

Our Lady of Fatima

By Greg Witherow

In 1917 World War I was in its fourth year. In May of that year, anguished that his mediation to end the War failed, Pope Benedict XV asked for Mary's intercession for the war to end. A week later, on May 13 Mary appeared to three children in the village of Fatima, Portugal. Mary told the children she would appear on the 13th day of the next six months. During her visitations she gave messages to the children, including what came to be known as the Three Secrets. Her final visitation resulted in the Miracle of the Sun, witnessed by 70,000 people.

Without accepting Catholic dogmas about Mary, **it is very difficult for a non-Catholic (except the Orthodox) to accept Fatima as fact.** For Catholics, the Church has ruled Fatima as "worthy of belief". It is one of only ten Marian apparitions so ruled by the Church. As the era of public revelation ended with the death of the Apostles, such events are categorized as private revelation. Private revelations cannot add to the original deposit of faith. While they may be judged "worthy of belief", belief is not required. In this short essay we will review the Marian events at Fatima and examine the evidence for it.

Angelic Preamble

The three main characters of this story are Lucia (aged 10) and her two cousins Francisco (aged 8) and Jacinta (aged 7), who were brother and sister. They are pictured here:

In 1916 an angel appeared to the children three times while they were caring for their sheep. The angel identified himself as the Angel of Peace. On the third visitation a host and a chalice were suspended in the air as the angel prostrated himself in front of it. He gave the children communion from it but the children did not tell anybody about the events, feeling an inner necessity to keep quiet about them.



Lúcia Santos (*middle*) with her cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto, 1917.

Mary Appears

The next year, on May 13, 1917 the children were again watching the sheep. Although the sky was clear blue they saw two consecutive flashes of lightning. They looked up and saw "a lady, clothed in white, brighter than the sun, radiating a light more clear and intense than a crystal cup filled with sparkling water, lit by burning sunlight."

The children stood there with open mouths as the Lady smiled and said: "Do not be afraid, I will not harm you." Lucia as the oldest asked her where she came from. The Lady pointed to the sky and said: "I come from heaven." Lucia then asked her what she wanted: "I have come to ask you to come here for six months on the 13th day of the month, at this same hour. Later I shall say

who I am and what I desire. And I shall return here yet a seventh time."¹ She promised the War would end soon.

Visitations took place on June 13th, July 13th, August 19th (delayed 6 days as the children were imprisoned), September 13th and October 13th.

The Three Secrets

During the six months, Mary revealed to the children (amongst other things) what have become known as the Three Secrets. Lucia described the first secret as follows:

“Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repulsive likeness to frightful and unknown animals, all black and transparent. This vision lasted but an instant. How can we ever be grateful enough to our kind heavenly Mother, who had already prepared us by promising, in the first Apparition, to take us to heaven. Otherwise, I think we would have died of fear and terror.”²

In the Second Secret Mary said the following:

“You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. 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. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. 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.”³

¹ During this apparition Mary told the children that Francisco and Jacinta would come to heaven soon, but that Lucia would stay on earth a long while to spread the message. (Francisco and Jacinta died in the influenza epidemic of 1919. Lucia passed away on February 13, 2005). They were also told to pray the rosary every day.

² Fatima In Lucia's Own words, Lucia de Jesus (1995), The Ravengate Press, pp101,104

³ Ibid, page 104

The third secret, revealed by the Vatican on June 26, 2000 was as follows:

“After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendor that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’ And we saw in an immense light that is God: ‘something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it’ a Bishop dressed in White ‘we had the impression that it was the Holy Father’. Other Bishops, Priests, Religious men and women going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, Religious men and women, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersion in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.”⁴

The Miracle of the Sun

Mary promised the children she would perform a miracle on her final apparition on October 13. As only the children could see or hear her, this miracle would validate their testimony. What transpired became known as the Miracle of the Sun. It was witnessed by 70,000 people.

“Lucia called out to the crowd to look at the sun. Sometime while Lucia was pointing towards the sun and claiming to have visions of various religious figures in the sky, it is believed that the sun appeared to change colors and to rotate like a fire wheel. Then it seemed as though the sun would crash down to earth. For some the sun appeared to fall from the sky before retreating, for others it zig-zagged. The phenomenon is claimed to have been witnessed by most people in the crowd as well as people many miles away. While the crowd was staring at the sun, Lucia, Francesco, and Jacinta were staring at a lovely sight; a picture of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph... the holy family.”⁵

The View of a Skeptic

Was Fatima a hoax, a superstitious ruse manipulated by the Catholic hierarchy? To pull it off would require a number of things. First, it requires the children made up the stories (an elaborate one). Second, the Miracle of the Sun was a group hallucination; people saw what they wanted to

⁴ The Message of Fatima (2000), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Some think this alludes to the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II in 1981. But this is still an open question and the Church has no official position, only opinions.

⁵ I pulled this text from Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_F%C3%A1tima#cite_note-23

see (images of Mary in toast come to mind). Third, the Church must have doctored the Second Secret as it accurately predicted World War II. We will examine each of these possibilities here.

The Testimony of the Children

In 1917 the Portuguese state was decidedly anti-Catholic and wanted the Fatima events to cease. In August the children were apprehended by the authorities and threatened to be boiled in a pot of oil one by one unless they recanted. They refused. Thrown in with the prisoners of the jail, the children led them in praying the rosary. Separated from their parents and threatened, the **7, 8 and 10 year old children were willing to be martyred in boiling oil**. Would the adult reading this have the courage to do the same? (Think about it). This was no ruse; they believed.

The Testimony of Witnesses

Avelino de Almeida was an anti-Catholic skeptic and reporter for the newspaper O Seculo (The Century). This newspaper was the “paper of record” in Portugal and decidedly anti-Catholic. In fact, Almeida had written a satirical column only a few days earlier ridiculing the whole Fatima phenomena (and in doing so probably adding to the national interest). But standing in the crowd on October 13, Avelino de Almeida had to write the following,

“...one could see the immense multitude turn towards the sun, which appeared free from clouds and at its zenith. It looked like a plaque of dull silver and it was possible to look at it without the least discomfort. It might have been an eclipse which was taking place. But at that moment a great shout went up and one could hear the spectators nearest at hand shouting: "A miracle! A miracle!" Before the astonished eyes of the crowd, whose aspect was Biblical as they stood bareheaded, eagerly searching the sky, **the sun trembled, made sudden incredible movements outside all cosmic laws - the sun "danced" according to the typical expression of the people.**”

The non-believer Avelino saw what the believers saw. Other reports are as follows⁶:

“The sun's disc did not remain immobile. This was not the sparkling of a heavenly body, for it spun round on itself in a mad whirl, when suddenly a clamor was heard from all the people. **The sun, whirling, seemed to loosen itself from the firmament and advance threateningly upon the earth** as if to crush us with its huge fiery weight. The sensation during those moments was terrible.” — Dr. Almeida Garrett, Professor of Natural Sciences at Coimbra University

“The sun, at one moment surrounded with scarlet flame, at another aureoled in yellow and deep purple, seemed to be in an **exceedingly swift and whirling movement**, at times appearing to be loosened from the sky and to be approaching the earth, strongly radiating heat.” — Dr. Domingos Pinto Coelho, writing for the newspaper *Ordem*

⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_of_the_Sun#cite_note-DeMarchib_146-19 for all of the following quotes

“...The silver sun, enveloped in the same gauzy grey light, **was seen to whirl and turn in the circle of broken clouds**... The light turned a beautiful blue, as if it had come through the stained-glass windows of a cathedral, and spread itself over the people who knelt with outstretched hands... people wept and prayed with uncovered heads, in the presence of a miracle they had awaited. The seconds seemed like hours, so vivid were they.” — Reporter for the Lisbon newspaper *O Dia*.

“On that day of October 13, 1917, without remembering the predictions of the children, I was enchanted by a remarkable spectacle in the sky of a kind I had never seen before. **I saw it from this veranda...**” — Portuguese poet Afonso Lopes Vieira. This man was truly a skeptic. He had heard of the predicted event, but didn't bother to show up.

“As if like a bolt from the blue, the clouds were wrenched apart, and the sun at its zenith appeared in all its splendor. It began to revolve vertiginously on its axis, like the most magnificent fire wheel that could be imagined, taking on all the colors of the rainbow and sending forth multicolored flashes of light, producing the most astounding effect. This sublime and incomparable spectacle, which was repeated three distinct times, **lasted for about ten minutes**. The immense multitude, overcome by the evidence of such a tremendous prodigy, threw themselves on their knees.” — Dr. Formigão, a professor priest at the seminary at Santarém

“I feel incapable of describing what I saw. I looked fixedly at the sun, which seemed pale and did not hurt my eyes. Looking like a ball of snow, revolving on itself, **it suddenly seemed to come down in a zig-zag, menacing the earth**. Terrified, I ran and hid myself among the people, who were weeping and expecting the end of the world at any moment.” — Rev. Joaquim Lourenço, describing his boyhood experience in Alburitel, eighteen kilometers from Fatima.

Even if the event could be explained as a natural phenomena (which it can't), such as some combination of an eclipse and St. Elmo's Fire, what are the odds the 10, 8 and 7 year children could predict the exact date of such an event in advance? Can anybody say ZERO?

The Testimony of the Second Secret

Much of the Second Secret dealt with predicting World War II. But a skeptic might scoff at this. Why? The secret was only revealed to the public in 1941, after the war began. Was it fabricated? That possibility seems unlikely for at least three reasons. First, why claim the war would start with Pius XI when September 1, 1939 is widely regarded as the official start of the war, **during the reign of Pius XII**? Second, 1941 was too early to claim an “annihilation of nations” had occurred⁷. Third, as a matter of policy Russia was not spreading its errors in 1941. Stalin had (in opposition to Trotsky) adopted the “Socialism in One Country” policy for the Soviet Union before World War II⁸, focusing resources internally. Only with the Cold War did Russia aggressively spread its Atheistic errors to undermine the West.

⁷World War II killed 70 million people, **more than any event in history**. It made millions refugees and homeless. Atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. Germany temporarily ceased to be a nation being partitioned into 4 zones. The Holocaust killed millions.

⁸ See this website for more background information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism_in_One_Country

The Accuracy of the Second Secret

- Mary stated Russia would spread its errors and persecute the Church. In fact the Communist Revolution commenced in October 1917 and came to completion (after a Civil War) in 1922. With Atheism the central tenet of Communism, great persecution, war and **evil was spread by this godless state during the Cold War.**
- Mary stated “When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father.” **On January 25, 1938 the Aurora Borealis was seen over the whole of Europe** and as far south as Southern Australia, Sicily and Portugal and across the Atlantic to Bermuda and Southern California.
- Mary predicted “a worse [war] will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI”. There is no doubt the prediction of a greater war was accurate. But skeptics will point out Pope Pius XI died on February 1939 and World War II is considered to have begun on September 1, 1939 (during the Pontificate of Pius XII). Was Mary wrong? In fact, a case can be made that the War was set in motion long before September 1, 1939.

Japan invaded China in 1937, then the USSR and Mongolia in 1938. Hitler invaded the Saarland in 1935, Austria in 1938, Sudetenland in 1938 and the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. War raged in the Spanish Civil War and Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Poland was carved up in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. **In fact, the Axis powers had started their wars of conquest long before the Chamberlains of the world acknowledged them.** Mary was right, Chamberlain’s peace was Fiction.

- In 1984 Pope John II consecrated Russia (and the world) to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down. In December of 1991 the Soviet flag was lowered for the last time over the Kremlin. **While the yeast of the Holy Spirit still needs to do its work,** persecution of Christians has ceased in Russia and she no longer foments Atheistic lies. We still wait for the conversion of Russia and a period of peace.

Summary

At Fatima Mary called on the world to repent of its sin. She reminded us that Hell exists and many souls reside there today. Specifically, she called for reparations (prayers and sacrifices) for lost souls, praying the Rosary daily and First Saturday devotions⁹, all practices consistent with authentic Catholic teaching. Yet these things are things foreign to many Catholics today. And Protestants remain unconvinced. Our Lady of Fatima calls us to reconsider.

⁹ On the first Saturday of five successive months, one goes to confession, attends Saturday Mass and receives Holy Communion. Then the Rosary is recited. Then for at least fifteen minutes afterwards one should meditate on the Rosary's mysteries. During Communion one is to be visiting Jesus Christ, who, according to the doctrine of Transubstantiation, is physically present in the Eucharist. The activities of the Five First Saturday’s devotion are different from the same devotions on other days in that all should be done with the intention in the heart of making reparation to the Blessed Mother for blasphemies against her, her name and her holy initiatives.

