

Chapter 7

The Cardinal Defaults

By the closing months of 2006 the former Archbishop Bertone, Secretary of the CDF, had become Cardinal Bertone, successor to Cardinal Sodano as Vatican Secretary of State under Pope Benedict XVI. During the previous year Sister Lucia had passed on to her eternal reward at the age of 97, to be followed shortly by Pope John Paul II. But the controversy over the Third Secret had not only failed to abate, it had reached a higher intensity than ever before. Antonio Socci's *Fourth Secret* (published in November 2006) had shifted to the Vatican a heavy new burden of proof. The evidence Socci had given such wide publicity, including the testimony of Archbishop Capovilla, made it incumbent on the Vatican to demonstrate clearly and convincingly that it was not in fact engaged in what could only be called a conspiracy to conceal the words of the Virgin Mary indicated by Lucia's momentous "etc" and set forth in a text once located in the papal apartment, in the right-hand drawer of the writing desk called "Barbarigo."

The Risk of Default

This was an unprecedented development in the history of the Church: a nationally prominent lay Catholic and television celebrity had, in essence, publicly accused the Vatican Secretary of State and his collaborators of deceiving the Church and the world in a matter of grave spiritual and temporal importance. This time, the accusation could not be handled with a dismissive reference to "Fatimists." Socci obviously could not be considered biased since he had been in *agreement* with Bertone's position before he began to examine the evidence. But as more and more members of the faithful, including Socci, were coming to recognize, the "Fatimists" were nothing more or less than faithful Catholics who were dead right in their contentions. Thanks to Socci's book, which gave voice to the concerns of these Catholics, the Vatican apparatus responsible for the handling of the Third Secret had been well and

truly indicted in the court of public opinion. Now there was no choice but to answer the indictment; for not to answer it would be to concede that it was true.

On the other hand, to answer Socci would be a perilous undertaking. If his (and the “Fatimists”) allegations were indeed true, then denying them would require further deception and the grave risk of further contradiction by the known facts. On the other hand, to join issue with Socci but then fail to address his allegations on their merits would be even worse than not answering him at all; it would amount to a total default by Bertone and the Vatican. Given the danger, if the allegations were true there could be no “official” Vatican response, and certainly no response from the Pope (who has always remained aloof from the controversy). And, in fact, as of this writing there has been no official Vatican response at all to *Fourth Secret* or the case it presents. Socci, then, would have to be answered “unofficially” so as to preclude Vatican accountability for any unfavorable outcome. The failure of whoever answered Socci would be *his* failure, not the Vatican’s. That, at least, appears to be the reasoning behind the means by which Socci was answered.

A book that answers nothing

In May of 2007, Rizzoli, the same publisher that had published *Fourth Secret*, rushed into print a book by Cardinal Bertone entitled *L’Ultima Veggente di Fatima* (“The Last Visionary of Fatima”) (*Last Visionary*).¹⁸⁹ *Last Visionary*, which appeared in bookstores a mere six months after *Fourth Secret*, is essentially a 100-page interview of the Cardinal concerning various subjects, followed by another 50 pages of appendices. This mass of verbiage surrounds a mere nine pages of comment in response to the claims of Socci and the “Fatimists” (including Father Gruner, whose name is also mentioned by the Cardinal). The interviewer was a layman, Giuseppe De Carli, a *vaticanista* (reporter on the Vatican beat) and ardent admirer of the Cardinal, whose fawning questions not only posed no real challenge to the Cardinal, but actually assisted him in promoting what Socci had called “the official reconstruction” of the Third Secret.

The book is subtitled “My meetings with Sister Lucia.” These

¹⁸⁹Bertone, Cardinal Tarcisio, *The Last Visionary of Fatima* (Milano: Rai and Eri Rizzoli, 2007). All English translations are mine.

were the purported meetings the Vatican had sent Bertone to conduct in preparation for “revelation” of the Third Secret in June 2000 and to defend his position after publication of the vision and *Message* were met with widespread incredulity. *Last Visionary* states that there were three meetings in all: April 27, 2000 (the one in which Sister Lucia supposedly denied ever receiving an “express order of Our Lady” regarding disclosure of the Third Secret in 1960), November 17, 2001 (the “disastrous” interview discussed in Chapter 5), and a never previously mentioned meeting on December 9, 2003, whose contents are not explicitly cited. Bertone says these three encounters lasted “at least ten hours” in total.¹⁹⁰ In view of what has already been presented here, it should hardly be surprising that not even one minute of those ten hours was transcribed or recorded on audio or videotape. Instead, the Cardinal “took notes” of which he later made “syntheses.”¹⁹¹

In an entirely new revelation, however, the Cardinal claims that he drew up “edited minutes (*verbali redatti*)” of the meetings which Sister Lucia “signed with full conviction...”¹⁹² These allegedly signed “edited minutes” have never been published and were never mentioned before *Last Visionary*. Nor, quite tellingly, does the Cardinal provide copies of either the “edited minutes” or his “notes” as appendices to *Last Visionary*. And none of the purported witnesses to these interviews has ever attested to the accuracy of Bertone’s “notes,” “syntheses” and “edited minutes.”¹⁹³

Incredibly enough, in *Last Visionary* Bertone reveals that he did not even draft a list of specific questions in preparation for his three important missions from the Vatican to interrogate Sister Lucia.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹¹Ibid., pp. 39, 48.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁹³*Last Visionary* states that during the meeting of April 27, 2000 the then Bishop of Fatima, Serafim de Sousa Ferreira e Silva, was also present (p. 42). I have already noted that during the purported meeting of November 17, 2001, Rev. Luis Kondor, SVD, Vice-Postulator of the cause of Bl. Francisco and Bl. Jacinta, and the prioress of the Carmelite Convent of St. Teresa in Coimbra were said to be present. To my knowledge, none of these witnesses has come forward to authenticate Bertone’s accounts of what Sister Lucia allegedly said to him, with one exception: Bishop Serafim appeared on television in September 2007 to confirm what he pointedly noted was “only one fact”: that he saw Sister Lucia authenticate the text of the vision of the bishop in white during Bertone’s meeting with the seer on April 27, 2000. See discussion in Chapter 10. Of course, no one disputes the authenticity of this text.

¹⁹⁴Bertone, *Last Visionary*, pp. 49-50.

Yet De Carli himself notes that when he went to interview Bertone for the book he was “armed with neat pages of questions and a tape recorder.”¹⁹⁵ That is the usual procedure for conducting a reliable interview of an important subject for the historical record. But all such safeguards were dispensed with here. Today, there is no way of verifying independently what Sister Lucia is alleged to have said to Bertone during ten hours of conversation. We have only Bertone’s alleged “notes,” “syntheses” and “edited minutes,” but even these are not provided. And that, obviously, is exactly the way the Cardinal wants it.

Avoiding every issue

In undertaking to answer Socci, Cardinal Bertone was obliged to address at least these major points of Socci’s presentation in *Fourth Secret*:

- the testimony of Archbishop Capovilla that there are two texts and two envelopes comprising the Third Secret;
- the testimony of Bishop Venancio and Cardinal Ottaviani that there is a text of the Secret one page and 25 lines in length, as opposed to the four pages and 62 lines of the vision of “the Bishop dressed in white”;
- the words of the Virgin following Sister Lucia’s “etc” in the Fourth Memoir;
- the evidence for the lodging of a text of the Secret in the papal apartment, as distinct from the text in the Holy Office archives;
- the reading of texts of the Secret by two Popes (Paul VI and John Paul II) on dates *years earlier* than the dates in the official account in *Message*, strongly evidencing the existence of a text other than the text of the vision produced in 2000;
- the Virgin’s “express order” linking the Secret to 1960, the year following the calling of the Second Vatican Council by John XXIII;
- the abundant testimony that the Secret refers to a grave

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 31.

crisis in the Church after 1960 in conjunction with a planetary catastrophe.

Although he has written an entire book to answer Socci, Bertone ducks *every one* of these points in *Last Visionary*, with one exception: linkage of the Secret to 1960. On this issue, Bertone offers an explanation that is patently incredible, as we shall see. Let us examine briefly *Last Visionary's* attempt—or rather, *failure* to attempt—an answer to Socci.

Conceding Capovilla's testimony

First of all, in *Last Visionary* Bertone silently concedes Archbishop Capovilla's testimony that there are indeed two envelopes and two texts pertaining to the Third Secret. On this decisive point it is crucial to note that De Carli *specifically invites* Bertone to comment on the claim that there are "Two texts of the Third Secret. One made known in 2000, the other remains in the papal apartment where it was put by Pius XII, consulted by John XXIII and by Paul VI. The so-called 'Capovilla envelope', for the name of Monsignor Loris F. Capovilla, secretary of Pope Roncalli."¹⁹⁶

And the Cardinal's reply? *He simply ignores the reference to Capovilla.* Instead, he issues an indignant and irrelevant protest:

You know what they who use the magnifying glass of prejudice cling to? They cling to the fact that in the 'Secret' revealed there is not one word of the Virgin addressed to the shepherds.... The words of the Virgin would have been temerarily censored, because they are considered devastating. And on what stands the apodictic certainty that the "envelope" always remained in the "apartment", even in a drawer of the bedside table of the Pope?¹⁹⁷

Attention, first of all, to the tacit admission (under the appearance of a denial) that there *was* a text in the papal apartment! Bertone has subtly recast the issue to be whether that text "*always* remained" there. Bertone then asks to know the basis for the claim that the text "*always* remained there"—as if he doesn't know! Yet, Bertone is perfectly aware of Archbishop Capovilla's testimony—

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

put before him a moment earlier by De Carli—that there are two envelopes and two texts of the Third Secret, one of which was lodged in the papal apartment.

Bertone's stupendous evasion leads to these alternative conclusions, all fatal to the "official reconstruction": (a) Bertone, whose very mission is to defend the "official reconstruction," declined to speak with Archbishop Capovilla about his "explosive" testimony because he knows or suspects that testimony is true and does not wish to have it confirmed to him directly by Capovilla; (b) Bertone attempted to remonstrate with Capovilla concerning his testimony, was unable to obtain a retraction, and Capovilla has stood by that testimony despite pressure from the Vatican Secretary of State; or (c) under the mental reservation I have already discussed, Bertone is mentally operating as if the missing text does not "exist" because it has been deemed "inauthentic," so that Capovilla's testimony concerning it can likewise be treated as "non-existent."¹⁹⁸

Apart from the testimony of Capovilla, which he fails disastrously to address, Bertone also ignores the testimony of other witnesses concerning the lodging of a text in the papal apartment (Mother Pasqualina and Robert Serrou), and the photograph in *Paris-Match* magazine. Nevertheless, as we will see in Chapter 10, Bertone would finally be forced to admit that there was indeed a text in the papal apartment, despite his evasions and apparent denials over the previous seven years.

There is also a glaring omission here. Despite being aware for many years of the issue of the text in the papal apartment, and certainly since 2000 when *Message* was published, Bertone does not state in *Last Visionary*, and has never stated elsewhere, that he simply asked John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger, Stanislaw Dziwisz (the Pope's beloved personal secretary and now the Archbishop of Krakow), or any number of other people who would know the answer, whether in fact there was a text of the Third Secret in the papal apartment during the reign of John Paul II or any of his predecessors. It would have been a simple matter to line up witnesses, including the late Pope himself while he was still alive,

¹⁹⁸Any possible sudden "retraction" by Capovilla in the future would obviously be suspect, and would contradict his own document recording the location of the Third Secret in the desk drawer of the writing desk in the papal bedchamber. I will discuss in Chapters 9 and 10 Bertone's failed attempts to obtain a "retraction" from Capovilla, who has not only retracted nothing he said to Paolini, but has actually made further revelations damaging to the official account.

to testify that there was never any such text—if such were really the case. But not even one witness is presented on this crucial point from a host of people who have knowledge of the matter.

Only three conclusions are possible: (a) Bertone never asked the question because he does not wish to know the answer, or (b) he knows the answer but is concealing it dishonestly, or (c) under the mental reservation the document in the papal apartment does not “exist” because it is deemed “not authentic.” No matter which conclusion is accepted, Bertone’s failure to contest or even to *mention* Capovilla’s testimony means that the case is over: Bertone has defaulted.

Conceding Cardinal Ottaviani’s testimony

In *Last Visionary* De Carli himself summarizes some of the evidence, including the key testimony of Cardinal Ottaviani, that “the ‘Secret’ was written on a single piece of paper. *Twenty, twenty-five lines in total,*” whereas the document published by the Vatican in 2000 “was of 62 lines. Four pages, exactly.” Then De Carli inquires of Bertone demurely: “Could not the first document contain the words of the Madonna and the second the description of the vision?” Bertone’s reply begins with another blatant evasion:

The first document does not exist. It has never existed *in the Archive of the Holy Office*. To arrive at the documents of the *archive* three keys are necessary. Then [the 1950s] there was not the figure of the Congregation [for the Doctrine of the Faith, successor to the Holy Office], the Pope himself was head of the Holy Office. *I do not know what the words of Cardinal Ottaviani refer to.*¹⁹⁹

Notice that Bertone is careful to qualify his denial: the posited missing document “never existed *in the Archive of the Holy Office,*” which of course is not the same as saying that it never existed at all. Bertone knows quite well that the claim before him is precisely that the missing document was *not* in the Archive, but rather in the papal apartment. This is the very claim Bertone has already conceded by failing and refusing to address the testimony of Archbishop Capovilla, or indeed any of the other evidence placing the document in the papal apartment.

¹⁹⁹Bertone, *Last Visionary*, p. 76.

As for Bertone's evasion that he does not know what Cardinal Ottaviani was talking about regarding a one-page text of 25 lines, here we see again a very curious lack of effort to investigate and refute a key piece of evidence that demolishes the "official reconstruction." If the report of Cardinal Ottaviani's testimony were false, Bertone had access to still-living witnesses and Vatican records that could have demonstrated this. Yet Bertone does not even try to deny that Ottaviani said what he is reported to have said. He merely claims *not to know* what document Ottaviani was referring to. The testimony of Cardinal Ottaviani is thus conceded just as completely as the testimony of Archbishop Capovilla.

Again, Bertone has defaulted. In fact, as we shall see in Chapter 8, during his television appearance a few weeks later, Bertone, reversing his claim that he had no idea what Ottaviani was talking about, would *positively admit* that Ottaviani had testified that the Secret was written on a single page with 25 lines of text—an admission that contributed to the total collapse of the "official reconstruction" during Bertone's appearance.

Evading the testimony of Joaquin Navarro-Valls

Bertone's next evasion concerns the crucial evidence of the statement by papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, reported by *The Washington Post*, that John Paul II read a text of the Third Secret in 1978, only days after his election. As noted in Chapter 4, the text John Paul II read after the assassination attempt in 1981 was brought to him from the Holy Office archives, whereas there is no record of any text of the Secret being brought to him from those same archives in 1978. Therefore, it follows that what the Pope read in 1978 must have been a *different* text located in the papal apartment, where indeed a text of the Secret was lodged during the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI, as Archbishop Capovilla and other witnesses have testified *without contradiction* by Bertone.

Here De Carli was at least persistent, but his persistence was rewarded with a series of clearly calculated dodges. First, De Carli asks: "According to you, John Paul II first had the 'Third Secret' brought to him in Gemelli Polyclinic in July of 1981. Had he already read the text?" Bertone's astounding reply: "I am convinced he

had not read it.”²⁰⁰ He is *convinced*? Bertone was the key man responsible for managing the Third Secret controversy from 2000 going forward, yet he never simply *asked* the Pope before he died in 2005 when His Holiness first read the Third Secret? He never asked Navarro-Valls, who is *still alive*?

Pressing further, De Carli asks: “You are convinced of it or you are sure of it?” In reply, the Cardinal dodges again: “I am sure. I base myself on the documentation of the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, documentation that I compared with the results of the Archive of the Secretary of State.”²⁰¹ Amazingly, Bertone, who could have simply asked the Pope—and can still ask Navarro-Valls—when the Pope first read the Third Secret, has failed to do so but instead tells us that he “bases” himself on a comparison of two sets of documents that would tell us nothing about the matter!

Pressing still further (even as he moves into the next chapter of *Last Visionary*), De Carli asks: “A Pope who feels devotion to Mary in his spiritual DNA, knows that the Secret exists and *does not read it as soon as elected*?”²⁰² Indeed, it is impossible to believe that John Paul II had no interest in reading the Third Secret until he was in the hospital in July 1981, nearly three years into his pontificate, especially when one considers that his predecessor Paul VI read the Secret within *six days* of his election, even before he had been installed as Pope. Here is Bertone’s evasive answer—his third on this point: “*In my opinion*, no. It depends on the sensibility, on the particular circumstances. Just elected, John Paul II had put himself to the objective of re-evangelizing the world.”²⁰³

In his *opinion*? When all he had to do was ask the Pope? When all he has to do today is ask Navarro-Valls to confirm or deny the report in *The Washington Post*? When, for that matter, he could ask anyone else who would know, such as Pope Benedict XVI or Archbishop Dziwisz? And John Paul II, we are asked to believe, had no time to read the Third Secret *during the first three years of his pontificate* because he was too busy re-evangelizing the world? But what could have been more helpful in that endeavor than the contents of the Secret, containing precious advice from the very

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 57.

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 58.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 59.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 59.

Mother of God to whom the Pope was devoted, as Bertone is at pains to remind us?

What is to account for Bertone resolutely confining himself to an “opinion” (or a pointless document comparison) on a matter of fact he could have verified instantly with an inquiry of the Pope, Navarro-Valls, Archbishop Dziwisz and who knows how many others who would be able to answer the simple question whether the Pope read a text of the Secret in 1978? Once again, only three conclusions are possible: (a) Bertone does not wish to know the answer so that he can appear to deny (without actually denying) that the Pope read the Secret in 1978; (b) he already knows the Pope did so and is hiding the truth because it shows the existence of another text; or (c) under the mental reservation, whatever text John Paul II read in 1978 is “not authentic” and thus does not “exist.”

In any case, Bertone’s evident aversion to admitting that the Pope read a text of the Secret in 1978 (just as Navarro-Valls reported) is understandable: Again, if the Pope read the Secret in 1978, then the document he read was not brought to him from the Holy Office archives, which has no record of any such transaction. Since it was not in the archives, it must have been in the papal apartment—precisely where Archbishop Capovilla places it in testimony Bertone refuses to address *even when he is asked about it directly* by a friendly questioner.

Moreover, Bertone had nothing to say about the testimony of Archbishop Capovilla that Pope Paul VI likewise read a text of the Third Secret *years before* the official account says he did: in 1963, versus 1965, as the official account claims. Still another resounding silence in the face of powerful evidence that there is a text of the Secret we have yet to see.

Post-mortem “surprise” testimony from Sister Lucia

In the remainder of his discussion of the issue of a text of the Secret in the papal apartment, Bertone offers another evasion combined with a surprising new statement posthumously attributed to Sister Lucia:

Two things I know: that in the memory of those who have managed *the archive* there has never existed two envelopes, but only one envelope. The other is the word, on the contrary, the official recognition of

Sister Lucia: “This is the ‘Third Secret’ and it is the only text?” “Yes, this is the Third Secret, and I have never written other.” The most hardened Fatimists, I am thinking of those who revolve around Father Nicholas Gruner, remain disappointed.²⁰⁴

Before we discuss Bertone’s newly introduced “quotation” of Sister Lucia, which appears nowhere in the previous seven years of the “official” account, we must pause to consider the careful wording of his repeated evasion that in the Holy Office *archive* there was only one envelope in “the memory” (the memory of who, exactly?) of those who have managed it. Once again, Bertone knows full well that the text in the Holy Office archive is beside the point, but notice the qualifier that precedes his statement: “Two things *I know...*” followed by the “two things” Bertone “knows.” That is, Bertone does *not* “know”—because he *chooses* not to “know”—whether there is (or was) another text of the secret in an envelope stored in the papal apartment rather than the archive. He does not “know” this because *he did not ask*. Or, even worse, he did ask and will not—at least not yet—tell us the answer.

But, as I will discuss further in Chapter 8, it will be *Bertone himself* who finally reveals the existence of the second envelope as if it had always been part of what was in the archive, suggesting that Lucia had for some reason redundantly employed two identical sealed envelopes to hold one text, even though he had never even hinted at the existence of a second envelope before. And, as we will see in Chapter 10, Bertone, via De Carli, would finally acknowledge during his own television broadcast in September 2007 that there is yet *another* envelope pertaining to the Secret, bearing the dictation of John XXIII and the names of those who had read the text of the Secret, which envelope Bertone has *never produced* even though his own broadcast concedes that this envelope *was indeed kept in the papal apartment*.

What, then, is one to make of Bertone’s above-quoted declaration in *Last Visionary* that in “the memory of those who have managed *the archive* there has never existed two envelopes, but *only one envelope*”? Clearly, if there was only one envelope in the archive, the second, never-before-mentioned envelope must have come from somewhere else: i.e., the papal apartment.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 76.

Now to the posthumous “surprise” testimony of Sister Lucia. In the above-quoted passage Bertone suddenly introduces—for the first time ever in this controversy—a purported statement by Lucia he somehow has failed to mention before: “Yes, this is the Third Secret, and I have never written other,” in response to the purported question: “This is the ‘Third Secret’ and it is the only text?” Where did this alleged statement come from? When does Bertone claim it was uttered? Was it during any of his three unrecorded interviews of Lucia? If so, was it the interview in 2000, 2001 or 2003? Who claims to have witnessed this previously unheard-of statement besides Bertone himself?

As Socci asks: “Why did Bertone never report such an important phrase in his official publication [*Message*]?” To which I would add: Why does the purported statement not also appear in Bertone’s communiqué concerning the “disastrous” post-*Message* interview of Sister Lucia on November 17, 2001? Both *Message* in 2000 and the communiqué in 2001 were published for the very purpose of quashing all further speculation about the Third Secret. Yet we are asked to believe that a purported statement by Lucia bearing directly on the question of a missing text was somehow inadvertently omitted not only from these “official” documents, but from any other statement by Bertone or other Vatican officials *over the next seven years*, only to jump out of the top hat during an interview with Giuseppe De Carli—conveniently enough, at the very moment a living eyewitness (Capovilla) has just confirmed the existence of the missing text.

It seems Bertone’s mysterious “notes,” “syntheses” and “edited minutes” of his private encounters with the late Sister Lucia rather conveniently yield just what he needs, just when he needs it—and not a moment sooner. And we are asked to believe this posthumously revealed statement by the same man who has already claimed that Sister Lucia, who wrote on the Third Secret envelope “By express order of Our Lady...”, told him that she had never received an express order of Our Lady. Further, as Socci observes, we are asked to believe a “new statement that now—and only now that the seer is already dead—the prelate attributes to her.”²⁰⁵

Furthermore, it is difficult to see why we should believe the

²⁰⁵Antonio Socci, “Dear Cardinal Bertone: Who—Between You and Me—is Deliberately Lying?”, *Libero*, May 12, 2007; English translation at <http://www.fatima.org/news/newviews/052907socci.asp>. See also *The Fatima Crusader*, No. 86 (Summer 2007), pp. 35-42.

Cardinal's claim regarding this suddenly introduced statement when, as the Cardinal himself will reveal on television in a few weeks, his claim that there is "only one envelope" pertaining to the Secret is false.

Ducking the "etc" – again

But not even the suddenly revealed "saving" statement of "Sister Lucia" clearly and unequivocally addresses the question Bertone resolutely refuses to answer or even to acknowledge when it is put to him directly: Whether Lucia wrote down anywhere the words of Our Lady concluding the discourse whose ominous beginning she recorded in her Fourth Memoir: "In Portugal the dogma of the faith will always be preserved etc." Or this question: Whether Lucia ever wrote down any words of the Virgin *at all* explaining the vision of the bishop in white. That, apparently, is something else Bertone can say he does not "know."

Socci asks how, absent a motive to conceal, the question of the remainder of the Virgin's discourse interrupted by "etc" could have been overlooked by Bertone in his multiple interrogations of Sister Lucia: "Can one perhaps accept that a phrase of such capital importance had been distractedly forgotten? What better occasion to clarify the sense of that dramatic word remaining in suspense? But nothing, unfortunately, that Bertone wished to ask the seer (had he perhaps a fear of the answer?)... A choice that unfortunately credits the idea of an insurmountable embarrassment concerning that phrase of the Madonna and worsens the suspicion that there is something grave to hide..."²⁰⁶

In *Last Visionary* Bertone continues to avoid like the plague any discussion of the "etc" issue even though he *states the issue himself* in answering Socci's claim that a withheld text of the Secret mentions terrible events for the Church after 1960:

One returns to the hashed and rehashed thesis that the attempt on the Pope of May 13, 1981 is not the content of the Third Secret.²⁰⁷ The 'Third Secret' would be instead the sequel of the phrase 'In Portugal the dogma of the faith will always be preserved etc...'

²⁰⁶Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 90.

²⁰⁷Notice the attempt to pass off Cardinal Sodano's nonsensical and widely rejected "interpretation" of the vision of "the bishop dressed in white" as if it were self-evidently "the content of the Third Secret."

that, according to the Fatimists, would be explosive. After that “etc” *there is* [N.B.: a revealing slip of the tongue?] there would be, other text.²⁰⁸

Having stated the “Fatimist” claim accurately enough, Bertone then fails to make the least attempt to refute it. He simply mocks it as a “hashed and rehashed thesis.” As if it were beyond the pale to point out that “etc” means the following words have been omitted! As if Father Schweigl, who was certainly no “Fatimist” but rather the emissary of Pius XII in 1952 had not testified (without contradiction by anyone) that the *second part* of the Third Secret “is the logical continuation—though I may not say anything—of the words: ‘In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc.’”²⁰⁹ As if no one should be suspicious that, despite the Vatican knowing of this burning issue for many years, Bertone never bothered to ask Sister Lucia what follows the “etc” and where she had written it down, or, if he did ask her, has hidden the answer. As if there were nothing amiss in Bertone and his collaborators using Sister Lucia’s Third Memoir instead of the more complete Fourth, which contains the words of the Virgin ending with Lucia’s “etc”, so that *Message* could pretend those words are not part of the Message of Fatima, but rather Lucia’s later-added “annotations” which could be relegated to a footnote and conveniently ignored.²¹⁰

Taking up the very issue Bertone had just raised only to duck it, De Carli, while offering a soothing comment about how unfair it is that Bertone has been “put on the griddle,” makes this statement:

That ‘etc’, according to Socci and others... would allude to the text that the Vatican has not wished to reveal. It is not revealed because it is a boomerang against the Church. The prediction of a planetary apostasy on the part of the Church. An “Apocalypse Now” for Rome. Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of the Antichrist. The smell in the air of the smoke of Satan...”

²⁰⁸Bertone, *Last Visionary*, p. 77.

²⁰⁹*The Whole Truth About Fatima (WTAF)*, Vol. III, p. 710.

²¹⁰Although Bertone and company shunned the Fourth Memoir in their attempt to “interpret” the Third Secret as a mere depiction of past events in *The Message of Fatima*, in *Last Visionary* Bertone suddenly discovers its merits, citing it as “the more extensive” document, and quoting it concerning Sister Lucia’s explanation that the content of the apparitions was indelibly imprinted on her soul and “almost impossible to forget... God himself [sic] doesn’t want it to be forgotten.” Bertone, *Last Visionary*, p. 80.

And the Cardinal's reply? He *once again* completely ignores the "etc", uttering an indignant protest while waving a red herring:

They are pure ravings. Excuse me, you wish that the prophecy of Fatima concerns the apostasy of the Church of Rome? Rome the place of the Antichrist?²¹¹ With the love the Madonna has for the Pope and the Pope for the Madonna? All the Popes of the 20th century, including Pope Ratzinger? Books can be written... which denounce the presence of a conspiracy, a warped plot, to not speak the truth but to transmit it in code. And he who can understand, let him understand. No, it is a reconstruction, an inquest... I am amazed that journalists and writers who proclaim themselves Catholic lend themselves to this game.²¹²

Nowhere amidst the indignation is there an answer to the charge that Bertone and his collaborators have deliberately evaded the telltale "etc" because they know it is the continuation of a missing part of the Message of Fatima. Here Bertone continues to evade the issue, even though De Carli has just brought it to his attention! Instead, Bertone rather demagogically defends the honor of the conciliar and postconciliar popes, when no one, including Socci, has contended that Our Lady prophesied that *the Popes* will lose the faith.²¹³ Quite the contrary, the Message of Fatima prophesies that the Pope "will have much to suffer," and that suffering includes what the Third Secret (in the missing explanatory words of the Virgin) predicts: apostasy in the Church, which, after all, is predicted by Sacred Scripture itself.²¹⁴

²¹¹A clear reference to the approved apparition of Our Lady of La Salette, who warned in 1846 that "Rome will lose the Faith and become the seat of the Antichrist," but not that Popes would apostatize. Curiously, Bertone cites the reported words of Our Lady as if they were the "ravings" of "Fatimists," without mentioning that they pertain to an apparition of the Virgin decisively approved as authentic by the Bishop of Grenoble, who established devotion to Our Lady of La Salette. See CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA (1917), *La Salette*. The precise content of the Secret that Our Lady of La Salette conveyed to the seer Melanie Calvat is beyond the scope of this book. The content of the apparition is in no way necessary to my presentation.

²¹²Bertone, *Last Visionary*, p. 78.

²¹³Notice also that Bertone has read Socci's book attentively enough to have caught Socci's phrase "he who can understand, let him understand" apropos his hypothesis that the Third Secret has been revealed indirectly via the apocalyptic sermons of John Paul II at Fatima in order to make it possible for the Vatican to claim that "everything" has been revealed. Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 91.

²¹⁴E.g. "Let no man deceive you, for it [the Last Times] will not come unless the

Ignoring a train of witnesses

As for Bertone's remark that Socci and the "Fatimists" promote "pure ravings" unworthy of true Catholics by contending that the Secret predicts an apostasy in the Church, Socci points out that it is not he, but rather unimpeachable witnesses who link the Third Secret to apostasy:

In his book [Bertone] adds an attack on me, because I would have suggested that the Secret foresees the "apostasy of the Church of Rome", and of the upper hierarchy. First of all: Bertone should carefully read again what Jesus said to Sister Lucia in His apparition in August 1931.²¹⁵ Furthermore, it's not I who talked about apostasy, but Cardinal Ottaviani and Cardinal Ciappi ("In the Third Secret, it is foretold, among other things, that the great apostasy in the Church will begin *at the top*").²¹⁶ An analogous concept appears in Sister Lucia's words to Father Fuentes and in two statements by Cardinal Ratzinger....²¹⁷

Yet in *Last Visionary* Bertone has not one word to say about the testimony of the parade of witnesses already discussed here, including cardinals, popes and Sister Lucia herself, who establish that the Third Secret involves more than a wordless and ambiguous vision of a "Bishop dressed in white."

What we have just discussed represents Cardinal Bertone's entire attempt in *Last Visionary* to answer the case Socci had presented in *Fourth Secret*. As we can see, Bertone effectively concedes Socci's entire case, thereby inflicting major damage on the official account. Bertone gives the mere appearance of answering Socci, when in truth the Cardinal has defaulted on

apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3).

²¹⁵"Make it known to My ministers that given they follow the example of the King of France in delaying the execution of My request, they will follow him into misfortune..." *WTAF*, Vol. II, pp. 543-544.

²¹⁶See Fr. Gerard Mura, "The Third Secret of Fatima: Has It Been Completely Revealed?", the periodical *Catholic* (published by the Transalpine Redemptorists, Orkney Isles, Scotland, Great Britain), March 2002.

²¹⁷Socci, "Dear Cardinal Bertone...", loc. cit. (at <http://www.fatima.org/news/newsviews/052907socci.asp>); see also *The Fatima Crusader*, No. 86 (Summer 2007), pp. 35-42. Socci is here referring to Father Fuentes' interview of Sister Lucia in 1957 and the statements of Cardinal Ratzinger in 1984 and 1985, which were discussed in Chapter 3.

every count of Socci's meticulously pleaded indictment. As Socci notes: "The problem is that this book doesn't give even a single answer to the questions I raised. On the contrary it causes further problems. I felt totally embarrassed while reading such a bungled and self-wounding response."²¹⁸ But the damage to the "official reconstruction" caused by *Last Visionary* does not end there.

A new version of Sister Lucia's "confession"

In *Last Visionary*, Bertone presents an entirely new version of the claim he first made in *Message*: that during an unrecorded interview of Sister Lucia she told him that the Virgin never gave her an "express order" that the Secret "can only be opened in 1960" by the Patriarch of Lisbon or the Bishop of Leiria. For the reasons already discussed, Bertone and his collaborators were clearly intent on negating the very idea that the Virgin Mary herself linked the Third Secret to 1960, the year after the calling of Vatican II by Pope John XXIII. In *Last Visionary* the attack on the "express order of Our Lady" continues.

Addressing this issue, De Carli comments that "On the envelope of the Congregation [the one allegedly containing the vision] was written '1960'. It was necessary to open it in that year.... It was a precise wish of Sister Lucia." That framing of the question already steers us away from the truth: Sister Lucia wrote much more than '1960' on the envelope, and what she wrote was much more than *her* wish. But De Carli has set up Bertone's reply:

At the approach of that date someone thought that in that year something extraordinary should happen. I asked Sister Lucia: "Was it the Madonna who suggested that date, to indicate a deadline so precise?" She responded: "It was a decision of mine because I felt that 1960 would be a date very far from the writing of the 'Secret' in 1944 and because I had thought that I would be dead in that year, therefore the last obstacle to the interpretation and to the disclosure of the secret would have been taken away. *The Madonna did not communicate anything to me* in that regard."... It was

²¹⁸Socci, "Dear Cardinal Bertone: Who—Between You and Me—is Deliberately Lying?", loc. cit. (at <http://www.fatima.org/news/newsviews/052907socci.asp>); see also *The Fatima Crusader*, No. 86 (Summer 2007), pp. 35-42.

a *fictional date* and Lucia *confessed it* with disarming candor.²¹⁹

Amazingly, Bertone once again publicly accuses Sister Lucia of being a confessed liar—the chosen seer of God who, at age 10, would not lie under a threat of torture and death by the Mayor of Ourem, as we saw in Chapter 1. Just as amazingly, Bertone suggests that God chose a messenger who would simply invent orders from the Blessed Virgin that had never been given. Bertone’s new account of Sister Lucia’s alleged “confession” that she simply invented an express order of the Mother of God—an order she obediently inscribed on the outside of the *two* envelopes Bertone will show the world on television only weeks later—is unbelievable on its face. Before examining this incredible “confession,” however, it will be helpful to place it side-by-side with the original “confession,” published seven years earlier in *Message*.

TABLE 1
BERTONE’S TWO VERSIONS OF SISTER LUCIA’S ALLEGED
“CONFESSION” REGARDING THE “EXPRESS ORDER OF OUR LADY.”

<u>June 26, 2000</u> (<i>Message</i>) ²²⁰	<u>May 10, 2007</u> (<i>Last Visionary</i>) ²²¹
<p>Bertone: “Why only after 1960? Was it Our Lady who fixed that date?”</p> <p>“Lucia”: “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.”</p>	<p>Bertone: “Was it the Madonna who suggested that date, to indicate a deadline so precise?”</p> <p>“Lucia”: “It was a decision of mine because I felt that 1960 would be a date very far from the writing of the ‘Secret’ in 1944 and because I had thought that I would be dead in that year, therefore the last obstacle to the interpretation and to the disclosure of the secret would have been taken away. The Madonna did not communicate anything to me in that regard.”</p>

²¹⁹*Last Visionary*, p. 92.

²²⁰*The Message of Fatima*, p. 29.

²²¹Bertone, *L’Ultima Veggente di Fatima* (*Last Visionary*), p. 92.

We see, to begin with, an alarming “liquidity” in Bertone’s quotations of Sister Lucia, allegedly drawn from his never-produced “notes.” The wording and content of the two purported quotations are entirely different, and Bertone mysteriously fails to indicate during which of his three unrecorded interviews of the seer (April 2000, November 2001, December 2003) he allegedly obtained the 2007 version of her “confession.” Nor does he provide any contemporaneous record of the alleged “confession.”

An examination of Bertone’s “notes” would be quite interesting since, as between the 2000 version and the 2007 version of the “confession,” there is a drastic alteration of Lucia’s alleged rationale for “choosing” the date 1960. In the 2000 version Lucia is quoted as having chosen the date because of an “intuition” that it would not be understood before 1960, but would be understood after that year. In the 2007 version, however, the “intuition” regarding 1960 has disappeared, to be replaced by a mere “decision” based on totally different reasons: 1960 was “very far” from 1944, Sister Lucia thought she would be dead by 1960, and with her death the *last obstacle* to revealing and “interpreting” the Secret would be removed.

The 2000 version of the “confession” was merely incredible, for the reasons already discussed in Chapter 4. The 2007 version—another posthumous “surprise” Bertone had never mentioned before—is not only incredible, but filled with nonsense that could not possibly have been uttered by Sister Lucia unless it was the product of undue influence upon the seer. At least six objections present themselves:

- *First*, Sister Lucia would never, on her own, make a “decision” when to reveal the Secret Our Lady had ordered her to “tell no one” except Francisco. The very idea is laughable.
- *Second*, 1960 was not “very far” from 1944. And even if it were, that a date was “very far” from 1944 was not a logical reason for Lucia to “decide” that *this* date, of all dates, would be a good time to reveal the Secret she was under heavenly orders *not* to reveal.
- *Third*, what would give Sister Lucia the idea that she would be dead in 1960 when she lived to the advanced age of 97? Nowhere in any of her writings do we find the least suggestion that she anticipated dying before her 53rd birthday.

- *Fourth*, why, of all the years that elapsed between 1944 and her death in 2005, would Sister Lucia “choose” 1960 as the year to reveal the Secret? Why *sixteen* years from 1944, rather than a round number like ten or twenty years?
- *Fifth*, what would make Sister Lucia think that she, the very recipient of the Third Secret, the chosen seer of God, was an *obstacle* to its disclosure and “interpretation,” such that only her death would remove “the last obstacle to the interpretation and to the disclosure of the secret”? And even if she had expressed this absurd idea, why would she view herself as the *last* obstacle?
- *Sixth*, in *Last Visionary* Bertone claims that he was sent to Coimbra to interview Lucia in April 2000, just before publication of the vision and the commentary in *Message*, because the Pope “had need of a definitive interpretation on the part of the religious.”²²² Yet, in the same book, Bertone asks us to believe that Sister Lucia viewed her very existence on earth as “the last *obstacle*” to the Secret’s interpretation!

Having announced the latest version of Sister Lucia’s “confession”—unmentioned during the previous seven years, and revealed only after her death—Bertone says it is a “plausible explanation, but I think that it cannot be completely satisfactory. [To say the least!] The arc of time from 1944 to 1960, probably, signified for her a remote horizon, a sufficiently wide temporal arc for the comprehension of the sense of the vision.”²²³

Bertone apparently fails to recognize the monumental absurdity of this declaration: that Sister Lucia, the chosen seer of God, was so deprived of any sense of the vision God Himself had deigned to give her, and so abandoned by Our Lady of Fatima in the aftermath, that she had to construct her own “temporal arc” for assessing the vision’s meaning, including the arbitrary selection of the year 1960 as the end point of this “arc.” This, we are asked to believe, was the disordered state of affairs the Mother of God left behind for Cardinals Sodano and Bertone to tidy up with their “interpretation” of the Third Secret in 2000, some 83 years after the Fatima apparitions.

²²² Bertone, *Last Visionary*, p. 39.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.92

Why so much concern over 1960?

One might wonder why Cardinal Bertone would devote so much attention to discrediting Sister Lucia's testimony that the Virgin had linked disclosure of the Third Secret of Fatima to the year 1960. What does it matter to Bertone and his collaborators that Our Lady had temporally connected that particular year to the Secret? Why are they apparently so unwilling to let that connection stand? And why, as if to make it easier to convict Lucia of inventing the date, did they keep from the public the envelope (or, as it would turn out, *two* envelopes) confirming precisely that connection by an "express order of Our Lady"? There are two reasons that would explain these actions as anything other than pointless and irrational.

First, as I have already suggested, if the very Queen of Heaven had expressly linked the events prophesied in the Secret to the year 1960, this fact alone would destroy the "preventative interpretation," which demands that the vision of the "Bishop dressed in white" depict the 1981 assassination attempt, which has no connection whatever to 1960—or, for that matter, to what is plainly depicted in the vision itself: a Pope being executed by soldiers, followed by the killing of bishops, priests, religious and members of the laity on a hill outside a ruined city.

Second, the authors of *Message* know that Our Lady's directive to delay disclosure of the Secret until 1960 points unmistakably to the conclusion that the vision, which has no apparent connection to that year, must be only one part of the Third Secret, whose connection to 1960 (and events following) could be made clear *only by another text* wherein the Virgin explains the vision's historical context and meaning. I recall here once again Father Schweigl's revelation that the Third Secret "has *two* parts," one of which is "the logical continuation... of the words: 'In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc.'"²²⁴

So, the "express order of Our Lady" had to go. Only by eliminating the Virgin's temporal connection of the Third Secret to the year 1960 could Bertone succeed in re-linking the Secret to 1981, in keeping with his "interpretation" of the vision, while directing attention away from the fact that the vision standing alone cannot possibly be complete, as there is nothing about it

²²⁴WTAF, Vol. III, p. 710.

which would, to recall Sister Lucia's words to Cardinal Ottavaini, "be more clear" (*mais claro*) in 1960 as opposed to, say, 1950. Thus, to defend Bertone's account it would be essential to claim that Sister Lucia had invented the Virgin's directive. Conveniently enough, Lucia is unable to contradict Bertone today.

But Catholics must ask themselves: *Who is more likely to be guilty of an invention here: the chosen seer of God or a prelate intent on defending his personal position?* It is opportune to repeat Socci's observation about Bertone's unrecorded and selectively reported interviews of the seer: "The sensation that arises from this 'management' of the last witness of Fatima, this ecclesiastical self-contradiction, is of a certain brazenness, and of seasonal and colorful versions of the truth. Almost as if public opinion, the mass media and the faithful did not know how to reason critically and to catch contradictions and evasive answers."²²⁵

*A new version of Lucia's "agreement"
with the "preventative interpretation"*

But there is still more "management" of Sister Lucia to consider. Offering another posthumously revealed statement, in *Last Visionary* Bertone suggests, but does not actually say, that in the end Sister Lucia explicitly agreed with Cardinal Sodano's justly ridiculed interpretation of the vision of the executed bishop in white as a depiction of the failed attempt on the life of John Paul II. As Bertone now reports for the first time in this seven-year controversy: "I asked her [Lucia]... if she had connected the reference to the 'Bishop dressed in white' with the attack on John Paul II, if the 'Third Secret' regards not only the Popes, but in a quite particular way, Pope Wojtyla." De Carli asks Bertone what Sister Lucia answered, and Bertone replies: "That she had immediately connected, as soon as it came to her knowledge, the 'Third Secret' with the attempt to assassinate the Pope."²²⁶

Here, however, neither the alleged question nor the alleged answer is quoted, but only Bertone's characterization of what he claims was said seven years ago. And what Sister Lucia is alleged to have said—revealed only after her death—is a distinct "improvement" on the version that appeared in *Message*:

²²⁵*Fourth Secret*, p. 127.

²²⁶*Last Visionary*, p. 62.

As regards the passage about the Bishop dressed in white, that is, the Holy Father—as the children immediately realized during the “vision”—who is struck dead and falls to the ground, Sister Lucia was in full agreement with the Pope’s claim that “it was a mother’s hand that guided the bullet’s path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death” (Pope John Paul II, *Meditation from the Policlinico Gemelli to the Italian Bishops*, 13 May 1994).²²⁷

In 2000 Bertone asserted in *Message* that Lucia told him she “was in full agreement” that the Virgin guided Ali Agca’s bullet into a non-fatal trajectory, *not* that the bishop in white was in fact John Paul II. In *Message* it was Bertone, not Sister Lucia, who referred to the “passage about the Bishop dressed in white,” whereas Lucia referred only to the trajectory of the bullet. By juxtaposing the two unconnected statements, Bertone had created an impression—and that is all it ever was—that Sister Lucia agreed with Cardinal Sodano’s interpretation of the vision. But now, seven years later, Bertone suddenly announces that Sister Lucia “immediately connected, as soon as it came to her knowledge, the ‘Third Secret’ with the attempt to assassinate the Pope.” Yet this news appears nowhere in Bertone’s more contemporaneous account in *Message*, his communiqué concerning the alleged post-*Message* interview in November 2001, or in any other statement by Bertone before publication of *Last Visionary*.

But wait: After Bertone scoffs at “the Fatimists” for maintaining that a vision of the Pope being killed by soldiers signifies that a Pope is killed by soldiers, De Carli takes the bull by the horns and asks Bertone outright: “All of this you explained to Sister Lucia and she accepted the interpretation?” Bertone’s answer: “Certainly, *even if not in these terms*. She insisted on the force of prayer and on the conviction, like granite, that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary cannot be deaf to our supplications.”²²⁸

In other words: No! When asked a direct question, Bertone was forced to concede that Sister Lucia did *not* actually agree that the Pope in the vision is John Paul II. And if she did not agree, then she could not have believed that the Third Secret relates entirely to 20th Century events culminating in the 1981 assassination attempt.

²²⁷*Message*, p. 29.

²²⁸*Last Visionary*, p. 65.

Yet another disaster

I could go on for many more pages, but it is time to stop, for the point has been made: *Last Visionary* is another disaster for Bertone and the Vatican. What Bertone seriously maintains was “an operation of transparency”²²⁹ in May-June 2000 is shown by his own book to be what Socci had already proven it to be: a cover-up. The worst case scenario has unfolded for the Vatican: Bertone joined issue with Antonio Socci but failed to answer him on the merits, thereby conceding Socci’s case—and, still worse, embroiling himself in even more contradictions and implausible contentions than before. As Socci rightly concludes in his reply to *Last Visionary*, this is bad news not only for Bertone and the Vatican, but for the Catholic Church as a whole:

For any author, being personally attacked by the Vatican Secretary of State without a scrap of evidence would be a coup. But for me it is a disaster, because I consider myself first of all a Catholic before a journalist. I would have preferred to be dead wrong and to be confuted. Or I hoped that the Holy See would finally decide to reveal the entire truth about the Third Secret of Fatima, by publishing—as Our Lady requested—the still concealed part. Otherwise, I would have preferred to be ignored, snubbed, boycotted. But the only mistake, the only thing to avoid, is exactly what Bertone did: presenting himself publicly, without answering anything and, rather, adding disastrous new revelations. For him and for the Vatican.²³⁰

Yet Bertone had refused to admit the slightest problem with the “official reconstruction” he so indignantly defended in *Last Visionary*, a reconstruction that “leaks water from every part.” Instead, Bertone complains of those (such as Socci) who refuse to accept, as Bertone would have it, that “the prophecy is not open to the future, it is consigned to the past.”²³¹ Bertone accuses his

²²⁹Ibid., p. 57.

²³⁰Socci, “Dear Cardinal Bertone: Who—Between You and Me—is Deliberately Lying?”, loc. cit. (at <http://www.fatima.org/news/newsviews/052907socci.asp>); see also *The Fatima Crusader*, No. 86 (Summer 2007), pp. 35-42.

²³¹*Last Visionary*, p. 79.

critics of “not wanting to surrender to the evidence”²³²—what evidence?—even as he tellingly ignores a mountain of evidence that negates the official account.

Papal praise for both Bertone and Socci?

I cannot conclude this chapter without noting that Bertone’s book boasts a letter of “presentation” from Pope Benedict, in which His Holiness very conspicuously avoids even the smallest detail of the controversy. In this letter, as Socci notes, the Pope “confines himself to generalities” that have nothing to do with Socci’s contentions. But, in a thickening of the plot, Socci reveals that *he* has a letter from the Pope “concerning my book, thanking me for ‘the sentiments which have suggested it.’” Socci says that the Pope’s words are “comforting before the insults and coarse accusations” Bertone has hurled at him.²³³

While Socci is understandably comforted by the Pope’s letter, it raises enormously troubling questions: Why would the Pope thank Socci for a book that accuses the Vatican of a veritable conspiracy to conceal the very words of the Mother of God, while at the same time appearing to lend support to his Secretary of State in an attack on Socci, filled with evasions that only confirm the suspicions of the faithful? If what Bertone says is true and what Socci says is false, then why did the Pope’s letter to Socci apparently contain not a word of rebuke or correction? And why has neither the Pope nor the Vatican issued *any* official criticism of *Fourth Secret*, which launches into the worldwide public forum the gravest possible accusations against Vatican officials, and even Popes John XXIII and Paul VI?

Here we must return to our provisional hypothesis. Perhaps, as Socci suggests, Pope Benedict himself labors under the mental reservation first put into play by John XXIII’s private decision that he could not (or rather would not) determine the unpublished text to be authentic. Just as Pope John privately (but without any authoritative judgment) deemed the Secret inapplicable “to the years of my pontificate,” evidently because it warns of an ecclesial and planetary catastrophe he regarded as inconceivable and at odds with his personal optimism, so also certain members of the

²³²Ibid.

²³³Socci, “Dear Cardinal Bertone...”, loc. cit.

Vatican apparatus since then have privately concluded that the missing text is “not authentic” because it constitutes a profoundly negative heavenly commentary on the state of the Church and the world on their watch. To recall Socci’s observation, Pope John’s initial dismissal of the Secret “weighed like a boulder on his successors.”²³⁴ Benedict and the Vatican apparatus, then, would have inherited a veritable legacy of privately regarding the unpublished text as impossible to accept and thus, conveniently enough, consider the text to be the mere “thoughts” or “annotations” of Lucia rather than authentic words of the Blessed Virgin. From which premise it would be easy for them to rationalize the unpublished part of the Secret as “non-existent.”

Yet, Pope Benedict knows that Socci is correct in his investigations into the existence of this “non-existent” text. Thus, the Pope, under the posited mental reservation—to which he had committed himself as Cardinal Ratzinger, co-author of *Message*—would be able to lend his name informally to Bertone’s denials (which are not really denials) while also acknowledging the validity of Socci’s work. And in the process of lending his name to Bertone’s work while also expressing gratitude to Socci for *his* work, the Pope would not himself be admitting or denying anything, unlike Bertone and his collaborators. It is hard to see another explanation for the Pope’s personal letter of appreciation to Socci regarding a book that indicts Vatican prelates for covering up part of the Third Secret of Fatima!

What a mystery there is before us! As Socci says, it is “the greatest mystery of the 20th century.”²³⁵ A mystery that has only intensified during the first seven years of this century. A mystery that, only a few weeks after the publication of Bertone’s *Last Visionary*, could not have been more intense, as Bertone made an unprecedented television appearance in an effort to shore up the crumbling official account.

²³⁴Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 164.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 14.