

The Two Texts of The Third Secret

A book review of *The Fourth Secret of Fatima* written by Antonio Socci, Italian journalist and essayist. He was a correspondent for the weekly *Il Sabato* and directed the international review *30 Giorni*.

by Edwin Faust

“Precisely so.”
With these two words, the former secretary of Pope John XXIII dispelled the cloud of contradiction that has overshadowed the Vatican’s release of the Third Secret of Fatima. The words were in answer to a question posed by a Fatima expert recounted in Antonio Socci’s *The Fourth Secret of Fatima*. What they affirm is the existence of two separate texts of the Third Secret: one kept at the Holy Office, another in the papal bedroom. Two texts, differing in content: the one containing the published vision; the other, the undisclosed message beginning with the words, “In Portugal the dogma of the faith will always be preserved.” The revelation is astounding, but, as Socci demonstrates, we are compelled by the evidence to accept it as true, and this truth reconciles many of the

contending “facts” that have accumulated through the years since Sister Lucy first committed the Secret to writing in 1944.

Socci, a prominent media figure in Italy, published his book in Italian in 2006. It is now available in English translation and represents perhaps the most important contribution to an understanding of the Third Secret that we now possess. This is so for two reasons. First, Socci is a highly respected media figure, known for his critical appraisal of traditional Catholics. He is, in a word, respectable in the eyes of the mainstream press and the Roman Curia and cannot therefore be readily dismissed. Second, he brings to light crucial information that any fair-minded person is bound to accept and reasoning that is as lucid as it is compelling.

Socci was led to investigate the details surrounding the release of the Third Secret by an initial desire to vindicate the Vatican's claim that the entire contents of the Secret had been published and that the events named in the Fatima prophecies were now a matter of history, not a warning of things yet to transpire. When the Vatican published "The Message of Fatima" on June 26, 2000, the document was received with a great many reservations and, in some cases, outrage and accusation. Far from concluding the history of Fatima, the Vatican appeared to open yet another whole chapter, and perhaps the most controversial one, in the story of the remarkable apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to three shepherd children in Portugal in 1917. Socci began his polemic squarely on the side of the Curia and ended it unexpectedly in the camp of their traditionalist critics. The evidence allowed him no honest alternative.

The Sodano Interpretation

Six weeks prior to the release of the Secret, on May 13, 2000, at the beatification ceremony held at Fatima for two of the seers, Francisco

and Jacinta Marto, Vatican Secretary of State Angelo Cardinal Sodano announced that the text of the Third Secret was soon to be made public. He accompanied this sensational announcement with a curious and startling "interpretation" of the as-yet undisclosed text. In the presence of John Paul II and the world's media, Sodano claimed that the Secret was a prophecy of the attempt on the life of the Pope that had taken place on May 13, 1981. It was on that date that the would-be Turkish assassin Ali Agca wounded the Pope with a single gunshot. The Holy Father recovered, attributing his escape from death to the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima. Sodano both stunned the world with his assertion and ignited a firestorm of controversy. Even prior to the release of the Secret, Sodano's interpretation appeared problematic, if not highly doubtful.

Fatima experts, informed Catholics and the media were struck by what can only be described as the extreme disproportion between the events at Fatima and their supposed culmination as described by Sodano. That the Mother of

God should have appeared and performed the Miracle of the Sun, witnessed by 70,000 people, to guarantee the authenticity of a prophecy that a failed attempt would be made on the life of a Pope in 1981 appeared improbable. Certainly, the most spectacular public miracle in the history of the Church must have some far greater import.

And what was the point of so prolonged a secrecy about such a matter? What purpose could it have served? And if the prophecy were fulfilled in 1981, why did the Vatican not make it known until 2000? And there was also the established fact that Sister Lucy had said repeatedly that the Secret was to be revealed in 1960, at the request of the Blessed Mother, because "it would be clearer then."

How can one reasonably claim that an assassination attempt in 1981 would be clearer in 1960? And, of course, there was the overarching problem that those who had read the Secret and those who had made detailed studies of the Fatima Message agreed in their testimony that the Third Secret concerned dangers to the faith, particularly from apostasy among the hierar-

chy. Sodano made no mention of this.

So weeks before the publication of the text by the Vatican, a great many questions were waiting to be answered. But answers came there none. In fact, the publication of the text of the Secret had been delayed to allow Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to prepare a commentary that was to serve as a "symbolic key" for understanding the vision.

This key was essential to the Vatican's attempt to make the Sodano interpretation plausible, for on the face of it, the scenes described in the published text did not remotely resemble what had occurred in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

The secular media pounced on the discrepancy, concluding that the whole thing was a failed exercise in face-saving by a Church embarrassed by its past and trying to shed the baggage of the miraculous. *The Los Angeles Times* summed up the disclosure of the text and the interpretive key as the Vatican's attempt to "gently debunk Fatima."

The Key That Fits No Lock

Socci points out that in the commentary, Ratzinger says rather pointedly and more than once that he is charged with providing an explanation of Sodano's interpretation, thus discreetly distancing himself from any personal commitment to it. Ratzinger even went so far as to claim in later interviews that the Church has no definitive position on the meaning of the vision contained in the Secret. In other words, one is not bound to accept Sodano's claim. The media, both secular and Catholic traditionalist, most decidedly rejected Sodano's interpretation as well as the Vatican's "symbolic key." The discrepancies were too great to be ignored. The Italian press, as Socci points out, was the most severely critical of the Vatican's version of events. For once, the secular media and traditionalist publications found common ground.

The published Secret details a vision of "a bishop dressed in white" who appears to be the Pope. This bishop passes through a ruined city strewn with corpses, for whom he prays. He ascends a hill at the

top of which is a rough wooden cross. There, he kneels and is killed by soldiers who shoot him with bullets and arrows. After he falls dead, his prelates, priests and religious, along with some lay people, are also killed. The Sodano interpretation refers to a bishop falling "as if dead," a clear departure from the plain image of the vision, but one that fits better with the wounding of John Paul II. The ruined city is glossed over, but the corpses are supposed to be those of the martyrs who died for the faith in 20th Century. But why would the bishop in white pray for martyrs who are already in Heaven? Then, there is the principal problem: the bishop in white is killed, not wounded, and he is struck by soldiers, not a single assassin, and he is struck with bullets and arrows, not a single gunshot from a pistol. And if the Blessed Mother intended to spare the Pope, why did She give the children a vision of a dead Pope? Did She not know that She would intervene to save his life?

The Vatican apparently did not foresee the widespread rejection of their interpretation of the Third Secret as presented in the published

text. Their response was to dispatch the then-Secretary for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Tarcisio Bertone, to the Carmelite convent in Coimbra, where he was to obtain Sister Lucy's confirmation of the Vatican interpretation of the vision. The 2001 interview with the cloistered seer was reported to have lasted hours, yet Bertone's report contains at best only a few minutes of Sister Lucy's actual speech. There was no recording of the interview, visual or audio; no stenographic transcription; no document containing the questions asked and the answers received. In short, we have only Bertone's word for it that Sister Lucy stated that the published text was the authentic Third Secret and that she agreed with the contents of the Vatican commentary on the document. If such were the case, would it not have prevented subsequent skepticism to have recorded, in some fashion, the actual interview? If only for historic reasons, this would have seemed an obviously appropriate thing to do. But Bertone did not do it neither in 2001 nor again in 2003, when he conducted a second interview,

and his critics can reasonably ask why. They have yet to receive a reasonable reply.

The Loose End

There was a residual problem that Bertone also had to address if Fatima were to be consigned to history: the requested Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His methodology was the same he employed in dealing with the Secret: a reported private interview with Sister Lucy in which she confirms the consecration was done. Of course, the stumbling blocks were several. Both Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II had consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, but Sister Lucy was on record as saying that these consecrations did not satisfy the Blessed Mother's request, which specified Russia, not the world. John Paul II acknowledged as much himself. The bishops were also required to join the Pope, if the Blessed Mother's request were to be honored, and that had never occurred, even in the consecrations of the world. But Bertone was undeterred. He claimed that in his 2001 interview with



Antonio Socci, for the first time, in his book, *The Fourth Secret of Fatima*, produces the testimony of a first-hand witness from the inner circle of Pope John XXIII to prove his point. This book, by a friend of Pope Benedict XVI and a former friend of Cardinal Bertone, has caused public sensation and debate.

Sister Lucy, she said that John Paul II's 1984 consecration of the world was "accepted by Heaven" and that it satisfied the Blessed Mother's request for the Consecration of Russia. If Bertone were to be believed, this would mean that Sister Lucy had contradicted her earlier statements that the 1984 consecration did not meet the terms of Mary's request. The question of the participation of the bishops was not addressed, nor was the conversion of Russia and the period of world peace that Mary had promised would follow the consecration, both of which had conspicuously not occurred. There was yet another problem.

Bertone, in what might be

presumed an attempt to bury Fatima once and for all, said Sister Lucy categorically affirmed that she had no new revelations or apparitions other than those that were already known. This statement was supposedly made in 2001. But if that were the case, how could Sister Lucy have given Bertone her assurance that Heaven had accepted the 1984 consecration as satisfying the Blessed Mother's request? How could she have known this? In 2005, the day after Sister Lucy died, Bertone tied up this loose end by telling an Italian newspaper that the seer had received a previously undisclosed revelation that the 1984 event satisfied the demand for the Consecration

of Russia. It apparently had slipped his mind until then.

As the evidence mounted and the questions multiplied, Socci began to dig ever deeper, a course of action that cost him the friendship of Bertone and drew him ever closer to the positions of traditional Catholics whom he had formerly discounted.

Then, the bombshell.

The Key That Fits All Locks

Socci became familiar with the research of a Fatima expert named Dr. Solideo Paolini. In the course of Paolini's investigations, he had recourse to Archbishop Loris Capovilla, who had served as secretary to Pope John XXIII and who was present when that Pope opened the envelope containing the Third Secret. Capovilla was shy of Paolini's more direct questions, but promised during an in-person interview that he would send him, from among his papers, something that would contain "a phrase." Along with this cryptic statement, Capovilla also suggested that Paolini read the "The Message of Fatima," the Vatican's publication of the Third Secret and its accompanying documents.

Surely, thought Paolini, he must be aware that I would already be quite familiar with those documents. Why would he suggest that I read them?

When Capovilla's papers were delivered to him, Paolini found one bearing official seals that recounted the opening of the Third Secret by Pope Paul VI on June 27, 1963. Capovilla was consulted that day by the Substitute Secretary of State Msgr. Angelo Dell'Acqua, who telephoned him to ask where the Third Secret was kept. Capovilla told him it was in a particular drawer in the papal bedroom. It had been kept in the papal bedroom by Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII. Pope Paul obviously read the Secret that day, for he asked Capovilla in a meeting the following day, June 28, why his name was on the envelope in the papal bedroom containing the Third Secret. Capovilla explained that John XXIII had requested that he make a note on the envelope.

It then dawned on Paolini that Capovilla's account contradicted that contained in the Vatican's official version of events published with the text of the Secret on June 26, 2000 – the document

Capovilla had mysteriously suggested Paolini look at after he had promised to send him "a phrase." According to the Vatican's "The Message of Fatima," Pope Paul first read the Secret on March 27, 1965, after sending for the envelope kept at the Holy Office. Paolini, perplexed, telephoned Capovilla, pointing out the discrepancy. After some evasions, Capovilla said: "But I am right: perhaps the Bertone envelope is not the same as the Capovilla envelope." Paolini interrupted him. "Therefore, both dates are correct because there are two texts of the Third Secret?" After a brief pause, Capovilla answered, "Precisely so."

Two texts? Was there any evidence to support Capovilla's claim? Yes. And oddly enough, it appeared in the *Washington Post*. In the newspaper's analysis of the controversy surrounding publication of the Third Secret, it reported in its July 1, 2000 edition that the Pope's spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said that John Paul II had read the Third Secret in 1978, soon after he was elected Pope, but Bertone said John Paul II read the Secret for the first time in the hos-

pital, having sent to the Holy Office for the envelope, which was delivered to him on July 18, 1981. Could the Secret read by the Pope in 1978 have been the text kept in the papal apartment and the one read in 1981 the text committed to the Holy Office? Bertone inadvertently supports that conclusion by another mix-up in dates. He says that John Paul II ("spurred by the contents of the Secret") decided to consecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which he planned for a ceremony at St. Mary Major on June 7. But then, according to Bertone, the Pope would not have seen the text of the Secret until July 18.

There is also no record of any request by John Paul II for the text of the Secret from the Holy Office in 1978. The Pope is also reported to have made some rather dramatic references to dire events predicted in the Third Secret during a visit to Fulda in 1980, reported in the German press. This would have been a year before he had read the Holy Office text. Assuming the German report is not completely fabricated (an impossibility), from where did the Pontiff obtain his knowledge

of the contents of the Secret if not from a text other than that entrusted to the Holy Office, i.e., the one in the Capovilla envelope known to have been kept in the papal bedroom?

The Reason For Two Texts

But the large question remains: why two texts? To answer this, some other contradictions must be addressed. When the Vatican requested that the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima deliver to Rome all documents relating to Fatima, including Sister Lucy's written account of the Third Secret, Monsignor Venancio, then auxiliary bishop of Leiria, admitted examining the envelope containing the Secret under a bright light. He reports that he saw one sheet of paper containing about 25 lines of handwriting. But the text published by the Vatican, with the photocopy of Sister Lucy's original, comprises about 62 lines of text. How can this discrepancy be reconciled? Sister Lucy herself gives us a clue. She writes to the Bishop of Leiria that she has complied with the request to write down the Secret and says that it is "in a sealed envelope, and that is in

the notebooks."

We also have the testimony of Cardinal Ottaviani, former head of the Holy Office, who, in a press conference in 1967, also says that Sister Lucy wrote the Secret on a single sheet of paper. He also publicly stated that the Third Secret was 25 lines of text. If this is so, what text was published by the Vatican as the Third Secret in June 2000? The account of the vision, obviously, which came from the notebooks. But what of the single sheet of paper with the 25 lines? That, we have not seen.

And there is yet one more mystery that the existence of two texts resolves: what happened to the part of the Secret that begins "In Portugal, the dogma of the faith will always be preserved"? It would seem that this must be the text kept in the drawer in the papal bedroom and not published in the June 26, 2000, Vatican document "The Message of Fatima". This is the text that deals with what then-Cardinal Ratzinger described in 1984 as "dangers threatening the faith and the life of the Christian and therefore of the world." The text released by the Vatican in 2000 says noth-

ing of these matters, nor does it contain any words of the Blessed Mother, which the Third Secret has been repeatedly acknowledged to contain. Even the communique issued by the Vatican in 1960 announced that the words of the Blessed Mother to the seers contained in the Third Secret may never be revealed. There are no words of the Blessed Mother in the text released by the Vatican.

If, as seems certain, the single sheet of paper deals with Our Lady's words about the failure of the hierarchy and the terrible events that may await the Church and the world as a consequence, then it is understandable that those who have concealed the message should want to shield themselves from public exposure. Why should the hierarchy have wished to conceal the message in the first place? We cannot know for certain. Perhaps, like John XXIII, some nurtured doubts about the supernatural origin of the Fatima Message, though it is difficult to find any justification for such a position. Perhaps, some preferred their own prudence to the counsels of the Mother of God. Spiritual blindness is

the self-inflicted punishment of those who refuse Divine guidance. But how many souls will these blind shepherds lead into the pit?

Socci's book provoked a response by the Vatican in the form of a book by Bertone, which purports to defend his position but, from all accounts, evades all the salient points raised in *The Fourth Secret*. How could it be otherwise?

Socci has done an invaluable service to the truth, to the Catholic Church and to the world, especially if his exposé prompts a full and honest disclosure from the Vatican of the complete Third Secret. We know that had Our Lady's requests been heeded, World War II might have been avoided, along with the spread of worldwide communism and the horrors that attended it. What manner of vast and unimaginable human suffering—not to mention the greatest horror, the loss of souls—might be averted if, even at this late date, the Church and its Pontiff were to bow before Our Lady of Fatima, do the will of Her Son and accept the great mercies that are offered us? **FC**