

The Miracle of the Sun

by Peter Chojnowski, Ph.D.

This is an excerpt from the talk given by Dr. Chojnowski at *The Fatima Challenge Conference* about the Miracle of the Sun that took place at Fatima on October 13, 1917.

As Catholics who value and understand the validity of reason and evidence, we must ask ourselves: What lends credibility to this Miracle of the Sun? When we ask this question and begin to do the research, we are amazed at how much evidence there is to support the validity of the claims of this miracle. There are so many contemporary testimonies. I can mention only some of the basic sources which testify to the truth of this miracle.

The contemporary press is the first of these sources. Indeed, it was the anti-clerical Masonic press in Portugal which reported on the Miracle first.

When looking for reliable sources concerning historical events, it is always best to consult those who have no "bias" or "vested interest" in the events. If they testify to the truth of the historical claim, the claim is bolstered immeasurably. If, however, the witnesses are profession-

ally hostile and yet testify to the truth of the claims of their opponents, the testimony is of incalculable worth.

We have this kind of testimony in the account of Avelino de Almeida, the Editor-in-Chief of *O Seculo*, a liberal, anti-clerical, and Masonic daily in Lisbon. Mr. de Almeida was actually a witness to the events at the Cova da Iria.

To this testimony of the anti-Catholics, we add the testimony of the Church. The official investigation into the miracle itself began in November 1917. Monsignor Vidal, who was directing the diocese of Lisbon, instructed the parish priest to launch an immediate investigation into the case. So the Church, from the beginning, was investigating the claims and interviewing the witnesses. This investigation came to fruition when Bishop da Silva of Fatima officially approved the apparition as worthy of belief. This could not have been difficult, since, unlike most historical

events, the events on October 13th at Fatima had innumerable witnesses, whose testimony agree, and who have left innumerable documents.

These innumerable accounts of the events that October day were meticulously documented from the beginning until our own time. These accounts of the events came out in the decades when eyewitnesses were still alive, leaving open the possibility that the accounts could be refuted by the eyewitnesses. They could have objected when the reports came out, but no one did. In fact, on the 60th anniversary of the Miracle of the Sun, there were some 30 eyewitnesses who could still testify to the events on that day.

What also adds to the veracity of the claims concerning the Miracle of the Sun is the fact that the miracle itself was witnessed by some 70,000 people that day. Their testimony is unanimous. However, who were these witnesses, other than our Masonic newspaperman Avelino de Almeida? Were there only Portuguese Catholic peasants who attended this anticipated miracle?

The answer here is, of

course, no. The Portuguese historian, Leopoldo Nuñez, who was present on the scene on October 13th, says: "At the moment of the great miracle there were present some of the most illustrious men of letters, in the arts and the sciences, and almost all were unbelievers coming out of curiosity, led by the prediction of the seers. Even the Minister of Education of the Masonic government was there."

Here we have Our Lady, at the request of Lucy, proving the authenticity of Her Fatima Message to the unbelievers.

We continue the testimony given us by Avelino de Almeida, the professional anti-Catholic witness. It is worth noting that the editors of the other anti-clerical newspapers attacked de Almeida for his report. But even in the face of such criticism by his comrades he did not retreat from his testimony. In fact, 15 days after his original account of the Miracle, he published another story about the events, this time illustrating it with 12 pictures taken of the crowd in the midst of the Miracle of the Sun. Throughout this article, de Almeida just kept repeating, "I saw it ... I saw it ... I saw it."

Eyewitness Testimony

Let us follow the account of Avelino de Almeida, adding to it that of another eyewitness – Dr. Almeida Garrett, professor of the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Coimbra – obtained by Fr. Formigao.

The story for de Almeida begins on October 12, 1917, when he arrives at Fatima to “see” the non-fulfillment of the prophecy of a miracle. Here, the unbeliever – who was obviously impressed with the faith of the believers, says: “On the road, we encounter the first groups which are on their way to the holy place, a good 13 miles away ... Men and women are for the most part barefoot, the latter carrying their shoes in bags on their heads, while the men lean on thin sticks and are also prudently armed with umbrellas. Apparently indifferent to what is going on around them they do not seem to notice the countryside nor their fellow-travelers, but murmur the Rosary as they go, immersed in thought ... A woman recites the first part of the *Ave Maria* and immediately her companions continue the second part in cho-

rus. They move rhythmically and rapidly in order to reach the place of the apparitions by nightfall. Here, under the stars they will sleep, keeping the first and best places near the little tree.”

What a moving account. He must have been profoundly moved by what he saw. We can only wonder about his attitude. Perhaps it was one of pity for what he thought were the pathetic hopes of the people?

The whole night it rained. This was a change in the weather from what had occurred earlier in the autumn season. It was as if Our Lady was perfectly stage managing the scene to emphasize the miracle. The rain transformed the dusty roads into muddy quagmires. What does de Almeida say concerning the response of the people to these adverse conditions? “They did not lose hope and they did not forget the cause for which they came.” Soldiers, armed with pointed bayonets, were placed around the top of the mountain to prevent crowds from assembling.

The day of October 13th arrived. De Almeida continues: “By 10 o’clock the sky was completely hidden behind

the clouds and the rain began to fall in earnest. Swept by the strong wind and beating upon the faces of the people, it soaked the pilgrims, often without protection against the weather, to the marrow of their bones ... But no one complained or turned back ... Hours of waiting ... The great mass of people congregate round the oak tree which, according to the children, is Our Lady's pedestal."

"At Noon"

What amazes us about the Miracle of the Sun is the specificity of Our Lady; just as God Himself is so specific in all that He does. God does not create, sustain, or guide "the general." Our Lady said in July of 1917 that She would perform a miracle at mid-day on the 13th of October. But it was after noon, how can we say that Our Lady's promise was being fulfilled? Here it is necessary to say that the Portuguese government, due to its belligerency with France and Britain during World War I, decided that the clocks were to be set 90 minutes ahead so that Portugal would be in the same time zone as her fellow belligerents. On October 13th, 1917, 1:30 p.m. was actually

mid-day, sun time.

The hour of the miracle approached. The presence of the seers is announced shortly before the scheduled time of the apparition and miracle; they arrive about one-half an hour early. The little girls Jacinta and Lucy, crowned with flowers, are led to the place where the platform has been erected. When Lucy asks them – no, orders them – to shut their umbrellas in the drenching rain, something that goes against intuition, the order is transmitted and executed right away without resistance. Then they wait. What if there was no miracle? But there was.

Near the time of 1:30 p.m., a priest, who stood by the children and had been waiting since the evening before, began to grow impatient. "Look, it's mid-day now. Our Lady does not lie. Well, well." After a few minutes with nothing happening except the rain pouring down on the uncovered thousands, the priest again looked at his watch and said, "Look, its mid-day now. Our Lady doesn't lie. It's past mid-day. You see it's all a delusion. Run along all of you. Go away. It's a delusion." In response to this skepticism

and doubt, Lucy refused to go. It was mid-day, so the priest began to push the three children away from the site. Then the simple faith of Lucy took over. She began to cry and said: "If anyone wants to go, I shall stay where I am. Our Lady said She would come. She came the other times and She will come this time too."

At that moment Lucy looked to the east and said to Jacinta: "Jacinta, kneel down. Our Lady is coming. I saw the lightning." According to Sister Lucy's account, the impatient priest did not say another word and the children never saw him again. It was at this moment that the miracle commenced. Here are the stages of the Miracle of the Sun:

1) The Rain Stops

What is truly amazing about this miracle is that Our Lady perfectly "stage managed" the entire event. Each aspect of the miracle was directed to accentuate the miraculous nature of the phenomenon. Dr. Almeida Garrett reports, "The sky, which had been overcast all day, suddenly clears up; the rain stops and it looks like

the sun is about to fill with light the countryside that the wintry morning had made so gloomy." This sudden change of weather surprised all of the witnesses. Dr. Pereira Gens simply reports, "The rain suddenly stopped"; it "suddenly stopped," of course, at the exact moment which had been predicted for the miracle to take place.

2) The Vision of the Sun

Why "the vision of the sun"? Because at this moment, contrary to the normal phenomenon, everyone – and this is a unanimous testimony without contradiction – could look at the sun clearly, directly, and without wincing or closing their eyes. No one needed to turn away. This is what the editor of *O Seculo* says: "Then they saw a unique spectacle, [an] unbelievable spectacle for anyone who did not witness it. From the road ... one could see the immense multitude turn towards the sun, which appeared free from clouds and in its zenith. It resembles a dull silver disc, and it is possible to look at it without the least discomfort."

Dr. Garrett,¹ however, had this observation: "I ... saw it [the sun] as a disc with a clean

cut rim, luminous and shining, but which did not hurt the eyes. I do not agree with the comparison which I have heard made in Fatima – that of a dull silver disc. It was a clearer, richer, brighter color, having something of the luster of a pearl ... I felt it to be a living body ... It looked like a glazed wheel made of mother of pearl ... It was a remarkable fact that one could fix one's eyes on this brazier of light and heat without any pain in the eyes or blinding of the retina."

The light was visible 30 miles away, and appeared as a great red flash 16 miles down the road, in Leiria, where the angle of view was such that the climax of the miracle, the "falling", was not seen.

3) The Dance of the Sun

One would think that this would be enough, being able to look at the sun without having to turn away, but Our Lady wanted to demonstrate Her power in a more convincing way. So this sun that all the witnesses could observe without irritation "danced". This was called by many of the common folk present, "The Dance of the Sun."

De Almeida says concern-

ing this "dance": "The sun trembled, the sun made sudden incredible movements outside all cosmic laws – the sun 'danced' according to the typical expression of the people. It shook and trembled; it seemed like a wheel of fire."

Dr. Garrett adds: "The sun's disc did not remain immobile. This was not the sparkling of a heavenly body, for it spun round upon itself, it made a whirl." Also, "It spun like a firewheel, taking on all the colors of the rainbow ... It looked like a ball of snow, revolving upon itself."

According to Ti Marto, the father of Jacinta and Francisco: "At a certain moment the sun seemed to stop and then began to move and dance ... However, the sun stops, only to begin its strange dance all over again after a brief interruption, whirling upon itself, giving the impression of approaching or receding."

This "dance," which was seen by the 70,000 witnesses, was actually repeated three times during the course of the 10 minute-long miracle.

4) All the Colors of the Rainbow

With the Dance of the Sun something else began to hap-

pen. The landscape, and everything in it, began to take on, in succession, all the colors of the rainbow. The colors have been characterized as “monochromatic sectors” which appeared to revolve and to subsist without any known support. In other words, the colors were not prismatic but individual rays of brilliant color.

Dr. Garrett testifies: “During the solar phenomenon ... there were changes of color in the atmosphere ... I looked first at the nearest objects and then extended my glance further afield as far as the horizon, I saw everything an amethyst color. Objects around me, the sky and the atmosphere, were of the same color ... Soon I heard a peasant who was near me shout out in tones of stupefaction: **‘Look, that lady is all yellow!’** And in fact everything both near and far had changed to yellow. People looked as if they were suffering jaundice ... My own hand was of the same color.”

The exact same report comes from another witness, Maria do Carmo: “The sun took on all the colors of the rainbow. Everything took on the same colors: our faces, our

clothes, the earth itself.”

5) The Falling of the Sun

Now we come to the part of the Miracle that made many of those present on the scene of the Cova da Iria believe that the world was ending – such was the fearsomeness of the experience. This was clearly Our Lady’s warning that the Message of Fatima was not only a “message,” but, also, a very grave warning. What happened at that stage of the Miracle is called the “falling” of the sun.

“Then suddenly, one heard a clamor, a cry of anguish breaking from all the people. The sun, whirling wildly, seemed to loosen itself from the firmament and advance threateningly upon the earth as if to crush us with its huge and fiery weight. The sensations during these moments were terrible.”

Many were confessing their sins aloud and crying to Heaven for mercy. Parents were throwing themselves protectingly over their children. Some tried to run from the fire. Many were just paralyzed with fear.

Again, “The sun began to move and dance until it seemed that it was being de-

tached from the sky and was falling on us. It was a terrible moment! It seemed like a wheel of fire that was about to fall on the people.”

Alfredo de Silva Santos reports: “The sun began to move and at a certain moment appeared to be detached from the sky and about to hurtle upon us like a wheel of flame.”

Even though many thousands were expecting imminent death and were making their final preparations for that event, the Miracle was not the end but a warning and an indication of the mercy of God and the intercessory power of the Mother of God – because the sun returned to the heavens.

6) Everybody's Clothes Were Dry

Then the final miracle, the last manifestation of the intimate knowledge and love that God and His Blessed Mother has for mankind and for the pious faithful. Many of the witnesses, after panic was followed by sudden relief, would have thought the whole thing a dream if *each one* had not had a personal *tangible* evidence that they had been witnesses of

an “explosion of the supernatural.”

The captain of the regiment of soldiers on the mountain that day – with orders to prevent the gathering of the crowd – was converted instantly. Apparently so were hundreds of other unbelievers.

Fr. Lourenço: “This enormous multitude was drenched, for it had rained unceasingly since dawn. But – though this may appear incredible – after the great miracle everyone felt comfortable, and found his garments quite dry, a subject of general wonder ... The truth of this fact has been guaranteed with the greatest sincerity by dozens and dozens of persons of absolute trustworthiness, whom I have known intimately from childhood, and who are still alive [1937].”

We have it from Dr. Pereira Gens: “I still remember the delicious sensation that this warm caress of the sun gave me ... I [felt] my clothes almost dry now, although they were all wet a few moments ago.” 

Note:

1. Almeida Garrett was the professor of the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Coimbra.