

## Chapter 5

### A Disastrous Interview

With the doubts of the faithful continuing to mount, on October 26, 2001—a few weeks after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001—the story on the Third Secret “broke wide open,” as the reporters say. *Inside the Vatican* news service (along with various Italian newspapers) ran an article entitled: “The Secret of Fatima: More to Come?” The article reported: “News has just emerged that Sister Lucia dos Santos, the last surviving Fatima visionary, several weeks ago sent Pope John Paul II a letter reportedly warning him that his life is in danger. According to Vatican sources, the letter, claiming that events spoken of in the ‘Third Secret’ of Fatima had not yet occurred, was delivered sometime after September 11 to John Paul by the bishop emeritus [retired] of Fatima, Alberto Cosme do Amaral.”

When asked about the letter, the Bishop of Fatima at the time, Serafim de Sousa Ferreira e Silva, “did not deny that Sister Lucia had sent a letter to the Pope, but said [drawing a very precise distinction] ‘there are no letters from the seer that express fear for the life of the Pope.’” *Inside the Vatican* further revealed that “Sources have also suggested that Sister Lucia’s letter encourages the Pope to fully reveal the Third Secret,” and that Sister Lucia’s letter to the Pope “is said to contain this warning: ‘Soon there will be great upheaval and punishment.’”

The *Inside the Vatican* article further reported that an Italian diocesan priest, Father Luigi Bianchi, “claims to have met Sister Lucia dos Santos last week at her cloistered Carmelite convent in Coimbra, Portugal.” Echoing the suspicions of Mother Angelica and Catholics everywhere, Father Bianchi “speculated on the possibility that the Vatican *did not reveal the full secret* to avoid creating panic and anxiety in the population; to not scare them.”

Concerning Cardinal Sodano’s “interpretation” of the Secret as a prophecy of the 1981 attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II, Father Bianchi stated: “The message doesn’t speak only about an

attempt on the pontiff, but speaks of 'a Bishop dressed in White' who walks amongst the ruins and bodies of murdered men and women ... This means that the Pope will have to suffer greatly, that some nations will disappear, that many people will die, that we must defend the West from becoming Islamicized. That is what is happening in these days."

*Inside the Vatican* was careful to point out that Sister Lucia "is not allowed to speak with anyone who has not received prior permission from the Vatican ..." Accordingly, the magazine hedged its report by stating that "it is not immediately clear whether Bianchi received that approval, circumvented the need for it, or did not actually meet Sister Lucia as he maintains." But no one, including Sister Lucia herself, ever denied that the meeting with Father Bianchi took place.

That at least some of *Inside the Vatican's* sources are within the Curia itself was suggested by Cardinal Ratzinger's response to these developments. The magazine quoted him as having said that the "recent rumors of a letter are only the continuation of 'an old polemic fed by certain people of dubious credibility,' with the objective of 'destabilizing the internal equilibrium of the Roman Curia and of troubling the people of God.'" Notice, however, that neither did Cardinal Ratzinger actually deny the existence of the letter from Sister Lucia to the Pope.

Cardinal Ratzinger's remark was a window into the effect the "Fatimist" polemic was having on open minds within the Vatican. How could people of "dubious credibility" destabilize the "internal equilibrium of the Roman Curia"? If their credibility were so dubious, the Roman Curia would hardly be destabilized by anything they had to say. And just who were these people of "dubious credibility"? *Inside the Vatican* suggested that Cardinal Ratzinger might have been referring to Father Nicholas Gruner. But where was the evidence that Father Gruner was of "dubious credibility," as opposed to a veritable font of accurate information on the subject, much of which Socci himself has studied in reaching the conclusions he did? And what about René Laurentin? What about Mother Angelica? What about Father Bianchi? What about *Inside the Vatican* itself, whose editor was, if anything, beholden to the Vatican apparatus, as the very name of his magazine suggests? What about the millions of other Catholics who were already harboring the well-founded suspicion that the Vatican had not been entirely forthcoming in its claim that the prophecies of the Message of Fatima, including the Third Secret, "belong to the past,"

and that its warning of a great chastisement of the Church and the world need no longer concern us? Does any serious Catholic really believe that, given the state of the world today?

Catholics the world over continued to wonder what had happened to the words which follow the Virgin's momentous opening declaration: "In Portugal the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc." Why had the collaborators in *Message* run away from this phrase by removing it from the Message of Fatima and consigning it to a footnote? What had happened to the missing words of the Virgin?

*What sort of interview is this?*

In the face of these and other questions that would not go away, Archbishop Bertone conducted another unrecorded "conversation" with Sister Lucia—like the one of April 27, 2000, in which Lucia had allegedly denied ever hearing of the "express order of Our Lady" she had inscribed on the envelope containing the Secret. This second "conversation" took place on November 17, 2001, but was not revealed for more than a month. On December 21, 2001 *L'Osservatore Romano* published Bertone's brief communiqué concerning the interview, entitled "Meeting of His Excellency Mons. Tarcisio Bertone with Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart." This was followed by a translation in *L'Osservatore Romano's* English edition.<sup>172</sup>

The communiqué states that the purported interview was conducted in the presence of Bertone himself and "Rev. Luis Kondor, SVD, Vice-Postulator of the cause of Bl. Francisco and Bl. Jacinta, and of the Prioress of the Carmelite Convent of St. Teresa." That is, Sister Lucia was questioned while being surrounded by authority figures. But no transcript, audiotape or videotape of the two-hour session has been produced, and neither Father Kondor nor the Prioress has ever attested to what was allegedly said by the seer. Although the communiqué claims Bertone and Sister Lucia conversed for "more than two hours," Bertone had provided only his summary of the alleged conversation, sprinkled with a few words attributed to Lucia herself.

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<sup>172</sup>See "Incontro di S.E. Mons. Tarcisio Bertone con Suor Maria Lucia de Jesus e do Coração Imaculado," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Italian edition), December 21, 2001, p. 4; and "Archbishop Bertone met Sr. Maria Lucia: Convent of Coimbra, Portugal, 17 November 2001", *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), January 9, 2002, p. 7.

*Sister Lucia “agrees” she’s a fake*

The communiqué immediately undermined its own credibility with the following assertion: “Going on to discuss the problem of the third part of the secret of Fatima, she [Sister Lucia] says that she has read attentively and meditated upon the booklet published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [i.e., *Message*], and confirms *everything* it says.” For the reasonably skeptical observer, this claim was simply too much to accept. When a Vatican functionary, no matter what his rank, comes out of a locked convent and declares that a 94-year-old nun inside “confirms everything” in a 44-page document he has co-authored (*Message*), reasonable people have the right to expect a bit more by way of corroboration—especially when, as we saw in the previous chapter, that document politely suggests that the nun in question might, more or less, have concocted a pious fable. On these grounds alone one would be justified in suspecting that the latest secret Sister Lucia interview was but another attempt to manipulate a captive and obedient witness, who had yet to be allowed to speak at length to the faithful in her own unfiltered words.

What did Bertone and Sister Lucia discuss for more than two hours, given that the entire communiqué—most of which did not contain *any* alleged words of the seer—could be read aloud in about three minutes? By way of comparison, a one-hour address delivered at a normal rate of speech would require some 14 single-spaced typewritten pages to transcribe; a two-hour address would require about 28 pages, or approximately 14,000 words. Yet Bertone’s communiqué concerning an alleged two-hour interview of the seer had provided *a mere 463 words* purportedly from her own mouth, most of which had nothing to do with the matter at issue.<sup>173</sup> These 463 words included *a verbatim quotation of 165 words* from Cardinal Ratzinger’s theological commentary, which Sister Lucia had obviously not recited from memory during the alleged “conversation” with Bertone. Yet those 165 words are quoted as if they had been uttered by Sister Lucia herself, indicating that the purported “conversation” was really a cut-and-paste document designed to state a predetermined conclusion.

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<sup>173</sup>This discussion employs both the *Vatican Information Service* English translation of the communiqué and that provided by the *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition of January 9, 2002, as corrected where errors in translation from the Italian are apparent.

*Two hours – nine words!*

And what about the burning issue that had supposedly required this special mission to Coimbra to speak with Sister Lucia: the doubts that had been raised about the completeness of the Vatican's disclosure of the Third Secret? Amazingly enough, out of more than two hours of alleged conversation with Lucia, Bertone's communiqué quotes a grand total of *nine words* on the subject, which are as follows: "Everything has been published; there are no more secrets."

The question that allegedly elicited this answer was not provided. Instead, Bertone's communiqué declared: "To whoever imagines that some part of the secret has been hidden she replied: ..."—followed by the nine quoted words. Replied to what? What *exactly* was Sister Lucia asked about the Vatican's disclosure of the Third Secret? What was the full context of the question and the answer? And why was Sister Lucia not asked the one question millions of people around the world were asking: *Where are the words of Our Lady* following the phrase "In Portugal the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc."? Notice that here, at the very crux of the matter, we are not shown that Sister Lucia was asked even one precise question, such as:

- What are the words of Our Lady following "In Portugal the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved etc."?
- Did the Virgin explain the vision of the "Bishop dressed in white" in her own words at any time?
- Does the Third Secret include a separate text in which the Virgin explains the vision, and if so, where is this text?
- What about the testimony of numerous witnesses (including the Bishop of Fatima and Cardinal Ottaviani) that the Third Secret was written on a single sheet of paper, comprising 25 lines, as distinct from the four sheets on which the vision was written, comprising 62 lines?

All such particulars were studiously avoided. We are not even given the wording of the one question that *was* asked. These omissions could not be more telling. Recall here Bertone's evasive yet highly revealing answer to a query about the "etc" during the press conference in June 2000: "It is difficult to say if it [the "etc"] refers to the second or the third part of the secret... it seems to me

that it pertains to the second.”<sup>174</sup> Thus Bertone was fully aware of the “etc” issue when he conducted the “interview” in November 2001, yet he failed to ask Sister Lucia herself whether the “etc” pertains to the third or the second part of the Great Secret even though he had a golden opportunity to settle the very question on which the “Fatimists” had focused so effectively. Or, if Bertone did ask Lucia about the matter, he failed to report her answer. This strange behavior is understandable *only* if there is something to hide.

Consider also that the nine words Bertone quoted, allegedly uttered during an unrecorded conversation behind closed doors in November 2001, were literally *the last words* “Sister Lucia” *would ever be allowed to say on the subject before her death*. As *Catholic World News* noted: “Apart from that statement, which was released by the Vatican in December 2001, Sister Lucia maintained her public silence until her death in February 2005.”<sup>175</sup> What is to account for the continued “inexplicable gagging” of Sister Lucia even *after* the Third Secret, so Bertone claims, had been totally revealed? If there was nothing to hide, if “everything has been published; there are no more secrets,” why was Sister Lucia not free to speak after June 26, 2000?

*Does Lucia “confirm” Sodano’s “interpretation”?*

An additional 14 words are attributed to Sister Lucia concerning Cardinal Sodano’s “interpretation” of the vision as a depiction of the 1981 assassination attempt. The purported question and answer are as follows:

“Is it true that speaking to Rev. Luigi Bianchi and Rev. José dos Santos Valinho, you cast doubt on the interpretation of the third part of the ‘secret’?”

Sr Lucia answered: “That is not true. I fully confirm the interpretation made in the Jubilee Year [2000].”

The faithful could hardly be expected to believe that Lucia had freely and willingly “confirmed” *Message’s* claim that the vision published in 2000 “uses images which Lucia may have

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<sup>174</sup>Quoted in Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 89.

<sup>175</sup>“Fatima Secrets Fully Disclosed, Cardinal Bertone Insists,” *Catholic World News*, May 14, 2007 at <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=51121>.

seen in devotional books and which draw their inspiration from longstanding intuitions of faith."<sup>176</sup>—in other words, that Sister Lucia “confirmed” that she made up the vision in her own head. Nor was it reasonable to believe that Lucia “confirmed” that the vision depicts the 1981 assassination attempt when her own purported letter to the Pope on May 12, 1982, published in *Message*, demolished Sodano’s “interpretation” by saying *nothing* about the attempt *a year after it happened*, but rather warned that “we have *not yet seen* the complete fulfillment of the final part of this prophecy.”

But even if we assume for the sake of argument that Lucia uttered the suspiciously legalistic phrase “I fully confirm” during the purported interview, we have been deprived of the context of the relevant question and answer as there is no independent record of the encounter. How do we know that Sister Lucia spoke at all as opposed to merely “agreeing” to an answer that had already been written out for her—like the 165 words from Cardinal Ratzinger’s theological commentary that Bertone has coming out of Sister Lucia’s mouth? How do we know that Lucia was not pressured into giving the answer Bertone wanted? Was she, for instance, asked the same question repeatedly until she gave the “right” answer? Was it suggested to her that the Pope himself expected Lucia to agree with Sodano as a matter of loyalty to the papal office? Was Lucia, a habitually obedient cloistered nun, told that it was her duty to concur with Sodano and “the Pope”? Was she otherwise subjected to subtle or not so subtle pressure that would be apparent if we had a video tape, an audio tape or even a transcript to review?

That we ought to be dubious of Bertone’s account is, in the end, shown by Bertone himself. In his book attacking Antonio Socci, published in May 2007, Bertone gives this answer to the question whether Lucia “accepted the interpretation” of the vision by Cardinal Sodano: “Certainly, even if *not in these terms*. She insisted on the force of prayer and on the conviction, like granite, that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary cannot be deaf to our supplications.”<sup>177</sup> Now, there is a very great difference between “I fully confirm” (2001 version) and “not in these terms” (2007 version)! The latter phrase means, in fact, simply *no*. For this reason alone, we may reject as unreliable what Bertone claims Lucia told him in November

<sup>176</sup>*The Message of Fatima (Message)*, p. 42.

<sup>177</sup>Bertone, Cardinal Tarcisio, *L’Ultima Veggente di Fatima (Last Visionary of Fatima)* (Milano: Rai and Eri Rizzoli, 2007), p. 65 (hereafter “Last Visionary”).

2001 concerning Sodano's "interpretation" of the vision or indeed anything else. Moreover, in Chapter 8 I will discuss how, all told, Bertone has given *five different versions* of what he claims Lucia told him concerning Sodano's interpretation, as well as multiple versions of other things he claims Lucia said. No wonder we have never been presented with an independent record of Bertone's interrogation of the seer.

### *Glaring Omissions*

Finally, it appears that during the alleged conversation at Coimbra, Bertone *never asked Sister Lucia about her letter to the Pope* as reported by Father Bianchi and *Inside the Vatican*, nor was she asked about her face-to-face meeting with Father Bianchi, during which they discussed Sodano's "interpretation" of the Secret. Likewise, Bertone once again conspicuously failed to ask Sister Lucia to authenticate the purported "Letter of 8 November 1989," which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was Bertone's *only evidence* for the claim that Sister Lucia "agreed" that the 1984 consecration of the world was a consecration of Russia. Yet Bertone knew that this letter had come under attack as an obvious fake immediately after the press conference of June 26, 2000. These glaring omissions only further undermined the credibility of the "interview."

Moreover, as Socci notes, Sister Lucia's 303-page book on the Message of Fatima, *The Appeals of the Message of Fatima*, published a month before the purported interview, says nothing about the widespread doubts which had arisen concerning disclosure of the Third Secret, even though Lucia states she had written the book as "an answer and a clarification of *doubts and questions* addressed to me," and the preface, by the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima at the time, likewise observes that Sister Lucia had asked the Holy See's permission to write a book in order to "answer *multiple questions* in a global manner, not being able to answer every person individually." Sister Lucia's failure to address the one Fatima-related question uppermost in people's minds—has the whole Third Secret been disclosed?—spoke volumes. As Socci observes: "It is inevitable to conclude that this heavy silence is very eloquent, because it is a precise choice: she did not want to affirm that which was attributed to her."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>Socci, *Fourth Secret*, p. 126.

*Socci's assessment: a disaster*

This was the sum total of what Bertone attributed to Sister Lucia concerning the controversy he had gone all the way to Coimbra to address during a two-hour conversation of which no independent record had been made. Socci states the only reasonable conclusion: "The few words attributed to her... are such as to not have objective credibility."<sup>179</sup> In his elegant Italian way, Socci summarizes the impact of the purported interview of November 17, 2001: "The sensation that arises from this 'management' of the last witness of Fatima, this ecclesiastical self-contradiction, is of a certain brazenness, and of seasonal and colorful versions of the truth. Almost as if public opinion, the mass media and the faithful did not know how to reason critically and to catch contradictions and evasive answers."<sup>180</sup> In sum, the purported interview was, as Socci puts it, "disastrous," because "once it was decided to do it... it was necessary to respond totally and seriously to the objections and questions, not eluding them or giving clearly inconsistent answers. It was necessary to do it in a convincing way, incontestable, verifiable by anyone and above all suspicion. Otherwise, there would result the opposite of what was wished: it would furnish definitive proof that something grave was being hidden..."<sup>181</sup>

And that is exactly what happened. The "meeting with Sister Lucia" in November 2001 had backfired even more loudly than the press conference in June 2000. The "disastrous" interview would, in fact, be a major reason for Antonio Socci's "conversion" to the cause of the "Fatimists" in 2006, when public incredulity was cresting to a new high. Another reason was the testimony of a living eyewitness who would come forward in that year to confirm that there are indeed two different but related texts comprising the Third Secret of Fatima—testimony Socci would bring to the attention of the entire world.

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., p. 116.