

Chapter 4

Something is Missing

On June 26, 2000, after forty years of growing pressure from the faithful, including such “Fatimist” organizations as Father Nicholas Gruner’s Fatima apostolate, the Vatican conducted a press conference to publish what it claimed is the entirety of the Third Secret. Conspicuously absent from the proceedings was the last surviving Fatima visionary. Sister Lucia was not even permitted to watch the internationally televised press conference on television. Sister Maria do Carmo, custodian of Sister Lucia’s convent in Coimbra, told *Corriere della Sera* that “We watch TV, but only in exceptional cases. The press conference on the Secret of Fatima is not such.” This prompted Socci to ask: “And what are these exceptional cases for the Carmelites of Coimbra? Perhaps the finals of the world soccer championship?”¹²⁴

Some six weeks earlier, then Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, had announced during the papal Mass for the beatification of Jacinta and Francisco at Fatima that the Secret would be published along with “an appropriate commentary.”¹²⁵ The text of the purported Secret, spanning four pages and 62 lines, was photostatically reproduced as part of a booklet containing that commentary, entitled *The Message of Fatima (Message)*. Aside from the commentary, written by Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Message* included an Introduction by then Archbishop Bertone, serving at that time as Secretary for the CDF.

According to *Message*, the Secret that had been suppressed and kept “under absolute seal” since it arrived at the Vatican in 1957 is nothing more than the following:

J.M.J.

The third part of the secret revealed at the Cova da

¹²⁴Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 34.

¹²⁵Vatican Information Service, May 13, 2000.

Iria-Fatima, on 13 July 1917.

I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine.

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: "Penance, Penance, Penance!". And we saw in an immense light that is God; "something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it" a Bishop dressed in White "we had the impression that it was the Holy Father". Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersion in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.

Tuy-3-1-1944.¹²⁶

That this vision is *part* of the Third Secret can hardly be doubted. But the worldwide reaction of the Catholic faithful to its disclosure can be summed up with a single incredulous question: "*That's it?*" Yes, the vision is dramatic, but its meaning is far from

¹²⁶*The Message of Fatima (Message)*, p. 21.

clear: An angel with a flaming sword. Flames from the sword threatening to set the world afire, but repelled (temporarily?) by the Virgin. The angel thrice demanding penance from humanity. A "Bishop dressed in White," who seems to be the Pope, hobbling through a half-ruined city filled with corpses (what city? how ruined?). The execution of the Pope by a band of soldiers (who are they?) as he kneels before a rough-hewn cross on a hill outside the city (is it Rome?). And then the martyrdom of countless bishops, priests, religious and laity (who? when? where?), as two other angels gather up the blood of the martyrs to sprinkle on Heaven-bound souls.

What does it all mean? The vision as published does not contain a single word from the Virgin by way of explanation. Yet Our Lady had taken care to confirm for the seers the vision of hell they had clearly understood upon the very sight of it: "You have seen hell, where the souls of poor sinners go." *Message* offered no explanation for the missing words of the Virgin, as if no one should be puzzled by this. But it defied belief that the Virgin had *nothing* to say about the dramatic but ambiguous content of the vision. Doubting questions immediately abounded:

- Where are the *words* of the Virgin which are the "logical continuation" of her statement "In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc"?
- What is so terrible about this ambiguous vision that Sister Lucia could not commit it to paper without a direct intervention of the Virgin Mary?
- Where is the letter to the Bishop of Fatima, comprising some 25 lines of text?
- Given that *Message* stated that the text of the vision had been kept in the Holy Office archives,¹²⁷ where is the text that was kept in the papal apartment under the Pope's personal custody during the reigns of Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI?
- Why is the vision devoid of any reference to a crisis of faith in the Church and dramatic consequences for the world, alluded to by a train of witnesses who had either read the Secret or had indirect knowledge of it?

¹²⁷*Message*, p. 5.

There is, on the face of it, no rational explanation for the Vatican's refusal to disclose the text of this vision in 1960 or the rigorous suppression of it for forty years thereafter. Indeed, in his commentary on the Secret in *Message*, the same Cardinal Ratzinger who said in 1984 that the Secret is a "religious prophecy" concerning "dangers to the faith and the life of the Christian and therefore of the world", was now saying that in the Secret "No great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled. We see the Church of the martyrs of the century which has just passed..."¹²⁸ If that were true, then why did Cardinal Ratzinger not simply *say so* back in 1984? As Portuguese bishop Januario Torgal declared: "If the Vatican knew it was not apocalyptic, why on earth did it make it public only now?"¹²⁹

What about 1960?

Moreover, on its face the vision has absolutely nothing to do with 1960, the year the Secret was supposed to be revealed because it would be "more clear" then. Evidently in recognition of this problem, Cardinal Bertone claims in *Message* that during an unrecorded "conversation" with Sister Lucia at Coimbra on April 27, 2000, weeks before the press conference, she allegedly told him that the Virgin *had never said anything* about 1960:

Before giving the sealed envelope containing the third part of the "secret" to the then Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, Sister Lucia wrote on the outside envelope that it could be opened only after 1960, either by the Patriarch of Lisbon or the Bishop of Leiria. Archbishop Bertone therefore asked: "Why only after 1960? Was it Our Lady who fixed that date?" Sister Lucia replied: "*It was not Our Lady*. I fixed the date because I had the intuition that before 1960 it would not be understood, but that only later would it be understood..."¹³⁰

Tellingly, *Message* fails to mention that on the envelope Sister Lucia had written: "*By express order of Our Lady, this envelope can only be opened in 1960...*" Nor does *Message* include a copy

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 32.

¹²⁹*The Washington Post*, "Third Secret Spurs More Questions; Fatima Interpretation Departs From Vision," July 1, 2000, quoted in Mark Fellows, *Sister Lucia: Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart*, p. 190.

¹³⁰*Message*, p. 29.

of the envelope as part of its supporting documentation. During the telecast of May 31, 2007 Bertone would finally reveal the envelope—or rather, *two* such envelopes, as we will see in Chapter 8. But on June 26, 2000 Bertone had the temerity to claim that Lucia declared to him in private weeks earlier: “*It was not Our Lady. I fixed the date!*” I say temerity, because the Cardinal knew that his representation was flatly contradicted by what Lucia had written on the envelopes he had chosen not to reveal.

One cannot overestimate the significance of what Bertone is claiming here. If the “express order of Our Lady” concerning revelation of the Secret in 1960 was purely Sister Lucia’s invention, if she had misled Canon Barthas, Cardinal Ottaviani, the Bishop of Fatima, the Cardinal Patriarch of Portugal, the whole Church and the entire world, why should anyone believe anything she claimed to have heard from the Blessed Virgin? Why should anyone believe a single word of the Message of Fatima?

There are only two alternatives: Either Sister Lucia lied about this crucial matter throughout her life, which is inconceivable, or the words attributed to her by Bertone were not hers. In the latter case, Lucia’s purported statement would be either an outright fabrication by Bertone, the product of undue influence upon the seer, or an utterance arising from a loss of mental capacity due to her advanced age. Here, in and of itself, is reason to doubt the entire official account, as Socci does.¹³¹ To quote Socci: “[B]ut Lucia would never have dared to establish herself a date to make it [the Secret] known to everybody: only the Madonna, who had imposed secrecy on the message, could do it.”¹³²

What about the telltale “etc”?

And what of the famous “etc” in Sister Lucia’s Fourth Memoir? To recall again Father Schweigl’s testimony, the Third Secret includes

¹³¹By “official account” I do not mean any teaching of the Holy Catholic Church regarding the Third Secret controversy, for there is no such teaching. As will become clear in the course of this discussion, the “official account” means nothing more than the representations of Cardinal Bertone and his collaborators in the Vatican apparatus, who have not been given any papal authority to bind the faithful to their version of the facts or their purported “interpretation” of the vision of the Third Secret. On the contrary, as we will see, the Pope has not intervened in this controversy, and the former Cardinal Ratzinger made it quite clear in 2000 that the commentary on the Secret in *Message* has not been imposed upon the Church. Socci rightly recognizes that the faithful are at liberty to question the “official account.”

¹³²*Fourth Secret*, p. 38.

the “logical continuation” of the Virgin’s discourse following the phrase that ends with Sister Lucia’s “etc”—“In Portugal, the dogma of the faith will always be preserved etc.” In fact, the attention of Fatima scholars had always been focused on the “etc” as the key to the Third Secret, since it was obvious that the Virgin’s words to the seers had not trailed off in the middle of a thought.

Yet, in a maneuver that has undermined all confidence in the official account, *Message* evades any discussion of the “etc” by taking the text of the Message of Fatima from Sister Lucia’s *Third Memoir*, where Our Lady’s prophecy concerning Portugal does not appear, rather than the more complete *Fourth Memoir*. Like *Message*’s attack on the credibility of the “express order of Our Lady” regarding 1960, this conspicuous avoidance of the *Fourth Memoir* could only engender suspicion. Why rely on the *Third Memoir* when the more complete *Fourth Memoir* was available? In his Introduction Bertone attempts to explain this curious behavior as follows: “For the account of the first two parts of the ‘secret’, which have already been published and are therefore known, we have chosen the text written by Sister Lucia in the *Third Memoir* of 31 August 1941; some *annotations* were added in the *Fourth Memoir* of 8 December 1941.”¹³³ Significantly, Bertone’s Introduction *does not specify* what is contained in these “annotations,” which is none other than the very phrase of the Virgin he had to know was at the heart of the entire controversy.

According to *Message*, then, the only difference between the *Third* and *Fourth* memoirs is “some annotations” by Sister Lucia, the suggestion being that no one should think it amiss that the drafters of *Message* had “chosen” the former document, which was not cluttered by these “annotations.” The suggestion was less than honest, for as we saw in Chapter 2 the Virgin’s words concerning the preservation of dogma in Portugal were manifestly not Lucia’s “annotations” but *an integral part of the Fatima message*, immediately after which Our Lady herself had said: “Tell this to no one. Yes, you may tell Francisco.” Yet Bertone, having characterized the very words of the Virgin as “annotations” buries her words in a footnote that *Message* never mentions again.¹³⁴

Socci calls attention to an evasive but extremely revealing comment by then Archbishop Bertone at the June 26th press

¹³³*Message*, p. 3.

¹³⁴*Message*, p. 15. The footnote reads: “In the ‘Fourth Memoir’ Sister Lucia adds: ‘In Portugal, the dogma of the faith will always be preserved etc. ...’”

conference. When asked about whether the “etc” is indeed the beginning of the Third Secret, Bertone stated to the press: “It is difficult to say if it [the ‘etc’] refers to the second or the third part of the secret [i.e., the Great Secret of July 13, 1917]... it seems to me that it pertains to the second.”¹³⁵ The implications are astonishing: *Bertone does not deny that the “etc” could in fact be part of the Third Secret*, which would mean that the Third Secret includes the Virgin’s *spoken words*. In a curious equivocation, Bertone states it “is difficult to say” whether this is so, and that it “seems” to him that the “etc” pertains to the second part of the Fatima message. It *seems* to him? Why would he not have determined the answer to this crucial question before the momentous Vatican presentation on June 26, given that he had a “conversation” with Sister Lucia concerning the content of the Third Secret only weeks before, on April 27, 2000, as his own Introduction to *Message* reveals?¹³⁶

Furthermore, even if it were the case that, as Bertone suggests, the “etc” pertains only to the Second Secret—i.e., the part of the Great Secret that predicts World War II, the spread of Russia’s errors “throughout the world” and so forth—then it follows that the Vatican *has yet to reveal the Second Secret in its entirety*. Thus, no matter how it is viewed, Bertone’s comment is a major blow to the credibility of the official account.

Socci asks the pertinent question: “How can one elude that explosive *incipit* [beginning] of the Virgin Mary as if it were a marginal ‘annotation’?” There is, writes Socci, “a clear sense of a great embarrassment before a phrase of the Madonna that one cannot succeed in explaining and that one tries to remove silently.”¹³⁷ Why the embarrassment? Because, as Socci and so many others have concluded, the “etc” is the gateway to the missing words of the Virgin that complete the Third Secret of Fatima. Hence the “etc” must be downplayed and ignored if the gateway is to remain closed.

A telling discrepancy

Bertone’s Introduction to *Message* contains another point that would prove to have decisive importance in this controversy.

¹³⁵*Fourth Secret*, p. 89; citing Aura Miguel, *Totus Tuus*, p. 141.

¹³⁶*Message*, p. 8.

¹³⁷*Fourth Secret*, pp. 75-76.

According to Bertone, John Paul II did not read the Third Secret until July 18, 1981, a full three years into his papacy, when the text of the Secret was taken from the Holy Office archives and brought to him at Gemelli Hospital, where the Pope was recovering from the assassination attempt.¹³⁸ But according to papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, as reported by *The Washington Post*, John Paul II read the Third Secret in 1978, *within days of his election*.¹³⁹ There is no record, however, of any text of the Secret being brought to John Paul from the Holy Office archives in that year.

Thus, whatever text John Paul read in 1978 must have been located elsewhere—evidently in the papal apartment, as attested by the witnesses and photographs already cited. It is highly significant that *neither Navarro-Valls nor the Pope ever denied the report that the Pope had read the Secret in 1978*, even though (with explosive implications) that report flatly contradicted Bertone's own representations to the press.¹⁴⁰ But it could hardly be the case that John Paul II, the very Pope who evinced a preoccupation with Fatima, would have waited until three years after his election to read the Secret. This major discrepancy between the accounts of Bertone and Navarro-Valls in itself indicates the existence of two distinct but related texts of the Third Secret.

Cardinal Sodano's "preventative interpretation"

The credulity of the faithful was strained past the breaking point by what Socci has called "the preventative interpretation" of the vision launched by Cardinal Sodano in May-June 2000—that is, an interpretation designed to prevent anyone from finding in the Third Secret what Sodano, Bertone and others did not wish them to find. When Sodano announced at Fatima in May 2000 that the Secret would soon be published, he suggested that it was

¹³⁸*Message*, p. 5.

¹³⁹Bill Broadway and Sarah Delancy, "3rd Secret Spurs More Questions; Fatima Interpretation Departs From Vision," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 2000: "On May 13, Vatican Spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the Pope first read the secret within days of assuming the papacy in 1978. On Monday, an aide to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [Bertone], Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said that the Pope first saw it in the hospital after his attack."

¹⁴⁰The Associated Press, "Vatican: Fatima Is No Doomsday Prophecy," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2000: "'John Paul II read for the first time the text of the Third Secret of Fatima after the attack,' a top aide to Ratzinger, Monsignor Tarcisio Bertone, told journalists during a news conference to present the document."

nothing more than a prediction of events that had already come to pass, culminating in the 1981 attempt on the life of John Paul II. According to Sodano:

The vision of Fatima concerns above all the war waged by atheist systems against the Church and Christians, and it describes the immense suffering endured by the witnesses to the faith *in the last century* of the second millennium. It is an interminable Way of the Cross led by the Popes of *the twentieth century*.

According to the interpretation of the “little shepherds,” which was also recently confirmed by Sister Lucia, the “bishop dressed in white” who prays for all the faithful is the Pope. As he makes his way with great effort towards the Cross amid the corpses of those who were martyred (bishops, priests, men and women religious and many lay persons), he too falls to the ground, *apparently* dead, under a burst of gunfire.

After the assassination attempt of May 13, 1981, it appeared evident to His Holiness that it was “a motherly hand which guided the bullet’s path,” enabling the “dying Pope” to halt “at the threshold of death.”...

The successive events of 1989 led, both in the Soviet Union and in a number of countries of Eastern Europe, to the fall of the Communist regime which promoted atheism. For this too His Holiness offers heartfelt thanks to the Most Holy Virgin....

*Even if the events to which the third part of the Secret of Fatima refers now seem part of the past, Our Lady’s call to conversion and penance, issued at the beginning of the twentieth century, remains timely and urgent today....*¹⁴¹

In essence, Cardinal Sodano would reduce the Third Secret to the *Second Secret*—i.e., the second part of the Great Secret of July 13, 1917—which, as we saw in Chapter 1, predicted World War II, the spread of world Communism and the consequent persecution of

¹⁴¹Vatican Information Service, May 13, 2000.

the Church, the martyrdom of the faithful and the suffering of the Holy Father. But if the Third Secret merely predicts the very events Our Lady had already predicted in the Second Secret, what is the point of the Third Secret? Why would Sister Lucia have found it so difficult to commit the Third Secret to paper? Why would Our Lady have refrained from directing Sister Lucia to write down the Secret until 1944—*after* World War II and the spread of Communism were already well under way?

As for Sodano's claim that the Pope executed by soldiers outside a half-ruined city filled with bodies was John Paul II, it was manifest that Sodano had misled the public when he declared at Fatima the previous May that the Pope in the vision "falls to the ground, *apparently* dead, under a burst of gunfire." In truth, the Pope in the vision "*was killed* by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him" outside the half-ruined city. John Paul II, on the other hand, was *not* killed by a lone assassin during the attempt that took place in a perfectly intact Saint Peter's Square.

Any attempt on the life of a Pope is a grave affair, and John Paul II had suffered greatly at the hands of his would-be assassin. Nevertheless, the Pope had completely recovered from his wounds and resumed an active life that included skiing and hiking in the Italian Alps and swimming in the built-in pool he had installed at Castelgandolfo shortly after his election. His physical condition after recovery was rightly described as "impressive."¹⁴² The Pope's death *a quarter century* after the attempt resulted from the complications of Parkinson's disease, not the shot fired by Ali Agca in 1981. Moreover, why would Our Lady of Fatima give an "express order" (to recall Sister Lucia's writing on the envelope) that the Secret be revealed in 1960, when that year has no relation to the 1981 assassination attempt or to *any other particular* in the vision? In short, the suggestion that John Paul II is the Pope in the vision is not merely a "stretch," it is patently unbelievable. Sodano had blatantly twisted the content of the vision to suit his contrived interpretation.

¹⁴²"He has been a terrific sportsman," said George Weigel, author of a biography of John Paul. Weigel said the Pope had a swimming pool built at his summer residence at Castelgandolfo during the first summer of his papacy. "The story goes that he justified it by saying it was cheaper than building a new conclave," he said. "The first 15 years of his pontificate [i.e., until 1993, 12 years after the assassination attempt] he took breaks to go skiing, and the miracle about that was the Italian paparazzi actually left him alone." Quoted in "Pontiff Was Sportsman as Well as Leader," Associated Press, March 4, 2005. After the assassination attempt the Pope "went on to a full recovery, and sported an impressive physical condition throughout the 1980s." *Pope John Paul*, Short Biography at wikipedia.com.

It should go without saying that Catholics are not required to accept Sodano's "interpretation." As Cardinal Ratzinger stated during the June 26th press conference: "*It is not the intention of the Church to impose a single interpretation.*"¹⁴³ Ratzinger's own commentary in *Message* would speak only of "attempting" an interpretation. And, ironically enough, *Message's* own supporting documentation demolishes Sodano's patently unsustainable construction. Bertone's Introduction cites a purported letter from Sister Lucia to John Paul II in 1982 regarding the contents of the Secret. Curiously, both the translation and the photo-reproduction of the original handwriting appended to *Message* present only a fragment of the purported letter, without any address or salutation to the Pope or signature by Sister Lucia. The Pope is not mentioned even glancingly in the fragmentary text, and there is nothing about the fragment to indicate that it was meant for the Pope as opposed to anyone else. But here, in pertinent part, is what the fragment says:

Since we did not heed this appeal of the Message, we see that it has been fulfilled; Russia has invaded the world with her errors. And if *we have not yet seen the complete fulfillment of the final part of this prophecy*, we are going towards it little by little with great strides.¹⁴⁴

That is, in *Message*—the very document which argues that the vision of the bishop in white depicts the assassination attempt—Sister Lucia herself is quoted to the effect that, fully a year *after* the attempt, we have *not yet seen* the complete fulfillment of the Third Secret. Furthermore, Lucia makes *no reference whatsoever* to the attempt. As the fragment from the letter shows, the attempt was not even on Sister Lucia's "radar" in 1982, much less at the very center of her understanding of the Secret.

It must be noted that the Portuguese original of this strange epistolary fragment contains a phrase that negates any possibility it was addressed to John Paul II: "The third part of the secret, *that you are so anxious to know*, is a symbolic revelation..." It could not possibly be the case that in 1982 John Paul II was "so anxious to know" the Third Secret, because by all accounts he had already

¹⁴³"Vatican releases additional Fatima information," United Press International, June 27, 2000.

¹⁴⁴*Message*, p. 9.

read it by then. The words “that you are so anxious to know” reveal beyond doubt that the addressee of the purported 1982 letter was someone other than the Pope. But, attention: The English and other translations of the fragment in *Message* all omit the words “that you are so anxious to know” so that the phrase reads simply: “The third part of the secret is a symbolic revelation” followed by the remainder of the sentence.¹⁴⁵ No ellipses are used to indicate the omission, as honesty would require. The systematic excision of the key phrase from translation after translation could only be a calculated deception. It would require a Portuguese reader, closely examining the photo-reproduced fragment, to discover the ruse.¹⁴⁶ (See [Appendix IV](#).)

Ratzinger follows Sodano – but why?

Despite these enormous problems with Sodano’s “preventative interpretation,” Cardinal Ratzinger’s theological commentary in *Message* adopts it uncritically, albeit while acknowledging that it is only an “attempt” at an interpretation:

Before attempting an interpretation, the main lines of which can be found in the statement read by Cardinal Sodano on 13 May of this year ...¹⁴⁷

For this reason the figurative language of the vision is symbolic. In this regard Cardinal Sodano stated ...¹⁴⁸

As is clear from the documentation presented here, the interpretation offered by Cardinal Sodano, in his statement on 13 May...¹⁴⁹

First of all we must affirm with Cardinal Sodano...¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁶From the English translation: “The third part of the secret [deleted: “that you are so anxious to know”] is a symbolic revelation...” The photo-reproduced fragment reads: “A terceira parte do Segredo, *que tanto ansiais por conhecer* [that you are so anxious to know], e uma revelação simbólica ...” *Message*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷*The Message of Fatima*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 42.

Cardinal Ratzinger's commentary follows Sodano in pronouncing the Third Secret a thing of the past:

A careful reading of the text of the so-called third 'secret' of Fatima, published here in its entirety long after the fact and by decision of the Holy Father, will probably prove disappointing or surprising after all the speculation it has stirred. No great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled. We see the Church of the martyrs of the century which has just passed represented in a scene described in a language which is symbolic and not easy to decipher.

We must affirm with Cardinal Sodano that "the events to which the third part of the 'secret' of Fatima refers now seem part of the past". Insofar as individual events are described, *they belong to the past*.¹⁵¹

These affirmations are plainly impossible to accept, for if the vision reveals "no great mystery" and concerns only 20th Century events, there would have been no reason to keep it under lock and key at the Vatican since 1957, or to declare in 1960 that it would be kept "forever under absolute seal." Nor would there have been any reason for Cardinal Ratzinger to have declared in 1984 that the Secret speaks of "dangers threatening the faith and the life of the Christian and therefore of the world."

There is a mystery here: Cardinal Sodano's competence to "interpret" the Secret is never explained. The Vatican Secretary of State has no doctrinal authority over the Church, and Sodano did not receive any papal authority to undertake his "interpretation," which is presented as a mere "attempt" to explain the vision. Why, then, was Sodano even involved in the matter? This strange situation appears to reflect the ascendancy of the Vatican Secretary of State to the level of a veritable "prime minister" of the Church in keeping with the radical restructuring of the Roman Curia carried out by Cardinal Villot after Vatican II.¹⁵² According to this restructuring the Secretariat of State was elevated above all the Vatican Congregations and Tribunals, the Pontifical Councils, and numerous administrative offices, with the Secretary of State directing and "coordinating" the entire

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 32, 43.

¹⁵²For a detailed discussion of this development see *The Devil's Final Battle*, Chapter 8 (also at <http://www.devilsfinalbattle.com/ch8.htm>).

ensemble. Thanks to Villot's work, the Secretary of State became nothing less than a kind of *de facto* Pope, even though the divine constitution of the Church does not include this arrangement. In fact, the Vatican Secretariat of State did not even exist until the 15th Century.¹⁵³ While the real Pope has retained ultimate authority, in practical terms he has largely been reduced to rubber-stamping the Secretary of State's daily management of Church affairs.

In the postconciliar epoch of "ecumenism," "dialogue" and *aggiornamento* (updating) of the Church, the Message of Fatima has become a matter of ecclesiastical politics over which the Secretariat of State assumed control, and which it stills controls in the person of Sodano's successor, Cardinal Bertone. This explains why Sodano took it upon himself to "interpret" the vision and why even Cardinal Ratzinger, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, deferred to Sodano when he had no moral or dogmatic obligation to do so.

Did Our Lady give us a cipher?

Sodano's "interpretation" of the Third Secret was said to be necessary because, as Cardinal Ratzinger states in his commentary, the vision is "not easy to decipher." But were the faithful really expected to believe that in 1917 the Blessed Virgin gave the visionaries a *cipher* that would have to be deciphered by—of all people—the Vatican Secretary of State in 2000? That hardly seemed consistent with the clarity and detail of the Second Secret, which, as we have seen, predicted a whole train of clearly specified *future* events: the end of one war and the beginning of another "worse" war following an unknown light in the night sky; the very name of the Pope who would reign in the days leading up to that war; the very name of the nation that would spread its errors throughout the world; precise admonitions concerning war, famine, persecutions of the Church, the martyrdom of the good, the suffering of the Holy Father and the annihilation of various nations; and the ultimate conversion of Russia and the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

¹⁵³See "Secretariat of State" at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/documents/rc_seg-st_12101998_profile_en.html ("The origins of the Secretariat of State go back to the fifteenth century. The Apostolic Constitution *Non Debet Reprehensibile* of 31 December 1487 established the *Secretaria Apostolica*...").

The “not easy to decipher” vision would *not* require deciphering, however, if—as with the first two parts of the Great Secret of Fatima—there are *words* of the Virgin to explain it, as opposed to Vatican prelates “attempting an interpretation, the main lines of which can be found in the statement read by Cardinal Sodano on 13 May of this year ...”¹⁵⁴ The very claim that the Third Secret could not be understood without an “interpretation” suggested by Cardinal Sodano only demonstrated that there must be something more to the Secret than the vision standing alone.

Dispensing with the Consecration of Russia

Although the Consecration of Russia is not the primary focus of this book, the way in which this question was handled in *Message* is indicative of a general intent to sweep inconvenient facts under the rug. Bertone’s Introduction purports to enlist Sister Lucia for the proposition that Pope John Paul II’s consecration of the world in 1984 sufficed for a consecration of Russia: “Sister Lucia personally confirmed that this solemn and universal act of consecration corresponded to what Our Lady wished... Hence any further discussion or request [for the Consecration of Russia] is without basis.”¹⁵⁵ But how could Sister Lucia “confirm” that the same sort of ceremony that did not suffice during the reigns of Pius XII and Paul VI—a consecration of the world with no mention of Russia and no participation by the world episcopate—was suddenly sufficient?¹⁵⁶

Curiously, Bertone cites only one solitary piece of evidence in support of his claim: a purported letter from Sister Lucia, identified only as “Letter of 8 November 1989,” in which Sister Lucia is alleged to have written: ““Yes it has been done just as Our Lady asked, on 25 March 1984” (*“Sim, està feita, tal como Nossa Senhora a pediu, desde o dia 25 de Março de 1984”*).¹⁵⁷ Even more curious: the addressee of the letter is not identified, nor is a copy of it provided as part of

¹⁵⁴*The Message of Fatima (Message)*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁵*Message*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶Concerning the consecration of the world by Pius XII and several bishops on October 31, 1942, Sister Lucia wrote: “The Good Lord has already shown me His contentment with the act performed by the Holy Father and several bishops, *although it was incomplete according to His desire*. In return He promises to end the war soon. The conversion of Russia is not for now.” Letter to the Bishop of Gurza, February 28, 1943; quoted *WTAF*, Vol. III, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵⁷*Message*, p. 8.

Message's supporting documentation.

Knowledgeable readers of *Message* knew why: the letter, to a Mr. Noelker, had long since been exposed as a fake. Generated by a computer at the dawn of the personal computer age, the letter contained a blatant error: a statement by "Sister Lucia" that Paul VI consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart during his visit to Fatima in 1967, when in truth he had consecrated nothing at all on that occasion. Sister Lucia, who was present throughout the Pope's visit, would hardly have made such a mistake. Nor was it credible that an elderly cloistered nun, who had written thousands of letters by hand over her lifetime, would suddenly switch to a word processor at age 80 to peck out a one-page note to a Mr. Noelker, especially when even many business offices in Portugal were without personal computers at that time.¹⁵⁸

Still more curious: the dubious "letter of 8 November 1989" was the only evidence Bertone cited even though, as *Message* states, Bertone had "conversed" with Sister Lucia on April 27, 2000, only two months earlier, and could have obtained her direct testimony on this question at that time—or indeed at any other time. The failure to cite *any* direct testimony by Lucia, when such testimony was readily obtainable, speaks volumes. And note well: During the April 2000 "conversation" Bertone *did not ask Sister Lucia to authenticate the "Letter of 8 November 1989"*, even though Bertone had to have known of the worldwide circulation of articles decisively debunking the letter.¹⁵⁹ The only reasonable inference is that Lucia was not asked to authenticate the letter because the letter was indeed a fake that could not be authenticated.

To knowledgeable Catholics, it was not surprising that Bertone had been forced to rely *entirely* on a non-authenticated and previously publicly debunked 11-year-old "letter" to an unidentified addressee. That purported letter was the only thing Bertone could pit against a lifetime of contrary testimony by Sister Lucia.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸Flatly contradicting himself, Bertone would admit seven years later that Sister Lucia "never worked with the computer." See *Last Visionary*, p. 101 ("Sister Lucia never worked with the computer, nor visited any website.") This is one of the many self-contradictions in which the Cardinal has embroiled himself, as Socci has noted.

¹⁵⁹This letter was published and critiqued on pp. 10-11 of the May 1990 (No. 229) issue of *The Catholic Counter-Reformation* (CRC, English edition, published by Maison Saint-Joseph, F-10260 Saint-Parres-lès-Vaudes). This critique was explicitly referenced in *The Fatima Crusader*, No. 35 (Winter 1990-91), with a circulation of some 500,000 copies, in a story debunking the Noelker letter (on pp. 12ff, or at <http://www.fatimacrusader.com/cr35/cr35pg12.asp>).

¹⁶⁰For a detailed presentation of Lucia's testimony from 1946-1987, see *The Devil's*

A funeral for Fatima?

All in all, Sodano's "interpretation" was patently designed to consign the Third Secret in particular and the Fatima message in general to the dustbin of history, evidently in the hope that all questions would cease after June 26, 2000. Following Sodano's lead, Bertone's Introduction goes so far as to declare:

The decision of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to make public the third part of the 'secret' of Fatima brings to an end a period of history marked by tragic human lust for power and evil, yet pervaded by the merciful love of God and the watchful care of the Mother of Jesus and of the Church.

Not only is the Message of Fatima consigned to the past, but also the very lust for power and evil! But if the Pope had brought an end to the era of the lust for power and evil by publishing the vision of "the Bishop dressed in White" in the year 2000, why had he not ended that same tragic era by publishing the vision much sooner, indeed at the first opportunity? Bertone, however inadvertently, makes a mockery of the Vatican's suppression of the Third Secret for so many years.

Even worse than *Message's* defense of the "preventative interpretation" is its suggestion that Sister Lucia's entire witness might be suspect. The theological commentary cites one, and only one, "authority" on Fatima: the late Flemish theologian Edouard Dhanis, S.J., whom the commentary identifies as an "eminent scholar" in the field of "private revelations." Cardinal Ratzinger knew, of course, that Dhanis, a modernist Jesuit, made a veritable career out of casting doubt on the Fatima apparitions. Dhanis proposed that everything in the Message of Fatima beyond a call for prayer and penance was cobbled together in the minds of the three children from things they had seen or heard in their own lives. Dhanis thus categorized as "Fatima II" all those things the "eminent scholar" arbitrarily rejected as fabrications—without ever once interviewing Sister Lucia or studying the official Fatima archives. Dhanis, in fact, flatly refused to speak to the seer or study the archives when invited to do so.¹⁶¹ His intellectual honesty is

Final Battle, Chapter 8 (also at <http://www.devilsfinalbattle.com/ch8.htm>).

¹⁶¹See Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, "Part II: The Critical Study of Fatima," *The Whole Truth About Fatima: Vol. I, The Science and the Facts*, pp. 381-535.

non-existent when it comes to Fatima.

As Dhanis put it: "All things considered, it is not easy to state precisely what degree of credence is to be given to the accounts of Sister Lucia. Without questioning her sincerity, or the sound judgment she shows in daily life, one may judge it prudent to use her writings only with reservations. ... Let us observe also that a good person can be sincere and prove to have good judgment in everyday life, but have a *propensity for unconscious fabrication* in a certain area, or in any case, a tendency to relate old memories of twenty years ago with embellishments and considerable modifications."¹⁶² In other words, according to Dhanis, Sister Lucia was a very sincere and pious fake.

Yet Dhanis, neo-modernist debunker of the Message of Fatima, is the one and only "eminent scholar" cited by *Message's* theological commentary on the meaning of the Third Secret and the Fatima message as a whole. The commentary even follows Dhanis' methodology by suggesting that, after all, Sister Lucia may have concocted the vision from things she had seen as a child: "The concluding part of the 'secret' uses images which Lucia may have seen in devotional books and which draw their inspiration from long-standing intuitions of faith."¹⁶³ But if that were true of the images in the vision of the bishop in white, it could also be true of any and all aspects of the Fatima apparitions. With a single sentence inserted into the middle of things, the commentary, like Dhanis, undermines the credibility—at least in the minds of a gullible public—not only of the Third Secret proper, but the entirety of the Message of Fatima.

No wonder the headline in the *Los Angeles Times* read: "The Vatican's Top Theologian Gently Debunks a Nun's Account of Her 1917 Vision that Fueled Decades of Speculation."¹⁶⁴ Even the secular press could see what was going on: the attempt at a funeral for Fatima.

Exit Our Lady, enter Gorbachev

The Third Secret having been "gently debunked" on June 26,

¹⁶²Dhanis' attack on the veracity of the Fatima message is explained and critiqued in more detail in *WTAF*, Vol. I, Part II, Chapter 1. All quotations of Dhanis are from this source.

¹⁶³*Message*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁴*Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2000.

the “prime minister” immediately got down to what he considered the serious business of the Church. The very next day none other than Mikhail Gorbachev was seated as a guest of honor between Cardinals Sodano and Silvestrini at a Vatican press conference. The conference had been called to celebrate one of the key elements of the Church’s supposedly new “orientation” after Vatican II, as administered by the Secretary of State: *Ostpolitik*, or the policy of conciliating instead of confronting communist regimes that oppress the Church. Gorbachev had come to the Vatican to help promote the posthumous publication of the memoirs of Cardinal Casaroli, the grand architect of *Ostpolitik* and Cardinal Sodano’s predecessor in office.¹⁶⁵ No questions from the press were permitted at this curious press conference—a press conference without questions from the press! Evidently, Sodano wanted to be certain that no one inquired about the Third Secret, or why the Vatican was honoring the likes of Gorbachev, a man who admits he is still a Leninist and whose tax-free foundations are promoting the use of abortion and contraception to eliminate billions of people from the world’s population.¹⁶⁶

What can one conclude from all of this but that the program of “prime minister” Sodano (carried forward by his successor, Cardinal Bertone) is radically inconsistent with the program of Our Lady of Fatima?

Widespread disbelief

For these and many other reasons, reaction to the Vatican’s publication of the vision of the bishop in white and Sodano’s “interpretation” of it was, quite simply, widespread disbelief. Contrary to what Sodano and company no doubt intended, the

¹⁶⁵“Gorbachev Helps Introduce Casaroli Memoirs,” *Catholic World News*, June 27, 2000.

¹⁶⁶In September 1995, Gorbachev held his “State of the World Forum” in San Francisco. Over 4000 of the world’s “elite” paid \$5,000 per person to attend the 5-day event. In a closing plenary session of the forum, a philosopher/author named Sam Keen provided a summary and concluding remarks on the conference. It reveals the forum’s anti-life, anti-Christian ethos. To the conference participants, Keen said: “There was very strong agreement that religious institutions have to take the primary responsibility for the population explosion. We must speak far more clearly about sexuality, about contraception, about abortion, about the values that control the population, because the ecological crisis, in short, is the population crisis. *Cut the population by 90 percent and there aren’t enough people left to do a great deal of ecological damage.*” See “World’s Elite Gather to Talk Depopulation,” John Henry Western, *The Interim*, April 1996.

June 26th press conference was not the end of the Third Secret controversy, but only a new beginning. On the very day of the press conference, an editor of *Il Giornale* asked René Laurentin, the renowned Mariologist, if he felt the Vatican had now clarified everything regarding the Third Secret. Laurentin replied: "Not at all. There are some things that did not convince me."¹⁶⁷

Laurentin was putting it mildly; and he was hardly alone in his doubts. As Socci notes, the official account of the Third Secret, especially its "interpretation" by Cardinal Sodano, "leaked water from every part,"¹⁶⁸ and everyone could see it. *La Repubblica*, one of Italy's major newspapers, agreed. Only a day after the press conference an editorial appeared in which the author declared flatly: "The celebrated 'Third Secret' cannot be reconciled with the dramatic events of May 13, 1981. There is no Pope who falls 'apparently dead.' The scene is another. A Pope killed by 'soldiers who fire bullets and arrows at him.' It is no use to invoke the language of symbols and metaphor... [The vision] points somewhere else entirely."¹⁶⁹ But where, Socci asks? "Evidently toward a Pope who has yet to arrive." The words of the Virgin would tell us who that Pope is, but the words of the Virgin were missing.

Less than a year after the *Message* press conference, the worldwide incredulity of the faithful was given voice by Mother Angelica, the foundress of the Eternal Word Television Network, who in May 2001 declared to a television audience of millions:

As for the Secret, well *I happen to be one of those individuals who thinks we didn't get the whole thing.* I told ya! I mean, you have the right to your own opinion, don't you, Father? There, you know, that's my opinion. *Because I think it's scary...*¹⁷⁰

Some five years after Mother Angelica expressed her incredulity to the world, Socci would completely change his mind, reject the Vatican's official account and join the growing ranks of Catholics who are convinced the Vatican has withheld from the faithful a text of the Third Secret—a text containing the words of the Mother of God following the telltale "etc" that *Message* so conspicuously avoided. Socci was led to this conclusion by the

¹⁶⁷Quoted in Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁸Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰"Mother Angelica Live," May 16, 2001.

facts thus far presented. As those facts show, the document the Vatican produced in 2000, while undoubtedly a part of the Third Secret, does not present *any* of the many elements discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. To recapitulate those elements, on its face the vision of “the Bishop dressed in white” is *not*—

1. something so terrible that Sister Lucia would not have been able to write it down without a special intervention of Our Lady;
2. a statement containing the *words* of the Virgin which are “the logical continuation” of “In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc.” (Father Schweigl);
3. one page and 25 lines in letter form (Sister Lucia, Cardinal Ottaviani, Bishop Venancio) that was lodged in the papal apartment (Archbishop Capovilla, Mother Pasqualina, Robert Serrou);
4. in two parts: one pertaining to the Pope and the other containing the “logical continuation” of the Virgin’s words in her opening declaration: “In Portugal the dogma of the faith will always be preserved etc” (Father Schweigl);
5. linked to 1960, the year in which the sealed envelope was to be opened, according to the “express order of Our Lady” inscribed on the envelope (Sister Lucia);
6. a “divine warning” about suicidal changes in the liturgy, theology and soul of the Church (Pius XII);
7. a prediction that after 1960 the devil will decimate the ranks of priests and religious, leaving the faithful without spiritual leaders, and that “nations will disappear from the face of the earth” (Sister Lucia to Father Fuentes in 1957);
8. “so delicate” that it cannot be allowed “for whatever reason, even fortuitous, to fall into alien hands” (Cardinal Ottaviani, 1967);
9. a text that was “diplomatically” withheld because of the “seriousness of its contents,” including “great trials” and “tribulation” for the Church which “it is no longer possible to avert,” and the destruction of “whole areas of the earth” so that “from one moment to the next millions of people will perish” (John Paul II at Fulda, 1980);

10. a text that—a year *after* the 1981 assassination attempt—still could not be revealed because it could be “badly interpreted” as of 1982 (John Paul II);
11. a “religious prophecy” of “dangers threatening the faith and the life of the Christian and therefore *of the world*” (Cardinal Ratzinger, 1984);
12. something that would make for the “sensationalistic utilization of its contents” (Cardinal Ratzinger in 1985);
13. a prediction of apostasy in the Church (Cardinal Oddi) that “begins at the top” (Cardinal Ciappi) and is “worse than the annihilation of a nation” (Bishop do Amaral);
14. a text whose “details” would cause “disequilibrium” in the Church as of 1996—a full *fifteen years* after the assassination attempt (Cardinal Ratzinger);
15. “essentially the same” as the message of Our Lady of Akita, which warns of both a crisis of faith within the Church and a planetary catastrophe (Cardinal Ratzinger to Howard Dee, former Philippine ambassador to the Vatican, 1998);
16. a warning to avoid the “tail of the dragon” which sweeps consecrated souls from their vocations (John Paul II, May 13, 2000).

The missing key to the vision

While the vision of the bishop in white does not present any of these elements, it would, however, be *consistent with every one of them* if there were a separate text—a key to the vision—in which the Virgin explains the vision along the lines indicated by the many witnesses already cited. Such an explanation would involve this scenario: Following a collapse of faith and discipline in the Church after 1960 the world will suffer a tremendous chastisement, a great part of humanity will be destroyed, the city of Rome itself will be reduced to ruins, a hobbling Pope will flee Rome only to be executed by a band of soldiers on a hill outside the city, and much of the remnant of the Church will be hunted down and killed after him. It is worth noting that such a text would also be consistent with the historically recorded prophetic remarks of Pope St. Pius X: “I saw one of my successors taking to flight over the bodies of his

brethren. He will take refuge in disguise somewhere; and after a short retirement he will die a cruel death. The present wickedness of the world is only the beginning of sorrows which must take place before the end of the world.”¹⁷¹

Now, once again, we know from Father Schweigl’s testimony that the Third Secret “has *two parts*: One part concerns the Pope...” and the other is the aforesaid “logical continuation” of the words of the Virgin following Lucia’s “etc”. Therefore, we can conclude, just as Socci has concluded, that the vision of “the Bishop dressed in white” is the part of the Secret that concerns the Pope—i.e., his execution on the hill outside the half-ruined city—and that the second part must explain the events leading to the death of this future Pope. *Only* such a text would convert what Cardinal Ratzinger called a “difficult to decipher” vision into a prophecy as clear as the rest of the Message of Fatima.

Since the Mother of God did not come to Fatima to convey debatable obscurities to mankind, it would become obvious to more and more people that the disclosure of June 26, 2000 was incomplete. Recognizing the growing trend of popular incredulity, Cardinal Bertone would make a move that only increased that incredulity and provided yet another reason for Socci to join the ranks of the “Fatimists.”

¹⁷¹Yves Dupont, *Catholic Prophecy, The Coming Chastisement* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 22.