

Overview

Socci Accuses Bertone

On May 12, 2007, Antonio Socci, one of Italy's most respected Catholic intellectuals, published in his widely read column this astonishing challenge to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican Secretary of State: "Dear Cardinal Bertone: Who—between you and me—is deliberately lying?"¹ Socci was responding to the Cardinal's suggestion, in a book the Cardinal had published days before, that Socci has misled the Catholic faithful in his own book, *Il Quarto Segreto di Fatima* (*The Fourth Secret of Fatima*).

In *Fourth Secret*, Socci contends that the mysterious vision of "the Bishop dressed in white," published by the Vatican on June 26, 2000, is not the entirety of the Third Secret of Fatima, contrary to what Cardinal Bertone and his Vatican colleagues have asserted. In that vision the white-clad bishop, apparently a future Pope, is executed along with bishops, priests and laity outside a half-ruined city filled with dead bodies, but there are no words of the Virgin to explain how this grim scenario arises. As Socci flatly declares, in agreement with vast numbers of skeptical Catholics, something must be missing: "[T]hat there is a part of the Secret not revealed and considered unspeakable *is certain*. And today—having decided to deny its existence—the Vatican runs the risk of exposing itself to very heavy pressure and blackmail."²

A Remarkable Change of Mind

Socci's conclusion is all the more remarkable in that he is a very prominent member of the "mainstream" Catholic establishment in Italy, the host of a popular Italian television show (*Excalibur*), and a personal acquaintance of Cardinal Bertone and the former

¹*Liberio*, May 12, 2007 (Via Merano 18, 20187 Milano, Italy); see English translation at <http://www.fatima.org/news/newsviews/052907socci.asp>.

²Antonio Socci, *Il Quarto Segreto di Fatima* (Milano: Rai and Eri Rizzoli, 2006), p. 173.

Cardinal Ratzinger, having hosted press conferences for both prelates. Given his position, it is not surprising that Socci was at first determined to demolish the claims of the so-called “Fatimists” that the Vatican is holding something back. Socci once viewed such claims as mere “dietrologies,” an Italian idiom for conspiracy theories that look behind (*dietro*) events for hidden plots. He was convinced that the vision of the bishop in white was all there was to the Third Secret, and that in *The Message of Fatima*, the Vatican-published commentary on the vision and the Fatima message in general, Ratzinger and Bertone had laid all questions to rest.

As Socci first believed, “Fatimist” literature casting doubt on the completeness of the Vatican’s disclosure originated “from the burning disappointment of a Third Secret that controverted all of their apocalyptic predictions.” The “Fatimists” had to be refuted, he thought, because the “polemical arms” in their arsenal were “at the disposal of whoever wanted to launch a heavy attack against the Vatican.”³ But then Socci encountered unexpected strength in the “Fatimist” case, which he had never studied closely. At the same time, his own suspicions were aroused when Cardinal Bertone declined to grant him an interview, despite their friendly relations and Socci’s intention to defend Bertone’s position. That refusal opened Socci’s eyes to the possibility “that there are embarrassing questions and that there is above all something (of gravity) to hide.”⁴

As Socci explains: “In the end, I had to surrender.... Here I recount my voyage into the greatest mystery of the 20th century and set forth the result I honestly reached. A result that sincerely contradicts my initial convictions...”⁵ What completely changed Socci’s mind and made him “surrender” is simply this: overwhelming evidence, which will be surveyed here. The evidence convinced Socci that the “dietrologies” of the “Fatimists”—i.e., loyal Catholics who have reasonable doubts about the official account—were actually correct: there must be a separate but related text of the Secret, not yet revealed, containing “the words of the Madonna [which] preannounce an apocalyptic crisis of the faith in the Church starting from the top.” This second text is probably “also an explanation of the vision (revealed on June 26, 2000) where there

³Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵Ibid., p. 14.

appear the Pope, the bishops and martyred faithful, after having traversed a city in ruins.”⁶ That explanation, writes Socci, would involve “the preannounced assassination of a Pope [the white-clad bishop in the vision] in the context of an immense martyrdom of Christians and of a devastation of the world.”⁷ Only such an explanation would make sense of the otherwise inexplicable vision.

Motive and Intent: Socci’s Hypothesis

It must be noted at the outset that, despite Socci’s public challenge to Cardinal Bertone quoted above, *Fourth Secret* does not claim simply that Bertone and his collaborators at the Vatican are a pack of liars and knaves, much less the Popes who have reigned during this controversy. The reality is far more complicated.

As the law recognizes, there is a distinction between motive and intent. For example, from a *motive* of reasonable fear for one’s own life, one may have the *intent* to commit bodily harm upon another. Bodily harm intentionally committed for that motive would not be a crime, but rather lawful self-defense. If Socci and the “Fatimists” are correct, then the Third Secret in its entirety—the already published picture and the missing soundtrack, as it were—depict a collapse of faith and discipline in the Church in conjunction with a worldwide catastrophe. That being the case, Vatican officials would have a perfectly human motive to hide the missing part of the Secret, because it would constitute a negative heavenly commentary on their own stewardship of the Church and a warning of global disaster that could cause panic among the faithful. The existence of this *motive*, however, does not necessarily point to *intent* to engage in outright lying about what Socci calls the “part of the Secret not revealed and considered unspeakable.”

Rather, Bertone and the other Vatican officials involved may be employing what the moral theologians call a “broad mental reservation,” meaning an equivocal statement or statements made with a qualification hidden in the mind of the speaker. An example of this is the statement “Mrs. Smith is not *here*,” uttered with the mental reservation “in this room” when Mrs. Smith is in the next room. Suppose Bertone and company have been persuaded—or

⁶Ibid., p. 82.

⁷Socci, *Fourth Secret*, pp. 63-64.

have persuaded themselves—that the missing portion of the Secret is “not authentic” but rather something Sister Lucia only thought she had heard from the Virgin Mary. In that case, a broad mental reservation would involve a statement such as: “We have revealed the *authentic* Third Secret,” with the mental reservation “but not what we deem the inauthentic words attributed to the Virgin.” As we will see, Cardinal Bertone has employed precisely such language in discussing what the Vatican revealed in June of 2000.⁸

It must be noted, however, that a broad mental reservation is not morally justified when the hearer of the statement has a right to know the truth.⁹ If, as Socci and others (including this writer) contend, there is a hidden text of the Third Secret, the faithful have a right to know of its existence, even if someone privately deems that text “inauthentic” without a public and authoritative judgment of the Church. Nevertheless, the presence of a mental reservation would allow one to conclude that strictly speaking the prelates in question are not “lying through their teeth,” even if they are concealing an element of the truth. Rather, they have convinced themselves they are telling the whole truth so far as the faithful need to know it. They may even think they are doing their duty before God to “protect” the Church from the shock and panic of a “false” revelation. This possible explanation should be kept in view when considering what is presented in the coming pages.

Socci’s own hypothesis along these lines, to which we shall return, is that while John Paul II expressed the desire to reveal the entirety of the Third Secret, “a compromise solution was reached.” It was decided to reveal the missing portion of the Third Secret *indirectly* through the Pope’s sermon at Fatima on May 13, 2000, wherein the Pope (as Sister Lucia did) linked the Secret to apostasy in the Church by pointed references to verses 1, 3 and

⁸A “broad” mental reservation, which involves a misleading equivocation from which the truth could still be inferred from the words, is to be distinguished from a “strict” mental reservation, which involves a statement that falsely appears to convey the truth without qualification: e.g., “I did not steal the money,” uttered with the mental reservation “with my left hand, but rather with my right hand.” As to the Third Secret, a statement involving a “strict” mental reservation would be the unqualified declaration: “We have revealed the entire Third Secret,” with the mental reservation “more or less” or “in its essence” or “so far as we consider it authentic.” A strict mental reservation is simply a lie, and is never morally permissible. See Jone and Adelman, *Moral Theology* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Bookshop, 1944), § VIII, Chapter I, LYING, pp. 260-261.

⁹Jone and Adelman, *Moral Theology*, loc. cit.

4 of Chapter 12 of the Book of the Apocalypse. The idea, writes Socci in an allusion to Scripture, is: "He who can understand, let him understand."¹⁰ This indirect revelation of the missing text, combined with publication of the vision, "would have permitted them [the Curia] to be able to say that all of the Third Secret had been revealed, but without an integral explicit publication to avoid—according to their view—a great shock to the Christian people, sensationalistic broadcasts and a reaction of panic."¹¹

Thus, the controversy Socci has joined is not simply a question of white hats versus black hats, but a complex clash of human motives with a supernatural event that provokes fear as well as devotion, and has put the faith of certain people to the test by placing them in what they perceive to be an untenable situation.

A Matter of Spiritual and Secular Urgency

And so we enter upon the unprecedented scene of no less than the Cardinal Secretary of State attacking a respected Catholic layman, and that layman, a loyal son of the Church, accusing the Vatican of a cover-up of the very words of the Mother of God. At this moment millions of Catholics around the world are following the Socci-Bertone controversy in newspapers and on the Internet, and it is the talk of cardinals, bishops, and monsignors inside the Vatican walls. So important is this controversy that Cardinal Bertone has felt constrained not only to write a book against Socci, but also to appear for more than an hour on Italy's most popular television talk show, a subsequent radio broadcast, and a second television show he himself produced in an effort to debunk Socci—with Socci himself barred from participating in any of these forums. Yet, as Socci has pointed out, Bertone has failed to address *a single one* of his contentions in *Fourth Secret*, thus conceding Socci's entire case.

Simply at the level of public interest, therefore, this is a sensational story: There is a secret not revealed, and the Vatican, for whatever reason, is hiding it from the world, while the prominent Catholic layman who makes this grave accusation is being attacked, but not answered, by a Vatican prelate of the highest rank. But the contention that the Vatican is concealing part of the Third Secret of Fatima is more than just a sensational news story. If Socci is right,

¹⁰e.g., "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matt. 11:15).

¹¹Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 91.

the contents of the hidden text predict catastrophes for the Church and the world which could be averted or at least mitigated if we were given the benefit of the warnings and spiritual correctives the text no doubt contains. The Socci-Bertone controversy revolves, then, around a matter that should concern every man, woman and child on earth, believer and unbeliever alike. We are indeed dealing with “the greatest mystery of the 20th century,” a mystery that continues into this century with consequences that could not be more dramatic. That mystery is everyone’s concern.

A Word About “Scandal”

Nor should anyone be heard to complain that to air this matter, as Socci has done, “scandalizes” the Church. Such a scandal would be “the scandal of the Pharisees,” who attacked the good deeds of Our Lord Himself because they perceived them as threats to their respectability. Besides, as no less than Pope St. Gregory declared, “It is better that scandals arise than that the truth be suppressed.” Writing in his own defense against this charge of “scandal,” Socci observes: “The Gospel speaks very clearly. Jesus says: ‘the truth will make you free.’ It does not say: be careful because the truth will create problems.... The Church is not some kind of sect or Mafia gang that demands from us a code of silence. But it is the house of the sons of God, the house of liberty and of truth.”¹²

This book, like Socci’s, has been written in the spirit of the quest for truth, the truth that makes us free. For the Third Secret of Fatima is not just a mystery one can solve by investigation of the facts, although it is certainly that. As Socci has recognized, the Third Secret is, above all, a vital warning from the Mother of God to the whole Church and all of humanity by which we might avoid the dangers that threaten us and be assisted in our progress toward the final end of man in eternal beatitude.

¹²“Bertone nel ‘Vespaio’ delle Polemiche” (“Bertone in the ‘Wasp’s Nest’ of the Polemics”), *Liberio*, June 2, 2007.