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Vatican releases text of once-secret prophecy

Move follows Pope's surprise announcement in May

June 26, 2000
Web posted at: 11:01 p.m. EDT (0301 GMT)

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From staff and wire reports

VATICAN CITY -- Seeking to discourage continued speculation about the so-called "third secret of Fatima," the Vatican on Monday released what it said was the complete text handwritten by the sole survivor of three shepherd children who said the Virgin Mary spoke to them in 1917.

The third secret had been closely guarded by the Vatican until May 13 of this year, when Pope John Paul II revealed that it predicted his 1981 assassination attempt. Many followers had mistakenly believed the Vatican had been hiding the secret because it foretold the apocalypse.

There were some contradictions between the May 13 and Monday's accounts, including whether John Paul had read the secret before or after he was shot.

Vatican cautious

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The Vatican was also cautious about the meaning of visions for the church, describing such private revelations as helpful but without an obligation that they be believed.

"It should be kept in mind that prophecy in the biblical sense does not mean to predict the future but to explain the will of God for the present, and therefore show the right path to take for the future," said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

The first two secrets, long ago made public, are said to have foretold the end of World War I, the outbreak of World War II and the rise and fall of Soviet communism.

The so-called third secret was first read by Pope John XXIII in the early 60s, according to the Vatican, but neither he nor his successor, Pope Paul VI, made it public, thus fueling speculation that it contained a horrible prediction, perhaps the end of the world.

In a commentary laying out the Vatican's interpretation of the secret, Ratzinger wrote: "No great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled."

However, Ratzinger's commentary did contest suggestions by the Turk who shot the pope, Mehmet Ali Agca, that he was merely an instrument of God's plan.

The pope, shortly after he was shot, said he believes the hand of the Virgin Mary deflected the attacker's bullet, allowing him to survive.

This shows, Ratzinger said, "that there is no immutable destiny, that faith and prayer are forces which can influence history and that in the end prayer is more powerful than bullets and faith more powerful than armies."

Excerpts from the nun's letter

In her 43-page letter written in 1941, Sister Lucia de Jesus dos Santos described a bishop dressed in white. The letter continued: "We had the impression that it was the Holy Father ... climbing 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

VIDEO
 Rome Bureau Chief Gayle Young reports on how the Roman Catholic Church interprets Sister Lucia de Jesus dos Santos 43-page handwritten letter
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group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him..."

In the second secret, thought by some to predict the rise and fall of Soviet communism, dos Santos said Russia must embrace the church, or it will "spread (its) 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 shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."

Discrepancies

When John Paul II visited [Fatima](#) on May 13, the anniversaries of both the visions and the assassination attempt, his spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said the pope had read the secret within days after assuming the papacy in 1978.

But a top aide to Ratzinger, Monsignor Tarcisio Bertone, told Monday's Vatican news conference that John Paul read it for the first time in his hospital bed after the attack.

Ratzinger explained that popes had delayed revealing the secret because of the fuzziness of the message and that only "in the light of history can you decipher the story."

As would be expected, not all skeptics were satisfied. The Rev. Nicholas Gruner, who runs the Fatima Center Web site, said from Fort Erie, Ontario, that he had questions about the authenticity of the handwritten letter.

Interest in the message was such that the Vatican's Web site was jammed all day.

Rome Bureau Chief [Gayle Young](#), [The Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) contributed to this report.

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Vatican ends mystery of the third prophecy of Fatima

Secret revealed as Pope John Paul II beatifies children who saw vision of Mary

May 13, 2000
 Web posted at: 4:21 p.m. EDT (2021 GMT)

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[FATIMA, Portugal](#) (CNN) -- In a dramatic revelation, the Vatican disclosed on Saturday that the so-called third secret of Fatima foretold the 1981 assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II.

The Roman Catholic Church revealed the prophecy during a ceremony in Fatima, Portugal, in which Pope John Paul II beatified two children who said the Virgin Mary spoke to them in Fatima several times in 1917.

The ceremony coincided with the 19th anniversary of the attempted assassination of John Paul and the 83rd anniversary of the day the Virgin Mary is first thought to have appeared to the children.

After years of speculation, including fears that the third vision told of apocalypse, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano said that the "third part of the secret of Fatima" speaks of a "bishop clothed in white" who "falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a burst of gunfire."

The Vatican believes the prophecy refers to the attempted assassination of John Paul, who was shot May 13, 1981 at St. Peter's Square in Rome. The pope credits the Virgin Mary with saving his life when he was seriously wounded by Mehmet Ali Agca.

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Some Catholics believe the two other prophecies, well-known within the Catholic Church, tell of a vision of hell, interpreted as World War II, and the rise and fall of Soviet Communism.

More than a half-million pilgrims witnessed Saturday's beatification mass at Fatima, about 87 miles (140 km) north of Lisbon. The ceremony marks the final step in the process of achieving sainthood.

Shepherds in a field

Jacinta and Francisco Marto and their cousin, Lucia dos Santos, said the Virgin Mary appeared to them as they were tending sheep in Fatima. According to the children, she gave them three visions.

For decades, however, the third vision was a closely held secret, known only by popes and a few top Vatican officials.

Speculation about the vision has electrified church members, with some fearing it called for the end of the world. The secret of Fatima inspired hundreds of books and even prompted a 1981 plane hijacking by a man who wanted the Vatican to reveal it.

Since 1930, when the Church declared the visions to be worthy of belief, Fatima's fame has spread. The town of about 8,000 draws about 5 million pilgrims a year, putting it on par with the shrine of Lourdes in southern France.

Jacinto and Francisco died of pneumonia two years after they said they saw the Madonna. Their cousin, Lucia, became a nun.

Lucia, 93 and in frail health, has been cloistered since 1929 in a Portuguese Carmelite convent. Lucia attended Saturday's ceremony, sitting beside the tombs of her cousins in Fatima's neo-Baroque basilica.

The sister is ineligible for beatification because it is a status reserved for the dead.

Horrors of 20th century

In a two-and-a-half-hour ceremony, John Paul told pilgrims that modern society must return to traditional values if it wants to avoid self-destruction.

"The message of Fatima is a call to conversion, appealing to humanity so that it does not fall into the (devil's) trap," he said, adding that a struggle between good and evil continues today.

The horrors of the past century, including wars, ethnic cleansing, drugs and abortion, has produced many victims of evil, he said.

"Man, by putting God to the side, cannot reach happiness. He will only end up destroying himself," said the pope, resplendent in gold

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and white vestments.

The pontiff, who turns 80 on Thursday, looked tired on his arrival Friday in Portugal. The Mass in Fatima, however, appeared to energize him.

This is John Paul's third trip to Fatima.

Correspondent Gayle Young, The [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) contributed to this report.

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