

# Fatima: The secret's out, despite claims to the contrary

VATICAN CITY - Despite claims there are still secrets connected to the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, Pope Benedict XVI and his secretary of state said the entire message has been published and has been interpreted accurately.

The Marian apparitions to three children in Fatima, Portugal, began 90 years ago May 13, and Pope John Paul II ordered the so-called "third secret" of Fatima to be published in 2000.

As the Fatima anniversary approached, the Vatican bookstore was selling copies of "The Last Fatima Visionary: My Meetings With Sister Lucia." The 140-page, Italian-language interview with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, opens with a letter of presentation from Pope Benedict.

The two men worked with Pope John Paul to publish the "third secret" and to write an official commentary on it, describing its depiction of a "man dressed in white" shot down amid the rubble of a ruined city as a prophetic vision of the 1981 attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul.

In the new book, Cardinal Bertone said Carmelite Sister Lucia dos Santos, at the time the last surviving visionary, confirmed the Vatican's interpretation.

He also said Pope John Paul felt that since the assassination attempt had already taken place and he survived, the 2000 beatification of Sister Lucia's cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, was an appropriate occasion for announcing the publication of the secret.

The continuing rumors that the Vatican is still hiding something puzzle Cardinal Bertone and, he said, they irritated Sister Lucia, who died in February 2005 at the age of 97.

In the book, Cardinal Bertone said, "The most diehard 'Fatimists,' like those who follow Father Nicholas Gruner's Fatima Crusader magazine, remain disappointed."

Father Gruner, a priest based in Canada, repeatedly has said that the Vatican's text does not match other accounts by Sister Lucia and, basically, does not contain anything worrying enough to have prevented Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II from publishing it earlier.

The strange thing, Cardinal Bertone said in the new book, is that Pope John Paul decided to publish the secret precisely to put an end to the wild speculation that had surrounded it.

"The pressure from the 'Fatimists' was extremely strong," the cardinal said.

"The most absurd theses" were being spread, mainly presuming that the secret predicted catastrophic world events or widespread heresy at the top levels of the church, Cardinal Bertone said.

"Clearing up the question was a pastoral concern," he said.

Pope Benedict's letter, written in late February, reflects that concern.

The publication of the third secret "was a time of light, not only because the message could be known by all, but also because it unveiled the truth amid the confused framework of apocalyptic interpretations and speculation circulating in the church, upsetting the faithful rather than asking them for prayers and repentance," Pope Benedict wrote.

The pope, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said he wrote the Vatican commentary "after having prayed intensely and meditated deeply on the authentic words of the third part of the secret of Fatima, contained on sheets written by Sister Lucia."

Pope Benedict said that for him the secret can be summarized "by the consoling promise of the Most Holy Virgin: 'My immaculate heart will triumph.'"

Cardinal Bertone's knowledge of the Fatima secret is not something that comes just from a book.

As secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he was sent by Pope John Paul to Fatima to discuss the upcoming publication of the secret with Sister Lucia.

What was known as the “third secret” was, in fact, the third part of a vision shown to Sister Lucia and her cousins.

Sister Lucia had made the first two parts public in the late 1930s. They included a vision of hell shown to the children, along with prophecies concerning the outbreak of World War II, the rise of communism and the ultimate triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, especially in Russia if the country was consecrated to her Immaculate Heart.

Sister Lucia wrote down the third part of the message, sealed it in an envelope and gave it to her local bishop. The message was sent to the Vatican in 1957, where successive popes read it, but decided not to reveal its contents.

As for objections that the secret could not refer to Pope John Paul since he did not die, Cardinal Bertone said such objections show an ignorance of the spiritual purpose of prophecy.

“Prophecy is not guided by a deterministic fatalism,” he said. “Prayer and penance are stronger than evil and than bullets.”

While prophecy warns of what could happen if people do not pray and repent, he said, it also demonstrates the fact that “conversion, penance and prayer can change the course of history.”