

THE VATICAN AND THE SECRET LIES OF FÁTIMA

Since the Virgin Mary allegedly appeared to three children at Fátima in 1917, the Catholic world has been fascinated with the three secrets that she imparted, but the Vatican may have fabricated them for its own political and religious purposes.

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In the last two centuries, the Catholic Church has made apparitions of the Virgin Mary an ever more important part of the Christian religious experience and doctrine. Some critics argue that the popularity of the Catholic faith is largely maintained by the popularity of the Virgin Mary. The so-called Marian era—the period when the Virgin Mary appeared and offered messages to those who saw her—began in the early 19th century with a series of apparitions, those at Lourdes no doubt being the most famous. But the most intriguing apparition occurred in the early 20th century, in the Portuguese hamlet of Fátima.

The Virgin Mary is said to have appeared at Fátima six times, starting on 13 May 1917, with a final apparition on 13 October 1917 when she performed a great Sun miracle "which all shall see so that they may believe".¹ During the second or third apparition, the three young witnesses—Lúcia Santos and two of her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto—were allegedly given three secrets by the Virgin Mary. Two secrets were revealed in subsequent years, but the so-called Third Secret of Fátima was kept hidden by the Vatican for almost six decades. As a result, there was endless speculation about its nature and importance—rightfully so, as the Second Secret was linked with major political events of the 20th century. But what if all of these "secrets" were fabricated by the Vatican for political and religious reasons?

Messages from the Virgin Mary

According to the standard accounts, the First Secret was a vision of Hell and a prediction of the imminent deaths of Lúcia's cousins Francisco and Jacinta. They died in 1919 and 1920, respectively, as a result of the influenza pandemic.

Lúcia did not reveal the contents of the Second and Third Secrets and informed the Vatican of the Second Secret only in July 1941, following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union which began on 22 June 1941. The Virgin, Lúcia said, had proclaimed that if Russia were converted back to Christianity, many years of war and persecution could be avoided—but, since 1917, communism had only expanded its reach. It seemed that Lúcia was advocating that the invasion of the Soviet Union was a good thing, as per the Virgin Mary herself. Nazi Germany, of course, lost the Second World War and, with its demise, communism spread across Eastern Europe. The Cold War came to be seen as many years of "wars and persecution of the Church",² and so, it seemed, the Second Secret was true.

It also meant that there were great expectations to know the Third Secret, which was assumed to be as accurate as the Second and no doubt of even greater importance. Indeed, the Third Secret of Fátima became the subject of extraordinary conspiracy theories, with suggestions ranging from the Virgin's announcement that extraterrestrial life exists elsewhere in the universe to a portent of the end of the world.

While Lúcia had received the information in 1917, she only informed the Vatican of the Third Secret in January 1944. When her letter was delivered, the Vatican refused to make it public. Lúcia therefore proclaimed that this secret had to be revealed upon her death, or in 1960 at the latest.

Lúcia, however, had been a hostage of the Vatican for many decades. Although she was not a devout Catholic when the visions occurred, and her father was actually an atheist,³ she was forced into a convent where she could not communicate with anyone and was later placed in solitary confinement. Access to Lúcia required the consent of the highest Vatican circles and it was rarely granted. What Lúcia desired was therefore totally at the Pope's discretion.

Keepers of the Secrets

It was not until mid-March 1957 that Pope Pius XII asked for the document, but he apparently did not read it. Instead, it was placed in the Secret Archives of the Holy Office on 4 April 1957 and, ahead of its intended revelation in 1960, the sealed envelope was brought to Pope John XXIII on 17 August 1959. Hesitating, he said: "We shall wait. I shall pray. I shall let you know what I decide."⁴ Nothing happened. Finally, on 8 February 1960, the Vatican announced that the contents of the Third Secret would not be revealed.

In his turn, Pope Paul VI read the contents on 27 March 1965 and returned the document to the Secret Archives, also deciding not to publish the text.

The next Pope who took an interest was Pope John Paul II, who asked for the envelope following the attempt on his life on 13 May 1981. Once again, it was returned to the Secret Archives. However, was it a coincidence that the Pope was shot on 13 May (1981) and that the first apparition of Fátima occurred on 13 May (1917)? Was this evidence of "divine synchronicity"—or careful planning?

After the attempted assassination, it was clear that the Pope believed there was a connection. On the occasion of a visit to Rome by the then Bishop of Leiria (the bishopric to which Fátima belongs), the Pope decided to give him the bullet which had remained in the Jeep after the assassination attempt so that it might be kept in the shrine. By the Bishop's decision, the bullet was later set in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fátima.

By way of background, although labelled a "secret" in 1917, the Second Secret was actually a prophecy:

"...If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end: but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one

will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI... To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the Consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."⁵

The war that was going to end in 1917 was obviously the First World War. The "worse one" was going to be the Second World War. Interestingly, Pius XI presided over the Church from 1922 till 1939, and we should rightfully query whether the Virgin truly dictated this Second Secret in 1917 or whether Lúcia edited in the Pius XI

mention. And if Lúcia did edit it in, the question might be asked: what else did she edit in? The letter containing this prophecy was only composed in 1941. When Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 31 October 1942, it was clear that the Vatican was already making use of the Second Secret.

Even though such doubts should exist about the Second Secret, it is clear that no such

doubts existed in the heart of Pope John Paul II. After the assassination attempt, he immediately thought of reconsecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and he composed a prayer for an Act of Entrustment which was to be celebrated on 7 June 1981 in the Basilica of St Mary Major.

On 13 May 1982, exactly a year after the assassination attempt that was at the core of the Third Secret, Pope John Paul II was in Fátima, both to thank Mary for saving his life and to carry out a public act of consecration of the whole world—including Russia—to her Immaculate Heart, as per the Virgin Mary's instruction, as dictated to Lúcia in 1917...or so it seems.

On 13 May 1991, Pope John Paul II was in Fátima (again) to meet with Sister Lúcia. The event, of course, was the 10th anniversary of his miraculous escape from death, and it was clear—even though the contents of the Third Secret had not yet been released—that he wanted to commemorate this in Fátima. During the mass, he specifically said thanks to the Virgin Mary for the liberation of Europe from communism. Indeed, whereas in 1981 communist powers were believed to have ordered the papal assassination, a decade later communism was dead across Eastern Europe.

The 1990s saw intense speculation on the nature of

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the Third Secret, so much so that the Church began to be depicted as the evil keeper of a secret that should long have been revealed to the world, as per Sister Lúcia's wishes.

The Pope visited Fátima (yet again) on 13 May 2000 to celebrate the beatification of Jacinta and Francisco, the two other Fátima visionaries, and again spoke to Sister Lúcia. As early as 1935, there had been attempts to have the two visionaries beatified.

That same day, 13 May 2000, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, then Vatican Secretary of State, announced that the Third Secret would be revealed, and he disclosed what he claimed was a portion of it. Sodano announced that the secret spoke of "the Bishop clothed in white" who, while making his way amid the corpses of martyrs, "falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a hail of gunfire".⁶ Cardinal Sodano went on to indicate that this was a prediction of the 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II.

Finally, just over a month later, on 26 June 2000, Pope John Paul II authorised the release of its contents, claiming that the 1981 assassination attempt was the fulfilment of this Third Secret. The announcement received mixed reactions. For some, it was the Church finally officialising what had been "known" for years, if not decades. For others, there was doubt.

The Third Secret Revealed

The full text of the Third Secret was released by then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) on 26 June 2000 on the Vatican's Internet site. However, upon its publication, it was clear that it did not say that the Pope fell "apparently dead" but that he was killed. This is the passage of the officially published text:

"...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."⁷

It is clear that the "Holy Father" is killed at the top of a mountain by a group of soldiers and that he does not die alone, as "one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious" die, too. In short, this is a

vision of carnage, and not at all like what happened on 13 May 1981. While Pope John Paul II was passing through St Peter's Square, he was driven, not walking; nor were there any corpses around him. He did not climb a mountain or kneel at the foot of a big cross. The only potentially matching correspondence, it might be argued, is that assassin Ağca was a soldier and he did indeed try to kill the Pope with a gun. Even though some bystanders were injured in the shooting, no bishop or priest, let alone several of them, died.

However much Pope John Paul II might have believed in Fátima and that the Virgin of Fátima predicted his assassination attempt, however much there is this coincidence of dates (13 May), it appears that the Third Secret, based on the official publication of the document in 2000, does not apply to the failed assassination attempt of 1981. How is this explained?

The Pope believed that the Virgin altered the course of history and that he should have died by Ağca's bullets, but that the Virgin personally intervened and rescued him. In short, the Virgin Mary herself stopped her own prediction from coming true! It begs the question: why did she simply not say so?

Amidst all of this, however, were numerous questions that weren't asked, like why Sister Lúcia had been so adamant that the Third Secret had to be revealed by 1960 at the latest, even though the events foretold in it were for 1981—a gap of two decades, making us wonder why Lúcia felt the Third Secret had such urgency. However, in retrospect, it is but a small mystery in a much larger enigma!

Faked Secrets

The central question as to whether the secrets are genuine or not is the credibility of Sister Lúcia. Only six days after the 13 October 1917 apparition, Canon Manuel Nunes Formigão questioned her.

Canon Formigão: "The thirteenth of this month: did you ask that the people would look at the Sun?"

Sister Lúcia: "I don't remember having done that."

Formigão: "Did you ask them to close their umbrellas?"

Lúcia: "The last time, I cannot remember whether I asked them."

Formigão: "Did she tell you that the people would be punished if they did not repent their sins?"

Lúcia: "I do not remember whether she said that; I think not."

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Formigão: "The thirteenth, you did not have such doubts as you have today about what the Virgin has said. Why do you have such doubts today?"

Lúcia: "That day I could remember better; it was closer to the events."⁸

Lúcia clearly had a rather short-term memory, which begs the question of how she could possibly correctly remember decades later what had transpired in 1917, when, six days after the final apparition, she had already forgotten most of what had happened. One might argue that the secrets were nevertheless forcefully imprinted on her memory, but the evidence suggests otherwise.

That same day, 19 October 1917, in front of Father José Ferreira de Lacerda, when she was asked "What did the lady say the fifth time?" (i.e., 13 September), Lúcia replied: "I do not remember well, but it appears to me that she said..."⁹

"It appears to me that she said" doesn't invite confidence, and it again begs the question as to whether Lúcia correctly remembered the contents of the Second and Third Secrets, written down decades later.

Indeed, Father José Rolim would later conclude: "Because of the interrogations we have submitted them to, the visionaries were the first to hesitate about the words that the lady had truly used."¹⁰

But it gets worse. There are clear contradictions between what Lúcia said in October 1917 and what she revealed in 1941 and would comment on later. In 1917, Lúcia declared to Canon Formigão: "The Virgin did not speak about penitence."¹¹ However, in 1946, to Father Thomas McGlynn, Lúcia claimed: "She continued to demand sacrifices and penitences."¹²

Worse still, in October 1917, Canon Formigão asked Lúcia whether she had been given a secret, which Lúcia confirmed. Asked whether the Virgin gave it only to Lúcia or to all three children, Lúcia replied: "All three."¹³ Most importantly, he asked: "If the people were to know the secret that Our Lady revealed to you, would they be sad?" Lúcia answered: "I think they would remain as they are, more or less the same."¹⁴

This suggests that the secrets as given by the Virgin Mary were quite modest, and seem not on a par with the revelations of the Second and Third Secrets several decades later. This is underlined when Lúcia went on the record stating that the secret only applied for the good and happiness of the three children present, and not anyone else.

Should we draw the conclusion that the Second and Third Secrets as revealed by the Church had nothing to do with the message which the Virgin gave to the three witnesses in Fátima?

It definitely appears that we should. In fact, seeing that Lúcia was kept a hostage by the Church for several decades, there is no way at all to verify that what the Church claimed was actually what Lúcia was told. We simply have to take the Church's word for it. (Sister Lúcia died on 13 February 2005.)

It is no wonder that the official records of these 1917 interrogations were placed under seal by Church officials for several decades, as they completely tear apart any credibility that these "secrets" have.

It is clear that in 1917, the secrets revealed by the Virgin were not that important, at least not to the world as a whole. What was important—and remains the case—is that in October 1917 a truly supernatural event was witnessed by thousands: the Sun seemed to stop in its tracks—a phenomenon that convinced hardened sceptics who had travelled to Fátima to be shown how fake it all was that something truly magical had just happened.

But as supernatural events are unimportant—if not demonic—in the eyes of the Church, the entire event was redefined in a more Christian context. Soon, a political dimension was added to it, too. And so, one of the greatest lies of the 20th century was created: the Third Secret of Fátima.

The Greatest Lie

Based on Sister Lúcia's memoirs, written down between 1935 and 1941, it is clear that the

"secrets" and their contents at best contain some errors but are likely completely erroneous and potentially fraudulent, written by those who were in charge of this visionary.

All the first-hand testimony, taken down in 1917, shows that Lúcia was confused about many things, and even though she was given a secret—one secret—she believed it had to do only with the children themselves. Specifically asked whether people would take note of the secret if they were told and whether it would have an impact on them, Lúcia highly doubted that this might happen.

Yet, from 1941, that is precisely what we are meant to believe: that there were two other powerful secrets revealed by the Virgin to Lúcia, one to do with the need

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for the Soviet Union to convert and another that continued to intrigue thousands if not millions of Christians. It is nothing more, or less, than something that either Lúcia on her own, or with the help of her entourage, concocted after 1935. Seeing that Lúcia was a nun in solitary confinement with no political agenda, the Church is the more likely suspect, using an innocent child and the Virgin Mary as the postergirls for a political campaign.

No one seems to have realised that the entire scheme of the secrets was a game of cat and mouse, part of a deliberate campaign to gain support from Catholics in the fight against communism. The secrets transformed the fight against communism from a political, western agenda to a divine call to arms, the express desire of the Virgin Mary—and, by extension, Jesus—which was not only of vital importance for the future of mankind but also part of the "End Times" that were said to be upon us. Religious, apocalyptic imagery was painted upon an otherwise rather bland political agenda.

The Unthinkable Thought

Is it a coincidence that the first of the most famous series of apparitions occurred on 13 May and that the Pope was shot on the same day of the year? Maybe. But the Pope did not believe so. However, as the assassination attempt was an act of man, the question is whether the date was chosen by accident or by careful planning. If so, the question should be asked whether the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II was part of an extraordinary political framework, the boundaries of which have never been defined.

It is now commonly accepted that the assassination was ordered by the leaders of the Soviet Union, who via the KGB ordered it down to a satellite intelligence agency which eventually managed to recruit an assassin. Although this is the accepted sequence of events, it has never been proven, as such matters are simply hard to prove—they were designed that way. The reason normally given is that Pope John Paul II was always suspected of being a staunch anticommunist and that the Soviet regime realised that this Pope would stop at nothing in his fight against communism. That the Kremlin therefore ordered his assassination was a case of "stop him before he would stop them". Maybe.

Another hypothesis is that someone realised that if the Pope was shot—dead or not—on 13 May, this could be used as part of the worldwide anticommunism campaign that had been in operation around Fátima for several decades. If the Pope survived, it was evident that he would embrace Fátima—which he did. If he died, his

entourage could make him into a martyr and persecute communism—with the full co-operation of the western political powers.

Finally, let us remember that 1981 was a time when the Vatican was embroiled in extraordinary difficulties, most of these political and financial and of its own making. A dead or injured Pope would—and did—completely shift the focus and momentum.

The unthinkable thought, therefore, is whether someone—a noncommunist—decided to use the date of 13 May to try to assassinate the Pope as part of a larger anticommunist religious agenda, one in which the Secrets of Fátima had been used for a number of decades and would continue to be used for several more.

That is speculation, but what is fact is that the Church incarcerated a nun for most of her life and abused her image in a political and religious anticommunist campaign. Lúcia, definitely the image of the Virgin Mary and maybe the Pope himself were used as pawns in a game of charades. ∞

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Endnotes

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