Shortly thereafter, she experienced a vision of St. Therese of Lisieux, who imparted to her sacred poems and writings. Two years later on April 7, 1970, Lueken encountered her first appearance of the Virgin Mary at her home. She was instructed to build a shrine near St. Robert Bellamine Church in Bayside New York. Mary instructed Lueken that she would speak through her, and that the shrine was to be named "Our Lady of the Roses, Mary Helper of Mothers." Mary promised to make a personal appearance if a rosary vigil were held starting on June 18, 1970. Vigils were held as requested, and several hundred missives have been passed through Lueken.

As word spread of her revelations, every Saturday evening, people gathered at the devotional site, near the remains of the Unisphere built for the 1964-65 World's Fair. At the site, people would "kneel or sit in folding chairs and pray the rosary from 8:30pm to 11:30pm, before an adorned five-foot statue of the Virgin Mary. The statue stands on a

modest slab of cement that marks the former Vatican Pavilion site, the spot where Michelangelo's *Pieta* was housed during the World's Fair" (Wojcik 1996: 129).

Photography and the use of media (internet/publications) enhanced knowledge of the revelations and served as a major source of promotion.

Lueken's apparitions were most often apocalyptic, focusing on the destruction of earth by a comet and the coming of World War III, at which time three quarters of humanity would be killed. The signs of the end-times were already ardent globally through the presence of AIDS, famine, war, pornography, communism, and corruption in the Catholic Church among other things. However, destruction could be avoided by adherence to Pre-Vatican II doctrine and strict practice of prayer and penance.

After an investigation by Church officials in 1973, "the diocese of Brooklyn declared that it found no basis for belief that Veronica Lueken had seen the Virgin Mary" (Wojcik 1996). The diocese issued a similar declaration in 1986, which stated that the Bayside visions 'completely lacked authenticity' and advised Catholics to 'refrain from participating in the vigils and from disseminating any propaganda related to the Bayside apparitions" (Wojcik 1996:131). However, this campaign did nothing to dissuade belief and assembly at the apparition site. In fact, it appeared to have the opposite effect as more people began to take note of what was reoccurring there.

In 1975, the apparition site was moved from Bayside to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park due to objections from local residents over the vigils and the controversial nature of the revelations. The move also seemed to have no effect on the attendance at the site as people continued to visit, and the use of technology (internet/media) helped to spread word of the apparitions even further.

## **San Damiano, Italy – Rosa Quattrini**

The apparitions at San Damiano lasted from 1964 to 1981 and were witnessed by Rosa Quattrini. Growing up, Rosa was the second to youngest of seven children in a family that suffered frequent economic hardship. Losing her father when she was only two, her daily life was comprised of mostly farm work, as she left school after the third grade. With her other three sisters leaving home for religious vocations, Rosa remained at home to assist her family. Rosa developed poor health following three pregnancies and became bedridden.

Her condition became acute in 1961, and she was hospitalized multiple times before a sudden recovery she attributes to miraculous events. According to Rosa, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, an unknown young woman came to the house collecting alms for the local priest Padre Pio and asked to see Rosa. She asked how Rosa was doing and then instructed her to get up out of the bed. After complying, Rosa proclaimed that she was healed, and this began a special connection she would seek out with Padre Pio. During a pilgrimage to San Giovanni with him, Rosa would confide that the woman who had healed her was in fact the Virgin Mary. For the next three years, as she did service work, she considered Padre Pio to be the central agent through which God would intervene and guide her life.

It would be October 16, 1964 that the next momentous event for Rosa would take place. According to Rosa, the Virgin would appear to her on this day in an entirely new context and give her a message intended for the public. This was the first of many public

messages to come over the course of the next decade, attracting international attention as pilgrims from all over came to visit San Damiano. The Virgin instructed Rosa that she would return each Friday with a message that Rosa was to reveal to the world. This continued for the next four years, with Rosa appearing dressed in black each Friday and delivering a message to large crowds of pilgrims. The messages ended in 1968 when the Bishop of Piacenza ordered Rosa to cease appearing to the public. To comply partially, Rosa moved indoors and conveyed the Virgin's messages via a loudspeaker to the waiting crowds. Then in 1970, with sanctions threatened against her by the Church, Rosa ceased to report the messages publicly.

Another of the important events surrounding Rosa's apparitions concerned the emergence of healing water. In August of 1965, Rosa revealed the apparition spot to be a source of healing water. A year later, the Virgin confirmed the spot and instructed that it was necessary to dig a well, taking two years to complete. During the construction of the well, Rosa also received revelations that the spot was to be transformed into a garden and sanctuary for the sick, prompting the formation by a group of Italians called the "Comitato Madonna Di San Damiano." This group charged itself with publicizing Rosa's messages, but was disbanded less than a year later after the bishop of Piacenza issued a negative opinion concerning the apparition's supernatural origins. Subsequent groups formed, but were plagued with dissension and economic troubles.

Rosa's revelations remained a source of confrontation between the laity and Church officials for the duration of their occurrence. From the outset, Church officials were skeptical of the supernatural origin of Rosa's visions, taking a negative opinion as to their source. At various points, priests and religious officials from various local

dioceses were warned against participation in the events at San Damiano, on penalty of withdrawal of authority and even the ability to say Mass. According to the Bishop of Piacenza, a “vast propaganda” had brought people to San Damiano and it was “painful that people pretended to honor the Holy Virgin by a ‘cunning disobedience’ to the Church. Many who had come in good faith had been led into error, endangering both the Christian faith and true Christian piety” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 118). When these warnings were ignored, specific sanctions were threatened against Rosa, other leaders of the movement, and supporters of San Damiano. Devotees of San Damiano were instructed to reevaluate and redirect their piety to more appropriate expressions of Marian devotion. After Rosa’s death in 1976, there was a further hardening against the cult by Church officials. Despite the controversy and condemnation from the Church, devotion to Rosa’s revelations continued, with devotees understanding the site as offering purification and protection of both body and soul from apocalyptic dangers (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

**“Virgin of El Barrio,” Estela Ruiz, South Phoenix.**

Estela experienced her first communication with the Virgin Mary on December 3, 1988 and the apparitions lasted until 1998. The mother of six children, and married to a devoted Catholic, Estela came from a middle-class, Mexican-American family. Well-educated with a master’s degree, Estela described herself as a “Sunday Catholic” before receiving apparitions and locutions of Mary. While living a fairly conventional life, she stated that prior to her visions she was in need of a radical conversion, which is why she believes Mary purposefully picked her to be a messenger. Growing up the daughter of an alcoholic father, Estela experienced a tumultuous childhood and, at the time of her initial

visions, reported experiencing tension and difficulty within her family life. “Estela was reaching a ‘crisis’ in her life – her salary and career successes were starting to lose their appeal and she was beginning to think about the ‘state of my soul’” (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 39).

Estela’s initial apparitions involved photographs of Mary “glowing” with a bright light and speaking to her. Her husband was a very devout, lifelong Catholic who had worshiped Mary extensively previous to Estela’s revelations and made pilgrimages to Marian shrines and adorned their house with various images of the Virgin (some of which were the ones that began glowing in Estela’s presence). Despite her ambivalence in her faith, Estela believes the Virgin did not appear to her husband because no one would have believed his experience due to his intense, lifelong devotion to Mary, while she, lax in religious conviction, she was more convincing in her experience –it came as more of a surprise to her and others. Soon after her initial apparitions, Estela and her husband, Reyes, went to their spiritual advisor, Father Jack Spaulding, to tell him of her experiences. Father Spaulding encouraged Estela to trust in her visions, as well as relaying his own visions of the Virgin along with six other local visionaries known as the “Scottsdale Nine.”

Estela received intense support from her family and Father Spaulding, encouraging subsequent communications with Mary. “Just as Estela’s interpretations of her visions are deeply informed by her childhood and by her relationships with her mother, husband, and family, they are also influenced by her connections to Father Jack Spaulding and the group of nine Scottsdale Visionaries” (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 68). The local visionary group Scottsdale Nine had a large impact on the Ruiz family, with some

members of her family having already been involved with the group prior to Estela's visions.

During the first five years of receiving apparitions, the Virgin appeared to Estela every Tuesday and Saturday morning with messages for the local community as well as "the Americas." The messages were then translated into Spanish and English by Estela so that they may reach a wider audience. Because of the apparitions, Estela and her family started Mary's Ministries and ESPIRITU, a lay ministry dedicated to spreading the messages from the Virgin. In addition to the outside ministry that developed as a result of the apparitions, Estela also used her apparitions as a means of bringing her family together and resolving the internal conflict and problems her family members were experiencing.

As to the nature of Estela's message, while some of Estela's apparitions conveyed messages of the Virgin's love for humanity, the overwhelming majority contained apocalyptic messages. "This Lady defies stereotypes of a passive, sweet Virgin and definitely shows her displeasure to Estela when her children are misbehaving...She issues stern warnings that draw attention to the rampant evil in the modern world. Her messages have apocalyptic overtones and reflect millennial themes of twentieth century Marian visions" (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 83). Within the Virgin's apocalyptic messages also came a sense of hope – the world is worth saving if men and women are willing to turn their hearts over to God. Abortion, unmarried cohabitation, feminism, atheism, and violence were all themes discussed in Estela's apparitions and messages.

The messages expressed a "battle" between "Mary's soldiers" – people must remain vigilante about the plans of Satan. Estela's visions, while describing worldly-ills,

were also specific to the South Phoenix community she lived in, providing personal messages for her community and a call for social justice. At the time of Estela's apparitions, South Phoenix had been likened to a war zone with all the gang fighting taking place. The area was also experiencing socio-economic depression and urban blight. Estela interpreted many of her messages as a call to first tackle the ills of her local community with the help of Mary's Ministries before taking on other worldly problems.

Over the course of ten years, two hundred and seventy-seven public messages were delivered to Estela, emphasizing "Mary's role as mother, intercessor, and warrior for God; the need to 'change hearts' by turning to God; the 'evils of the world,' especially in the United States; and the possibility of healing" (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 87). In 1998, the Virgin announced she would no longer be sending messages to Estela that her work had been completed and could now be continued by her followers. Estela received a message on August 1, 1998 from the Virgin stating that her last public message would be on December 5<sup>th</sup>. Estela distributed the message to her followers in a public memo in November. Even with the messages coming to an end, the evangelization and work of social justice continued on in the community, with Mary's Ministries remaining and pilgrims continuing to visit the Ruiz shrine.

Messages and apparitions received by Estela were deemed not to be supernatural after a Church investigation in April 1990. "This judgment by the three members of the committee in no way dampened the enthusiasm of the Ruizes or the thousands of pilgrims who visit the Marian shrine each year and are convinced of Mary's presence" (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 92). Modeled after Lourdes, a shrine at the Ruiz house was dedicated to the

Virgin as a source of healing. The shrine also serves as “neutral ground” for different gangs, who often approach the shrine soliciting protection from Mary.

### **Kerizinen, France – Jeanne-Louise Ramonet**

Between 1938 and 1965, Jeanne-Louise Ramonet reported receiving seventy-one apparitions from Mary in the town of Kerizinen, France, located in an agricultural district and known for its Catholic piety. Jeanne-Louise remained the focus on pilgrimage and devotion up until her death in 1995, at which time her group of supporters have carried on her dedication and work. During her childhood she suffered from chronic poor health, was from a peasant family, had little formal schooling, and was known for coming from a family of pious Catholics. She had wanted to join a convent, but could not due to her health. At one point, while experiencing particularly poor health, she visited the shrine at Lourdes and came back partially healed of her afflictions.

She had her first vision on September 15, 1938. She was watching cows when suddenly she saw a bright light and the image of a young woman. She kept this a secret until her second apparition a year later on October 7, 1939, at which time she told her confessor who instructed her to tell no one. She obeyed until 1947, when word of her apparitions was overheard at confession and the news spread around the town. Pilgrimage began to the area in the 1940s, at first by neighboring villagers who would travel to say the Rosary with Jeanne-Louise in the evening. By the 1960s and 70s, the number of pilgrims to the site had increased, drawing broad national and international pilgrimage. In the late 1960s, people began moving permanently to Kerizinen, starting the formal membership of the group *Les Amis de Kerizinen*, dedicated to overseeing and promoting the shrine. Jeanne-Louise’s visions normally occurred while reciting the Rosary.

Sometimes while being observed by pilgrims as she prayed the rosary, Jeanne-Louise would suddenly stop speaking, fall to her knees, and enter a trance-like state for some time before resuming the recitation. In August of 1949 while in the midst of a trance, Mary reportedly instructed Jeanne-Louise and others to pray for a spring at the site of the impromptu shrine, and on July 13 1952 the spring started to flow and has continued ever since.

The apparitions at Kerizinen have never been formerly recognized by the Church – in fact the Church tried on several occasions to curtail worship in Kerizinen. On several occasions, Church officials issued interdictions on the site making worship there grounds for excommunication. Despite the opposition from the Church, Jeanne-Louise continued to work to fulfill the commands she had received from the Virgin, erecting a chapel, promoting pilgrimage to the area, and creating a lay association of women that would become the basis for a religious order based in Kerizinen. The Church had difficulty with Jeanne-Louise’s elevation of the Virgin, and their intense focus on the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross in lieu of Vatican II standards, which placed less interest on those veneration. The series of interdictions “shocked and reacted doubts in the spirits of people from the area. Nonetheless, local people continued to visit Kerizinen discreetly” (Badone 2007).

### **La Salette, France – Melanie Calvat and Pierre-Maximin Giraud**

The apparition in La Salette, France was a one time occurrence in 1846, reported by two young shepherd children, Melanie Calvat and Pierre-Maximin Giraud. This was the “first Marian apparition of modern times outside the cloistered religious environment to attract widespread attention and to be official ‘recognized’ by Roman Catholic

authorities (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Melanie, the older of the two visionaries, was the fourth of ten children and came from a poor family with little formal education. Maximin, the youngest of four, grew up under an absent father and endured abuse from his stepmother and was also put to work early with little to no formal education. Although they lived in the same town and both worked as shepherds, they met only shortly before the apparitional encounter.

The two young shepherds were herding together one day, when after awaking from a nap and realizing their cattle were missing, came upon a bright light that materialized into a young woman. The young woman spoke to them, warning them of an impending famine due to the “pain” caused to her. Both children recounted their experience to their employers the next day, while never identifying the woman as the Virgin. Instead they attributed the message as to a woman who had been abused at the hands of someone in her family. It was only after Melanie’s employer suggested that they saw the Virgin Mary was it decided the local parish priest should be made aware of the experience. “The sire of the La Salette apparition soon became a focus of both curiosity and devotion for people in the region, and reports of miraculous events were not slow to follow” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 32). Most notable among early miraculous events surrounding the site was the emergence of a spring where the Virgin had appeared, that it later began to flow freely and became known as a healing center. Within eight to ten weeks of reports of the apparition, thousands of pilgrims were traveling weekly to the site and healings continued to be reported. The prophecies of famine and crop destruction by the Virgin continued to be publicized and haunted France in the years following the apparition, at some point overshadowing the healing qualities of the spring. Despite the

apparition happening only once, its message would carry on in popularity well into the twentieth century.

“The Church’s formal recognition of the La Salette apparition in 1851 marked the point, according to later Roman Catholic interpreters, at which the supernatural mission of the two children was assumed by the Church itself. This meant that from that time on, Melanie and Maximin were to be regarded as ordinary persons with no special gifts or powers, whose subsequent lives, views, and visions (should there be anymore) should cast no aspersions on, nor affect the understanding of, the apparitions for which they had once been the instruments” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Upon the authorization from the local bishop, both children were later removed from their homes and enrolled in a Catholic school. They both went to live unsettled lives; Maximin tried several careers before succumbing to ill health at a young age, while Melanie became the focus of a small, but influential, group of followers, placing her at odds with the Catholic church.

### **Marpingen**

In July 1876, three eight year old girls, Margaretha Kunz, Katharina Hubertus, and Susanna Leist, became the recipients of visions of Mary in the midst of the woods surrounding their village. These events had a lasting effect on the area and came to be known as the “German Lourdes.” These girls came from poor families, with minimal education, and were remarkable only for the ordinariness. Not known for possessing any unusual traits, the girls were found to be well-behaved and diligent. Among the three, Margaretha Kunz emerged as the leader and the focal point of subsequent investigations of what the girls saw.

While the rest of the town was busy harvesting hay, the girls had been sent out to play in the nearby woods, and it was here that they would receive their first vision. At the time, Marpingen was celebrating the Marian festival of the visitation, marked by particular devotion to the Virgin. This set the mood for the vision of a “woman in white” seen by the girls. Upon returning to the village the girls immediately informed the parents of what they had witnessed. Their parents dismissed their account as nonsense, suggesting that the girls had merely seen a woman from the village. However, they were encouraged by others to return to the woods the next day and pray the rosary; if they saw the woman again, they were to ask if she was the “Immaculate Conceived.” In this sense, ancillary actors played an important role in the development of the girls’ story, at different points helping to “improve” on the details of the story. Despite their initial skepticism, the girls’ parents emerged as the chief advocates of their stories, not only returning with the girls to the site, but also posing questions to be asked during the apparitions. The apparitions at Marpingen also became unique in the ordinariness of the messages and actions of the Virgin. “The apparitions described by the Marpingen children did not so much represent the eruption of the divine into everyday life, as subject the divine to an everyday regime. We can see this in the lengthy, commonplace exchanges the seers reported having with the Virgin, who sometimes sat and sometimes joined them in their games as they rolled down the hillside” (Blackbourn 1994: 112).

When first questioned, the girls’ description of what they had seen closely mirrored fragments from what they had learned in books or catechism classes. This added a layer of skepticism to already ambivalent church authorities. From the start the children faced difficulties with questioning from the clergy. In the early stages, they faced harsh

questioning and were very fearful going into the interviews, prompting those in the town to ban the clergy from visiting the apparition site so that the children could be at peace there. The children also faced pressure from state authorities as they were interrogated fourteen separate times. These interrogations were conducted at a Protestant-run orphanage to which all three children were removed, without their parents knowledge) following a court ruling on November 6 1876. The girls were “confined to the institution, separated from their parents, severely restricted in their visitors, and kept under close observation” (Blackbourn 1994: 115). The new environment in which the girls were placed in created great anxiety for them and in response many of the apparitions they experienced during this time suggested the Virgin appeared as a sort of talisman to them – a form of protection against harm. It was also during this time that the children went through a cycle of confessions as to the falsity of their claims and subsequent retractions of these confessions. During this time all three fell ill with the scarlet fever epidemic that had been striking children in Marpingen.

The apparitions at Marpingen resonated with the town and within two days of the apparitions the crowd at the site had grown to over a hundred. Initial skepticisms were overcome and the villagers all took it upon themselves to assist with the apparitions in various ways, and soon a “cult of the German Lourdes” had developed. Coinciding with the growing support for the apparitions were the miraculous healings of several local villagers that happened at the apparition site through the guidance of the children. This greatly contributed to a rise in the number of pilgrims from outside of Marpingen who traveled to the town to visit. By the end of the second week of the apparitions, the

number of pilgrims exceeded those visiting Lourdes in 1876. At various points over 20,000 visitors were reported in the town.

The importance of Marpingen did not fade with time either. In fact, quite the opposite happened. As the twentieth century witnessed a wave of German apparitions, there was renewed support for Marpingen as a new crusade for the acceptance of the apparitions by the Church. Supporters such as Friedrich Ritter von Lama devoted much time and effort into spreading word of the apparitions through the publication of booklets released in 1934 calling for official recognition of Marpingen as the German Lourdes. Earlier, in 1932, the local parish council had agreed to make available land for the construction of a chapel at the site. It was completed in 1933 and the chapel served as a catalyst for renewed apparition movement. This was once again met with trepidation by church officials who again tried to stamp out the movement and divert attention from devotion to the chapel. Much of this tension between the church and supporters of Marpingen lasted into the 1960s before it eventually began to fade.

### **Medjugorje**

In 1979, Father Benko, who served in the parish of Medjugorje, attended a meeting of the Charismatic Renewal Movement at a monastery in Italy. After expressing concern for some of the developments within the local diocese, he purportedly received two prophecies from some of the leading figures of the movement. In one of them, a fast growing movement was seen and the other told him not to worry, “I shall send you My Mother and everyone shall listen to her” (Bart 1995: 14). Father Benko would return to Medjugorje and make preparations to follow the prophecies foretold to him. He would encourage prayer, fasting, and recitation of the rosary among other practices. During this

time he would tell his congregation that God would reveal his graces to the children of Medjugorje (Bax 1995).

On June 24, 1981, as two young girls were walking on the hills of Podbrdo in Medjugorje, returning home from evening mass, they reported having encountered a luminous figure hovering about three feet above the ground. Afraid and unsure of what they had seen, they rushed back to the village and returned with two more of their friends, where all four of them saw the lady again. Rushing back to town, they told people of their experience and were met with skepticism and teasing. However, by the next day word had spread throughout the town of the children's experience and curiosity began to grow. The next day the children, with two more friends, headed back to the hill where they had seen the apparition. There they found the lady waiting for them, and they fell to the ground and began to pray the rosary. Three days later, word had spread to the neighboring villages and a crowd of two or three thousand had gathered at the site, with almost everyone present witnessing a miraculous light. The children, the only ones to see the Virgin, recounted her chanting "peace" to them (Swann 1996).

The next day all six children were summoned to Citluk where they were questioned by police and despite lengthy interviews they all remained unwavering in their response. Each following day of the next week the Virgin continued to appear to the children and the crowd increased to some fifteen thousand. It was also at this time the numerous miracles were reported, most often in the form of miraculous cures. Many of those healed went to the local churches to confirm them. Cures contributed greatly to the religious revival of the town, and by 1991 more than sixteen locals claimed to have been healed of serious diseases as result of intercession of the Virgin (Bax 1995). The more the

crowds swelled, the more the attention of the Communist authorities was aroused. Six days after the apparitions began all six seers were summoned by officials to the city of Mostar where it was suggested they be committed to a psychiatric ward. Fearing a riot of the large crowds that had gathered the children were deemed healthy and released. The apparitions then continued, and the Virgin's messages urged confidence in faith.

Later Podbrdo was no longer used as the apparitional site, as the events moved indoors to private homes in compliance with the requests officials had sent out in an effort to cut off both pilgrims and the seers.

From its onset, the visions in rural Medjugorje have been controversial and contested by various groups, and supported with increasing devotion by the laity and local Franciscan friars. The local bishops, as well as secular authorities, have employed severely repressive measures in an effort to stop support of the apparitions. The six seers were taken in numerous times to police stations and threatened. Many priests and sisters associated with the apparitions were arrested, and a few were even sentenced to prison terms. Priests in certain parishes attempted to bar their parishioners from worshipping at Medjugorje, but that usually had the opposite effect, sending even larger numbers of worshippers there to visit. It was also much too late for the authorities to suppress the apparitions and devotion to them. By September 1984, millions of pilgrims from all over the world were traveling to Medjugorje at a rate of about a thousand a day (Swann 1996).

While there has been no formal reaction by the Vatican, by mid-1986 three "heavenly messages" had been widely circulated. The first message spoke of the Virgin's love of the Pope and her protection of him during travel. The second encouraged him to continue his efforts at peace and the third emphasized the urgent nature of the Virgin's

messages and the need to heed them. By this time, “what began with six people’s supernatural experience in a small peasant village had developed into a firmly established Franciscan-run devotional regime with an impressive number of international branches” (Bax 1995: 21). A routine developed among the seers and the pilgrims that led to a familiar, daily practice. The pilgrims would mingle with local people in the village until about six o’clock in the evening when the seers would come out (typically rotating two a day) and proceed into a small private room in the rectory, at which time Mary would appear to them for a few minutes. Her messages were then announced by a Franciscan priest and then the seers went outside, usually greeted with a flurry of camera flashes, and ushered into the church for an evening service. This routinization of the apparitions reveals how the entire town has become involved in the devotion. From craftsmen manufacturing devotional objects, to villagers employed to serve meals and act as tour guides – each member of the village found a role to fill in one way or another that relates to devotion of the apparitions. Also of note is the immense pressure and scrutiny the seers were under. Not all were able to cope; one stopped receiving visions after a year and another after a year and a half. Still yet a third moved to Sarajevo and was no longer actively involved in the devotion.

Another factor contributing to the ongoing popularity of the apparitions Medjugorje surrounds the ten secrets supposedly revealed to each of the seers (Zimdars-Swartz 1995). This information is considered confidential and of three types. The first consists of personal secrets relevant only to the seers individually and not disclosed to the public. The second type of secret involves matters of interest to the public while not relating directly their well-being. The third type of secret told to the seers is the crucial

public secrets that allegedly concern not only the Catholic Church, but the whole world and should be revealed gradually. According to the visionaries, the Virgin promised each seer ten secrets and once they have received this number, it is understood the frequency of apparitions will decline. In addition, each seer claims that Mary will supply a sign, designed for the atheists, that will be both visible and permanent that will be disclosed at an unknown date and time. This message also contains apocalyptic undertones and it is believed by many of the faithful that Mary appears so frequently at Medjugorje because “these apparitions are the last apparitions of the Blessed Virgin on earth” (Zimdars-Swartz 1995: 238).

### **Our Lady of Clearwater – Rita Ring, Clearwater, FL**

On December 17, 1996 an image was discovered on the side of a two-story, glass-paneled building that was popularly postulated to be that of the Virgin Mary. It has publicly become known as “Our Lady of Clearwater” and “Our Lady Clothed of the Sun” (Swatos N.D.). The image, formed by sap from nearby trees, has become a permanent fixture since it is only removable by dismantling the entire building. Since its discovery, scores of people have been drawn to the site to see what was thought to be a Christmas miracle. At certain points, over eight hundred people per hour were crossing the intersection in front of the building. Some estimate over a million people having visited the area to date.

The popularity and focus of Clearwater as a pilgrimage site was in many ways defined by Rita Ring. Raised in a religious family, Ring led a conventional middle-class life as a mother of four children and taught mathematics at the University of Cincinnati.

In 1991, she began receiving revelations from Jesus and Mary that she would relay to a priest for guidance and interpretation (Sullivan 1995).

This priest, Father Edward Carter, a Cincinnati Jesuit Theology professor, provided reinforcement of Ring's authority and validated her messages for "theological legitimacy." Father Carter was also the founder of "Shepherds of Christ," a lay Catholic organization, which Ring would be asked to join as a locutionist. Shortly after the Clearwater discovery, Shepherds for Christ purchased the building to ensure its protection and turned it into a formal shrine.

Two days after the discovery of the image at Clearwater, "Mary specifically authenticated her Clearwater apparition to Ring and told her to begin the work in Florida" (Swatos N.D.: 14).

I will appear to you, my children, on a (former) bank building in Florida. You have made money your God! Do you know how cold your hearts are? You turn away from my son, Jesus, for your money. (Huba 1998)

In many ways, the "holiness of the place is reinforced by the charisma of Ring" (Swatos 14). Her revelations serve as a direct enhancement to the attention of Clearwater, pointing out ongoing wildfires in Florida at the time as punishment for ignoring Mary's messages, sending a stern forewarning: "If they ignore the Mother any longer, your world is on a fine line" (Huba 1998).

At other points, Ring has purported seeing a statue of Mary "come alive," and beginning in 2000, she witnessed an image of Mary suddenly turn completely to gold on the fifth of each month. Following Ring has been facilitated through a collection of tapes, books, and videotapes distributed by the Shepherds foundation. In many ways, according

to William Swatos, Ring can be considered a charismatic cult leader who authenticates the apparitions to the faithful and maintains the popularity of the site.

### **Our Loving Mother – Nancy Fowler, Conyers, GA.**

Nancy Fowler, a Roman Catholic mother and housewife, reported having apparitions of the Virgin Mary from 1990 to 1998 at her home in Conyers, Georgia. While alone, involved in daily tasks and prayer, Fowler reported visions of Mary and occasionally Jesus, going public with her messages when they began to address society, and specifically American Christians. These apparitions centered on messages addressing the eroding morality in America, focusing in particular on abortion.

On September 2, 1990 the Virgin Mary would lament to Fowler, “There is too little faith here. I am very sad. This is my first message for the United States of America” (Phillips 2000). It was at this point Fowler decided to go public with her revelations. Mary promised she would return each month, on the thirteenth, to speak to Fowler. However, pressure from local civic and church officials would cause a shift in these revelations, announcing later that Mary would only reveal messages yearly on October 13<sup>th</sup> (Britt 1998).

Shortly after the public announcement of these revelations, Fowler’s home and property was overwhelmed with people wanting to be part of the experience. After the crowds outgrew her property, Robert Hughes, a Virginian businessman, purchased property near her house to allow for more space. He built a worship site there and founded the organization “Our Loving Mother’s Children” around Fowler’s experiences. The group began distributing publications of Fowler’s revelations, started a website, and listed announcements of anticipated visions in order to allow people to gather beforehand

for rosary recitation. A worship center was built on the property, complete with an “apparition room” for Fowler to enter for meditation on the designated days, along with a loudspeaker system outside to announce what was revealed. Photography was also encouraged as validation for Mary’s appearance. At various points, anywhere from twenty to eighty thousand people would gather at these times to take part in Fowler’s apparitions.

Fowler’s visions would end on October 13, 1998 with one last apparition, in which she spoke of the need for children live a Godly life and “urged followers to ‘pray against the evils of this day’ and shun materialism” (BBC 1998). As far as canonical status, the Catholic Church has never officially recognized Fowler. While the revelations were ongoing, Atlanta Archbishop Lyke published an official statement warning priests not to lead pilgrimage or visits to Conyers, although this would do little to as a deterrent for followers (Britt 1998). Although the apparitions ceased, the group founded to follow her; Our Loving Mother’s Children, still continues to operate and maintains a core of dedicated followers.

### **San Sebastian De Garabandal – Conchita Gonzalez**

San Sebastian De Garabandal, a small village in Northern Spain became the site of serial apparitions among four young girls beginning on June 18 1961, with thousands of messages and visions reported over the next two years. The events surrounding the apparitions have been documented both by the lead young seer, Conchita Gonzalez, as well as a collection of accounts from fellow villagers gathered by Ramon Perez in 1971.

On the evening of June 18, 1961, twelve years old Conchita, suggested to three other friends that they go pick apples from a nearby yard. While doing so, they

encountered a very beautiful figure that “shone brightly.” Frightened, they ran off and told a fellow girl about what they had encountered, with word spreading rapidly of their seeing an angel. Later that night, Conchita, reported hearing a female voice telling her not to worry, she would see her again while saying prayers. Two days later, they would ask a woman from the village to accompany them to the site, at which time she witnessed them falling into ecstasy while saying the rosary. This would continue for the next couple of weeks, with the local priest supportive, but cautious of what the girls were experiencing.

Church authorities took note of Conchita’s leading role in the apparitions. Not long after the apparitions began, at the request of diocesan authorities, she was taken to Santander for a period of time to be questioned. While there, she reported one appearance of the Virgin, with the other girls reporting the same occurrence back in Garabandal at the same time. Her time in Santander would bring to an end the initial phase of apparitions, with the appearances becoming increasingly individualized. It would also be at this time that paranormal events were reported in conjunction with the apparitions. No longer confined to apparitions at the initial site, the girls would fall into ecstasy at various times, oftentimes tilting their heads back, looking upwards, and speaking. Witnesses of these apparitional events reported the girls becoming heavier and when pushed or moved they would retain their positions. Later, doctors would examine the seers during their moments of ecstasy, revealing the girls to be unaware of pain or pricks to their body despite showing marks later.

After one year of receiving apparitions, an appearance on July 18, 1962, a paranormal occurrence would take place that became a marked feature of Garabandal and served as a solidification of the miraculous events taking place. In accord with an

announcement made by Conchita two weeks earlier and recorded in detail by witness Pepe Diez, during the apparition a communion host miraculously appeared on Conchita's tongue during her state of ecstasy. This was witnessed by many others as well, adding to the popularity and pilgrimage to the area.

Despite the popular devotion in Garabandal, Bishop Vicente Puchol Montis of Santander took previous retractions by the girls at various points of inquiry as signs disconfirming the divinity of the apparitions. On March 17, 1967 he issued an announcement declaring there to be no apparition of the Virgin Mary or angels and no divine messages. He ended the statement by "reasserting that 'the words of the Gospel, the Pope, the Councils, and the ordinary *magisterium* of the Church' were the means of transmission for the 'real messages from heaven'" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 150). Similar statements were reissued later by various Church authorities, all denying the divinity of Garabandal's apparitions. However, this did little to dissuade supporters of the apparitions from their beliefs, as they continued to pray and come to the town for devotion.

## **Analysis Chapter**

Stark introduces twelve components in the formulation of revelations. Each module highlights a different dimension in which all actors (both founders and followers) play a pivotal role around revelations and meaning produced from them. Placed within this specific context, the development of revelations coincides with the development of religious culture itself. This theory provides a chance to understand how apparitions progress, and in doing so provides insight into the development of religious movements. Stark's theory is one of the few existing models that seek to advance our understanding of the development of revelations. While his theory provides valuable insight, it fails on several points to accurately represent the phenomena. The following analysis will both confirm and challenge Stark's theory, with the goal of moving towards a more comprehensive model of revelations that seeks to better explore the progression from an individual psychic experience to a social phenomenon.

**1. Revelations will tend to occur when (a) there exists a supportive cultural tradition of communication with the divine and (b) the recipient of the revelation(s) has direct contact with a role model, with someone who has had such communications.**

Stark begins his analysis by focusing on where revelations tend to develop and who assists in the initial process. Here, the importance of a supportive culture is stressed, alongside the need for the visionary to have contact with a role model who has already undergone a similar experience. In many ways, Stark emphasizes the need for some form of cultural script to be present, whether in the form of a role model or cultural tradition to set the stage for the development of individual revelations.

Catholic history has created an environment conducive to revelations. Catholicism is rich with narratives of saints glorified through revelations and visions. This frequency of divine interaction within the tradition facilitates this potential, making direct contact with an actual person who has received revelations unnecessary. Instead, the ideology provides a sense of direct contact with hundreds of men and women saints, disciples, and prophets who were the recipients of apparitions and divine transmissions. An environment that is rich in religious ideology is central to the development of apparitions into sustained movements, as seers are influenced by the religious temperament around them. As will be shown, the role of ancillary actors in the transition from solitary vision to shared movement is vital.

The beginning of Stark's first component deals with the presence of a support cultural tradition that helps to develop such communication with the divine. Each of the Marian apparitions happened within the context of ongoing and active Catholicism. Each visionary was immersed in active religious culture, whether through themselves or a close relative (e.g. husband) that led to an environment that was conducive to the reception of revelations. Other revelations happened within the context of Marian festivals or heightened attention to the Virgin, creating an atmosphere ripe for divine interaction.

Thus Stark's analysis concerning the presence of a supportive cultural tradition in the development of revelations can be broken down to multiple levels. The first level is that which points to a general cultural conduciveness for revelations. Here, it is evident how common Catholic culture lends itself to an environment conducive for the development of revelations. Its rich history of divine communication, by both the lay and

the clergy, opens up the possibility for such interaction to happen in the future. Festivals marked by the Virgin, create a space ripe for revelations, as much spiritual focus is directed towards active interaction with the divine. Veronica Lueken [Bayside] and Nancy Fowler [Conyers] were both active Catholics, frequently engaged in prayer and keenly pious – behavior that opened them up to such an experience. Likewise, Alphonsine [Kibeho] was actively engaged in her Catholic faith, preparing for afternoon mass at her school when she experienced her first apparition.

In addition to a general conducive culture of revelations, the second level we see is one of a heightened supportive culture. This heightened supported culture ranges from locale, to certain times, to relations. In relation to locale, certain regions experience a heightened support of apparitions. During the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, over 386 apparitions have been reported on a world wide scale. When broken down, 301 out of the 386 reported apparitions took place in Europe, particularly during the early twentieth century (International Marian Research Institute 2008). This highlights a regional environment heightened for the production of revelations, as areas such as Europe contain a rich history of apparitions. Out of the 301 reported apparitions in Europe, 117 were reported in Italy, 42 in France, 26 in Spain, and 20 in Germany.

As the twentieth century progressed, a notable shift can be detected in the location of apparitions. Early in the century, Europe dominated in reported apparitions; however now an increasing majority of apparitions are being reported in the United States, with a total of 44 reported over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first century (International Marian Research Institute 2008). This was evident in the cases collected

for the purposes of this research, as all five of the later apparitions recorded came from the United States [Veronica Lueken, Nancy Fowler, Estela Ruiz, Mary Ann Van Hoof, and Rita Ring].

At Lourdes in France, Bernadette was not only part of a general conducive Catholic culture, but also lived in an area with heightened religious devotion, creating an ardent supportive cultural tradition. At her age, catechism classes were even more central (and required) than general schooling, something Bernadette was a part of when she received her first apparition (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Likewise, a similar atmosphere is found at Garabandal in Spain and La Salette in France. The children in each of these apparition cases were members of an area known for their Catholic zeal and heightened religiosity. So entrenched is the religious atmosphere that it dominated the girls' thought. The environment was similar at Kerzinen, where Jean-Louise had her visions. Located in an agricultural district, the area "had a long-standing reputation for Catholic piety and support for the clergy," setting the stage for the development of her revelations (Badone 2007: 458).

Stark's initial analysis may be broken down to a third level: certain time periods that lead to a heightened supportive culture in a region. This may take the form of a festival devoted to Mary, heightened devotion, or collective appeal to the Virgin.

The time when the Marpingen apparitions began would have been marked by a particular devotion to the Virgin Mary...The Marian festival of the Visitation that fell on July 2 was especially important in German-speaking Europe; and the following day was one on which, every year since the late seventeenth century, pilgrims from throughout the Trier diocese had traveled to the Marian shrine at Beurig [Germany]. This was the day on which the three girls found themselves still in the Hartelwald woods as dusk fell and the Angelus sounded (Blackourn 1994: 107).

At Medjugorje, a heightened appeal to the Virgin and announced anticipation of a forthcoming miraculous event set the stage for apparitions to occur. In the town, Father Benko began to develop a culture conducive to divine communication when he returned to Medjugorje from a meeting of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in Italy where he received prophecies from one of the group's leaders regarding the Virgin. Back at Medjugorje he began to urge his parishioners into prayer and rosary recitation, along with foreseeing the village's children as playing a prophetic role (Bax 1995). At Clearwater, Rita Ring's message validating the appearance of the Clearwater image came two days after the appearance of the image on the side of the building as news of the image swirled. As news of the image spread there began a heightened attention and devotion to the Virgin. Ring recalls Mary coming to her and "specifically authenticated her Clearwater apparition and told Rita to begin the work in Florida" (Swann N.D.: 8).

In addition to a heightened appeal to the Virgin, a fourth level Stark's point may be broken down is in regard to a heightened relational factor. Seers often were in contact with someone who was devoutly pious and introduced an extreme form of Catholicism into the seers' life. This has a momentous impact on the visionaries and set the stage for their apparitional experience. At San Damiano, Rosa came from an extremely pious family, with all three of her sisters having religious vocations. In addition to this, her initial apparition, the healing by a mysterious stranger, would not be identified as the Virgin until later. The Virgin's identity occurred after Rosa had gone on a mission trip and come under the guidance of known stigmatist Padre Pio, who helped to shape her identity as a seer (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

At Fatima, the three children were also heavily immersed in Catholicism by way of their family. This was particularly the case for the Lucia, whose mother spent great amounts of time teaching Lucia and her sisters about their Catholic faith. “Lucia remembered especially that at siesta time her mother gave them catechism lessons, which became especially intense during Lent. ‘I don’t want to be ashamed of you,’ she told her children, ‘when the priest questions you at Easter on your catechism’” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 70). Shortly before her apparitions began, Lucia asked her priest how to keep her soul pure and he directed her to “kneel down before the Virgin and ask her with great confidence to take care of her heart, to keep her heart for the Lord, and to prepare it to receive him worthily the next day” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Lucia would recall these words having a momentous impact on her spiritually. This encounter helped to establish a spiritual environment ripe for the visions she would later have, providing a supportive cultural tradition that would reinforce what she would see and recall to others.

Estela Ruiz’s [El Barrio] husband and children would help create a heightened environment ripe for the apparitions to come. Her husband, a life long devout Catholic, would adorn their house with images and statues of the Virgin, making multiple yearly trips to other Marian apparition shrines at Medjugorje and Lourdes. For Reyes, her husband, the Virgin was central to the spirituality of his life. Her children would participate in the locution group the “Scottsdale Nine” and remained active in their faith. Estela, although not serious about her faith prior to her apparitions, would be influenced by the high religiosity of her family. Estela’s initial apparition would happen when one of her husband’s pictures of the Virgin began to glow and she heard a voice (Nabhan-Warren 2005). In a similar vein, Mary Ann Van Hoof’s husband, an extremely pious

Catholic, would help to create a heightened environment conducive for revelations and encourage devotion to the Virgin. A non-practicing Catholic, Mary Ann's husband would be responsible for introducing her back into the Church and created a setting ripe for divine communication (Zimdars-Swartz 1989).

The second half of Stark's initial analysis deals with the visionary having direct contact with some type of role model who has had a similar experience. No evidence can be found among the Marian apparitions to support Stark's claim on this point. However there is evidence, developed later in the analysis that highlights how role models serve as key players *after* the initial visions in the development of apparitions into social movements. Further, it is not so clear what Stark actually means by the term role model and it is also not clear if he is examining their importance before or after the initial vision. He does not provide any information regarding how the role model-visionary relationship works. Does the visionary bring back specific information? Does the role model provide a template for the visionary concerning how revelations should proceed? In many regards, what appears and occur is varying levels of support provided by key individuals. This can best be broken down into different types: endorsers, shapers, and role models. Each plays a different, but vital, role in development of visions into movements.

To summarize, Stark breaks his first component down into two parts. The first concerns the existence of a supportive cultural tradition that may facilitate the development of revelations. This may be divided into a general conducive culture and a heightened supportive environment. The heightened supportive culture exists on three levels: regional, time, and relational. Each of the components is present and supported with Marian apparitions. The second part of Stark's development deals with the presence

of a role model who has had such of the revelation. Role models play a vital role in the subsequent development of revelations, as will be discussed later in the analysis, but are not present at the initial revelation.

**2. Many common, ordinary, even mundane mental phenomena can be experienced as contact with the divine.**

Now Stark shifts the focus from the environment to the mental phenomenon that constitutes divine contact. Mundane mental thought holds the ability to reach the realm of the sacred. It is on this point that Stark may be challenged, as the evidence does not indicate whether the mental thoughts of the visionaries at the time of the revelation could be considered mundane or sacred. This information was not reported by the visionaries; rather, in many instances it was reported that they were bewildered by what was taking place. Since the visionaries recorded their experiences in retrospect, it was difficult for them to recall precisely what they were thinking at the moment of the revelation.

However, what *can* be verified by the visionaries' accounts is their behavior at the time of the apparition. Shifting the focus, it is evident that the *behavior* and *actions* of the visionaries at the time of their apparitions rests in the mundane. This is an observable pattern that can be deduced apart from what the individual professes to having been thinking at the time. This moves the analysis towards an area that may be much more accurately documented and recalled. A portion of the seers reported being engaged in mundane social activities at the time of their initial apparition. This ranged from herding animals to playing in the woods to going about daily chores. Others would report their initial apparitions while in the midst of prayer. These Marian apparitions are remarkable for the fact that all occurred outside the boundaries of a church, while the individuals

were immersed in daily, mundane activity. Some of the apparitions took place while solitary (with little social influence), such as Clearwater, El Barrio, and Mary Ann Van Hoof, while others, such as Medjugorje, La Salette, and Fatima happened in groups.

A close examination of the Marian apparitions reveals a divide in the activities in which the seers were engaged at the time of the initial apparition, affecting how they were subsequently interpreted. The behaviors of the visionaries may be divided between those engaged in secular activities and those engaged in religious activity during their initial vision. As will be discussed below, the difference in activities translates into a difference of how these visions were originally construed.

At the time of their initial vision, some of the visionaries were engaged in religious activity, most commonly expressed in the form of prayer. It is important to note that these individuals most readily identified, from the onset, the figure in their visions to be that of the Virgin Mary. Their responses were immediate and fitting with conventional religious interpretations. Estela [El Barrio] was deep in prayer on the night of her first apparition, “praying to the Blessed Mother to take care of her family.” As she did so, “she saw a light emanating from the portrait; it grew brighter and brighter and she had to close her eyes...She spoke to me and said ‘don’t you know that I am going to take care of your children?’ I was praying for my children and she was listening *the whole time!* After she spoke I knew it was her.” (Nabhan-Warren 2005:25). In a similar vein, although fewer details have been provided, Nancy Fowler and Rita Ring both report being alone at home, immersed in daily activities and prayerful reflection when they were overcome with visions of Mary, which they immediately identified as such (Britt 1998, Swatos N.D.). Jean-Louise [Kerizinen] would experience her first apparition while in the midst

of prayer when she was out in the field herding cows. “Suddenly she was surprised by...a bright light and...saw a beautiful woman of about 17 or 18 years of age. Instinctively, Jeanne-Louise recognized the Holy Virgin” (Badone 2007: 457). Veronica Lueken [Bayside] was also in the middle of prayer, praying in her car for Senator Robert Kennedy immediately after his assassination when she received her first apparition. Lueken’s later visions would occur to her in her home while reciting the rosary. The location that would develop into a makeshift shrine to Mary stands on a modest slab of cement, which marks the former Vatican Pavilion site, the spot where Michelangelo’s *Pieta* was housed during the World’s fair (Wojcik 1996).

Other apparitions would take place either before or after daily mass, still in the context of a religious setting. These visionaries were also confident in what they were seeing and readily identified the Virgin. Their responses were also supportive of conventional Catholic culture. Alphonsine [Kibeho] was at school, charged with preparing for afternoon mass when she would hear a voice, followed by the appearance of a “Lady of Light,” whom she recognized to be the Virgin as she began to speak to Alphonsine (Swann 1996). The children at Medjugorje were traveling along a rural rocky path on their way home from evening mass when “suddenly they saw a luminous figure. Curious, but also somewhat apprehensive, they ran towards it. It was *Gospa*, [Virgin Mary] they immediately knew, who smilingly beckoned them closer. After a few heartening remarks and a promise to return the next evening, the figure vanished” (Bax 1995: 15).

The only case where the seer was engaged in religious activity, yet was unsure of what she was seeing is the case of Mary Ann Van Hoof. Her initial experience would

happen while lying in bed praying to the Virgin and Jesus “for the ability to perform her familial obligations” since she was suffering from illness. Moments later, she would hear a noise in the hallway and turn to see a figure “taller than her daughter and wearing a veil” that approached her. Van Hoof was frightened and turned away from the figure, when she turned back it was gone. Wondering who or what it was she saw, she finally conveyed the story to her family, at which time her husband “suggested that the figure must be the Virgin Mary” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 43).

The remaining seers were engaged in secular activities at the time of their initial vision. Moreover, these seers remained unsure, for some period of time, who and what it was they saw, in stark contrast to the other seers who were involved in religious activity and seemed more confident in identifying their visions. For these seers, it had to be suggested to them who it was they saw, marking an important component in the development of solo visions to social movement. By requiring the help and interpretation of others, the apparitions began the transition from an individual psychic experience into a social phenomenon. At Marpingen, the girls reported seeing a “woman in white” while out playing in the woods. Based upon the girls’ descriptions, the Virgin appeared to take on the form of an imaginary friend of the girls – playing, rolling down hills, and engaging in simple conversation. Many of the later apparitions would be remarkable in the ordinariness, as the girls would report having lengthy, commonplace conversations with the Virgin, and she would often engage in playing and activities such as rolling down a hillside with the girls (Blackbourn 1994).

The events at Fatima would play out in a similar context, happening while the children were out shepherding in the fields for their family. The children would report

seeing “a beautiful lady surrounded by a dazzling light who had told them to recite the Rosary every day,” but expressed reservation at telling anyone what they had seen because they were not “sure that the pretty little woman they saw was really the Virgin” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 77-78). Melanie and Maximin [La Salette] were herding cattle on the hillside outside of La Salette when they experienced their apparition. At the time, they were confused at what they were seeing, wondering if because the woman was weeping she was someone “whose son had beaten and left her,” and then thinking it might have been a saint because they saw it rising into the air. They would later describe the figure as a “beautiful woman” to their employer when relaying the experience (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 31-32).

At San Damiano, Rosa’s initial apparition would entail a mysterious healing by an unknown woman “collecting alms for Padre Pio.” This woman would come to her house as Rosa lay suffering critically ill, with little left to be done to help her. Rosa described the woman “as about twenty-five years old, very beautiful, more blonde than brunette, and dressed in poor clothing” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 94). At Lourdes, Bernadette was out collecting bones along the riverbank with friends when she saw something she identified as “*aquero*,” a local dialect term meaning “that one.” Unsure of what it was she saw, she knelt in prayer (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Through an analysis of Marian apparitions, we see that all the cases transpired while in the midst of daily, mundane behavior. This adds an element of the unknown to apparitions – breakthrough transcendence is unexpected, where no particular setting, mood, or mental state is needed. Marian apparitions happened in instances ranging from herding animals to lying bedridden. Viewing apparitions from this perspective is a shift

from the Stark's original conception that placed the emphasis on mundane mental phenomena, where instead here the focus is on the behavior of the visionaries. Further, the cases follow a continuum. There were those who were engaged in religious activity and were confident in identifying their visions as that of the Virgin and those who were involved in secular activity at the time and remained unsure of what it is was the saw, until they received advice.

**3. Most episodes involving contact with the divine merely confirm the conventional religious culture, even when the contact includes specific communication, or revelation.**

Stark shifts the focus to the content of the messages, pointing out how often most serve as a confirmation of conventional religious culture; even the specifics of the message are a reaffirmation of the norm. Similar themes manifest themselves, as patterns emerge conducive to popular religious sentiment. In this way, Marian apparitions are themselves a confirmation of Catholicism. They follow a language and imagery echoed by similar experiences within the culture, with even the specifics of the messages a reaffirmation of popular religious doctrine. Reoccurring themes are common among these apparitions, and they most often follow a script that reiterates conventional strands of Catholicism. An examination of initial Marian apparitions divides them between those that first reported a vision only and those that reported messages alongside their initial visions. All of these visions are remarkable for their conventionality and affirmation of Catholic imagery and rhetoric. As will be developed later in the analysis, many of these visions that start out conventional soon move to more novel rhetoric, most commonly an apocalyptic language that contrasts against mainstream Catholic ideology. This relates

back to the first part of Stark's analysis, where a general conducive culture lends itself to the development of revelations. Now we see how this conducive religious environment creates visions and messages reflective of this very culture that helped to create it.

While it is true that these apparitions serve as a reaffirmation of religious culture, they at the same time they enter the fringes of conventionality. All the seers share a commonality in appropriating power for themselves. The messages from Mary do not tell the seers themselves to have more faith, but point to society as needing to return to more pious living. In this sense, the seers place themselves in an endowed position of authority, commissioned by Mary at a very early stage, to be morally superior to the rest of society. This positions the seers as the moral leaders of the sectarian movement branching from the official Catholic Church.

The first group of apparitions examined was those that included a message by the Virgin in the initial vision. These apparitions included messages that reaffirmed Catholic ideology and mostly called for a return to more pious living. At La Salette, the children's first vision would entail seeing a woman surrounded by bright white light promised a famine if her words were not heeded:

For a long time I have suffered for you; if you do not want my son to abandon you, I am forced to pray to him myself without ceasing. You pay no heed. However much you do, you could never recompense the pain I have taken for you...If the harvest is spoiled it is your fault...A great famine will come...The others will do their penance in the famine. The walnuts will be worm-eaten and the grapes will rot. If they are converted, the stones and rocks will become heaps of wheat, and the potatoes will sow themselves in the fields. (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 30)

The prophecy of famine hints at the apocalyptic tone many of the apparitions would later take on.

Other visions shared the same similarity in a call to more pious living and professed a desire for peace, an ideology congruent with mainstream Catholicism. At Medjugorje, the Virgin, who asked to be called “Queen of Peace,” urged the people to “pray, fast, confess, and take communion” (Bax 1995:15). In other words, the Virgin urged them to be active in their Catholicism. Similar to this, Nancy Fowler’s [Conyers] first message called for Catholics to maintain the sacramental life and obey Church authorities (Britt 1998). At Kibeho, Alphonsine’s initial message from the Virgin also urged a return to the Church: “It is thus, that I come to reassure you, for I’ve heard your prayers. I would like your companions to have more faith, because they don’t believe sufficiently” (Swann 1996: 227). Rosa [San Damiano] reported that the Virgin (whom at the time she thought was simply a mysterious stranger) told her to pray specific prayers and follow the instructions of Padre Pio. At Fatima, the Virgin would promise to return to the girls later and told them they must recite the rosary every day (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

A portion of the initial messages received by the seers took on a personal tone that would later be translated onto a societal level. The messages contained instructions for what the seers were to do in order for the apparitions to continue, helping to develop routines and “orders” aimed at establishing the apparitions as a social movement. These messages reified common Catholic ideology and practices. At Lourdes, Bernadette would report hearing: “this is the Mother of Angels. There can be nothing for me on this earth; she has promised me a place in the kingdom of the elect if I come each morning for fifteen days to offer her my prayers in this same place” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 49). Estela’s [El Barrio] initial vision came in the context of conventional Catholic ideology - the Virgin venerated as the Mother of all, the one who cares and tends for her children.

As Estela sat praying to the Virgin to care of her family, she saw a portrait of her glowing and suddenly heard “don’t you know that I am going to take care of your children” (Nabhan-Warren 2005: 25). This message, which initially was aimed at Estela’s own children, would later be translated to mean the Virgin’s care of “her children,” i.e. society.

Mary Ann Van Hoof’s initial message also took on a personal tone that would later be translated into a larger context: “while her cross was heavy to bear, the world faced a greater burden of sorrow unless she would pray. She was commissioned to go to her parish priest with a request that the people be directed to recite the Rosary each evening at eight o’clock” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 43). At Garabandal, Conchita would report the children’s initial interaction with the Virgin to be entirely personal, speaking at length about their daily lives to her. “The Virgin reportedly laughed as they described these things; she taught them the proper way to recite the Rosary, and then, after promising to return the next day, she left them” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 129). Although the details of the message of not known, Jean-Louise’s [Kerizinen] early messages from the Virgin told her to tell her confessor only of her vision, followed later by promises of the presence of a spring if dedication continued to her, following similar themes from Lourdes (Badone 2007: 457).

Other initial messages focused more on the ways in which the Virgin may be venerated, calling for shrines and devotional sites to be resurrected in her honor. Veronica Lueken’s [Bayside] version focused more on the practical, urging the faithful to build a local shrine dedicated to her at which they could pray daily (Wojcik 1996). Although reports of the Virgin’s early messages are brief in the apparitions of Marpingen,

what is known of them indicates that the Virgin's requests were also practical in calling for a shrine to be built to her at the site and the sick be brought there for healing (Blackbourn 1993).

Again, recalling themes of piety and admonishments for sinful lives, Rita Ring's [Clearwater] message which was received two days after the image appeared on the side of the building in Clearwater, admonished society for its lack of faith and urged a turn from its sinful ways:

I appear to you, my children, on a bank in Florida. You have made money your god! Do you know how cold are your hearts? You turn away from my Son, Jesus, for your money. Your money is your God...I ask you to circulate my *Mary Message* tape made on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. (Swatos N.D.: 9)

It is evident that the Marian apparition cases support Stark's analysis on this point, as each of the cases served as a confirmation of conventional religious ideology. All the visions included messages that called for increased piety, more devotion to the Virgin and admonishments towards the unfaithful for their sinful lives. Other messages took on a more personal and practical tone, providing reassurance to the seers for their family and individual faith, while some gave instruction for shrines and memorials to be erected in the Virgin's honor. This continues to follow the notion that the presence of a conducive environment (Catholicism) sets the stage for the development of revelations. Following this line of thought, we now see it reaffirmed in the communication with the Virgin.

While it is true that these apparitions serve as a reaffirmation of religious culture, at the same time they begin to enter the fringes of conventionality. All the seers share a commonality in that they are appropriating power for themselves by being members of the laity as well as recipients of divine communication. The messages from Mary do not

tell the seers themselves to have more faith, but point to society as needing to return to more pious living. In this sense, the seers place themselves in an endowed position of authority, commissioned by Mary at a very early stage, where they are morally superior to the rest of society. They are leveling blame at members and not the Church itself; therefore the initial act is not confrontational except that it moves the locus of spiritual activity outside of the church. However, they do help to shore up authority at an early stage by building legitimacy to later take on the Church. This authority repeatedly designated women as the moral leaders of a sectarian movement that begins to split from the Catholic Church, something we will see develop further as the analysis continues.

**4. Certain individuals will have the capacity to perceive revelations, whether this be an openness or sensitivity to real communications or consists of unusual creativity enabling them to create profound revelations and then to externalize the source of this new culture.**

Stark's theory now reverts attention back to the individual, postulating how those who receive revelations are endowed with some form of unusual creativity or peculiar sensitivity to divine communication. These individuals possess the ability to externalize such interaction into a new culture that can be transmitted to others.

Stark's analysis can be viewed as inaccurate on this particular point. Following his logic, it is hard to determine if a person's creativity is a *cause* of revelations or if they are deemed creative *because of* having received revelations. At this point the reasoning becomes circular; only examining a narrow set of cases falsely identifies the characteristics of these recipients and fails to capture the large number of revelatory cases in which the individuals emerge into the spotlight from previously humble and simple

backgrounds. Further, it is not clear what he means by “real communications,” suggesting that others may in fact hold a creativeness that produces “unreal” communication with the divine. This is an indefinable attribute unknowable even to the visionary. It is assumable that anyone receiving such communication would define it as real – it is oftentimes in sharing revelations with others that the authenticity is doubted. The visionaries themselves do not appear to question their own mental status.

Rather than limiting this capacity to creatively endowed people, it appears the opposite may hold true. In the case of the Marian apparitions, as well as historically, those leading conventional lives become the beneficiary of revelations. All of the Marian visionaries are remarkable for their shared ordinariness. None were known to possess unusual creativity or some distinguishable openness to divine communication. The majority of apparitions developed while the seers were immersed in daily activity and preoccupied with work.

It also should be noted that in Stark’s analysis he attributes seers’ unusual creativity to their capacity to start a new religious movement. With the Marian apparitions, these cases start off as sectarian spin-offs of the larger Catholic tradition, making particular creativity neither necessary, nor present. These apparitional cases work to reaffirm one’s own faith; the presence of a story already exists and the goal of such movements is to express an already established religious culture in a new light. The visionaries themselves are mundane people, imbued with no unusual creativity. Instead, it is the support and movement around such individuals that makes them extraordinary. With over twenty-one thousand apparitions having been reported since the fourth century, the events are not particularly rare, yet only a few have had the right social factors at play

to allow them to ripen into full fledged social movements. Therefore, it is the presence of favorable social conditions, participants' social reinforcement, and visionary experience that allows these Marian apparitions to develop into movements.

Strikingly, all the cases of Marian apparitions happened to lay individuals, who were overwhelmingly female, and who demonstrated no remarkable or unusual characteristics. Rather, many, such as Jeanne-Louise [Kerizinen] were considered to be a "simple" and "sincere," with little formal schooling and coming from a rural, peasant villages (Badone 2007). Both Veronica Lueken [Bayside] and Nancy Fowler [Conyers] were described as leading conventional lives, absorbed in the daily routine of being a housewife and mother, and received their revelations while in the midst of housework. Neither was known for possessing an unusual or creative attributes that would have predisposed them to receiving revelations (Britt 1998, Wojcik 1996). Stark's theory may more accurately represent visionaries as being normal and passive in the creativity, adding to the power this embodies in the laity. In this sense, anyone, whether open to such experience or not, holds the possibility to be transformed into divine messengers.

As alluded to above, examining the seers of Marian apparitions reveals the overwhelming majority of individuals to be poorly educated and living in poor, rural areas, where often they were put to work at an early age and not encouraged to spend time developing any creative attributes. The eight seers at Kibeho were all young, with modest amounts of education and lived in a rural setting. They possessed no known unusual or creative attributes that would have predisposed them to be divine seers (Swann 1996). At Fatima, although extremely pious, the children possessed no other attributes that would have predisposed them to receiving divine contact. All had been put

to work at a young age, were forgoing formal schooling, and came from poor families. Bernadette [Lourdes] was a fourteen-year-old with only the most basic of education, who was struggling to keep a home and livelihood in the midst of poverty. Rosa [San Damiano] was not known for possessing any unusual or creative characteristics that would have predisposed her to be able to create revelations. She had very little schooling, was from a poor farming family, and suffered from very poor health due to pregnancies. Melanie and Maximin [La Salette] were both young and poorly-educated when they witnessed their apparition (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). At Marpingen, the eight year old girls came from poor families, with minimal education, and remarkable only for the ordinariness (Blackbourn 1994). The six children who received the apparitions at Medjugorje were not known for possessing any unusual or creative characteristics and came from a poor, rural village (Bax 1995, Swann 1996). Additionally, the visionaries from Garabandal were four young girls, from a small rural village (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

In addition to the common environment of the apparitions, some of the seers were more immersed in secular culture than they were religious culture, while others were unsure of what it was they had witnessed until it was suggested to them that they had seen Mary. This again points out a flaw in Stark's theory, revealing how unusual or creative attributes are not necessary for the production of religious revelations. Estela [El Barrio] was not particularly active in her faith, nor was she as engaged in Marian devotion as her husband was (Nabhan-Warren 2005). She was more concerned about secular aspects of her life including graduate school, her career, and her family. Similarly, Rita Ring [Clearwater] lived a comfortable middle-class life as a mother and

mathematics professor at the University of Cincinnati, with no remarkable characteristics until her revelations began (Swatos N.D.). Both Estela and Rita are examples of individuals who received apparitions while initially more immersed in secular than religious culture. Related, the six children at Medjugorje, while involved in Catholic worship, were part of a region under communist rule that dissuaded overt religious practice, and if anything, were part of an environment that stifled religious creativity (Swann 1996).

Others were unsure of their experience and did not initially identify the figure they saw as the Virgin Mary, but instead described her in simple terms as a commonly dressed woman. This would include Mary Ann Van Hoof, who in the beginning was unsure of her experience and did not interpret the apparition to be that of the Virgin until suggested by her husband, giving her apparitions a new meaning and light within which to be understood (Zimdars-Swartz 1989). At San Damiano, Rosa would also first encounter a strange woman who helped her, and it was only after meeting and working with Padre Pio that she identified this woman as the Virgin. Melanie and Maximin [La Salette] were also initially unsure of what they had witnessed until it was told to them that the woman was Mary. For some time Bernadette [Lourdes] was unsure of what it was precisely she was seeing, and only with interpretation from others were her visions identified as the Virgin Mary. The four young girls at Garabandal were similar to the others in initially being frightened by their experience and unsure of who or what they had seen (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

It is evident with the Marian cases that Stark's analysis may be reworked to allow for the overwhelming evidence of the seer's ordinariness in behavior and lifestyle at the

time of the revelations. They possess no displayable unusual traits nor do they live extraordinary lives. Instead, the seers are mostly female and young, with modest amounts of education, who displayed varying levels of faith at the time of their initial visions.

**5. Novel (heretical) revelations will most likely come to persons of deep religious concerns who perceive shortcomings in conventional faith.**

**6. The probability that individuals will perceive shortcomings in the conventional faith(s) increases during periods of social crisis.**

The analysis shifts from the type of person receiving the revelation and to the dynamics of the message. We begin to see further emergence of the social and personal involvement that goes into the formation of apparitions into movements. Stark's sixth point, the probability that individuals will most likely perceive shortcomings in conventional faith during periods of social crisis, best explains the fifth point prior to it. Essentially, some form of crisis serves as a catalyst for novel revelations to be produced. The level and extent of these crises varies, as sometimes the suffering of the people (i.e. the crisis) came as a form of divine wrath put forth by a displeased deity.

It is important to note here that the crisis may exist on varying levels. Some of the crisis may take the form of personal suffering, sickness, economic deprivation, violence, or war. Crises are oftentimes present, on some level in the lives of many, which to a certain degree explains why apparitions are not an isolated phenomenon. In order for these apparitions to be successful, they need to be accepted on a larger, societal level. Thus, personal crises are often translated to a larger societal level. In this sense, social and/or personal crisis of some form equals a crisis in faith. Shortcomings in faith arise when there are no longer sufficient explanations for the conflicts and crises rife through

society. This may begin on either the personal or the social level. Very often personal suffering is transposed onto society as a means of expanding its implication to a larger aggregate level.

Stark's fifth point may be broken down onto two levels. The first concerns Stark's classification of visionaries being of deep religious conviction. This is present in all the Marian cases, as these seers were actively religious, practicing, devout Catholics. The second level deals with the perceived shortcomings. This is evident in either allegations of people's (i.e. society) faithlessness or accusations against the Church's stewardship. In the case of Marian apparitions, the perceived shortcomings were viewed in terms of the former – the revelations very often charged society with shortcomings in faith and voiced a need to live more pious lives.

A closer analysis of the evidence points out how shortcomings may not be limited to conventional faith, but expanded to including failings at the societal level. In other words, the inadequacy may not lie in one's faith, but instead in the societal behavior. This relates directly back to the notion that societal crisis translates directly into a crisis of faith. Perceived failings of society, inundated with violence, poverty, and suffering are representations of the result of society lacking in its attention to religiosity.

The nature of these messages is shaped largely by the individual's perception of the world, as revelations typically involve societal and personal shortcomings. The actual message expresses an urgency to reclaim morality and uphold Catholic doctrine and practices. Perceived failures of society are highlighted against a backdrop of prescribed change. These themes of perceived shortcomings range from personal failings or illness (Mary Ann Van Hoof, Estela Ruiz) to proclamations of society's shortfall, (Veronica

Lueken, Kibeho) to a need for more faith. Thus, we see varying levels of crisis that leads to the production of revelations.

The first level of crisis present in Marian apparitions consists of a personal crisis that most often is translated at a later point onto a societal level. The shift from personal to societal is evident in multiple cases. Here, personal suffering is translated onto a societal level and provides the opportunity for redemption through tribulation. Mary Ann Van Hoof verbalized shortcomings in her own life as a mother and wife, sparking her desire to pray for assistance (Zimdars-Swartz 1989). This proved the catalyst for her apparitions and translated her personal experience into a mirror for societal problems. Thus her personal suffering, in the form of an illness, became representative of a suffering servant, as her ill health was transformed “from a guilt-inducing inconvenience that interfered with her family obligations into a meaningful spiritual and physical suffering that she understood to be on behalf of a sinful community” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 41). Estela [El Barrio] perceived her family to be in a state of crisis and began to pray to the Virgin for assistance, at which time she saw her faith as the starting point for healing family problems and on a larger scale problems within her community. Her apparitions became a means of attempting to heal gang fighting rife through her community and draw people together (Nabhan-Warren 2005).

One of the popular forms that the crises took on was that of a social crisis, one where society itself is to blame for the ills of the world. The Virgin’s appearances offer the opportunity for change through piety and increased devotion to her. Rita Ring’s [Clearwater] revelations addressed eroding morals and spoke of what little faith existed in the United States, specifically addressing Florida and its “ungodly behavior.” Ring’s

revelations went as far as to cite wildfires in Florida as divine punishment for turning away from the teachings of Jesus. The messages highlighted how societal suffering came about as a result of having made “money their god” (Swatos N.D.). The messages at Kibeho reverberated with themes of shortcoming in people’s faith and a need for more pious lives (Swann 1996). At Fatima, Lucia’s apparitions, particularly the second secret, made a plea for end of war and a return to more pious ways. Her messages cited how society in its current form failed to make enough room for the sacred, resulting in continual cycles of violence (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). The apparitions at Marpingen saw the village as being in spiritual crisis and aimed at increasing the faith of the village. The appearances emphasized a need to recognize the Virgin in the everyday, highlighted by her numerous appearances all over the village to the girls (Blackbourn 1994).

Medjugorje, experiencing crisis in the forms of violence and the rule of a repressive communist regime, heard messages of a call to peace that resonated urgently in the region. Other messages concern a sign the Virgin will reveal that is directed towards atheists in order to convert them “before it’s too late” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). At La Salette, the messages warned against continuing to pay no heed to the Virgin or Jesus in society, and cited how the spoiled harvest in the region came as punishment for leading faithless lives. A great famine was forewarned if the people’s lifestyle was not changed (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

The third kind of crisis evident in Marian apparitions is faith-based crises. Here, faith itself is viewed as being in a state of crisis, with changes needed in the ways faith was approached. Veronica Lueken’s [Bayside] revelations spoke of shortcoming in modern Catholic faith and called for a return to pre-Vatican II devotion (Wojcik 1996).

Bernadette's [Lourdes] initial messages called for a change in faith, citing a need for stronger veneration to Mary. A solution to this was given in later messages that called for a shrine to be built at the site and the subsequent materialization of a healing spring (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). At Kerizinen, the messages also spoke of a crisis of faith, calling for increased religious dedication among the people. The Virgin promised a healing spring would appear if the village would pray more diligently (Badone 2007).

Stark's analysis on both these points is exemplified in the majority of the Marian cases. Present on varying levels, the apparitions all experienced some form of crisis at the time of the visions. Very often social crises, whether in the form of personal suffering or violence, created crises of faith that provoked the appearance of Mary. Sometimes the suffering itself was a form of divine wrath for having turned away from God. Often, piety provided the solution to such suffering.

**7. During periods of social crisis the number of persons who receive novel revelations and the number willing to accept such revelations is maximized.**

Now Stark's analysis further shifts its focus to the group dynamics that develop around apparitions. As has been explored previously, the groups' involvement is imperative to the formation of apparitions into social movements. Apparitions that formed a following quickly grew in numbers once the visions became public. It is evident how immediate the support was.

The first part of Stark's analysis involving social crisis has already been discussed in the previous section. We now see that crisis exists on varying levels and provides an important catalyst for the creation of revelations. During periods of crisis, it is much more likely that crises of faith will arise as well. Conventional faith serves as an explanation

for human existence; therefore, a breach in this flow, in the form of social crisis, simultaneously brings about crisis of faith. Thus, during these periods of crisis, people are much more willing to turn to novel revelations as a new means of understanding and making sense of their changing world.

However, the maximization of revelations during this period is untestable. There is simply no way to quantify this area of Stark's analysis. This information is unavailable for the Marian apparitions and largely unconfirmed. Instead, it is clear that we see a link between the different levels of crisis and revelation, as well as a link between people's experience and revelations. It is apparent that among the participants of Marian apparitions there exists a willingness to accept revelations – when visions occur, they result in immediate, positive, and persuasive responses from participants.

At her first public apparition, twenty-eight people were present with Mary Ann Van Hoof, by her second public apparition this number had already swelled to fifteen hundred (Zimdars-Swartz 1989). Nancy Fowler's apparitions garnered similar numbers; shortly after her visions became public, "on apparition days, up to 80,000 people brought rosaries and cameras to the grounds of the farm" (Britt 1998: 108). Likewise, "thousands of Catholic pilgrims annually visit Flushing Meadows-Corona in the boroughs of New York City," the site of Veronica Lueken's visions (Wojcik 1996: 129). Another popular American apparition, Estela Ruiz [El Barrio], once she went public, began receiving hundreds of pilgrims into her backyard shrine (Nablan Warren 2005).

Other visionaries utilized the media to their advantage in order to reach larger numbers of the faithful. At Clearwater, news of the sighting (on the side of the building) was broadcast on television and radio, promoted as a Christmas miracle, and within hours

thousands were gathering to see the phenomenon (Swatos N.D.) Likewise, at Kibeho, news of the apparitions traveled so fast, that within days the number of pilgrims exceeded those who could fit into the local chapel. An elevated podium was soon built not far from the initial site, “surrounded by fences to keep back the immense and growing crowds.” However, this too would prove not to be enough and shortly thereafter “Radio Rwandiasse installed a more effective loud-speaker system and began live broadcasting of descriptions of the events and the messages” (Swann 1996: 230).

Other apparitions happened in villages where word spread quickly and soon became the focus of the area. At Medjugorje, “within hours the whole village knew about it [apparition]. Accompanied by a rapidly growing crowd of villagers and people from neighboring hamlets, the seers went back to the hill the following evening.” Soon, the crowd grew to a few thousand on the hillside (Bax 1995: 15). Word of the initial apparition also spread quickly through the village at Fatima, and by the following day, “people were arriving from neighboring towns who wanted to see and accompany her to the apparition site.” A few months later, about 70,000 people had gathered in anticipation of the Virgin’s last visit (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 78). In the early days of the first apparition at Lourdes, word began to spread quickly of Bernadette’s visions. Following the Virgin’s instruction to return each evening to the grotto to pray, a crowd of eight to twelve hundred began accompanying her. Soon, this number exceeded sixteen hundred (Zimdars-Swartz 1991). Marpingen, considered to be the “German Lourdes,” witnessed a similar explosion of pilgrims and support. In fact, by the second week of apparitions, the number of pilgrims arriving in the village had surpassed those visiting Lourdes in 1876 (Blackbourn 1995: 131).

Although only a singular apparition, “the site at La Salette soon became the focus of both curiosity and devotion for people in the region, and reports of miraculous events were not slow to follow” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 32). After her first public apparition at San Damiano, Rosa “would attract international attention and that would bring pilgrims to San Damiano from France and Switzerland, as well as from Italy.” Large crowds of pilgrims would continue to assemble for four years until the bishop ordered Rosa to cease her public messages (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 102). Both the curious and the skeptical followed the girls back to the apparition site at Garabandal after their initial vision, so that eight of the next eleven days “a considerable number of people” would witness the girls’ ecstasy (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

With the latest section of analysis by Stark, the immediate support and congregation of a loyal following becomes evident. The analysis now begins to shift focus away from the seer and more towards the group dynamic. This is an important shift, as will be developed later, as group formation is imperative for the evolution of the apparitions into movements.

**8. An individual’s confidence in the validity of his or her revelations is reinforced to the extent that others accept these revelations.**

**9. A recipient’s ability to convince others is proportionate to the extent to which he or she is a respected member of an intense primary group.**

As alluded to before, the role of ancillary actors highlights a vital element in the transition of lone revelation to sustained movement. Confidence in and acceptance of revelations is crucial for their development. The production of revelations rests upon the reinforcement and embracing of these messages. In each case of the Marian apparitions,

the individual was able to gather a base of support that not only promoted their messages, but gave validity to what they were reporting. This initial acceptance and social support is pivotal in that it provides encouragement and validation. In each case either family or an immediate member of the community served as an initial supporter of the revelations and helped to foster future Marian contacts. In some cases it was an outside actor that informed the visionary that what she or he had seen was in fact the Virgin.

It should be pointed out that in the early stages of some apparitions the visionaries were confused and conflicted about their experience; as the process moved forward and social support emerged, the environment became more and more conducive for further revelations. The seers were empowered by the emerging clarity around them. However, it is important to note how in the beginning support was often mixed. As they attempted to make sense of what it was they had witnessed, they were confronted with a mixture of support and negation. This also highlights an element overlooked by Stark: the presence of resistance. As will be developed in more detail later, resistance is present from the onset for the seers. They are challenged immediately as to the validity of their claims. Adversaries range from family members, to fellow villagers, to governmental authorities, to the Church itself. In fact, as we shall see, the Catholic Church oftentimes was the biggest opponent of Marian apparitions.

Switching the focus, Stark analysis directs more attention towards the confidence supplied to the seers; it appears that support may in fact be a better measure. Marian apparition cases do not allow for the measurement of confidence, instead what is evident is a supportive environment that frees individuals for further visions. It is plausible that confidence does in fact play a role in the production of further revelations; however this

simply cannot be measured here. Instead, what is visible in the apparition cases is the emergence of alliances. These alliances are central to the production of further revelations.

As was discussed earlier, alliances came in varied forms. For some of the seers, there was a mixture of skepticism and support at the beginning of the apparitions. There was outright hostility in some cases that was mirrored against encouragement. At Kibeho, “Alphonsine told her lunch companions what she had experienced. Her story was not received well” and she was mocked and accused of lying. Later, she was “challenged to ask the Virgin to manifest herself to others as well.” This doubt was juxtaposed against other classmates and villagers regularly coming to pray alongside her. Two months later, other children began falling into the same ecstasy as her and the village as a whole began to pray at the site (Swann 1996: 227). Also facing support and admonishments, Bernadette [Lourdes] returned home after her initial visions and told her story to her mother and aunt. “Her mother said it was undoubtedly, a dream, and her Aunt Romaine said it was an illusion.” Lourdes police commissioner Jacomet and a woman from the village, Madame Millet, would be the first to believe her story and Jacomet would provide the first written account of her story. They provided the initial support and validation that Bernadette was indeed seeing the Virgin. This would be followed shortly by thousands gathering to witness and pray alongside her in the grotto (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 47).

The girls at Marpingen would undergo a similar experience of support and reproach as was seen at Lourdes and Kibeho. After returning home from seeing the

“woman in white” the children rushed to tell their parents of their experience, at which time:

Susanna Leist’s father told her she was talking nonsense, and suggested she had simply seen a village woman. Katharina Hubertus was given no food that evening by her father; her mother promised her a new dress if she stopped her romancing. Frau Kunz also resorted to a carrot and stick, promising her daughter a new dress and punishment if she continued to lie: ‘Your brother Peter will beat you half to death and you will go to hell and not to heaven.’ (Blackbourn 1993: 107)

While most of the girls’ parents did not believe the girls initial account, the one exception was Susanna Leist’s mother, who provided vital initial support.

Frau Leist was among the group of villagers who first heard the story. And according to the later account of Margaretha Kunz she said to the children: ‘Go back into the woods tomorrow, pray, and if you see her again ask who she is; if she says she is the Immaculately Conceived, then she is the Blessed Virgin.’ (Blackbourn 1993)

This initial support was vital to the girls; helping them to identify their vision as that of the Virgin and gain confidence in knowing someone believed their story. The rest of the parents would change their mind shortly thereafter and support their children’s visions. Soon the town as a whole would rally behind the children and defend them against church and state authorities.

An analogous experience happened at Fatima. Lucia, the leader of the three children, experienced the most confliction in relaying her story, confronted with an onslaught of support from curious villagers alongside taunts from her mother and sisters. Her mother, “worried about the gossip” became “determined to make her deny that anything had happened” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 87). The local mayor went as far as to have the children imprisoned for a period of time when they refused to relay the three secrets they had received from the Virgin. Later, after her admittance into a convent, the local bishops would work with Lucia to help recount her story and have them published. The opposition and skepticism by some was juxtaposed against growing support and

validation by villagers and pilgrims that gathered to build a large base of worship for the apparitions (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Other visionaries would have a different experience in relaying their accounts, receiving immediate validation and support, most often from some form of a mentor or neighbors. At Medjugorje, “within hours the whole village knew about it [apparition]. Accompanied by a rapidly growing crowd of villagers and people from neighboring hamlets, the seers went back to the hill the following evening” and gave messages to be passed along to the Virgin (Bax 1995: 15). Similarly, word spread quickly around Garabandal of the girls’ initial apparition, prompting many of the curious to gather in hopes of witnessing the girls’ ecstasy. While the local priest was initially cautious about what the girls were claiming, many in the village immediately became devoted supporters and worked to promote the visions, even in the face of disapproval by the Church (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

At La Salette, the employer of Melanie’s mother would be the first to take stock in the children’s story, suggesting to them that they who they had seen was the Virgin. “This suggestion apparently led other members of the two families to take the children’s story more seriously, for it was agreed that the next morning, Sunday, the children should tell their story to the parish priest” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 32). Word soon spread through the region, and devotion at the site followed. At Kerizinen, “realizing that support from the clergy for fulfilling the Virgin’s wishes would not be forthcoming, Jeanne-Louise turned to the laity.” Soon people moved from all over the region to Kerizinen to form the group *Les Amis de Kerizinen*, to promote and build a shrine at the site (Badone 2007: 454).

Despite Mary Ann Van Hoof's initial reservations in speaking of her experience, she eventually recounted the story to her family, at which time her husband interpreted it into a Marian context telling her the Virgin was not coming for personal reasons but instead using Van Hoof as a platform to expose the wickedness of this world. This is important to note, as it helped to contextualize Van Hoof's visions and from then on, she would unquestioningly identify all subsequent apparitions as being the Virgin Mary. The local priest, Father S. R. Lengowski would also prove to be a vital initial supporter of the apparitions until he was transferred to another parish in an effort to curb Van Hoof's support. Additionally, Van Hoof relied heavily on the partnership of outside persons to promote her messages and formulate them past the initial stages into a movement. Devotees advocated heavily against Church and civic officials who attempted to condemn the revelations (Zimdars-Swartz 1989).

For Nancy Fowler [Conyers], Robert Hughes' involvement was pivotal in the continuation of Fowler's apparitions, as he was responsible for purchasing and building worship space to which the faithful could come, helping to continue pilgrimage to Conyers. Since Fowler's messages centered on societal faith, Hughes support was immediately followed by the founding of the group "Our Loving Mother," whose involvement included building a public worship house and various media publications (financed exclusively in the beginning by Hughes) (Britt 1998).

The remaining visionaries immediately recognized the importance of making their visions a social product, sometimes even ordered so by Mary. Estela's [El Barrio] initial visions would be kept as a family matter, where she received immediate support and encouragement. Excited by this validation, Estela would later go public with her

apparitions and started the ministry group ESPIRITU as a means of carrying out the Virgin's wishes. This group, alongside her family, the local priest (Father Spaulding), and the locutionary group the Scottsdale Nine, provided the encouragement needed for Estela to continue forward with her visions (Nablan-Warren 2005).

Rita Ring [Clearwater] was already a part of the evangelical Catholic group "Shepherds for Christ" who immediately validated and promoted her messages from Mary that authenticated the Clearwater image. The group also purchased the building on which the image of Mary appeared, connecting Clearwater to Rita Ring and ensuring the continuation of worship at the site. They have since remained responsible for the building and distribution of materials concerning Ring's messages (Huba 1998). It is hard to know if the Clearwater apparition would have gained the publicity and acceptance it did if it had not been for Rita Ring's coinciding revelation. However, it is equally hard to know if Ring's message would have been as widely heralded had it not been for the promotion and support she received from the Shepherds of Christ. Despite this circular reasoning, it is nevertheless clear that Shepherds provided monetary and social validation for Ring's revelations. Their widespread use of media has garnered Ring and the Clearwater site a global following.

Rosa's [San Damiano] miraculous healing was witnessed by her aunt, who validated the visitation and subsequent healing. She also received immediate support from Padre Pio, who assisted her early on in interpreting what she had seen and helping her be open to further revelations. Once her apparitions became public, Rosa quickly realized that she was to be a vessel to deliver Mary's messages to the public and she most organize a public ministry to care for the sick and less fortunate (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Veronica Lueken's [Bayside] revelations were contingent on community acceptance, as they specifically called for group prayer and rosary recitation in order for the apparitions to continue. Without this acceptance and involvement, her revelations could not have continued. Shortly after she announced her messages from Mary, members of the community, helped to construct a shrine and subsequent group under the name "Our Lady of the Roses." Lueken also relied heavily on the partnership of outside persons to promote her messages and formulate them past the initial stages into a sustained movement. Devotees advocated heavily against the Church and civic officials who attempted to condemn and curtail the revelations (Wojcik 1996).

We see how attention is now shifting from the visionary to the importance of group involvement. We see how vital support is for the creation of further revelations, and how in some cases ancillary actors were responsible for identification of the vision. It is also clear how many of the visionaries received mixed support in the beginning, having to weave their way to understanding through a mixture of support and negation. In all the cases, as time passed an emerging clarity can be seen by the visionary as it became increasingly clear as to what they had seen and the new role they were undertaking.

**10. The greater the reinforcement received; the more likely a person is to have further revelations.**

**11. The greater the amount of reinforcement received and the more revelations a person produces, the more novel (heretical, deviant) subsequent revelations will become.**

The focus continues on the roles and support of the primary devotional group. The encouragement from these individuals is directly correlated with the fostering of future

revelations. The support of these groups has helped to authenticate both the individual and their revelations, with or without sanctioned approval from the Church. In each of the Marian cases, after the initial revelations and subsequent validation from the public, future revelations were produced, except for La Salette where Melanie and Maximin only received one apparition. This corresponds with the prior component of Stark's theory, once again highlighting how vital the role of support is in transforming the apparitions into movements. This support gives much needed confidence to the seers that help to override opposition that may arise from Church or state authorities.

While the focus on the earlier analysis centered on the development of the initial visions, now the analysis shifts to the development of the later apparitions and the expansion of the groups around them. At this point, there is increasing evidence of the building of networks around the apparitions. It also becomes visible how necessary these groups are for the continuation of the seers' apparitions and how they work to validate what is being reported. In some cases, the apparitions begin to take on a life of their own almost independent of what the seer is reporting. The group involvement manifests itself through reporting of additional outside visions, miraculous healings and signs, and other paranormal activity. As the apparitions progress, the apparitions begin to divide into three notable subsets.

The first of these subsets deals with miraculous healings and signs being reported after the initial visions. This becomes a clear sign of the groups' involvement in the apparitions, and oftentimes takes place independent of the seers. This would be the case at Marpingen, where after the initial apparitions, skepticism and doubt over what the children reported developed around the village. This, coupled with harsh questioning

from authorities cast an aura of doubt over Marpingen. Soon, word of the events spread and there were reports by two men, Nikolaus Recktenwald and Nikolaus Leist of seeing the Virgin and being miraculously healed of illnesses, independent of the seers, at the apparition site. This altered how the whole event was perceived, creating a scenario in which, “while the claims of the three original seers ran potentially counter to normal revelations of authority in the village, they became acceptable when they seemed to be confirmed by adult males with good village reputations. At that point the miraculous experience described by three ‘simple country girls’ could be celebrated” (Blackbourn 1994: 121). As more and more apparitions were reported by the girls and healings continued to take place, “support for the apparitions apparently cut across class lines, just as it transcended the endemic factionalism of the village.” The entire village underwent the “marianization of popular piety” and it became the village focal point (Blackbourn 1994: 126).

At Garabandal, increasingly large crowds of spectators witnessed the girls falling into oblivious ecstasy during their visions, proof to many that the supernatural was occurring in front of them. A year later, thousands would witness the miraculous appearance of a host on the tongue of Conchita. These miraculous signs rallied thousands to travel to Garabandal to pray and defend her against the Church’s accusations of falsity. While the events did not happen independently of the seers, it marked a shift in the development of the apparitions into movements, as the crowds now became active participants in the visions, seeing outwardly the paranormal activity that had once been confined to the visionaries themselves (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

At La Salette, the appearance of a miraculous healing spring at the site of the apparition supplied an ongoing life to what had been a single apparition. “The story of the discovery of the miraculous spring illustrates how, in the immediate aftermath of the children’s experience, perceptions of the supernatural began to take shape around the apparition site itself” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 35). As the number of healings rose, more and more began to travel to the area. It was reported by one local priest that “the mountain itself seems to lower itself and difficulties disappear. Children, old men, old women, pregnant women, all rush up there, arriving sweating and panting, drinking at the spring, and descend again joyous and content” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 38). Later the apparition was subsumed under the mantle of the Church, a trend we will see later in other apparitions. The Church’s formal recognition of the apparition in 1851:

Marked the point, according to later Roman Catholic interpreters, at which the supernatural mission of the two children was assumed by the Church itself. This meant that from that time on Melanie and Maximin were to be regarded as ordinary persons with no special gifts or powers, whose subsequent lives, views, and visions (should there be any more) should cast no aspersions on, nor affect the understanding of, the apparition for which they had once been the instruments. (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 42)

Like La Salette, Bernadette’s experience at Lourdes unfolded in a similar vein. Great crowds began to gather in the grotto and the apparitions, in a sense, shifted from a focus on Bernadette to the faithful who had congregated. Miraculous healings began to take place at the site. The first of these happened after Bernadette’s vision as she left the grotto she turned and hugged Eugenie Troy, a blind child whose sight would suddenly be restored. It would be at this point that support would swell for the visions and thousands more would descend of Lourdes to be a part of the events. Later, after the appearance of a miraculous spring, healings would regularly be reported independent of Bernadette’s involvement, marking a shift from seer to group. Others reported having visions at the

site and the crowds began to actively fight against attempted restrictions to the region placed by the State. On January 18, 1862 the apparitions would officially be recognized by the Catholic Church. Like La Salette, Bernadette would become part of the Catholic Church and her visions would come under the control of the church.

As we have seen with La Salette and Lourdes, some of the apparitions underwent a form of routinization, assumed under the banner of the Catholic Church. These visions experienced a transformation from seer to group focus that rested on how and where the Church decided for the visions to be presented. This shift can be detected at Fatima, where, after a short period following the initial visions, huge crowds began to gather and actively partake in the apparitions. During this time, participants would report hearing a “buzzing sound” and thunder, along with seeing a “little cloud over the tree” where the children knelt (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 81). As the experience became even more collective, there were reports of seeing the Virgin even while the children were absent. By 1921, however, the apparitions were taken over by the Church and Lucia, the only survivor of the three, entered a convent where she remained for the rest of her life. The paranormal events previously reported subsided and the Church controlled what information was made privy to the public, ordering Lucia to produce written accounts of her experience and the famous three secrets and decided where and how they were later revealed.

A similar experience would take place at Kibeho, even though the circumstances there are slightly different. “By 1994, the Kibeho visionaries had not been officially recognized, but instead the Catholic Church has encouraged a public devotional cult at the place of the presumed apparitions” (Ter Haar 2003: 421). This has been achieved by

the local priests taking “full control of the process, making sure that the visionaries received their messages at certain times, at certain places, and under certain conditions. In other words, the miracle has been domesticated” (Ter Haar 2003: 422). However, during the 1990’s the area was ravaged by war, and the “consequences on the local cult remain to be seen” (Tar Haar 2003: 422).

For the remaining apparitions, never recognized by the Church, or ruled against negatively, the shift from paranormal experience by an individual seer to group movement is not only noticeable but a necessary condition for the continuation of the apparitions. Estela [El Barrio] provides a definite example of this, as her visions translated into starting organizations through which she could carry out the Virgin’s messages. This transfer to collective behavior is evident from the shrine to the Virgin’s final message to Estela; all point towards the need for group involvement. The shrine itself in South Phoenix became a place where gang members visited often,

Asking Guadalupe to protect them and their families. Although class and racial boundaries were for the most part maintained at the shrine, one boundary is blurred; members of rival gangs can visit the shrine at the same time without fighting. The shrine is considered to be one of the few neutral zones in South Phoenix for gang members. (Nablan-Warren 2003: 190)

Estela received her final message from the Virgin on August 1, 1998, after having started the group Mary’s Ministries and its subsidiary ESPIRITU. During her final message, the Virgin relayed to Estela that she had nothing left to tell her, that now her work must be completed. In essence, this completed a transfer of power where the emphasis was previously centered on Estela and her visions to now a focus on Mary’s Ministries, where spiritual messages are transformed into worldly duties. Estela’s messages have been a catalyst for Catholic evangelization and social justice, a clearly demonstrated social

reform that physically engages the ‘battle against good and evil in the world’” (Nablan-Warren 2003: 101).

Likewise, Jeanne-Louise [Kerizinen] realized the power of the laity in reinforcing her visions early on, and turned to them to assist in carrying on her messages. “By the late 1960’s, one married couple and several single women had moved to the Kerizinen area from their homes in Paris and Southern Brittany. Together with the family of a prominent civic official in Brest, these supporters formed the nucleus of ‘Les Amis de Kerizinen,’ an association formed in 1972 to oversee and promote the shrine” (Badone 2007: 454). Jeanne-Louise died in 1995, with no definite position having been reached by the Church on her visions. A testament to the group that formed around her, they continue to remain together, seeking “to fulfill her mission of achieving recognition by the Church for her visions and associated messages. Her followers hope that some day they will be permitted to say mass in the oratory, and that Mille Ramonent will be canonized Sainte Jeanne-Louise” (Badone 2007: 455).

The apparitions at Medjugorje quickly became a source of national pride, iconized as a miraculous shrine through the immense reinforcement provided to the seers by the town. Very shortly after the apparitions began, “nationalism in the countryside increased and became more closely interwoven with the movement” (Bax 1995: 18). Soon, the visions of three young children came to represent the country’s nationalistic pride. Most impressive was the town’s total involvement in the production of the apparitions. “Almost all the villagers were in one way or another involved in the devotion. ‘Everyone is supported by Our Lady,’ remarked a local cynic” (Bax 1995: 22).

The crowds would also provide reinforcement in the revelations of Mary Ann Van Hoof. After Van Hoof went public with her apparitions, crowds soon began to gather on a regular basis, reaching up to 100,000 on feast days. Official groups would shortly thereafter be created, with bases in Necedah, Milwaukee, and Appleton. Each group raised money “for the construction of toilets and kneeling rails at the sacred spot. They purchased a hand-carved crucifix from Italy and erected it on a bluff overlooking Necedah, and placed a statue of Our Lady of Fatima at the spot” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 49). Also, John Horning, a wealthy businessman, bought sixty acres of land north of the Van Hoof farm to help expand the worship site. As can be seen, these groups helped to organize Van Hoof’s lone revelatory experience into a well-organized movement.

Rita Ring’s visions at Clearwater would be organized, promoted, and controlled by the lay organization Shepherds for Christ, for whom she was a part of prior to the Clearwater appearance. After Mary authenticated the Clearwater image, Shepherds bought the building and turned it into “center of spiritual renewal” (Swatos N.D.) From the start, Rita Ring relied on Shepherds to deliver and validate her messages to the larger public; without them her revelations may have remained private.

Veronica Lueken’s [Bayside] apparitions from the beginning were validated and facilitated through group involvement. She was instructed by Mary to build a shrine to the Virgin, and her visions would continue only if people came to pray the rosary daily at the makeshift shrine. So, “beginning in 1970, vigils were held regularly at the Bayside apparition site. Then in 1975, the site was moved from Bayside to Flushing Meadows-Corona because of complaints about the site. Even after the move, a group continued to pray daily at the shrine and listen to Lueken’s messages (Wojcik 1996: 130).

Nancy Fowler [Conyers] was also greatly helped by outside individuals after the initial apparitions, which reinforced them and allowed for their continuance. A Virginia businessman, Robert Hughes, even went as far as to purchase land near Fowler's house and formed an organization called Our Loving Mother's Children. This organization was vital to Fowler's messages and "distributes books and flyers on the phenomenon and maintains an active internet discussion group" (Britt 1998:108).

At San Damiano, Rosa's messages also would be greatly facilitated through group involvement. Groups would exist in several incarnations surrounding the apparitions and all would be centered on assisting in promoting the Virgin's messages to Rosa. Most notably these messages would call for the faithful to build a healing spring at the site and to develop a "City of Roses" where orphaned children, the elderly, and the sick could all be cared for. The first of these groups, formed in 1965 was the *Comitato Madonna di San Damiano*, whose primary concern was to publicize the events to the outside public (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

This section of the analysis represents an important shift in the development of revelations. Now the centrality of group involvement becomes fully apparent. The apparitions have moved past the initial stages where the visionary was somewhat unsure and confused of what they were experiencing. Now they are more confident in the apparitions with the assistance of a support network. This network has grown since the initial stages and now emerges to, in a way, take control of the apparitions – to oversee their production and acceptance into the larger culture. Sometimes this happens through the sudden appearance of miraculous healings or signs, or it may take place through being subsumed into the larger church, or yet it may come from the launching of a larger

more formalized group that now helps dictate where and how the visionary relays further apparitions.

**12. As they become successful, religious movements founded on revelations will attempt to curtail revelations or to at least prevent novel (heretical) revelations.**

This is yet another area where Stark's theory may be challenged, as the very existence of revelation by the lay are heretical. Though their messages may simply be a reconfirmation of conventional Catholic ideology, the fact that the laity holds the potential for divine communication garners the label deviant. In other words, revelations, by their very existence, may be deemed as deviant. The particulars of the message may not be the most pertinent part of the revelation – attention is drawn mostly to the visionary and their supernatural ability. Further, this highlights an area overlooked by Stark in analysis – the presence of opposition. Opposition is present, on varying levels, in all of the Marian apparition cases. Its presence oftentimes galvanizes supporters and helps to reify the faith of the devoted through the potential for negation.

While revelations often convey an overall message reflective of the dominant [Catholic] ideology, the Church most often met them with immediate opposition and rebuke. From an official stance, these revelations did not become more heretical over time – from the beginning they are deemed to be such. As touched upon earlier, part of the allure of these revelations is due to their springing from the ordinary. Considering the vast reporting of Marian apparitions over the centuries, only a very select handful has been officially approved by the Church. Most started off, and remained, in controversy with the established Church and fought against restraints. Examining Marian apparitions allows varying dynamics that emerge as new religious movements develop from within a

preexisting tradition. With this development, unique challenges and controversies arise that are overlooked in Stark's analysis.

The majority of Marian apparitions presented have been either disapproved by the Church or no decision has been reached, leaving the movements in a perpetual standoff with the Church. Only three of the cases examined here were officially approved by the Church and even these cases faced opposition and resistance from the Church and others before becoming accepted. As we will see, opposition was present, in some form or another, almost from the moment the apparitions became public knowledge. The seers oftentimes faced scrutiny from a variety of sources: family, the Church, skeptical neighbors, and even state authorities. It is important to reiterate the fact that the presence of opposition did not always have a detrimental effect on the movements – oftentimes it had the opposite effect, working to motivate and draw closer the base of supporters who were spurred into unity by the presence of resistance.

The majority of cases examined in this analysis received a negative opinion after an official investigation by the Catholic Church. At San Damiano, after Rosa went public with her apparitions, some of the immediate tension that developed between her and the Church surrounded her miraculous healing, which could not be substantiated through medical testing and caused her to become suspect among Church authorities. Rosa would also face resistance from state authorities.

In December of 1978, a district attorney sequestered the assets titled under Rosa's name and the names of her children and opened a judicial investigation, charging Rosa, her kids, her son-in-law, and two foreigners with perpetuating a fraud for personal benefit and with criminal intent in their publicizing of the appearances of the Virgin and her messages. (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 111)

These legal troubles would continue even after Rosa's death. Tensions would also continue to increase between Rosa and her followers and Church authorities, as the Church felt increasingly threatened by the emerging power of the people at San Damiano.

The standoff that developed between these officials and the seer and devotees of San Damiano involved more than a simple conflict of authority. It involved a conflict between the Church's need for a single, unified order and the human expressions of physical well-being that often crystallize around an apparition. (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 114)

This tension between the Church and the devotees of San Damiano would lead the church to issue a negative opinion on September 7, 1965. "It is clear that most Roman Catholic officials almost from the very first doubted the authenticity of the San Damiano apparitions and were troubled by the growth and the ongoing expressions of piety at the site." From its earliest incarnation the cult attracted enough attention "to have insured a kind of political standoff with Catholic officials" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 113). In the official decision, Church authorities asked the people to be "concerned about the 'human quality' of the Church's celebrations and create appropriate channels for the devotion to the Virgin Mary that were in line with pronouncements of Vatican II" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 124). The group organized to promote the visions at the time, *Comitato Madonna di San Damiano*, disbanded and re-organized in 1967 as *Pro San Damiano* in order to continue promotion of the site. Worship was undeterred even after the negative opinion (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Nancy Fowler [Conyers] would also clash with Church authorities who were concerned over how the movement garnered power for the laity. Reviewing former Atlanta Archbishop Lyke's published "warnings" over the site revealed a "concern not only about authenticity but also about an anti-hierarchal communitas." The grassroots efforts at Conyers prompted the archbishop to warn "priests not to accept invitations to

lead pilgrimages or visits to Conyers, nor are they to initiate such...It is important that we do not authenticate these alleged apparitions” (Britt 1998:111). The Church’s eventual negative ruling and warning about involvement would do little to deter devotion at Conyers and still adherents continue to ascribe to pre-Vatican II ideals and worship at the site (Britt 1998).

A similar story unfolded at Bayside, where Veronica Lueken’s visions were also disapproved by the Church. A formal investigation into Lueken’s visions was launched in 1973, at which time the diocese of Brooklyn “declared that it found no basis for belief that Veronica Lueken had seen the Virgin Mary.” A similar declaration would be reissued in 1986, citing that the “Bayside visions ‘completely lacked authenticity’ and advised Catholics to ‘refrain from participating in the Vigils and from disseminating any propaganda related to the Bayside apparitions’” (Wojcik 1996: 131). These repeated negative condemnations did little to dissuade belief among the devoted – in fact “it may have motivated many of them to increase their efforts to disseminate the Bayside messages and attempt to gain ecclesiastical acceptance for Mrs. Lueken’s visions” (Wojcki 1996: 114). In this sense, Church opposition worked to shore-up support for the apparitions and helped to unify the base of supporters who believe in the apparitions and still believe the Church may reverse its decision.

Clearwater was yet another apparition ruled negatively against. Here, most notably is the Church’s effort to distance itself from the organization that took over the Clearwater image and whom Rita Ring was closely associated, *Shepherds for Christ*. Ironically, this organization’s primary purpose was the pray for priests, yet the Church was careful to keep itself distant from them. After *Shepherds for Christ* purchased the

building containing the image of Mary in 1998, the St. Petersburg diocese disavowed any connection to *Shepherds*, calling the image a “naturally explained phenomenon” (Scott 2004).

Mary Ann Van Hoof and her devotees found themselves in a similar situation – battling the church from early on for recognition. Near the beginning of her apparitions, Bishop John P. Treacy of the La Crosse diocese “established a commission to investigate Van Hoof’s visions and her claims to be a ‘Victim Soul,’ that is to suffer on behalf of sinners and to experience the passion of Christ” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 37). To test Van Hoof’s claim that her suffering was redemptive and foretold how she was to manifest the stigmata, “Bishop Treacy ordered her to be hospitalized at the Marquette University medical school during Holy Week in the 1952.” At the end of the week, after being tested extensively, it was determined that she “did not manifest the stigmata and the investigating committee took this as evidence that there was nothing supernatural about Van Hoof’s illness” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 44).

Clerical reaction was also mixed from the start regarding Van Hoof’s visions. Initially, attempts were made to limit the crowds at Van Hoof’s home by banning additional feast day masses and warning the devotees that going might “bring dishonor to the traditional devotion to the Mother of God” (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 48). Father S.R. Lengowski, the local priest and confidante of Van Hoof, was supportive from the very beginning of her visions – a position that was costly to him. After expressing his support for Van Hoof, he was “first forbidden to be present at the Van Hoof farm for the apparition on the feast of the Assumption and shortly thereafter, on October 4, he was transferred to Wuerzburg, Wisconsin, some seventy-five miles away” (Zimdars-Swartz

1989: 49). This move would be blamed on his involvement with Van Hoof as the Church's effort to distance itself from the growing movement continued. An official condemnation of Van Hoof's claims was issued in 1955, followed by interdicts in 1970 and 1975 reiterating the Church's disapproval. Nonetheless, a "group of followers loyal to Van Hoof have persisted in the belief that the messages she reported were indeed delivered to her by the Virgin Mary and that she was indeed a Victim Soul. The group is today attached to the North American Old Catholic Church" (Zimdars-Swartz 1989: 37).

The apparitions at Garabandal, also disavowed by the Church, faced an array of opposition from varying sources. When the girls relayed their initial conversation with the Virgin, where they had told her at length about their daily lives, the "conversation with the Virgin became a point of controversy among the observers. Some did not believe that the Virgin would appear merely to hear about the daily lives of four young girls" and discounted their story (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 128). Soon, however, the support of the village would shift and the entire village would become devotees of the visions. Shortly thereafter, as devotion increased for the visions, Conchita, deemed to be the leader of the four girls, was taken to a neighboring village, Santander, where she was questioned extensively by Church officials who were becoming increasingly suspicious. Conchita's mother, who left her alone to be questioned, would return to Garabandal, where she was harassed by supportive villagers until she went and brought Conchita back home. At another point, doctors were sent by Church authorities to test the children to see if they were staging the ecstasies. This greatly angered many of the faithful, who felt their testimonies were going unheeded.

Adding more confusion to the cases, there was multiple periods of retraction by the girls of their story. Conchita's stay in Santander culminated with her signing a statement for Dr. Pinal that stated she was no longer seeing the Virgin, but that she thought her three companions were. "This would be the first of three periods in which one or all of the visionaries at Garabandal retracted some earlier statements about their experiences" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 146). These retractions and then later retractions of the retractions proved detrimental to the girls' validity. Bishop Vicente Puchol Montis of Santander took the retractions of the girls much more seriously," and on March 17, 1967 he issued a statement declaring that there had been no apparitions seen by the girls (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 150). "All the events at Garabandal had a natural explanation. He ended with a statement that only through the Church "were the means of transmission for 'real messages from heaven'" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 150).

"Supporters of Garabandal were not, of course, to be dissuaded from their beliefs by a commission's report and a local bishop's declaration, however much these may have been sanctioned and supported by higher authorities at Rome" (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 153). Devotees voiced objections to how officials judged the case, as they complained the investigation only interviewed but a few of the thousands who witnessed the miracles and felt they mostly dismissed testimonies they did take. Nonetheless, even in the face of official dismissal from the Church, the community of believers was able to flourish at Garabandal and continue worship.

Other Marian apparition cases are still without an official declaration from the Church, maintaining a divide between authorities and the devotees. Medjugorje is one such case, where opposition exists on multiple levels and the investigation by the Church

is ongoing. Tensions at Medjugorje have existed between the devotees, the local Franciscan order, and state and church authorities who have attempted to repress the movement. State authorities from the onset were hostile to the apparitions, labeling them a “fascist movement,” which “constituted a threat to the Yugoslav people” (Bax 1995: 16).

All the overt forms of intimidation, however, failed to lead to the results desired by the authorities. Soon after the mountain was made off-limits, the apparition started again, but in a different spot: before evening mass, in one of the side rooms of the Church...In short, it was partly due to the repressive actions of the authorities that the devotional movement expanded. (Bax 1995: 17)

The state attempted to exert even more intimidation over the movement by taking the six young seers several times to police stations, where they were questioned extensively, but to no avail.

While state authorities attempted to stifle the apparitions, there also existed a standoff between Church authorities and the Franciscans over who could lay claim to the movement, maintaining a deadlock for control. During this standoff, the bishop of neighboring Mostar “prohibited worshippers in the diocese from making pilgrimages to Medjugorje. Offenders would be barred from receiving the sacraments. This tactic, however, did not hit its intended target, but had the opposite effect” (Bax 1995: 18). Once again, as repressive measures increased, even more of the faithful journeyed to Medjugorje to worship at the site. The Franciscans, in response to such opposition, also increased their support among the local townspeople, effectively taking control of the movement. Thus, “what began with six young people’s supernatural experience in a small peasant village developed into a firmly established Franciscan-run devotional regime with an impressive number of international branches” (Bax 1995: 21). For some of the seers, the pressure and attention would prove too much. “It is common knowledge that

one of them stopped seeing the visions after a year and another after a year and a half. A third moved to Sarajevo and was thus no longer actively involved in the devotion” (Bax 1995: 32).

The apparitions at Kerizinen have also dealt with opposition and tension on multiple levels. Kerizinen was able to receive widespread publicity in the 1970’s primarily through the efforts of unmarried lay women supporters, who constitute the majority of the lay organization. This however may have also negatively impacted the movement, as “this predominance of women at Kerizinen may have been a factor hindering its investigation and recognition by the official church” (Badone 2007: 466).

“At Kerizinen, there were in fact two sets of competing ‘authorities’: diocesan clergy and bishops from the institutional church; and the lay group *Les Amis de Kerizinen*” (Badone 2007: 464). Diocesan authorities have reacted, on many levels, not simply to the nature of the apparitions, but instead to challenges posed by grass-root support for Jeanne-Louis. They imposed interdictions,

Thus pitting diocesan clergy against the lay group. Given its relative lack of political and social power, this [lay] group has chosen to emphasize the similarities between its own discourse and that of the official Church, in hopes that this strategy will eventually promote official recognition for the shrine, its visionary, and messages. (Badone 2007: 465)

Further, as support shifted from local townspeople to organizational control, local interest declined and neighbors began to be replaced as primary supporters of Jeanne-Louis by *Les Amis de Kerizinen*. Local people viewed the association in a very poor light. “When the association arrived, local people became colder, stopped being involved” according to local residents (Badone 2007: 459).

The chief source of consternation between Kerizinen and the Church lies with the traditional style of Catholicism practiced by devotees, where the rosary and the Stations

of the Cross are elevated. “While entirely orthodox, these devotions are less focused on promoting this-worldly social welfare than the type of post Vatican II Catholicism favored by the diocese” (Badone 2007: 455). Nor have the differences between the devotees and Church authorities been resolved. A decision has yet to be reached on the authenticity of the apparitions. “Jeanne-Louis died in 1995, at the age of 84, leaving a group of supporters who seek to fulfill her mission of achieving recognition by the Church for her visions and associated messages” (Badone 2007: 455).

The apparitions at Kibeho remain without an official decision by the Church, although the visions there have already been subsumed by the local church. During the early visions, both “excitement and consternation invaded the village of Kibeho.” The seers faced “vigorous opposition” by select local Church officials in the initial days following the apparitions, but this would change as more visionaries came forward and visitors to the site began to see paranormal signs while the visionaries were experiencing their ecstasy. After the visions had been going on for a while, two commissions of inquiry were set up in order to examine the authenticity of the apparitions and to impose a limit on the number of visionaries coming forward, which has shown a tendency to continue growing. Now, “the local priests have taken full control of the process...In other words, the miracles have been domesticated” (Ter Haar 2003: 421). By 1994, there had been no official recognition of the apparitions at Kibeho; however “the Catholic Church had encouraged a public devotional cult at the place of the presumed apparitions” (Ter Haar 2003: 422). The visions, as well as progress towards recognition, were impeded by the bloody civil war and massacre that took place in Rwanda during the 1990’s. The

precise effect that has had on the local cult remains to be seen (Swann 1996, Ter Haar 2003).

Estela's [El Barrio] visions in South Phoenix are also without a final decision from the Catholic Church. However, the bishop's decision thus far takes a middle stance. After reviewing the committee's report on the apparitions on April 10, 1990, Bishop O'Brien wrote an assessment "neither approving nor condemning the visions, the Bishop permitted them to continue as long as specific steps were taken to ensure their adherence to Catholic doctrine" (Nablan-Warren 2003: 91). The Church did rule because no "visible miracles" were present, the "messages and apparitions to Estela were not deemed supernatural. This judgment by the three members of the committee in no way dampened the enthusiasm of the Ruizes or the thousands of pilgrims who visit the Marian shrine each year and who are convinced of Mary's presence" (Nablan-Warren 2003: 92). However, these careful stipulations and monitoring by Church authorities have added some tension between them and Estela's devotees, as their form of Catholic evangelizing places them on the edge of accepted practices and expressions of faith.

The apparitions at Marpingen are unique in that the Church has never mounted a formal investigation and decision, thus no formal decision has been reached. The apparitions have faced opposition from both state and church authorities. As was discussed previously, at the time of the apparitions Germany was in the midst of the *Kulturkampf* where tensions were rife between the State and the Catholic Church.

However, from early on,

Many priests embraced the apparitions with a passionate conviction that left little room for doubt. Others were more skeptical, expressing alarm at the direction events were taking. But the enthusiasm of the pilgrims, the rash on initiative apparitions, and the political background of the 1870s all made it more difficult to exert control over the

popular sentiment. The clergy found itself caught between the rules of the Church, the pressures of the civil authorities, and the demands of the faithful. (Blackbourn 1993: 173)

During the apparitions, large numbers of priests visited the site, where “hundreds risked arrest and twenty were indeed prosecuted for illegally celebrating mass in the village” (Blackbourn 1993: 174). However, this is not to say that all the priests were in favor of the apparitions. The Marpingen visions also represented a source of contention among clergy. “A prudent concern not to antagonize the civil authorities” accounted for some of the reservation over participation in the events (Blackbourn 1993: 178). What makes Marpingen stand out from other apparitions, particularly in Germany, during this period was the degree of force employed by the State against them. The State came down harshly in an effort to quell the movement gathering in the town. These harsh tactics, however, also worked to have the opposite effect than State authorities intended. “At a time when *Kulturkampf* was imprisoning their fellow priests, the apparitions must have represented for many a solace: a sign of hope in a cold, hard world” (Blackbourn 1993: 174). The ongoing *Kulturkampf* also made it impossible for the Church to launch an official enquiry into Marpingen, as they were instead focused on battling the State.

While the Church’s position in the majority of the apparitions took the role of adversary, in other cases the Church used the apparitions to their advantage, effectively subsuming the movement into the folds of the Church organization and taking control of how the apparitions were perceived, prayed to, and what the visionaries were to say and do. However, this is not to say that the apparitions went without opposition, as very often the path to approval from the Church was imbued with opposition from family, the Church, the state, and neighbors. Fatima provides a good example of this, as the children, especially Lucia faced many antagonisms on their path to acceptance. Early on, people

were unsure how to respond the apparitions, as there was a mixture of support and apprehension. “It is likely that acute tension between the Church and the Portuguese state had led many persons, unsure of just what expressions of religion the government would tolerate, to be very much afraid of what was happening at the Cova da Iria that summer.” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 85).

Lucia was treated particularly harshly by her family and received the brunt of the opposition. Early on, Lucia was taken twice to a priest by her mother where they attempted to catch her contradicting herself (to no avail). Later, as support grew for the visions, the conflict centered mainly on attempting to get the children to reveal the three secrets told to them by the Virgin.

At Ourem, the children, who by now felt quite abandoned by their families, were subjected to further attempts to obtain the secret. On August 14<sup>th</sup>, when questioning and bribes failed to wrest it from them, they were placed in public jail and told they would remain there until a cauldron of boiling oil was prepared, into which they would be thrown alive. (Zimdars-Swartz 1993: 193)

Slowly, the Church changed its position and approved the apparitions. Years later, after the deaths of the other two children and after Lucia had entered a holy order some tensions still remained between her and the Church over the contents of the three secrets, particularly the third, which was the last to be revealed. Finally, in 1943, Lucia was ordered by Bishop da Silva to record the secret and submit it to the Vatican, ending any tensions between her and Church authorities.

Bernadette [Lourdes] would also face opposition on her path to approval. When she initially told her mother and aunt of her experience, she was dismissed, as well as received negatively by the local priest when she tried to approach him. Bernadette then returned to tell the priest of the Virgin’s wishes, where she was called a “liar” and the priest “complained that it was unfortunate to have a family in the town that created such

disorder” (Zimdars-Swartz 1993: 51). Local governmental officials also tried to stem worship of the visions, barricading the grotto after the apparitions had been going on for a few months. People promptly demolished the barricade, only for it to be replaced and once again demolished. This continued for a few months until the Emperor stepped in and ordered the barricades removed. As thousands of people streamed into Lourdes to worship at the site the Church launched an official inquiry into the visions. Four years after Bernadette’s visions began they were officially sanctioned by the Church. Bernadette shortly thereafter entered a convent where she remained for the rest of her life. She would have no more visions, and the Church would take control of the shrine at Lourdes (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

La Salette is another example of an approved apparition that was subsumed by the Church. Both of the children were initially dismissed by their families, and it was only with the support of their mother’s employer that they were taken seriously. Once the apparition was approved, Melanie and Maximin were to be regarded as ordinary persons with no special abilities. The main tension did not gather around the seers as the message of the apparition which forewarned of a coming famine as punishment for leading sinful lives. In the years to follow, “the prophecies continued to be publicized and to create controversy, somewhat overshadowing the fact that the site had originally attracted attention and had become a popular place of pilgrimage because of its miraculous healing spring” (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 42).

The cases of Marian apparitions point to an oversight in Stark’s analysis, as he fails to discuss the presence of opposition. Resistance is immediate in the case of apparitions; the establishment seeks to control the movement either through absorbing it

into the larger institution or by quashing the entire movement. This generally has the opposite effect, instead energizing the base and unifying them against the opposition. Therefore, an attempt to curtail novel revelations occurs right from the beginning, as the very nature of these visions are deemed heretical and represent a threat to authorities.

## Summary Chapter

After a detailed examination of the cases of Marian apparitions, we see how Stark's theory is both confirmed and refuted (see Table A). Marian apparitions closely followed the development of Stark's model in certain cases, while in other cases they challenged his analysis through a reworking of his theory. Such an analysis allows for a new and more encompassing theory of revelations that follows the development from individual psychic experience to a social phenomenon. It is evident how distinctively social apparition events are; they are wholly dependent on acceptance and support for outside actors in order to continue. Visionaries not only need, but also actively seek out validation of their experience in order to discern these events and become confident enough to produce further visions.

Much of the focus in the early stages of apparitions revolves around the presence of a supportive cultural tradition. In essence, some form of cultural script need be present for apparitions to occur; this may be in the form of a role model or a preexisting cultural tradition. In the case of Marian apparitions, the cultural tradition presents itself in the form of conventional Catholic ideology. Catholicism was present in or around the lives of the visionaries in all the cases of Marian apparitions.

Early in the analysis Stark examines how mental phenomena may be interpreted as contact with the divine. This was a point at which his analysis could not be verified, as it difficult to discern precisely what mental phenomenon was taking place at the time of the first vision by the visionary. Oftentimes these events were recorded much later by outside individuals, and in many instances the visionaries were unsure of how to interpret

their initial vision and did not perceive it to be divine contact. Therefore, a reworking of Stark's analysis is needed. What can be verified is the *behavior* of the seer at the time of her initial vision. From this perspective, it is evident that the behaviors and actions of the visionaries at the time of their first apparition rest in the mundane. All the apparitions are remarkable for the fact that they occurred outside the boundaries of the Church – whether working herding animals, engaged in play, or in the midst of prayer – all the visions took place firmly in the hands of the laity.

Next Stark shifts the focus to the content of the early messages. It is evident here how the messages themselves are a reiteration of conventional ideology; all the messages reaffirm traditional Catholic ideals and descriptions. They follow a language and imagery echoed by similar experiences within the culture, with even the specifics of the messages constituting a reaffirmation of popular religious doctrine. It should also be noted that while the details of the seers' messages reiterate conventional Catholic doctrine, the fact that the laity produces such contact, and thereby appropriates power for itself, places Marian apparitions on the fringe of conventionality. Through this appropriation of power the seers place themselves in a position of endowed authority, thereby indicting society with a lack of faith, and subsequently becoming a threat to the established Church.

Stark reverts attention back to the individual seer as the analysis proceeds, citing how he or she is endowed with unusual creativity. This is a point where his theory is challenged and reformulated, as all the visionaries were remarkable only for their ordinariness. Most of the seers were young females, with minimal education, poor, and oftentimes unsure of what they were seeing. None were known for displaying any unusual characteristics.

As attention is shifted back to the dynamics of the message received, we begin to see the emergence of the social and personal involvement that goes into the development of visions into social movements. Periods of social crisis produce heightened appeal for religious explanations – a time where conventional religious justifications may fall short, thereby producing a need for new and novel religious ideology. Crises may exist on differing levels – they may take the form of personal suffering, sickness, economic deprivation, violence, or war. Crises are oftentimes present on some level in the lives of many, which to a certain degree explains why apparitions are not an isolated phenomenon.

The emergence of apparitions as a social phenomenon takes center stage as the analysis proceeds forward. As the apparition begins to take on a larger life, group involvement becomes imperative for the continuation of revelations. Stark cites how by this point there is a maximization in the acceptance of revelations during periods of social crisis. This was found to be untestable, as there is no way to quantify this part of the analysis. Instead, it is clear that we see a link between the different levels of crisis and revelation, as well as a link between people's experience and revelations. There was a willingness among all the participants in each case of Marian apparitions to accept the revelations as the seer continued to produce them. As word spread of the apparitions, there was an immediate swell in support from a few participants to the presence of thousands.

The vital role of ancillary actors is highlighted as Stark's analysis continues, as it is their involvement that moves the experience from lone revelation to sustained movement. The visionaries were often confused and conflicted about their experience in

the early stages of the apparitions; as the process moved forward and social support emerged, the environment became more and more conducive for further revelations. The seers were empowered by the emerging clarity around them. Whether it was family, fellow neighbors, employers, or priests – outside individuals were responsible for helping the visionary to not only discern their visions, but to be confident that this was contact with the divine and they should continue forward with whatever was asked of them. It is important to point out that the visionaries did not receive only support. Very often, particularly in the early stages, there was a mixture of encouragement and negation from those surrounding the visionary. Nonetheless, the presence of support, in whatever varying levels, spurred the visionary forward into producing more revelations. This often caused a snowball effect, as validation assisted in producing more revelations and in turn won more support from neighbors and pilgrims.

The end of Stark's analysis focuses on how as movements become successful further heretical revelations are curtailed. This is another point on which Stark may be challenged, as the very existence of revelation by the laity is heretical. Though their messages may simply be a reconfirmation of conventional Catholic ideology, the fact that the laity holds the potential for divine communication garners the label deviant. This also highlights the role opposition plays in formulating revelations into movements; something overlooked by Stark in his analysis. Opposition is present, in varying levels, in all the cases of Marian apparitions. The presence of such oftentimes galvanizes supporters and further unites them in ideology, as they now have an antithesis to draw against.

This analysis traced the development from what began as a lone psychic experienced, with the presence of support and validation from ancillary actors, into the transformation of an independent religious movement. Even with some variation to Stark's analysis, the cases of Marian apparitions provide such an example. Stemming from conventional Catholic ideology, individuals received communication from the Virgin Mary that developed, with the proper support, into their own offshoot of the Catholic Church. These movements divert power away from the hierarchy and into the hands of the laity, providing a path where anyone may experience divine interaction. In almost all the cases, this transformation of power to the laity threatens the established Church and puts it at odds with conventional Catholicism. Very often church and state authorities react harshly against the movement, attempting various efforts to stop worship of the apparitions – almost always to no avail. There is something powerful about these movements, as they become an opportunity to experience faith through a new means. In a changing world, filled with crises and problems, people continue to search for new means answering the world's ills; the Virgin Mary has for centuries served as a confronting force in this ever changing world and visionaries' intimate interaction with her provide comfort to those faced with an ever-changing world.

Table A: Content Analysis of Marian Apparition Cases

<b>Stark's Theoretical Components</b>													
Apparition Cases	1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	A	B											
<b>Fatima</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Kibeho</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Lourdes</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Mary Ann Van Hoof</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Veronica Lueken</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>San Damiano</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Altered
<b>Virgin of El Barrio</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Kerizinen</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Altered
<b>La Salette</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Altered
<b>Marpingen</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Medjugorje</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>Clearwater</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered						
<b>NancyFowler</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Altered
<b>San Sebastian De Garabandal</b>	No	Yes	Altered	Yes	Altered	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Altered

**Yes** = case fits with Stark's theory, **No** = Case does not fit, **Altered** = Theory was challenged and altered, **N/A** = Not applicable to this case

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