

APPARITIONS OF OUR LADY IN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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BY

Dennis Barton

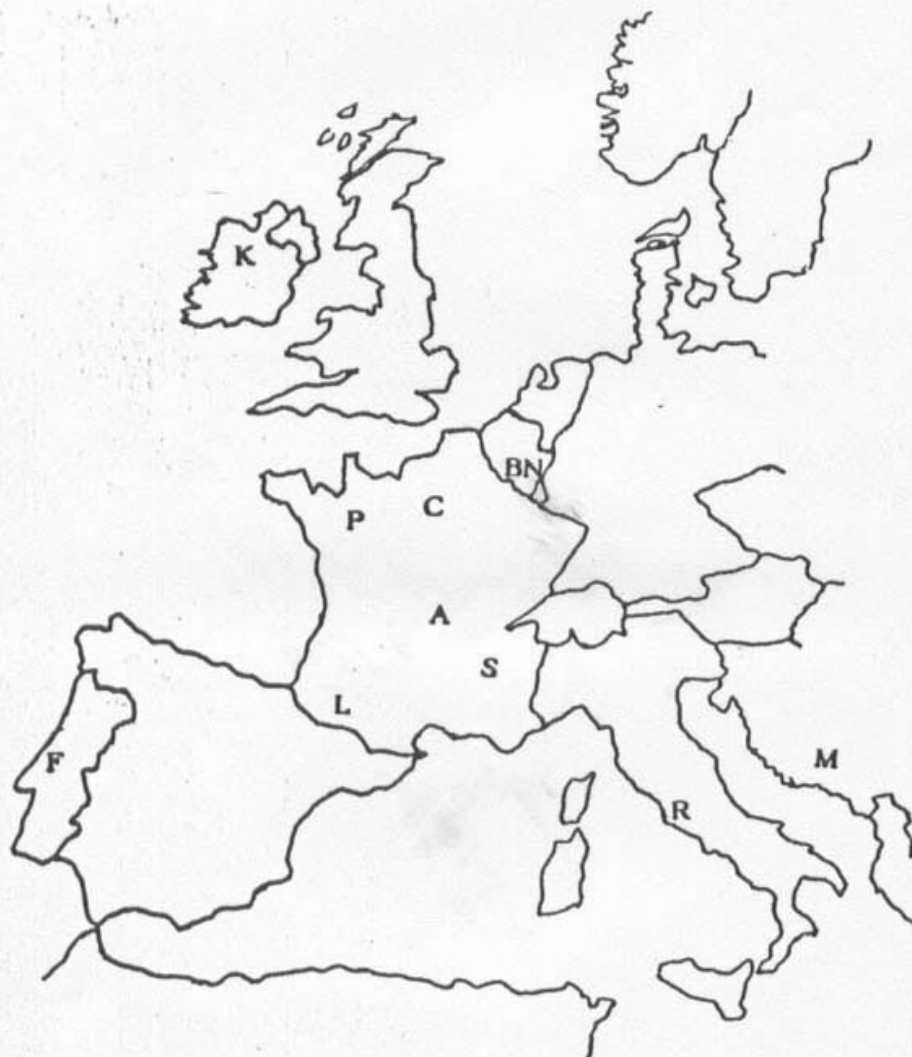


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Europe

A Paray-le-Monial
C Paris
S La Salette
L Lourdes
P Pontmain
K Knock

F Fatima
B Beauring
N Banneux
M Medjugorje
R Rome

INTRODUCTION

Countless books have been written concerning the political, economic cultural, military and religious aspects of European history. Yet reference is rarely made to its spiritual history. The possibility of prayer and sin influencing the course of history is not even considered by most historians. An historian must base his selection of facts and his judgements on firm evidence. But this should not mean excluding events, which have many witnesses, merely because they are of a spiritual nature.

On the other hand, books recording visions and spiritual messages tend to ignore the secular context of their times. Also, it is rare to see them placed in relation to one another, or to Papal acts. There is therefore a wall between secular history and spiritual history. It is hoped that this publication will go some way to make a breach in this wall.

The Catholic Faith consists of truths revealed by Christ while He was on earth. So, although the Church may approve of an apparition, it does not become part of the Catholic Faith. As Pope Benedict wrote:

"The assent of faith cannot be given to any 'private revelation'. Even when ecclesiastical approval has been given to 'devotions' such as those to Our Lady of Lourdes, the events that give rise to them demand only an assent of human belief conformable with the rules of prudence which represent them as probable and piously credible." ((CCMA 1)).

Individuals must examine the evidence according to their own abilities, but it would be rash to disregard judgments made by the Holy See or other Church authorities. This publication will consider the major apparitions of Our Lady in Europe during the last 350 years.

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

As God is creator of the whole universe, it can be difficult to realise the depth of His love for each individual. Many people find a devotion that concentrates the mind on one aspect of Christ's life to be helpful. Before the 16th century there existed a long tradition of private devotion to 'The Sacred Heart of Jesus'. This devotion, based on the knowledge that Christ is man as well as God, dwelt on the thought that God loves each person with a perfect human, as well as divine, love. As this is easier for the human mind to comprehend, it becomes easier to meditate on this love. A picture of a human heart, aglow with fire, symbolises this devotion.

In 1643 John Eudes promoted devotion to 'The Heart of Mary'. But the Church seemed reluctant to encourage this devotion while a similar public devotion to Christ's heart was not widely established. So in 1669 the Congregation of Rites declined to sanction its public celebration. ((CDI 387)).

In June 1675, Sister Margaret Mary Aloccoque, in the French town of Paray-le-Monial, had a vision of Jesus showing His heart as if burning with love. She informed Fr. Colomblere, who was her spiritual director, and said that Our Lord wanted him to spread this devotion. Colomblere consecrated himself to this mission on the 24th June 1675. ((VK 102-3)). Soon afterwards he was transferred to London, arriving in 1676. ((VK 102-3)). He was to act as chaplain to Princess Mary Beatrice of Modena, wife of James, Duke of York. ((VK 78)). Although priests were banned from England at the time, an exception was made for those serving foreign-born royalty. Colomblere made Margaret Mary's visions public and encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart.

So, in its modern form, this devotion was first preached in the Queen's royal chapel at the heart of the then anti-Catholic British Empire. But, during these same years hatred of Catholicism was whipped up to unprecedented heights, and Colomblere was expelled to France in 1678. ((VK 103)).

In 1673 James had become a Catholic and in 1685, king. While confirming the established position of the Church of England, he decreed that non-Anglicans were to be permitted freedom of worship and access to public offices and higher education. But, in 1688, anti-Monarchists caused confusion in the English army during the Dutch invasion of Britain. This made it necessary for James and his queen to flee to France.

The new rulers undid much of his work for greater freedom of religious thought and civil rights. ((CIHICA)). The overthrow of James was not only a turning point in British political history, but also a critical religious event. It ushered in a long period of a Calvinist type mood. The devotion preached by Colombiere, with its emphasis on Christ's burning human love for each person, countered the unemotional Calvinist spirit which now gripped the English speaking world. Similarly, it served as an antidote to the legalistic and pessimistic Jansenist mood, which had spread from Calvinist Holland into Catholic countries. While living in exile, James's wife, the Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland, was the first member of royalty to ask the Pope to institute a feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. ((VK 104)).

PAPAL ACT

Permission for public devotion to Mary's heart had been again refused in 1726. But by 1799 devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was so well established that public devotion to Mary's heart was permitted.

THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL

In 1830 Catherine Laboure, a novice at the Rue de Bac convent in Paris, saw a vision of the Blessed Virgin and was told that she had a special mission. The convent was situated in the 'left bank' district, which was the centre for the intellectuals creating the secular philosophy and politics that were soon to dominate Europe.

On November 27th, during another vision, Catherine was shown a medal. On one side was the figure of Our Lady with the words:

'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.' On the other was an 'M' surmounted by a cross with a bar beneath. Below were two hearts, one encircled by a crown of thorns, the other pierced by a sword. These obviously represented the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Catherine was told that whoever wore the medal, especially around the neck when indulged by the Church, would receive special graces. In five other visions, Catherine was assured that the sceptical Fr. Aladel, her spiritual director, would eventually have the medal made ((JB 14-17)).

In June 1832 the Archbishop of Paris gave permission for medals to be manufactured. The claims of miracles wrought were so numerous that within ten years 250 million medals had been distributed. It was the vast number of favours granted, graces received, preservations, conversions, and miracles, which persuaded the Church to recognise the apparitions, rather than the evidence presented by Fr. Aladel. ((JB 18-20)). Two examples of these may be given:

1. In October 1571 Christendom had been threatened by Islamic conquest and the critical sea battle of Lepanto was about to be fought. In an immense outpouring of prayer, especially by use of the rosary, Our Lady was begged to intercede with her Son to save Europe. When the Christian fleet was victorious and the Moslem threat ended, the Pope honoured Mary with the title of 'Our Lady of Victory'. ((CDI 541)).

In 1836 the parish priest of a Parisian church dedicated to 'Our Lady of Victories', was despairing over the neglect of religion in his parish. But one morning he heard a voice twice say: "Consecrate your parish to the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary for sinners." He did so, and drew up rules for an association under this title. That evening he was astounded to see five hundred people in his church. Within five years his association had twenty million members. ((JB 21)).

2. In 1825 Theodore Ratisbonne, a Jew, became a Catholic and soon afterwards, a priest. In 1840 he became curate of the Our Lady of Victories church and secretary of the association based there. He also founded an Order to work for the conversion of the Jews. His brother, Alphonse, had little interest in religion but, under pressure from a Catholic friend, agreed to wear a Miraculous Medal to prove he 'was not an obstinate Jew'. A few days later on 20th January 1842, while his friend was arranging some business with a priest, Alphonse looked around the church of St. Andrea in Rome. ((OLS 2-7)).

The Blessed Virgin, as depicted on the Miraculous Medal, appeared to him in a blaze of light. He experienced a feeling of mercy and generosity as the understanding and acceptance of the truths of Catholicism poured in on him. ((JB 20)). Within a short time Pope Gregory XVI recognised his conversion as a miracle. ((OLS 18)). By a strange coincidence exactly 100 years later, on 20th January 1942, the Wannsee conference was held by the Nazis to plan the destruction of European Jewry. ((WS 965)). Alphonse became a priest and joined his brother's Order. ((OLS 19)). This Order now works to bring Jews and Catholics to a greater understanding of one another.

LA SALETTE

On Saturday September 19th 1846, two children aged five and eight in southern France, saw 'a beautiful lady'. This lady said that the wickedness of people, especially by working on Sundays and swearing, would bring a chastisement. The grapes would rot and the wheat turn to dust. Children under seven would die in the arms of those carrying them.

The unique aspect of this vision was the copious tears of 'the lady'. These illiterate children did not know that the day of the vision was the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. The vision took place during first vespers, when the book of Lamentations was being used for readings. In these the author's sorrow over Jerusalem is transposed to Our Lady. As it was before the reform of the breviary by Plus X, every priest and religious throughout the world was reciting:

"What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion?" ((Lam. 2, 13)).

Just preceding were the words:

" ...infants. and babes faint in the streets of the city. They cry to their mothers, where is bread and wine? ...their life is poured out on their mother's bosom". ((Lam. 2, 11-12)).

Harvest failures, including the vines, caused great loss of life in Western Europe during the years following. La Salette became a centre of pilgrimage.

PAPAL ACTS

Sister Laboure's vision of 1830, with its depiction of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, had encouraged greatly increased devotion both to the heart of Jesus and to the heart of Mary. On December 8th 1854, twenty-four years after the words 'Conceived without sin' appeared on the Miraculous Medal, Pius IX defined the doctrine of Mary's 'Immaculate Conception'. This meant that from the first moment in her mother's womb, Mary was free from the stain of original sin.

During the following year, Pius IX extended permission for the limited public devotion to the heart of Mary. ((CDI 387)). In 1899, Pope Leo XIII consecrated the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. ((CCMB 143)). This devotion was now well established publicly and officially within the church.

LOURDES

On February 11th 1858, fourteen year old Bernadette Soubirous, in the French village of Lourdes, saw a vision of a lady. At this first apparition the lady placed her hands in the same position as on the Miraculous Medal. The first words were spoken at the third apparition on February 18th. During the ninth vision on February 25th, Bernadette was instructed to: "Go and. drink and wash at the spring and eat some of the green stuff you find growing there". Bernadette dug a hole with her hands in a muddy patch so that she could drink a little. She then washed in it, making her face muddy. By next day a stream was flowing out of the cave ((JB 114-5)). At the fourteenth apparition Bernadette was told to:

"Go and tell the priests to build a chapel here and to come here in procession". ((JB 116)).

During the seventeenth vision the Lady said:

"I am the Immaculate Conception". ((JB 117)).

Bernadette did not know what the words meant. ((CCMC 40)), but the use of this title, just four years after the definition of the doctrine, electrified the whole Church.

Local inhabitants of the area affirmed that there had always been trickle of water in the cave, but it was the clearing of rubbish after the ninth apparition which fully released the outpouring of water that has continued since. Lourdes soon became internationally known for miracles of healing which took place when physically, mentally or spiritually sick people bathed in the water. The Gospel being read at all masses on February 26th, the day the water started to flow from the cave, was:

"Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed, [waiting for the moving of water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whoever stepped in first after this troubling of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.] ((John 5. 2-4)).

The words within the squared brackets are omitted in some Protestant Bibles, but are included in those used by the Catholic Church.

The day of the seventeenth apparition, when the title had been uttered was the 25th of March, the feast of 'The Annunciation of Our Lady'.

PONTMAIN

In July 1870 war broke out between France and Prussia. The French armies suffered defeat after defeat. Paris was besieged, with Orleans and Le Mans occupied. On the 16th of January 1871 the Prussian army was ordered to take Laval, capital of the province of Mayenne. ((JB 128))

The bishops called for prayers throughout France. These were offered in the village of Pontmain in Mayenne province during the evening of the 16th. A few hours later, in the early morning of 17th January, four children aged 9 to 12 saw a vision of a beautiful lady in the sky.

Letters appeared which the children read out for the sixty or so adults who had gathered. "God will soon answer you. My Son allows Himself to be moved." ((JB 126)). Up till now the lady's hands had been placed as depicted on the Miraculous Medal, but they moved so that a red cross could be seen near her heart. This cross came to the fore with a red figure of Christ on it. At the top of the cross a shorter cross bar was to be seen. ((JB 127)). This was: 'The Cross of Lorraine', symbol of France. ((EA Vol 8, 248)). The vision ended just before 9 a.m. ((JB 127)).

During the night of the same day, the Prussians cancelled the order to capture Laval and began to draw back. ((JB 128)). Following a further French defeat at St. Quentin on the 19th, ((HALF 993)) an armistice was signed on the 28th and peace returned. ((JB 128)).

KNOCK

On the evening of August 21st 1879, fourteen adults saw a large montage (picture) on the end wall of a church at Knock, in the west of Ireland. It consisted of the figures of Our Lady, St Joseph and St. John the Evangelist around an altar upon which stood a lamb. ((JB 143)). A noticeable feature of this vision was that words were not spoken. No one can say why this was so, but it is interesting that the precursor of the Gaelic League was founded the following year. ((DGB 237)). Shortly afterwards the promotion of Gaelic became an important ingredient in Irish nationalism. If words had been spoken in Gaelic or in English, politicians could have used such speech, during the following years of strife, to claim divine support for their causes. The silence of the vision avoided its spiritual message being dragged into political controversy.

The message was conveyed by its powerful symbolism. It stressed evangelisation and the sacrificial aspect of the Mass. St. John the Evangelist, who was dressed as a bishop, held an open book. ((JB 143)). By implication this drew attention to the need for priests and missionaries.

During the second half of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th, the English-speaking world became open to Catholic growth. This not only applied to Britain and North America, but to Australia, India and many parts of Africa. To reap the benefits of the situation, large numbers of priests were required. Ireland was the only English speaking country to have a Catholic population to provide them. The dramatic highlighting of the central importance of evangelisation and the Mass, came at just the right moment to encourage vocations to the priesthood and Religious Orders. By the 1930s it was noticeable that nearly a third of the bishops in the world had Irish names. ((PH 227)).

PAPAL ACTS

During the 19th century, anti-Catholic liberalism had promoted uncontrolled Capitalism. This had led to widespread injustice, poverty and degradation. But instead of the people returning to the Church, which had fought this liberalism, they were placing their trust in atheistic marxist socialism through teachings, such as those contained in 'Rerum Novarum' issued in May 1891, Pope Leo XIII urged Catholics to fight for a just society to defeat both liberalism and marxist socialism.

But he was aware that providing principles for solving social problems would achieve little without a prayer-led spiritual revival. So between 1883 and 1901, he issued twelve Encyclicals, and almost as many decrees and apostolic constitutions, calling for increased devotion by means of the Rosary. He also established October as a month dedicated to this form of prayer. ((VMDO 77)).

On June 13th 1912, Pius X offered a plenary indulgence to "Those who went to Confession, received Communion and performed some devotion in honour of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin in the spirit of reparation..." on the first Saturday of each month. ((FR191)).

A European war broke out in 1914 and in November 1915 Benedict XV permitted (but did not order) bishops to add the invocation: 'Queen of Peace, pray for us', to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. The Pope also worked strenuously to achieve peace. By 1917 European society was bleeding to death and there was an imminent danger of anarchy and atheism sweeping across the whole continent. In desperation the Pope instructed his Secretary of State to send a message, dated 5th May 1917, to all the bishops of the world. After recording the horrors afflicting Europe and calling for prayers to the Heart of Jesus, he continued:

"And because all the graces which the Author of all Good deigns to bestow on the poor sons of Adam are, by the merciful disposition of Divine Providence, distributed through the hands of the Blessed Virgin, We desire that the earnest and confident prayer of her afflicted children may be more than ever addressed in this dreadful hour to the Mother of God... We order that from June 1st there shall be permanently introduced in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin the invocation, 'Queen of peace, pray for us, ...' May this pious and devout invocation arise from every corner of the earth; from the great temples as from the lowliest churches, from the palaces of the rich mansions of the great as from the humblest cottages wherever dwells a faithful soul, and from the blood-stained fields and seas. May it rise up to Mary, who is the Mother of Mercy and all-powerful by grace; and may it carry with it the agonizing cries of mothers and wives, the wails of innocent children, and the sighs of all hearts; may it prevail with her, in her loving motherly solicitude, to obtain for the stricken world the peace that is asked, and in the times to come remind mankind of the power of her mediation." ((TAB May 12, 1917)).

The first four lines drew on a teaching: 'that Mary is the 'Mediatix of All Graces', has not been formally defined. The addition to the Litany of: 'Queen of Peace, pray for us', had now become a rule.

FATIMA

On the 13th of May, eight days after Benedict's exceptional formal cry to Mary for help, ten year old Lucia Santos and her two cousins, Francisco Marto, aged nine, and his sister, Jacinta, aged seven, saw a vision of a lady. It was in a shallow saucer-like hollow called the 'Cove de Iria' in the parish of Fatima, 70 miles north of Lisbon, Portugal. The lady, 'resting' on a small oak-tree, asked the children to come to the same spot on the 13th of each month and promised that in October she would say "Who I am and what I want". ((JB 153)). She told Lucia to learn to read. ((GLB 46)). Although the children had agreed with one another not to say anything, Jacinta told her parents and there was much teasing in the village. But on June 13th, fifty adults were present during a second apparition at the Cova. The children claimed they were all told by the lady to say five decades of the Rosary daily. ((JAP 216)). The 'Cova de Iria' was a hollow named after St. Iria. This is the Portuguese equivalent of the Greek 'Irene', meaning 'Peace'. ((FR168)).

The children were also told to say after each Gloria: "O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are most in need." ((LS 162-6)).

On July 13th the lady said that the Rosary should be recited daily for the end of the war. A promise was made that there would be a great miracle on the 13th of October. ((JB 159)). At one point Lucia exclaimed 'Oh' and, when questioned by the crowd as to what had caused this, answered that it was a secret. ((LS 162 and JAP 63)).

Many years later she revealed that Jacinta and herself had been given a glimpse of what hell was like, and it was this that had caused the exclamation. 'The lady' also prophesied a future war and that she would return to show how peace could be obtained ((LS 104)). The crowds had noticed the sun losing its brightness at the time of the apparitions In June and July, and this was to happen again in September. There had been a curious yellow tinge to the atmosphere, and each time a white cloud had enveloped the oak-tree. ((VMDO 13 and 23)).

As August 13th approached, the anti-Catholic government and press launched bitter attacks on the events. The local mayor kidnapped the children on the evening of the 12th, and held them until late on the 13th. ((JAP 224)). While in prison the children were threatened with a cruel death, yet refused to disclose their 'secret'. ((CCMB 37)). 18,000 people had gathered at the Cova and they saw a flash of light followed by a cloud settling near the tree. The clouds and people were tinted in all the colours of the rainbow. ((JAP 82)). The cloud paused for a while, then rose and disappeared. ((VMDO 20)).

The lady appeared again to the children on August 19th at Valinhos, a short distance from the Cova.

Money had been collected on August 13th, and Lucia asked how it might be used. The answer was to celebrate the feast of: 'Our Lady of the Rosary' and to build a chapel. ((JB 164)).

On the 13th of September over 25,000 people were present. Many saw a globe of light moving from east to west that slowly came down to the oak tree and returned to the east afterwards. ((VMDO 23-25)). White petals were seen floating down a shaft of sunlight. ((VMDO 24)). The Vicar General of the diocese, with another priest, was present incognito and observed these manifestations. ((VMDO 23)). Soon afterwards the church authorities formally questioned the children. ((CCMB 18)).

On the 13th of October a huge gathering stood, in the pouring rain and deep mud, saying the Rosary. At noon a white wisp of vapour formed around the children three times. The rain stopped and the clouds split down the middle and rolled back to expose the sun. The crowd could stare at it without being blinded, for it shone like a silver disk, very clear and bright but quite without the blazing dazzle of normal midday sun. Then came two simultaneous phenomena. The children, at later interrogations, said that they saw Our Lady, St. Joseph and Jesus to the right of the sun. St. Joseph and Jesus blessed the people three times. Lucia alone then saw Our Lady and Jesus: a vision which changed to that of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, crowned as Queen of Heaven with her infant son on her knee.

The crowd did not see any of this. But they saw the sun shudder and begin to spin, while shooting out great beams of coloured light. After about four minutes it stopped moving, then recommenced its 'dance'. It halted again and then for the third time gyrated and swept the spectators with shafts of light of every colour. Suddenly the sun seemed to break away from the sky and move in gigantic zig-tags. It appeared to plunge down towards the Cova.

A yell of fear burst from the crowd falling on its knees. Finally the sun stopped and zigzagged back to its normal position. It lost its silver pallor and regained its normal noonday brilliance.

The whole phenomenon lasted about twelve minutes and was seen by individuals and whole villages up to forty-eight kilometres away. Villagers sixteen kilometres distant were bathed in different coloured lights. About 70,000 people at the Cova, including atheists and those who had come to scoff, claimed to have seen the phenomena. ((JB 167-172)). Despite the torrential rain, the crowd found their clothes were now perfectly dry ((JDM 127)).

This was not a natural event. Observatories had not recorded it. ((JDM 128)). Yet the children, three months earlier, had said there would be a miraculous sign. The editor of the atheist daily 'El Seculo', who had been ridiculing the events that very morning, was present. On Monday 15th he printed a truthful account to the shock of his readers. ((VMDO 37)).

During the months following, Francisco and Jacinta were constantly seen at prayer. The children imposed penances on themselves and willingly accepted the sufferings of illness and death. Their manner drew many, who had not been present at Fatima, to accept the truth of the events. ((CCMB 48)). All three were pressed to reveal what had occurred to make Lucia exclaim 'Oh' in July. Jacinta and Francisco said it would cause sadness if published, while Lucia said that she had no right to answer the question. ((CCMB 138)). All sorts of people questioned the children about other aspects of the visions. From their replies the: 'Message of Fatima' emerged, which was a call for prayer, penance, reform of life, reparation and the recitation of the Rosary.

It was recalled that St. Dominic in 1206, while trying to re-convert the south of France, withdrew to a mountainous region. Like Gideon (Judges vi. 36-40) he prayed for a sign that his plan for a new order of friars was what God wanted. He committed his prayer to Mary. Out of the darkening clouds appeared a ball of fire. It hung suspended until, shedding brilliance, it sped down directly over the chapel of Prouille. This occurred three times and on three separate occasions. Dominic accepted it as the sign he had requested. According to tradition it was then that Dominic was inspired to promote the Rosary. In his Encyclical 'Ingravescentibus Malls' of 29th September 1937, Plus XI wrote, 'Prouille was the cradle of the Rosary of Mary'. ((FR 81-82)).

Francisco died in 1919 and Jacinta the following year. When Jacinta's body was disinterred in 1935, to be placed beside her brother, her face was uncorrupted. ((JB 174)). In June 1921 Lucia, under another name, entered a boarding school.

Many had reported seeing shining globes or flakes during the apparitions, and on 13th May 1924 they were again seen and photographed. ((CCMB 45-46)). When visiting Fatima on 26th June 1927, the local bishop observed a shower of these globes. ((JAP 146)). There have been personal miracles at Fatima ((VMDO 102)) but, being overshadowed by the main events, they have not received much publicity.

THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL

Note

Until February 1918 the Julian calendar was used in Russia, so many history books give dates thirteen days behind those used in Western Europe. Dates given in this publication are according to the Gregorian calendar used in the West, unless noted otherwise.

The first stage In Russia

In 1877, when Lenin was 17, his elder brother was executed for terrorism. During the same year Lenin entered University, but due to his association with revolutionaries he was expelled. He came to hate 'The Establishment', and by the time he was allowed to sit for exams, his Marxist atheism was motivated more by hatred than idealism. ((RP 343-346)).

The Social Democratic Party, based on Marxism, included Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks hoped for a liberal revolution to overthrow the Tzar and establish Capitalism. This, they believed, would lead to the exploitation of the workers who were without property. These would then eventually rebel and establish a socialist society, where productive property would be publicly owned. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, believed that Marxists should aim to seize power immediately and establish socialism without going through a liberal (i.e. Capitalist) stage. In early 1917, while Lenin was living in Switzerland, social conditions in Russia deteriorated. Sections of the armed forces mutinied, industrial workers seized towns, and liberal members of the Duma [Parliament] deposed the Tzar. The liberals declared the Duma to be supreme and struggled to maintain law and order while preparing to hold elections. The Mensheviks found themselves in a difficult situation. They were preaching socialism, yet at the same time trying to prevent the uneducated revolutionary workers and soldiers from undermining the liberal controlled Duma, which was trying to establish democracy.

At the beginning of April 1917, Lenin arrived in the Russian capital of St. Petersburg. He found that not only were the Mensheviks supporting the liberal Parliament, but so also were his Bolsheviks. ((RP 393-4)). It appeared that Russia would establish a democracy with the Social Democrats becoming one party amongst many. The Mensheviks wanted atheistic socialism to be achieved in an atmosphere of freedom, where they expected religion would gradually die-out. Lenin used his great gifts of intelligence and oratory to regain control of the Bolsheviks. The arguments he used are now known as 'The April Theses' ((EHC 94-7)). Eventually his policy was endorsed at the 7th All-Russian Conference of the Bolshevik party which closed on May 12th. ((ML 136)).

On May 13th the commander of the Duma's armed forces admitted that he was unable to maintain law and order. So the next day the Menshevik leaders reluctantly agreed to become ministers in the liberal capitalist government. They hoped to help prevent anarchy and the return of the Tzarists. But in so doing they forfeited the role of an opposition and alienated the most active socialists. ((RP 405-6)).

So by May 14th, the Mensheviks had taken the decision that would lose them the confidence of the revolutionary workers and troops, and the Bolsheviks had emerged with a clear determination to lead these workers in a seizure of power.

Politically, May 12-14th 1917 were decisive days in the history of both Russia and the world. It was now only a matter of time, before growing Bolshevik organisation and strength would enable them to seize power from the compromising Mensheviks and the liberals. ((RP 406-7)). It was precisely at this time -- May 13th -- when Our Lady made her first appearance at Fatima.

Germany

By 1917 many Germans realized that they would lose the war. Eugene Pacelli (later Pius XII) was the Papal nuncio to Bavaria and was working for peace with the German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg. ((JOS 44-45)). On June 13th the Pope launched a peace offensive by sending letters to the warring powers. ((JOS 44)). This was the day of the second apparition at Fatima. The Catholics in the German Parliament proposed a motion that Germany should be willing to accept a honourable peace. With Socialist and Liberal support, it was passed. ((IP 53)). The generals were furious and successfully urged the Kaiser (King) to dismiss Holiweg. A loyal follower of General Ludendorff replaced him.

Ludendorff was a believer in the occult and openly hated the Catholic Church. He was determined to continue the war, and did so for another fifteen months. This led to the degradation and humiliation of Germany and, in its turn, to the rise of Nazism.

The second stage in Russia

The Bolsheviks took from May till October to prepare a coup. At the same time Ludendorff's policy, of continuing the war, was having critical repercussions in Russia. The Mensheviks and liberals were committed to a continuance of the war, while Lenin demanded immediate peace. Whole sections of the war-weary army and navy sided with Lenin's demand and eventually enabled the Bolsheviks to gain control of Russia. If the war had ended during the summer of 1917, as the German Catholics led by the Pope had urged, it is extremely unlikely that the Bolsheviks and Nazis would have achieved power.

It was on July 13th 1917 when the German Kaiser had forced his peace-seeking Chancellor to resign. ((IP 57)). It was the day when the events leading to Nazism in Germany and Communism in Russia were set in motion. ((IP 57)). It was also the day when the children at Fatima were being shown what hell was like, and hearing the prophesy of a temporary peace to be followed by a more terrible European war. ((LS 104-5)).

In Russia on the 23rd of October, the Bolsheviks made the final decision to seize power. ((ML 237)). Soon after the meeting ended, during the night of 23rd/24th October, an attempt was made to chop down the oak tree at Fatima. The wrong one was removed and, together with various pious objects, taken to near-by Santarema. During the 24th they were exhibited in mock respect. During the night of 24th/25th, a blasphemous burlesque parody of a procession in honour of Mary was held, with the encouragement of the local authorities. ((GLB 128-130)).

In Russia, Lenin's control of the capital was achieved during the night of November 6/7th. According to the Julian calendar, still being used in Russia, this was the 24/25th of October. So the night of 24/25th in both Catholic and Orthodox calendars saw the triumphant of evil.

The End of The War

In 1918 an armistice was signed which took effect on November 11th, and negotiations were commenced to arrange a peace treaty. In April 1914 the Holy See had designated the day after the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1919 this latter feast fell on June 28th. On that feast day Germany signed the Versailles Peace Treaty and the war was at an end. ((JLS 316)).

PORTUGAL

For several generations before the apparitions at Fatima, most Portuguese had abandoned religious practice. Anti-Catholic liberal politicians promised that the end of the Monarchy, the Church and Christian moral restraint would lead to an age of personal fulfilment and material prosperity. In order to prevent a revolution, the monarchy spent more money than it had and, by the turn of the century, the country was bankrupt.

Those who were religious tended to restrict their practice to a personal relationship with God combined with charitable works of mercy. The Papal Encyclicals, which urged them to also worship God by striving for social justice for their neighbour, had found little response.

In 1918 the king was exiled and, although there is nothing contrary to Catholic teaching in having a republican form of government, all the republican parties were anti-religious. The Church was disestablished and divorce introduced. Religious Orders were outlawed, religion banned from the schools, and saints' days ceased to be public holidays. All Church property was stolen, bequests to the church forbidden and one third of church collections taken in tax. The state assumed power to supervise seminaries and their textbooks, while priests became state employees. 'Lay Associations' controlled all religious activities, while bishops had to obtain government approval before making public statements. ((HVL 450-1 and HK 27)). At the end of 1911 the Patriarch of Lisbon and four bishops were banished from their dioceses for refusing to be controlled by the 'Lay Associations'. ((HVL 453)).

The popular and energetic Alfonso Costa was the elected Prime Minister for a year from January 1913. He publicly declared that his aim was to extinguish the Catholic Church within two or three generations. ((HVL 453 and HK 27)). In February 1914 a less extreme administration permitted the bishops to return.

But in June 1915 Costa's party swept to power again ((HVL 454-456)) and he was Prime Minister during the time of the apparitions. In August 1917 the Patriarch of Lisbon and the bishop of Oporto were forced into exile. ((HVL 458)). This was the month during which the children were kidnapped.

The country continued in a state of social and economic anarchy until, in December, the army overthrew Costa and re-established law and order. A more moderate anti-Catholic, Sidonio Pais, was placed in power. He abolished the 'Lay Associations', permitted the bishops to return and resumed relations with the Vatican. ((HVL 458)).

In January 1918 the Pope detached an area from the Lisbon diocese, including the parish of Fatima, to form the diocese of Leiria. ((VMDO 93)). A bishop of a small diocese would have more time to investigate the apparitions. Pais was murdered in December 1918 and Costa regained power in March 1919. During the next three years there were sixteen governments ((HVL 459)), and the country drifted into chaos. These governments repeatedly ordered local mayors to prevent pilgrimages to Fatima, but the numbers involved grew.

On May 13th 1920, despite the stopping of transport and regiments of troops cordoning off the Cova, people walked to the site and the mass pressure broke the cordon. Some of the soldiers then joined in the religious celebrations ((VMDO 91)). In August of that year the new bishop, who had been crippled when tortured by the police ((AOA 112)), took possession of his diocese. ((VMDO 93)). Fatima was situated in a desert like area so in November 1921 he ordered the construction of a vast concrete cistern to collect rainwater.

But as soon as digging commenced, water gushed up and the flow is now able to supply the needs of half a million pilgrims. ((VMDO 94)). In March 1922 the small chapel was blown up. But a bomb placed under the oak tree failed to explode ((VMDO 92)). In May 1922 the canonical process was opened ((VMDO 95)). When on May 13th 1923, 60,000 pilgrims arrived the sub-prefect decided it would be prudent to disobey his orders to prevent the pilgrimage. ((VMDO 92)).

While this spiritual renewal was taking place, the anti-Catholic politicians continued to fight amongst themselves and the economic situation became unbearable. In 1926 the army took power again and asked an economist, Antonio Salazar, to become Finance Minister.

Salazar had been born in 1889 into a deeply religious home. Family values and religion, in terms of contemplative prayer, personal salvation and acceptance of the cross of duty, were paramount ((HK 10)). He had won a free place to a seminary school and while there acquired a knowledge of Catholic Thomist philosophy. Later, while studying law and economics at University, he became interested in the social Encyclicals. As a professor he, led Catholic associations. But, although a Christian Democrat, he considered the country was not ready for parliamentary democracy.

In May 1929 the Chief of State and several members of the government, including Salazar, made a pilgrimage to Fatima. ((JAP 147)). In 1932 Salazar was appointed Prime Minister, a position he held until his death in 1968. He made the good of the family the centre of his policies, religion returned to the schools, there was freedom for all faiths and no attempt was made to control the Catholic Church by making it established. Many of Portugal's economic problems were gradually solved and progress made in curing social ills.

This extraordinary transformation may be seen as a reaction against the lies, social chaos and anti-religion of the previous years. But many consider that it was only possible because the events at Fatima had brought about a renewal in the spiritual lives of millions. They were then willing to accept their personal responsibilities and to search for justice and peace. In May 13th 1938 half a million Portuguese pilgrims arrived out of a total population of six million. ((VMDO 103)). Special services were held in parish churches for those at home. So when an allowance has been made for babies, the sick, the frail and essential workers, unable to attend, it is obvious that a very large proportion of the country had been deeply affected by the apparitions.

More Visions and church reactions

1. In 1925 Lucia became a nun in the Institute of St. Dorothy. But in 1948, desiring a more secluded life she transferred to the Discalced Carmelites ((LS 9)).

2. At the end of 1925 Lucia informed her confessor that on the 10th of December Our Lady had appeared to her. This was in order to complete the message of June 1917 about the Communions of reparation on the first Saturdays. ((LS 161 and 195)).

3. Lucia then claimed that on the 15th February 1926, Jesus asked why she was not carrying out the request made in December. She explained that as this devotion had already existed since 1912, her spiritual director wanted proof that Mary had specifically requested it. ((LS 195-7)).

4. She claimed that on 17th December 1927, Jesus gave her permission to disclose the part of the story of Fatima that concerned devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. ((LS 189-195)).

These three visions between 1925 and 1927 were recorded in a document sent by Lucia, to the Vicar General of her diocese, at the end of 1927. ((LS 189)). In this document she also explained that in June 1917 Jacinta and Francisco were told that they would soon be taken to heaven. But Lucia would live so as to promote worldwide devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart. ((LS 161 and 195)).

5. On first gaining power in Russia, the Communists viciously attacked the churches. But then for some years the policy was to eliminate religion by slow suffocation. In 1929 Stalin emerged as a dictator and in April he issued 'The Law on Religious Associations'. This was a much more severe persecution than before. ((TB 59)). It was an all out attempt to expunge religious belief from the Russian mind and to build a civilisation without God. Within a few weeks of this, Lucia informed her confessor that on the 13th June 1929 she had received a vision of the Trinity. It summed up the whole meaning of Fatima. During the vision she heard Our Lady say "The moment has come in which God asks the Holy Father, in union with all the bishops of the world, to make the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, promising to save it by this means". ((LS 200)).

6. Since 1922 the bishop's Commission had been deliberating over Fatima. But the action of the sun had been so dramatic that the Pope and the Portuguese bishops, on several occasions, showed that they personally accepted that Our Lady had appeared. ((VMDO 94 and 97)).

7. On the 14th April 1929 a Pastoral Letter by the bishop concluded:

"We Judge it well:

a. To declare worthy of credence the visions with which the children were favoured at Cova da Iria, in the Parish of Fatima, diocese of Leiria, on the 13th of each month from May to October, 1917.

b. To authorise officially the cult of Our Lady of Fatima." ((VMDO 95)).

8. On May 13th 1931, before 30,000 people the Cardinal and bishops consecrated Portugal to the Immaculate Heart of Mary ((VMDO 95-96)).

9. In September 1939 Lucia's bishop issued a Pastoral Letter urging the devotion of the 'First Saturdays'. In itself this was of little significance as the Church had promoted the devotion since June 13th 1912. But when he laid down the form that it should take, he said that Mary had revealed the devotion.

An extract reads:

'This devotion was revealed to Sister Lucia of Jesus by the most holy Virgin in these words:

"See my daughter, how my Heart is encircled by thorns with which ungrateful men pierce Me at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Do you, at least, strive to console Me; and say that I promise to assist at the hour of death with graces necessary for salvation all those who, in order to make reparation to Me, on the first Saturday of five successive months, go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, say five decades of the Rosary, and keep Me company for a quarter of an hour, meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary."

Imprimatur: Santuario da Fatima,

21 of September, 1939.

+Jose, Bishop of Leiria.

((FR 188-189)).

This Pastoral Letter indicated that the bishop and his Commission, who were in the best position to form a judgement, accepted the claims made by Lucia regarding visions, seen by her during the years after the events of 1917.

BEAURAING AND BANNEUX

Belgium

In 1921 the Belgian bishops, having a deep devotion to Mary, gained permission to hold an annual feast on May 31st, in honour of 'Our Lady, Mediatrix of all graces'. ((FR 18)).

During the evening of November 29th 1932 at Beauraing, near the French frontier, five young people saw a vision of 'a lady'. This was repeated nearly every evening until January 3rd 1933. ((JA 183)).

The visionaries asked whether the visitor was the Immaculate Virgin. She nodded, smiled and opened her arms. A man carried his daughter of ten years to the site and, through one of the visionaries, asked for a cure of the decayed bone in her leg ((JB 185)). The lady didn't answer but just smiled.

When the children asked what the lady wanted, she answered "A chapel". When they asked: "Tell us who you are", she answered: "I am the Immaculate Virgin". On another occasion she requested people to come in pilgrimage. She made no reply to requests for a sign to prove that she was who she claimed to be. One of the boys, Fernande, asserted that he saw a golden heart. The following day all the children said they saw it. The last vision, on January 3rd, was seen and heard by all the visionaries except Fernande.

They were given personal messages which have not been revealed. Also to one she said "I am the Mother of God" and to another "I will convert sinners". Fernande sobbed with disappointment. But there was a flash of light and the lady had a private conversation with him. ((JB 187-8)).

Twelve days later, on January 15th 1933, Our Lady appeared to a girl of eleven at Banneux, in the diocese of Leige, near the German frontier. This diocese had just been consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as requested at Fatima. ((LFH 50)). During the course of several visions, Our Lady asked for a chapel to be built and that a nearby spring be used to cure the sick. She announced, on January 19th, that she was "The Virgin of the Poor" ((DW 8)), and that "This spring is reserved for all the nations, to relieve the sick." ((DW 9)).

Visions were not seen from January 20th until February 11th, feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, when Mary said: "I have come to alleviate suffering". ((DW 12)).

On February 15th the girl who had been carried to the place of visions at Beauraing found herself cured. Three months later she cycled fifteen miles ((JB 185)). There were two more appearances at Banneux during which Our Lady asked for prayers. On March 2nd she appeared for the last time and said: "I am the Mother of the Saviour, the Mother of God". As she left, her face was unsmiling and she "looked really sad". ((DW 14-15)). The miraculous healing of two women in 1933 convinced the Church that the visions at Beauraing were genuine. ((JB 189)). Both Beauraing and Banneux are now places of pilgrimage.

Nazism

Just prior to the visions in Belgium, Nazism was on the verge of gaining power in Germany. Although disguised as no more than a political party and using Christian terms in its propaganda, it was a movement based on a pagan view of life's meaning. It aimed to replace Christianity with the ancient pagan gods of northern Europe. Other Germans were supporting Communism, which aimed to replace religious belief with atheist materialism. By 1932 Nazis and Communists held over half the seats in the Reichstag (Parliament). The small Catholic political party, aided by the Protestant president using his constitutional powers, struggled to maintain a democratic system of government based on Christian values. In November 1932 some who had been swept along by Hitler's promises were having doubts and his vote fell. But as the pagans and atheists still held half the seats in Parliament, and other democratic parties would not help to form a stable government, the administration of the country was reaching a state of paralysis.

The President said that as the Nazis were the largest party, they would have to be included in a coalition government. When the Catholic party refused to co-operate, he invited Hitler to Berlin on November 30th. and on January 2nd the President appointed a general as Chancellor (Prime Minister).

Hitler was losing popular support and was unable to pay his party workers. Two of his top four advisors urged him to compromise and form a government without becoming a dictator ((WS 176)). For twelve days the threat to Christianity appeared to be passing. But on January 15th, in a by-election at Lippe, the Nazi vote rose ((WS 180)). This dealt an immense psychological shock to the whole country. With Hitler's popularity on the rise again, it was the President who now felt he had to compromise before Hitler was swept to power.

He asked Hitler to form a coalition government with the Nationalist Party. This was done on Hitler's terms, but as it lacked a majority, fresh elections were needed. These were won by this Hitler led coalition on March 5th. 1933

Comment

The near victory of Hitler (Nov 30th-Jan 2nd) appears mirrored by Mary's urgent call for prayers at Beauring (Nov 29th-Jan 3rd).

Hitler regained the initiative on January 15th and power on March 5th. The apparitions which recommenced on January 15th and ended on March 2nd, again mirrored what was happening in Germany. It is likely that by the 2nd, when Mary was looking sorrowful, the Germans within the privacy of their own minds had decided how they were going to vote. The fatal decisions had been made. At Banneux Mary's stress on 'all nations', was a direct contradiction of Nazi racism.

LUCIA'S MEMOIRS 1941-1942

Lucia's bishop requested her on several occasions to write down more details about the events of 1917. But he respected her right not to make known 'the secret'.

During 1941, when a new edition of a book regarding Jacinta was being prepared, the bishop asked Lucia to contribute her memories of her cousin. She agreed but, to make her cousin's short life meaningful, found it necessary to make known two parts of 'the secret' to the general public. She said that there was a third part that she would still not disclose. These memoirs were in the form of reminiscences, not a biography nor an autobiography, nor a complete history of the apparitions.

The bishop of Leria, who had watched over the commission of enquiry since 1922, promoted their publication. The Vatican Press published the book giving the details ((VMDO 47)). This form of publication, together with the attitude of the Portuguese hierarchy and the Popes, point to the Memoirs being accepted as a true account of the apparitions by the highest church authorities. As the subject matter does not come within the scope of Catholic doctrine, this acceptance, like that of all visions, was based on human judgement.

In a Memoir dated 31st August 1941, Lucia wrote that on the 13th July 1917 Jacinta and herself had been given the knowledge that many went to hell. They saw in a vision what hell was like. This was the first part of 'the secret'. Lucia's narrative then continued with the second part:

'We then looked up at Our Lady, who said to us so kindly and so sadly:

"You have seen hell where 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 Plus XI. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given to 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 will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world.'" ((LS 104)).

The bishop then asked Lucia to describe Francisco's life. This she did in her fourth Memoir, completed on December 8th of the same year. The account of 'the secret' was repeated, with a few words added.

"In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved; etc... Do not tell this to anybody. Francisco, yes, you may tell him... When you pray the Rosary, say after each mystery: ["O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are most in need.]" ((LS 162-166)).

Notes 1. The dots after 'etc' and 'him' are in Lucia's original.

2. The prayer within the square brackets had first been taught to the children in June and made known then. ((GLB 46)).
3. Jacinta's version had "of your mercy" added to the end.
4. In 1917 the parents misquoted their children's words, making the last part read 'deliver the souls in Purgatory, especially the most abandoned'. This error was printed in some early books about Fatima. ((GLB 46)).
5. In June 1917 Russia was not a Marxist atheist country, so the words 'her errors' were without any apparent meaning at that time.

The Memoirs were published in April 1942. Some accepted that Lucia had reported the words exactly as uttered by Our Lady in 1917. Others took the view that she used her own words to exactly express information infused into her mind in 1917. Others noted that Lucia, as other mystics, had said that it is impossible to describe mystical experience in precise human words. With age, Lucia had gained a fuller vocabulary, and had, read the attempts of other visionaries to explain themselves. She would have rationalised in her own mind what she had experienced in 1917. These developments could have influenced the words used in her memoirs. For example: when describing the vision of hell she used traditional imagery. Whether this imagery was part of the vision or a rationalised form of an interior revelation, we will never know. It may have been similar to the events at Fatima where the sun had not gone out of orbit, yet 70,000 saw it do so.

In 1917 Lucia's mother had reported that her daughter had spoken of seeing 'sheeted forms' about a year previously ((CCMB 43)). Lucia in 1926 mentioned seeing angels before the 1917 apparitions ((CCMB 44)). Lucia in these memoirs provides more details ((LS 60-62)). Jacinta and Francisco were concerned at so many people going to hell ((GLB 57)). The event recorded in Lucia's memoirs would account for their concern.

Criticism

Lucia has been criticised for waiting until after the war had started before making known the prophecy about the illuminated sky. Her reply has been that Our Lady in 1917 instructed her to keep these things secret.

Lucia said that during a vision on 17th December 1927, Our Lord gave her permission to disclose the 'secret' so as to be able to promote devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

She immediately informed her confessor in writing, but he told her to destroy her letter. She told another confessor. He reacted in the same manner. But he then asked her to rewrite it ((VMDO 55)). These chaplains would most likely have told the bishop's Commission, which was collecting everything to do with the Apparitions, about these messages. She spoke to the priest of Olival ((VMDO 51)), who was on the Commission ((GLB 202)). She also informed her Mother Provincial, her bishop and Fr. Galamba, but couldn't remember how much detail she had included. ((JDM 201-3)).

It is worth reflecting that if the prophetic part had been made known to the public in the 1930s, No Pope-elect would have chosen the title of 'Pius XI'. To have done so would have been viewed by many as a sign of the inevitability of war during his reign. The will to work for peace would have been undermined. Also, the Church was condemning both Communism and Nazism and was determined not to give implicit support to either evil creed. Hitler's propaganda would have stressed that Mary had condemned Russia's errors but not those of Germany. For this reason, when in October 1942, while the war was still in process, the Memoirs were first published, the church authorities suppressed the word 'Russia' in the passage '...ask for the consecration of Russia to my ...', and replaced it with 'the world'. ((VMDO 54, CCMB 141-2)).

On 6th February 1938 Lucia wrote to her confessor asserting that the January light in the sky (an aurora) was the sign of imminent war. This letter was passed to her bishop, who sent a copy in February 1939 to Cardinal Cerejeira. ((GLB 220-1)).

As Lucia was burning with the desire to promote the message of Fatima, It is unlikely that she would have kept her 'secret' from the bishop when Christ had given her permission to reveal it. So it is probable that a small group were aware before 1938 of the main outlines of Mary's prophecy. The chaplains and bishop would not know, however, whether Lucia was fantasizing. So it is not surprising her bishop urged her to silence. If this is so, the aurora of January 1938 would have made a deep impression on the church authorities. The bishop publicly recognised the truth of her claim to be having visions on 13th September 1939, ten days after the start of the world war ((FR 187-8)) and repeated this on the 21st. ((FR 189)).

It may be noted that Lucia sent her third Memoir to her bishop on 31st August 1941. He promoted its wide publication a mere nine months later. The book in which it was published had an imprimatur of the Vicar General of Vatican City and was printed on the Vatican Press ((VMDO 47)).

It is most unlikely that this would have been done if the Church authorities had not been already aware of the contents and had considered them very carefully over many years ((VMDO 47)).

The criticism of Lucia for not making public the prophecy earlier, rests on the assumption that the sign of an illuminated sky was meant for the general public, even though Lucia says that it wasn't ((LS 110)).

Lucia received three messages for three separate recipients.

1. For the Public:

The need for prayer, repentance, the rosary and reparation.

Made known in 1917, this was authenticated by the miracle of the sun.

2. For the bishops and the Pope.

This consisted of what became known as two 'secrets'. But a more accurate description would have been that of a vision followed by a message. The vision dramatically stressed the importance of the message that followed. The message was the need for the bishops throughout the world to promote the First Saturdays devotion to the Heart of Mary. And for the Pope, in union with the bishops of the world (i.e. collegially), to consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It is not known what convinced the Church of the reliability of this message. If Lucia's bishop and high officials in Rome knew of the prophecies regarding the aurora and war before they were fulfilled, this would have provided evidence.

It should be borne in mind that Lucia didn't deliberately proclaim that she had 'a secret'. Her involuntary cry of: 'Oh', was heard by bystanders and, when they pressed her to explain it, she could only answer: "It's a secret". ((VMDO 12)). Without this incident the general public would not have been aware of 'a secret' until 1942.

3. For the Pope

The remaining part of the message was for the Pope and his close associates. When Lucia caught pleurisy in 1943, she decided to write the message down ((JAP 238)). In June 1944 she gave it, in a sealed envelope, to her bishop. Our Lady had not said when it should be made known but Lucia agreed that the envelope was to be opened at her death or in 1960, whichever came first. In 1955 Cardinal Ottaviani asked why they had to await 1960. Lucia replied: "Because then it will appear clearer". In 1957 the Sacred Congregation of the Faith took possession of the envelope ((JAP 197)).

In 1959, Pope John XXIII sent letters to all the bishops of the world. He asked which subjects should be discussed at the forthcoming Vatican Council. In early 1960 the responses from the bishops were being assessed ((LA 262-3)). It was at this crucial time that Lucia's message, to the Pope from Our Lady, was opened. Pope John read the note, which was on a single piece of paper, showed it to Cardinal Ottaviani and then returned it to the Vatican archives ((JAP 197)). As this message was addressed to the Pope, there was no need for it to ever be disclosed.

A NIGHT ILLUMINATED

In a previous section reference was made to an aurora in 1938, which Lucia considered to be the sign of impending war spoken of by Mary in 1917. This needs to be considered in greater detail.

On the 5th November 1937, Hitler called his chief Commanders to a four-hour meeting. They were Blomberg who was the Minister of War, Fritsch the commander of the army, Reader of the navy and Goering of the airforce. Also present was the Foreign Minister Neurath and minutes secretary, Hossbach. Hitler announced that he intended to launch a war in the east by 1943. Goering and Reader acquiesced but the others protested and tried to dissuade Hitler during the following weeks ((WS 307-309)). Neurath could be replaced easily, but the War Minister and the army Commander presented Hitler with a problem. As head of state Hitler was officially in command of the military, but the armed forces still possessed some independence and the soldiers were loyal to their officers and generals. If provoked, the army still held the power to overthrow him ((WS 320)).

When on the 12th January 1938, Blomberg married his secretary it came to Hitler's ears that she had been a prostitute. At the same time the Nazi police forged evidence to show that Fritsch was being blackmailed due to alleged homosexual behaviour. Hitler used these pieces of information to remove these men from office without provoking objections from other generals. With their removal Hitler became, in effect, the sole commander of all German armed forces. He stated this at a cabinet meeting on February 4th and, in a decree of the same date, by announcing: "From now on I take over personally the command of the whole armed forces". ((WS 318)). Hitler used his new authority to dismiss or demote sixty generals and remove Neurath from office. He replaced them with men willing to follow him into war. Hitler now had under his immediate and personal command a war machine with which to conquer Europe.

It was during the evening of January 25th that Blomberg was forced to resign. Referring to Blomberg's secretary, Colonel Jodl wrote in his diary: 'What influence a woman, even without realizing it, can exert on the history of a century and thereby on the world, one has the feeling of living in a fateful hour for the German people.' ((WS 311)). Fritsch was suspended from duties during the evening of the 26th.

It was during these same two nights of the 25th and 26th, that the sky was illuminated all over Europe by an extraordinary aurora. These are caused by sunspots and occur frequently above the arctic circle. But the Aurora of the 25th and 26th of January 1938 was very exceptional. Greenwich Observatory began keeping records in 1875. In January it reported the largest sunspot ever recorded. ((ILN 29th Jan. 1938)). The subsequent aurora was reported in the south of England where seldom seen. In Austria the sky was so lit-up and vivid that fire brigades were called out to deal with supposed fires ((26th Jan. 1938)).

The Times on the following day reported that the Aurora had been seen all over Hungary, where the red glare had awakened people and animals. The Swiss fire brigades were kept on standby as it was thought that there were fires in Alsatian villages.

It was seen in Munich and other German towns. Cafes in Vienna emptied. At Ostend fishermen didn't go out to sea. Due to fog it was not observed over Paris, but was seen in the rest of France. In Portugal, where an aurora had not been sighted for 50 years, it lasted for two and a half hours. In Gibraltar It was viewed for the first time in living memory. It was observed throughout Italy, even as far south as Sicily.

At Lerwick In Scotland it was the most memorable since 1905 and lasted twelve hours. It was particularly red and wireless services were interrupted. Railway signs in Scotland were put out of action. ((TL 27th Jan. 1938)).

Lucia wrote to her bishop saying 'this great unknown light' was the sign of impending war, as foretold on the 13th July 1917. ((JB 177)).

Two months later, Hitler used his new power to invade Austria. In September 1939 Hitler invaded Poland, which resisted, and within a few days Britain and France went to her aid. So September 1939 is normally accepted as the month when the world war started. It has been pointed out, that Our Lady spoke of war breaking out during the reign of Plus XI, yet he was dead by September 1939. But Hitler's conquests started with Austria although, to save lives, her army did not resist. The Allies officially recognised that Austria was Hitler's first victim and in need of liberation. ((EB 138 and RH 7-10)). At the time of the invasion of Austria, Pius XI was still alive.

PAPAL ACTS

In 1947 Pope Pius XII ruled that a feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was to be held throughout the Church each year on August 22nd, He also proclaimed a Holy Year commencing on the 24th December 1949, ((FJ 11)). During that year, on November 1st 1950, he defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary into heaven ((NP 246)). Catholics believed the tradition that Mary's body had not decayed but had been taken (i.e. assumed) into heaven. Pius XII was defining this belief as part of the Catholic Faith.

Just prior to the public definition in St. Peter's Rome, Pius saw a sign, which was repeated on November 1st and on the octave of the feast. The incident was later described by his housekeeper:

"On 30th October 1950 when the Pope was returning home from his walk In the Vatican gardens, Pius XII saw a strange spectacle: the sun which was still quite high in the sky, appeared as a dark, pale yellow ball surrounded by a bright halo. A soft, light coloured cloud floated in front of it. The ball moved outwards slightly, either revolving on its axis or leaving its path to the right and left and returning to it again". ((PL 136)).

The Pope told several people and made enquiries to see if the Vatican Observatory had detected any unusual activity. The Observatory replied that it had not seen anything exceptional. ((PL 136)).

Cardinal Tedeschini announced the incident to the one million pilgrims at Fatima on the 13th October 1951 ((JAP 151)), and this was reported in the *L'Osservatore Romano* of 17th November 1951 ((FJ 11)).

In 1981 an attempt was made to assassinate Pope John Paul II. This took place on May 13th, anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima. Afterwards, his assassin asked the Pope "I know that my aim was true, and I know that the bullet was very powerful and mortal... so why didn't you die?" The Pope replied: "One hand fired the shot, another guided it." ((TTR 7)). One report said that the Pope had made a gesture towards a little girl wearing a picture of Our Lady of Fatima, and that this slight movement had saved him. ((CDE 638 Dec 1990)).

The Pope accepted that Our Lady of Fatima had intervened ((TTR 3, 4)). Due to his wound the Pope was forced to cancel his world wide preaching tours and to stay in bed. While resting, he called for all the documents regarding Fatima to be brought to him ((TTR 6)). After careful study, he told bishop Hnilica that only Our Lady could overcome Communism. He arranged for a chapel to be built in a Polish forest close to the Russian border, and to have placed in it a statue facing the Soviet Union. The statue was of Our Lady of Fatima, but with the addition of a crown ((TTR 10-12)).

On May 13th 1982 the Pope gave thanks at Fatima for his survival, and publicly consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. But Lucia pointed out that Our Lady had asked for such a consecration to be carried out in union with the world's bishops (i.e. collegially). So on December 8th 1983 the Pope sent a letter to all the Catholic and Orthodox bishops asking them to join him on March 25th 1984 (feast of the Annunciation) In an act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For the ceremony, Our Lady's pilgrim statue was brought from Fatima and placed In front of St. Peter's in Rome. Lucia said that although some bishops may not have taken part, there had been general support so the request for a collegial consecration had been carried out. ((TTR 17-18)).

In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was elected Communist Party Secretary, the most powerful position in the Soviet system ((KRWE 33538)). After 68 years of apparently invincible and permanent Communism, and within a year of the consecration, the political move occurred which would bring Communist power to an end. The Pope next designated the fourteen months from the end of Pentecost 1987 (6th June) till the feast of the Assumption (15th August 1988), as a 'Marian Year'.

THE SPELL OF MARXISM IS BROKEN

On 28th April 1988, during the Marian Year, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would grant religious freedom. On December the 1st, Gorbachev and the Pope met. Diplomatic relations were established with the Vatican on the 15th March 1990. ((TTR 36)). On October 1st a Bill was passed to permit religious freedom, end atheist education in schools and permit church established schools. ((KRWE 37788)). It was also announced that there would be holidays on major religious festivals. The Pope became convinced that the collapse of state atheism in the Soviet Union was due to a miracle worked through Our Lady of Fatima. ((TTR 34-38)).

The Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin was returned to the Orthodox Church, and the first religious ceremony since 1917 was held In St. Basil's Cathedral on the 13th of October 1990. This was the anniversary of the great Fatima miracle. The Orthodox Church was not fostering devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, so the date had not been chosen with this intended significance. Both days fell on a Saturday. This commemorative service was held 'to celebrate Mary's intercession to alleviate human suffering.' ((TL Oct. 15th, 1990)). At Banneux, Mary had used the words "I have come to alleviate human suffering." ((DW 12)).

On 19th August 1991 a coup was attempted to re-establish Communism. ((KRWE 38368)). This day was the anniversary of August 19th 1917, when Our Lady appeared at Fatima out of sequence. In the West, TV stations showed Boris Yeltsin, on a tank outside parliament. He was calling the citizens of Moscow to come in there thousands to defend the building. But few in Moscow heard his call because supporters of the coup had seized all the radio and TV transmitters. ((KRWE 38369)).

The cult of Our Lady of Fatima had made Catholics very conscious of the need to work for the freeing of Russia from Communism. So, as soon as the oppressive laws were eased, a Catholic radio and TV network based in Belgium sent a transmitter to Moscow. While waiting for a licence, it was stored in a warehouse, so unknown to the Communists. The gift of the transmitter was an ecumenical venture, so one of Yeltsin's supporters in Parliament, an Orthodox Christian, was aware of its existence. It was offered to Yeltsin, and his troops sped to the warehouse and brought it to parliament hidden beneath lettuces and tomatoes. ((ACN Jan 1992, supplement)). Yeltsin used this transmitter, established on the roof of Parliament, to rally the people of Moscow and thereby defeat the Communist coup. ((KRWE 38369)).

From its inception this Catholic radio and TV network had been dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. ((CRTN 22nd September 1993)).

In 1944, the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was moved to August 22nd. But in 1971, this feast was transferred to the first Saturday following the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. ((TTR 52)). The 22nd of August became the Feast of the Queenship of Mary. ((TTR 52-3)). The small crowned statue of Our Lady of Fatima on the Polish border had symbolised this double meaning. By tradition the evening prior to a feast day is considered as part of the feast and called its 'vigil'. During the vigil of this feast the coup collapsed. So next morning, feast of the Queenship of Mary, Russia and its associated states awoke as countries finally free of state atheism.

Yeltsin was thankful for the transmitter's assistance, and permitted it to remain for a time on the roof of Parliament broadcasting Catholic and Orthodox religious programmes. ((ACN January 1992 supplement)). The station became known as 'Radio Blagovest' (An invitation to prayer). During the following weeks friendly relations developed between Mr. Correa, managing director of the Catholic network and the director of Russian television. Mr Correa had become dedicated to the radio apostolate due to his interest in Fatima. When asked to suggest programmes about the West, he proposed this topic. This resulted in the transmission on Russian TV, and 300 radio stations, of a 75 minute live programme from the 13th October 1991 celebrations direct from Fatima. It concluded with discussions involving a live audience in a Moscow studio ((TTR 76-80)). On the same day the old capital city of Leningrad reverted to its Christian name of St. Petersburg ((TTR 56)).

The programme was repeated in the non-Moslem republics during the evening. By public demand, it was repeated again on November 7th by over 150 Russian TV stations, 180 Polish stations and by 380 cable services in the USA. This day was the anniversary of the Communist seizure of power in 1917, according to the Gregorian Calendar ((TTR 79)).

On December 8th, the leaders of Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia, officially and legally declared the Soviet Union to be defunct. This day was the feast of the Immaculate Conception ((KRWE 38654)). On the day celebrated as Christ's birthday, the 25th of December 1991, the hammer and sickle flag, symbol of atheist power, was finally lowered in Moscow and on all Soviet embassies throughout the world. ((TL Dec 26th, 1991)).

THE THIRD 'SECRET'

On the 26th June 2000 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the full text of what Lucia had written for the Pope in 1943 [See the chapter headed 'Lucia's Memoirs', part 3]. The following is the authorized transcript of the original handwritten Portuguese version.

I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Elyria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine. 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 splendour 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, men and women Religious 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, men and women Religious and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspergillum 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.

In a commentary, Cardinal Ratzinger said that this was a preview of the 20th century, with its world wars and many local wars, of martyrs, suffering and persecution for the Church and unprecedented forms of cruelty. The message had emphasized the need for prayer and penance. And in this way the importance of human freedom was underlined.

MEDJUGORJE

Is Mary appearing at Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina? The 1991 statement by the Bishops of the former Yugoslavia, meeting at Zadar, neither accepted nor ejected the claims of the visionaries, but left the way open for a future final decision.

‘Church In History’ is neutral regarding the events and awaits a final decision from the Church. This appears to be unlikely in the near future.

However, a significant section within the Catholic Community see the events, signs and messages as a continuation and fulfilment of the events at Fatima. Millions of pilgrims travel to Medjugorje each year. So some readers may be interested in the speculations that have been made. The listing of these below does not imply ‘Church-in-History’s endorsement of their validity.

1. The events at Medjugorje commenced on June 24th 1981. This was very soon after Pope John Paul II committed himself to carrying out the collegial consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as requested at Fatima. Medjugorje could therefore be seen as Our Lady’s response to the Pope’s commitment.
2. The word ‘Mir’ (Croatian for peace), which was seen by many in the sky, has the same root as the word ‘Iria’ (From Irene in Greek meaning ‘peace’). Our Lady appeared at ‘the Cova de Iria’ at Fatima (See page 12).
3. Fatima is named after a converted Muslim princess who established a convent there. In 778 Mirat, a Muslim General, surrendered his castle of Mirambel to Our Lady, was baptised ‘Lorus’ and reappointed as commander. The town became known as ‘Lorus’ - [Our Lady]. Bosnia-Herzegovina is the meeting place of the Catholic world to the west, the Orthodox to the east and the Muslim to the south.
4. The solar phenomena was similar to that at Fatima, although on a far less scale.
5. The words of Mary: “I am the Queen of Peace”, recalls that Pope Benedict XV honoured her liturgically with this title in his letter of 1917 (see page 11).

6. The promise of leaving: 'a visible, beautiful, permanent and indestructible sign', recalls Pope Benedict's final request in his letter of 1917: "...and in the times to come remind mankind of the power of her mediation." (See pages 11 and 39).

Pilgrims are not drawn to Medjugorje by these speculations, but by stories of the shrine being a source of great graces. The speculations are based on the acceptance that Mary is appearing at Medjugorje. Those who do not share this acceptance see them as mere coincidences. Some see Medjugorje as a distraction from Fatima.

The calls at Medjugorje are similar to those heard at Fatima, although with a post-Vatican II tone: Prayer, penance, reparation, praying the rosary, life reform. There is no mention of receiving Communion on the seven Saturdays with associated Confessions, but a call for daily Communion and frequent Confession. There is an added emphasis on Eucharistic Adoration, fasting and Scripture reading.

In order to keep a sense of proportion between the value of apparitions and the Faith of the Church, it may be useful to re-read the Introduction to this booklet.

SHORT NOTES

1. In November 1915 Benedict XV permitted the invocation "Queen of Peace, pray for us" to be incorporated into the Litany. But it was not made compulsory till May 1917. ((TAB May 12th 1917)). It was during this same preparatory period that an angel was preparing the children at Fatima for the main apparitions of 1917.

2. Eugenio Pacelli was a central Catholic figure of the 20th century. As the Pope's representative negotiating with the German pro-peace Chancellor, he was at the centre of the struggle for peace in 1917. As Pope Pius XII, he had to guide the Church through the terrors of Nazism, the horrors of the Second World War and the challenge of Communism. He may have been strengthened by the knowledge that at the very moment Mary was appearing for the first time at Fatima, he was being consecrated in Rome as a bishop by Pope Benedict XV, who had called for Mary's help five days earlier. ((VMDO 115)).

3. The smuggling of radio equipment into the Russian Parliament under vegetables in 1991 recalls that the first statue of Our Lady of Fatima was made in a nearby Portuguese village. The intention was to install it in the Cova on 13th May 1920. To achieve this it had to be smuggled on a cart, under farm implements, through the army road-blocks surrounding Fatima. ((GLB 191-2)).

4. A similarity has been noticed between Pope Benedict's letter of 5th May 1917, and the themes at Fatima.

Benedict wrote of:

- a. the need to turn to heaven.
- b. the need to approach Jesus with contrite hearts.
- c. Mary being the distributor of all Christ's graces.
- d. the greatest temples and lowliest churches.
- e. the need for all faithful souls uniting in prayer to Mary.
- f. His wish that Mary will remind mankind of her mediation.

Mary said At Fatima:

- a. In May: "I am from heaven." ((LS 158)).
- b. In June: "Pray regularly 'O My Jesus forgive us...'" ((LS 166)).
- c. In July. "I shall come... If my requests... "my Immaculate Heart will triumph...consecrate Russia to me" ((LS 104-5)).
- d. August: "...help towards the construction of a chapel..." ((LS 66)).
- e. In September: "Continue to pray the Rosary in order to obtain the end of the war..." ((LS 168)).

5. It has been asked why Mary demanded a collegial consecration before Communist power could be broken. Lucia has said that Jesus wished the whole Church to realise that the defeat of Communism had been due to devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This would emphasize this devotion's importance. ((JAP 160)). It may be added that when the bishops joined the Pope's cry for help in May 1917, they were acting collegially. It was therefore appropriate for Mary to require a collegial response to her recipe for peace.

6. Hitler's government in 1933 consisted of Nationalists as well as Nazis. 'The parties would meet separately to decide policy prior to a cabinet meeting. As the Nazis had a majority in the cabinet, it was their meeting that effectively decided government policy. A cabinet meeting on 14th July 1933 ((GS 60)) ordered the sterilization of Germans with hereditary diseases.

It was the first step towards the extermination camps. The Nazi meeting most likely took place on the 13th, an anniversary of the July vision of hell.

7. Sometimes it is asked how far the Fatima promises have been fulfilled. Some would point out that Mary's promise to return was fulfilled on 10th December 1925. The world did not heed Mary's requests during the 1930's and, after a sign in the sky; Europe did experience a terrible war, famines and persecutions. Attempts were made to annihilate whole nations. Russia was not converted from atheism and, after the war, did spread her errors throughout the world. These caused smaller wars and the church was persecuted in many places. The Holy Father did eventually collegially consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and soon afterwards the threat of a nuclear war was lifted.

Although local wars still occur, many would claim that Mary's Heart has triumphed. Some people are disappointed that Russia has not been converted to Catholicism. But this was not promised. Mary's words could have meant that Russia would be converted from Marxism. Also we do not know what will happen in the future.

9. It has been widely reported that Jesuit priests living the message of Fatima were residing in the centre of Hiroshima when the atom bomb was dropped. It is said that they escaped unhurt and their house was undamaged. According to an eyewitness, this is not true. ((JS 8-15)).

MARY AND HER SON

All Christians should be evangelists: mediators, or 'bridges', between Christ and those who know little about Him. For Catholics, Mary is the great evangelist: constantly working to bring people to her Son. Her mediation, especially evident at shrines with occasional miracles, creates the spiritual climate for an encounter, in the depths of a person's being, with Mary's Son.

An underlying problem throughout Europe is what is known as Positivism. It may also be known as Empiricism or Materialism. People are dominated by the fear of believing without physical proofs based on scientific experiments on matter. Apparitions appeal directly to a person's spiritual nature, so bypass this blockage to understanding. They thereby open up the whole personality.

Apparitions are not intended to prove the truth of Christianity. They are signs that awaken or intensify the spiritual dimension of life. By providing a taste of holiness, of making a person aware of God's power and love, they are invitations to search further. The last words of Mary, recorded in the Bible when referring to her Son, are: "Do whatever He tells you". ((John 2: 5)).

THE MESSAGE OF THE APPARITIONS

This booklet has recounted apparitions in date order, placing them in their historical contexts and highlighted certain political events. But a summary is needed of the messages. The 1957 Papal Encyclical, written to celebrate the centenary of Lourdes, provides such a summary:

"In a society which was hardly aware of the evils eating away its very roots, which covered up its wretchedness and its injustices with a veil of brilliant and carefree prosperity, the Immaculate Virgin, whom sin had never touched, showed herself to an innocent girl. ...she ...uttered her urgent appeal: 'Repentance, repentance, repentance. ...You must pray to God for sinners.' ...as for the crowds who pressed around our Lord, so at Lourdes the cures of physical infirmities are at the same time acts of compassion and signs that the Son of Man has power to forgive sin.

It was the prayer of Plus XI ...'that blinded souls should receive the light of truth and justice, that those whom error has led astray should be led back to the right path, that a just liberty should everywhere be granted to the Church and an era of peace and true prosperity dawn upon all nations'.

The world to-day has many just causes for pride and for hope; but at the same time it is subject to a terrible temptation to that materialism which ...We ...have so often denounced. It is not only the basis of that philosophy, already condemned, that underlies the politics and economic system of a portion of mankind; it is manifested also in that love of money which, in proportion to the large scale of modern enterprises, weighs heavily upon the lives of so many people.

It betrays itself in the cult of the body, the excessive seeking for comfort and the shunning of any kind of austerity in life; it extends to the contempt of human life — even unborn life — which it destroys before it has seen the light of day.

It is present in the unbridled pursuit of pleasure which parades its shamelessness and tries to seduce souls still innocent, through literature and entertainments; It reveals itself in regardlessness for our brother's welfare, in the selfishness which crushes him and the injustice which denies him his rights. In a word it is the conception of life as regulated solely in view of material prosperity and earthly satisfactions. 'My soul,' the rich man said, 'thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thy rest; eat, drink, make good cheer.' But God said to him: 'Thou fool, this night thy soul is required of thee.' [Luke 12: 20).

Our complicated social structure and economic pressure sometimes put a strain on men's good will and seem to paralyse it. But ...We Ourselves have often insisted, that the possibility of social and political peace is primarily a moral question, no reform can be fruitful and no agreements enduring without a change and a purification of men's hearts. To this our Lady of Lourdes calls all men in this jubilee year." ((PXII 10-15)).

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A Miraculous Medal must not be treated as a lucky charm, but as a token of Mary's love for the one who is wearing it.

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MAXIMIILIAN KOLBE, while a Franciscan seminarian student in Rome, was inspired by a talk regarding Alphonse Ratisbonne and the Miraculous Medal. Later that year he founded 'The Crusade of Mary Immaculate' with the medal as a symbol of internal dedication to prayer, work and penance. The first meeting was held on 16th October 1917, three days after the miracle of the sun at Fatima, of which he was unaware. When Kolbe returned to his native Poland, the Crusade was so successful in encouraging vocations, that he was able to found a large Franciscan friary in 1927. The Crusade has now spread worldwide. Kolbe was murdered in Auschwitz Concentration Camp during August 1941 ((TMI 6-17)) and proclaimed a saint in 1982.

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"Miracles to the Catholic are facts of history and biography, and nothing else; and they are to be regarded and dealt with as other facts; ..."

John Henry Newman ((JHN 308))

Christian prophecies are conditional. They provide a forecast of what will occur if mankind lives in a certain manner. The fulfilment of such a prophecy is not inevitable as in a pagan fatalistic prophesy. A most important element contained within a Christian prophesy is the message that mankind can, through repentance, prayer and God's assistance, change the direction of human history.

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