

APPARITIONS-RELATED

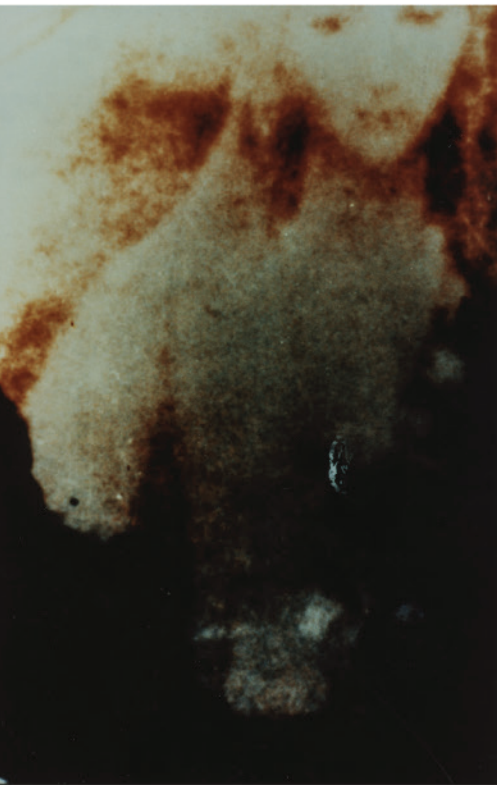
MISCELLANEA

(Tapes, photos, objects.)

Faith, Reason, and One-Hour Processing



## Marian Apparitions Collection, circa 1940–present



Picture taken by  
a pilgrim at Medjugorje

He pointed camera in  
direction the visionary  
was talking



**Jillian Slater**  
Archivist, Marian Library

The *Marian Apparitions Collection* (also known simply as the *Apparitions File*) contains correspondence, personal accounts, articles, newsletters, photographs, audio recordings, artifacts, and ephemera documenting Marian apparitions in the United States and around the world. The collection primarily documents apparitions reported during the second half of the 20th century. Materials include, for example, descriptions and personal accounts of visions or messages, photographs depicting a scene in which a miraculous image has been identified, news reports related to the apparition and bulletins or printed ephemera promoting an apparition or related cause. Although the collection contains some material dealing with the major, approved Marian apparitions (for example, Fátima and Lourdes), its focus is rather on documenting the hundreds of reported apparitions that are mostly unapproved. These include, for example, claims that are uninvestigated, under review, or which the bishop has made no decision regarding the supernatural character of the event.

In addition to the *Marian Apparitions Collection*, the Marian Library at the University of Dayton includes books, periodicals, artwork, rare books, and archival materials documenting the history, spirituality, and ecclesial foundations of Marian studies. The library is recognized both nationally and internationally as a center for scholarship on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## Curatorial Statement

The photographs in this exhibition are from the Marian Apparitions Collection. They are housed in simple cardboard boxes and plastic notebooks, are unassuming and appear to carry no special significance, but I found these small, mostly 4x6 inch photographs, extraordinary. They struck me as going to a deeper meaning, something of significance. They become something greater. Like any photograph of want, they achieve the level of fetish and artifact. For me these photographs address the intersection of the sacred, aesthetic, and descriptive aspects of the photograph. As well as the role the camera and photographic processes play in the making of the photograph and giving meaning to the photograph prior to the onset of digital photography; hence the title Faith, Reason, and One-Hour Processing.

This exhibition does not attempt to prove or disprove what is claimed to be evident in the photograph. It displays the original photograph (in most instances, image side and back) enlarged for exhibition but not altered in any way other than making a digital scan and inkjet print.

In addition to photographs, the collection houses objects that were too intriguing or tempting to be left out. I photographed several of these objects with the intent of including them in the exhibition. Although these items are not personal photographs of apparitions, they function in a similar way nonetheless, and are interspersed throughout the exhibition, thus adding to the depth of the material exhibited and the resultant conversation.

A very special thanks for the generous support and assistance of: the Graul Chair for Arts and Languages; the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; the Department of Art and Design; the Department of Religious Studies; Fr. Johann G. Roten, Director, Marian Library; Anthony B. Smith, Associate Professor, Department of Religious Studies; Jillian Slater, Archivist, Marian Library; Julie Jones, Media and Facilities Coordinator, Department of Art and Design; Francis Schanberger, Gallery Coordinator, Department of Art and Design; Emily Downey, Graphic Designer, Department of Art and Design.

**Joel Whitaker**

*Professor, Department of  
Art and Design*



Conyers, GA (Taken by Son of  
Visionary from Dayton, OH, who  
has been graced with special  
gifts of the Holy Spirit --  
notice tongues of fire)

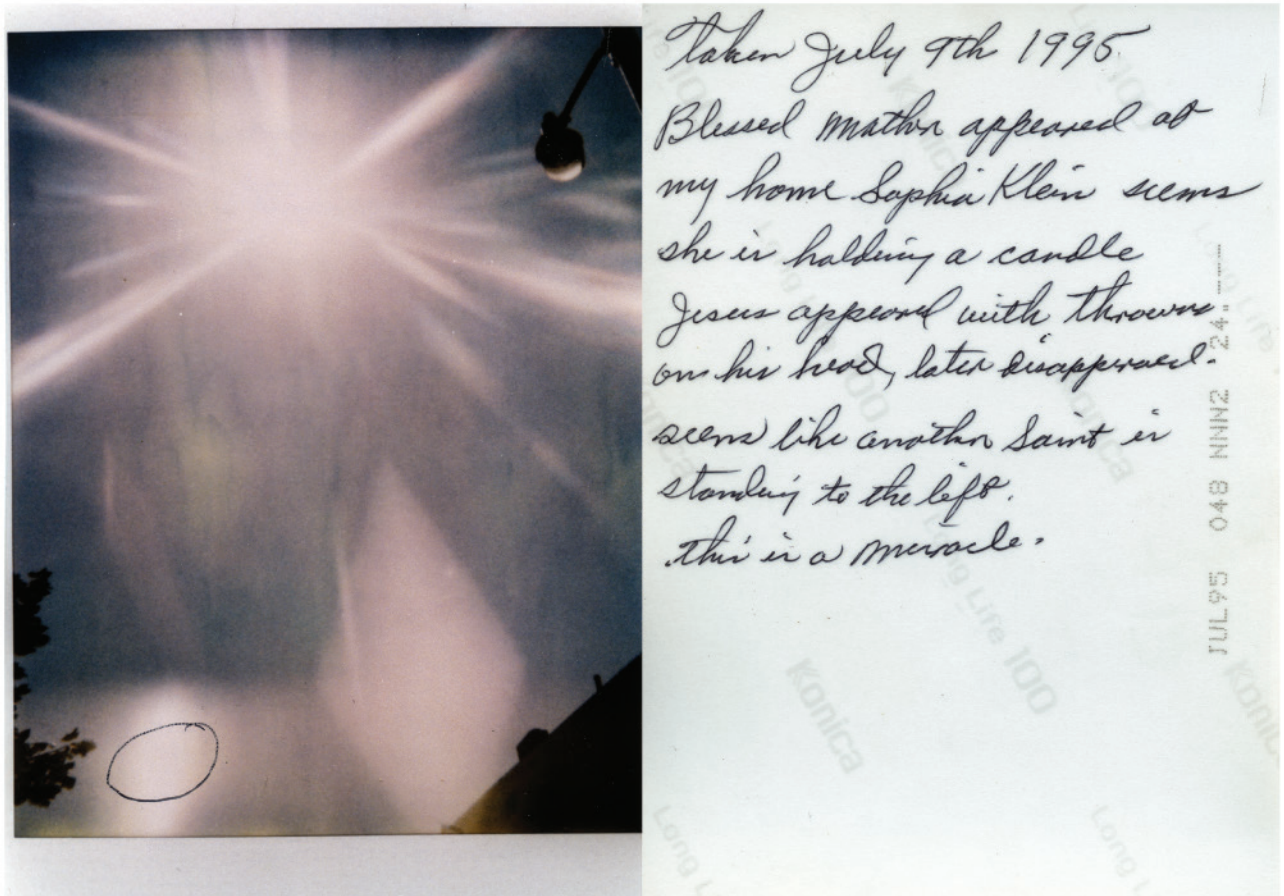


## Faith, Reason, and One-Hour Processing

**Anthony Smith**

Associate Professor  
Department of Religious Studies

The photographs included in *Faith, Reason, and One-Hour Processing* exist at the intersection of two notable dimensions of modern culture — popular Marian apparitions and the mechanical reproduction of visual images. Collectively, they appear prosaic but also puzzling. On one level, many are examples of photos marred, disfigured or blurred by the accidents of picture taking and processing. On another, they stand as memorabilia of trips made by the photo-takers, commonplace tokens of travel and leisure. But on an additional level, they indicate the durability of religious belief and practice through modern media such as photography. How one ultimately assesses these photographs, of course, depends on a host of prior assumptions and expectations of the viewer. Yet regardless of the value one attributes to individual photos, they are evidence of the material and visual character of popular religion.



Many of these photos were taken by people at shrines where the Virgin Mary was believed to have appeared and communicated special messages to individuals. Such sites are part of a long history of popular Marian devotion within Roman Catholicism. Particularly since the 19th century, claims of apparitions and special shrines commemorating supernatural events have garnered the interest, fascination and belief of countless people. Places such as Lourdes, France and Fatima, Portugal are particularly notable examples of Marian apparitions that have generated widespread attention and devotion.

More recently, reports of apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Medjugorje, in what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, beginning in 1981 have drawn numerous believers. Indeed, several photos in the exhibit offer testimony to Medjugorje as an important pilgrimage destination in the late 20th century. Medjugorje also helped foster additional claims of

*This is a very poor copy made from a color photo taken at the apparition site near Conyers Ga. The light around Mary is white to Golden. The dark area at top is blue. A witness said a golden fog settled over the whole crowd.*







Fr. RoTen- ? Questions  
 ① Who is the Lady & Baby  
 ② What is square object in her hand  
 "Book" symbolic to?  
 ③ bottom left patch of purple  
 edge @ far left tiny baby blue  
 object & stripe of red color across  
 it... identified by processor as  
 same color & shape toy in sons  
 Coffin - other objects also there  
 ④ Rt side of her purple wrap near  
 bottom edge approx 1" off to rt.  
 Shape of Teddy Bear & a Chalice.  
 Very clear.  
 ⑤ Color of baby's hair is a bluish  
 brown & auburn highlights identified  
 by processor as the same as my  
 sons in coffin color not anything  
 seen in this photograph in bracket  
 picture. Jesus as a Jew would have  
 dark curly hair ... correct?  
 Thank you Victoria

Marian apparitions in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s that created new pilgrimage sites in their own right. Other photos in the exhibit were taken at such places. In fact, the photographs serve as evidence of a wide-ranging, though often overlooked, subculture of Marian apparition sites that emerged in the late 20th century US. In addition to places such as Conyers, GA, and Santa Fe, NM that are included in the exhibit, other noteworthy sites were Lubbock, TX, Phoenix, AZ, and Falmouth, KY.

The exhibit therefore reveals the important role that photography has played in this world of Marian apparitions. Armed with their cameras, visitors to apparition sites such as the one in Conyers, GA could take their own pictures. For some, photographs could offer a tangible record of the shrines as distinctive places where the sacred is made present. The photos themselves could also assume significance as manifestations of the holy, capturing the miraculous that the eye of a believer could recognize. The photos therefore suggest that for some of the devout, religious meaning could be generated *through* visual media and activities such as picture taking.

Such photographs are thus embedded in a longer history of mass produced images and holy places. In the early 20th century, for instance, visitors to Lourdes could purchase postcards of the shrine they could bring home with them or send to friends. Later movies were made of the pilgrims at the shrine.

But most of the photos in this exhibit reflect developments during the late 20th century, which deepened the interpenetration of the visual and the devotional. For many of them were produced using inexpensive, Instamatic or Polaroid, point-and-shoot cameras that became popular beginning in the 1970s. They therefore mark a particular moment in the history of popular film photography just before the advent of digital cameras. Heirs to the portable Kodaks of the early and mid-20th century, these easy to use, often disposable

cameras provided new opportunities for ordinary people to document their own lives. Coupled with the ubiquitous photo-process stores, these new cameras extended the reach of photography in modern, everyday life. In the time it took to do the grocery shopping, one could drop off a roll of film and pick up an envelope of pictures.

As the photos in the exhibit make clear, these technological and social developments affected the culture of popular Marian apparitions. Inexpensive, portable cameras allowed picture taking to become part of pilgrimage experience at shrines. No longer dependent only on store-bought images and postcards, the devout now had easy means to create their own photos. While it is difficult to know exactly how individuals interpreted the pictures they took, for those who saw the sacred within them, these photographs could give the holy a personal immediacy, rendered in part through their own making. Where some viewers may see only the distortions caused by chemical reaction or light exposure in the photos, and others might glimpse iconographical imagery, some of the devout might perceive the presence of the transcendent. In this regard, many of the photos in the exhibit are examples of what folklorist Daniel Wojcik has called the practice of "miraculous photography" within Marian apparitional culture.

At the same time, these inexpensive photos in which some believers saw the Virgin Mary or the cross or other divine manifestations made the apparitions permanent. Like the appearance of Mary on the façade of a building, these photographs are evidence of what some scholars identify as a new turn in the history of Marian apparitions in the late 20th century. Such photos transformed appearances of the supernatural, which in the past had often been perceived as fleeting and impermanent, into a fixed, stable and public presence. The holy could be found in a 4 x 6 inch color photograph, held in one's hand and passed along or copied to family, friends and fellow devotees. If believing also entailed seeing, then these photographs offered those who believed a new visual archive of the miraculous.

These photographs, therefore, engage and arrest precisely because they suggest numerous, even contradictory meanings, depending on perspective. For they might serve as objects of both the most intimate commitments of faith and a public, shared subculture of religious devotion. They are products of chemical, mechanical processes and expressions of belief. They can be clasped tightly but also circulated through the mail. They are material artifacts and spiritual signs. They are both commonplace and unfamiliar.

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Beatrice Galant, Santa Fe

GALLERY LOCATION

Department of Art and Design

Gallery 249, second floor Fitz Hall

For more information: [go.udayton.edu/gallery249](http://go.udayton.edu/gallery249)

ARCHIVE LOCATION

Marian Library

7th floor of Roesch Library

For more information: [mlimri@udayton.edu](mailto:mlimri@udayton.edu)