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Fatima & Private Interpretations

Howard P. Kainz

Marquette University, howard.kainz@marquette.edu

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ARE THE LAST FOUR POPES A BUNCH OF LIARS ?

Howard P. Kainz

On Fatima & the Private Interpretation of Private Revelations

Catholics often criticize Protestants for their subjective “private interpretations” of the Scriptures that give short shrift to tradition. Some Catholics, however, are guilty of the very same thing when it comes to private revelations — messages reportedly given by Jesus or Mary to some individual or group of individuals. The 1917 revelations given by the Blessed Virgin Mary to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal, during World War I, at the outset of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, constituted possibly the most portentous wake-up call the Church has ever received. But the interpretation of the three “secrets” our Lady entrusted to the children have been subjected to the vagaries of private interpretation by Catholics who give short shrift to the Magisterium of the Church.

The most egregious example of this phenomenon comes from a Canadian priest, Fr. Nicholas Gruner, the so-called Fatima priest, and the Fatima Center he founded.

Fr. Gruner was ordained by the bishop of Avellino, Italy, in 1976, and transferred to Canada, but was suspended after refusing to return to his home diocese. The Vatican’s Congregation for the Clergy confirmed his suspension *a divinis* (the loss of faculties for celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, etc.) in 2001. The archbishop of Hyderabad, India, however, disagreed with the suspension and incardinated Gruner there — giving rise to confusion about Gruner’s ecclesiastical status, and claims by his supporters that his suspension was invalid.

For many years Fr. Gruner has been insisting that the request our Lady made at Fatima for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart by the pope in concert with the bishops of the world has not been made in the way the Virgin requested. His sticking point is that the consecration of Russia has not been made *by name*.

In December 1983, after consulting with Sr. Lucia, the only living Fatima visionary, Pope John Paul II sent out letters inviting all the world’s Catholic bishops, and some Orthodox bishops, to join him in a joint act of consecration, scheduled for the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1984. In the consecration, the Pope, accompanied not only in spirit by the bishops to whom he sent the letters, but also physically in St. Peter’s Basilica by numerous bishops and cardinals, consecrated the whole world to Mary’s Immaculate Heart. Reportedly fearing retaliation from the Soviet Union, which at the time was threatening to crush the Solidarity movement

Howard P. Kainz is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Marquette University and a former executive council-member of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. A widely published author, his most recent book is *The Existence of God and the Faith-Instinct* (Susquehanna University Press, 2010).

in Poland, the Pope added a diplomatic but pointed consecration of Russia herself: "In a special way we entrust and consecrate to you those individuals *and nations* that particularly need to be thus entrusted and consecrated" (italics added).

Asked a number of times whether this consecration fulfilled our Lady's request, Sr. Lucia wrote, "Publicly, in union with those bishops who wished to associate themselves with His Holiness, he made the consecration in the way in which the Blessed Virgin had wished that it should be made. Afterward people asked me if it was made in the way our Lady wanted, and I replied: 'Yes. From that time, it is made!'"

In November 2001 John Paul II, Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, and several others met with Sr. Lucia and asked her about the dissatisfaction expressed by Gruner and others over the lack of explicit mention of Russia, and their continuing requests to "re-do" the consecration. Sr. Lucia mentioned that her community simply threw such petitions away, adding, "I've already said that the consecration our Lady wished for was performed in 1984, and that it was accepted by Heaven."

Proponents of re-doing the consecration have suggested that some of Sr. Lucia's comments on the consecration were made under "coercion" by superiors or even by an "impostor," and that the consecration could *not* have been properly made since Russia has not really been converted — although the Berlin Wall came down, militant Soviet atheism is a thing of the past, religious freedom is allowed, President Dmitri Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin are Orthodox Christians, and very positive steps have been taken toward the ecumenical union of Orthodoxy and the Church of Rome. One could argue that the situation in Russia at least compares favorably with that in Portugal, about which our Lady, according to Sr. Lucia's *Fourth Memoir*, promised that "In Portugal the doctrine of the faith will always be preserved." In Portugal, according to a recent Harris Poll commissioned by Pax Liturgique, a mere 11.7 percent of those who identify as Catholics attend Mass weekly. Some preservation!

Possibly the Fatimists are expecting the sudden, mass conversion of all Russian citizens to the Catholic Church, the cessation of all social injustice, and the abrogation of all corruption — in other words, a "conversion of a nation" in a literal sense (the first ever!) that would make the emancipation of Christianity under Constantine in A.D. 313 look like a mere blip in ecclesial history.

Another example of Fatimists' private interpreta-

tion of this private revelation is their claim that there was a "fourth secret" given by Mary to the children at Fatima. In the official and historical account of the visitation, our Lady entrusted three secrets to the three children at Fatima. The first secret included a vision of Hell and God's wish to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the salvation of sinners; the second was a warning about the danger of a second world war and the spread of Soviet communism (a nascent, isolated movement at the time). Sr. Lucia wrote down the contents of these two secrets in 1941. She entrusted information about the third secret to her bishop in 1944, and it was sent to the Vatican in 1957. Pope John XXIII and his successors each read the secret and, in 2000, after much anticipation, the text of the secret was published by the Vatican. It contains a vision of the pope and the faithful of the Church enduring persecution and martyrdom as they ascend a mountain. At the top of the mountain stands the cross, at the foot of which the pope is murdered by soldiers.

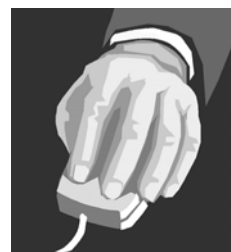
Fr. Gruner and his clerical and lay supporters held a "Fatima Challenge" conference in Rome in May 2010 to complain that an alleged addendum to the third secret has not yet been revealed. They point to circumstantial evidence: (1) In her *Fourth Memoir* Sr. Lucia writes that our Lady said, "In Portugal, the doctrine of the faith will always be preserved, etc." The "etc." in this prediction seems to indicate that a part of the secret has not yet been divulged. (2) There is some discrepancy in references to the

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“one page” and “four pages” on which the third secret was written. (3) Archbishop Loris Capovilla of Loreto, Italy, once referred to an envelope signed by multiple witnesses after the secret was read by Pope John XXIII, and that envelope seems to have gone missing. (4) Pope Benedict XVI recently affirmed that the Fatima revelations refer not just to the past but also to the present and future; but earlier explanations of the third secret, including explanations by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger before he became pope, indicate that it refers to the past, in particular to the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981.

The 2010 conference included a representative of “the other side,” Giuseppe De Carli, author of *The Last Visionary of Fatima* and *The Last Secret of Fatima*, books that include extensive interviews with Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone refuting the “fourth secret” hypothesis. De Carli, who died shortly after the conference, became flustered at one point in the cross-examination, saying, “When a secretary of State, Cardinal Bertone, says that the envelope mentioned by Capovilla corresponds to what was read by John XXIII, either John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI are liars, or we need to believe it.”

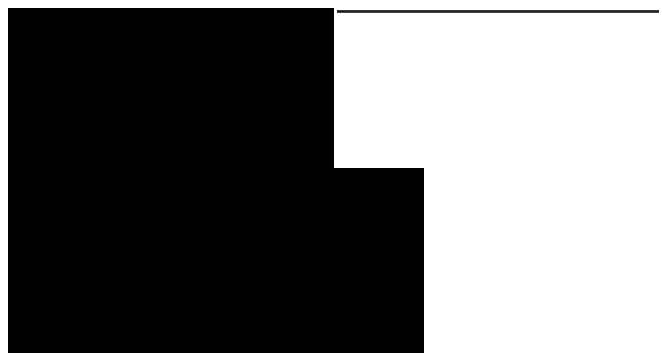
What, indeed, have the Fatimists, with the assiduity of professional sleuths, been looking for? Why are they so suspicious of a Vatican collusion in deception? A recent pamphlet, *The Still Hidden Secret*, published by the Fatima Center, proposes that the fourth secret probably contains an apocalyptic vision, and that it is “related to the vision in which the Virgin explains in Her own words how an internal crisis of faith and discipline in the Church is accompanied by a chastisement of the whole world, including the bishops, priests and laity who are killed ‘one after another’ by the same soldiers who have already executed the Pope.” Catholic News Service reports that some Fatimists “have deduced that the secret foresaw the changes of the Second Vatican Council, especially in liturgy and ecumenical dialogue, as part of the ‘great apostasy’ which church leaders refuse to acknowledge.”

Do we really need a special revelation from our Lady to tell us that there is an internal crisis of faith and discipline in the Church? And to warn about terrible persecutions, already gathering momentum in many countries? Aren’t we capable of reading the signs of the times ourselves? It seems that the Fatimists’ sleuthing is really a desperate attempt to find in the secrets an authoritative reason to reject Vatican II and all the Popes since Pius XII.

The Fatima Center held a follow-up conference, called “Consecration Now!” in Rome this past May for the

purpose of gaining popular support for a formal re-consecration of Russia by name. They are hoping that a massive groundswell of support will finally force the hand of Pope Benedict to accede to their request.

But would it not be more appropriate for followers of Mary to demonstrate the filial obedience required of Catholics by trusting the Popes, ceasing with the distracting accusations of Church-wide cover-ups and a faulty consecration, and focusing on the simple yet major request made by our Lady at Fatima: that Catholics say the rosary often, and at least one time in their lives go to confession and receive Holy Communion on five successive first Saturdays of the month, in reparation for sin? This was *the* central message of the Fatima revelations, a message that risks being lost amid the Fatimists’ agitation for the re-consecration of Russia and their fascination with third- and fourth-secret conspiracy theories. Something even more miraculous than the tearing down of the Berlin Wall might result if *this* request were widely heeded. n



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