

What Is The Fatima Secret?

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(N.C.W.C. News Service)

On December 4, 1957, Bishop Jose Alves Correia da Silva of Leiria, Portugal, died at the age of 85. For 18 years he had been the guardian of a sealed envelope containing the third secret of Fatima.

According to recent reports, the document is now supposed to be in the possession of His Eminence Manoel Cardinal Goncalves Cerejeira, Patriarch of Lisbon.

The only living person who knows the contents of this third message is Lucia Aboobra, 50, the last of the three shepherd children who witnessed the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima in 1917. She is now Sister Lucia, a Carmelite nun in Coimbra.

From time to time reports have been circulated stating that the third secret has been revealed—Bishop Correia da Silva is said to have opened the envelope. Sister Lucia is supposed to have gone to Rome to tell Pope Pius XII the secret.

BOTH THESE reports have been denied, yet the wildest rumors about the envelope's contents have been spread abroad. These include:

● Adolf Hitler was to have taken the Holy Father prisoner and, by diabolical means, to have made him a Nazi puppet.

● Italian communists will capture, torture and kill the Pontiff.

● The Pope will abandon Rome and transfer the See of Peter across the ocean.

If and when the contents of the third message are made public in 1960, the thoughtful Christian or average Catholic might wonder about the credibility of such extraordinary matters.

Is it wrong for one not to accept such revelations as true? Does one sin by doubting them? What is the teaching of the Church?

Although certain visions and revelations have been approved by the proper ecclesiastical authorities as being of supernatural origin, the Church teaches that Catholics are not obliged to accept them as matters of faith.

JUST AS ALL Catholics are required to keep the Ten Commandments but are not required to follow the evangelical counsels of absolute poverty and perfect virginity, so also are Catholics required to accept the dogmas of the Faith that are divinely revealed and which are termed "public" revelation, but they are not bound to accept "private" revelations.

The Church does not guarantee that private revelations predicting future events will take place even if these predictions are made by very holy and saintly persons.

In the Bible can be found the classical example of the prediction of a future event by a holy man—a prophet of God—that did not take place. It is the story of Jonas the prophet who was commanded by God to tell the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed in 40 days.

ANOTHER well-known example is that of St. Vincent Ferrer who spent his last 21 years (1398-1419) announcing that the end of the world and Last Judgment were about to take place, and to convince his hearers of its truth, he worked many genuine miracles.

The explanation of these two cases is that the fulfillment of

these two dire prophecies was conditional in the mind of God. Though he did not tell Jonas or St. Vincent Ferrer, God wanted to spare Nineveh and the world if there would be sufficient repentance among the people who were given the message.

ASIDE FROM the conditional revelation, the following may be the cause of error or misapprehension with regard to popular ones made by saints:

1. A faulty interpretation can be made of a revelation, vision or message. For example, St. Josep of Arce was told by the "voices" that she would suffer martyrdom, thought for a time that it meant the cruel and inhuman treatment and great hardships which she had to endure in prison.

2. Ignorance of the fact that historical events are often summarized in a general outline with only approximate truth, or merely symbolized, leads to error. For example, various saints and stigmatics have had visions of the suffering and crucifixion of Christ that have differed in details, though not in the essential parts.

3. Human activity or knowledge sometimes becomes intermingled with supernatural actions or knowledge without being distinguished by the recipient. For example, St. Hildegard (1098-1179) had many true revelations but she often unconsciously interpolated opinions or beliefs prevalent in her day that have since been disproved—beliefs in the existence of dragons, unicorns and griffins.

4. Involuntary modifications or additions can be made when the visionary is recalling details of a revelation from memory, especially if the revelation lasted for some time or if a long time had lapsed before the revelation was written down.

5. Embellishment of revelations can be made knowingly by those who write down the revelations, or by those who edit what has been written by the visionary. This happened in the case of Anna Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) and Mary of Agreda (1602-1665).

AMONG SOME striking examples of prophecies made by people of recognized virtue that did not come true is that of Blessed Anna Maria Taigi (1769-1837) who was beatified in 1920. She announced that the pontificate of Pope Pius IX would last 27 years and that he would live to see the triumph of the Church and the conversion of Russia, England and China. Actually, Pius IX reigned 32 years and died a prisoner in the Vatican.

Among some of the outstanding prophecies by saints or genuine visionaries that actually



Bishop Jose Alves Correia da Silva of Fatima, who died last month, guarded the sealed envelope containing the third secret of Fatima for 18 years. The envelope is not to be opened before 1960. The only living person who knows the secret is Sister Lucia Aboobra, the last of the three children who witnessed the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima in 1917. Bishop Correia da Silva is pictured at the Fatima Shrine, shortly before his death, at the age of 85. He was an invalid. (N.C. Photos)

took place is that of St. Catherine Labouré (1806-1875). She prophesied the murder of the Archbishop of Paris and all the horror and bloodshed of the 1871 Paris Commune 11 years before it happened.

A number of alleged mystics have made dire predictions which are supposed to be fulfilled in our times. One of these was announced by Father Theophilus Reisinger, O.F.M. Cap., the exorcist of a woman possessed of the devil in Erling, Iowa. This prediction, made in December, 1928, said that the archangel would reign for three years from 1932 to 1935.

Anna Catherine Emmerich also foretold the reign of the anti-Christ as being 30 or 40 years before the year 2000.

OTHER PURPORTED mystics have made the following predictions, the west coast will suffer a great earthquake and a large area containing Hollywood and Reno will disappear forever into

the Pacific Ocean; the entire city of Chicago will slowly sink, as though built on quicksand and disappear and a bloody persecution of Catholics will break out in Milwaukee.

To return to the secrets of Fatima, the Blessed Virgin appeared to three children who herded sheep in the fields near Fatima and Aljustrel, six times during 1917. She gave them three secrets when she appeared in that year. Ten years later, in 1927, Sister Lucia was allowed to reveal the first two:

The children had been given a terrifying vision of hell.

The Blessed Virgin had given them a message and a mandate to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and she predicted the punishment to be meted out to mankind for its sin if her mandate was not fulfilled.

The punishment which she foretold was that Russia would spread her errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecuting the Church; the good would be martyred; the Holy Father would have much to suffer, and various nations would be annihilated.

When Sister Lucia was gravely ill in 1939 she obtained permission from Our Lady at the insistence of Bishop Correia da Silva, to write out the third secret and seal it in an envelope marked "Not to be opened until 1960."

What is this third secret? Will it foretell a worldwide victory of communism? Will it predict the destruction of large segments of the world through nuclear warfare? Will it tell of a revolution in nature when all the elements of the earth seem to become disorganized as oceans spill over their boundaries, the seasons change their cycle, and winds, rain, sleet and snow cover the earth?

Or will it reveal that the requests of the second secret have been fulfilled by so many devout and faithful people that the reward of a period of peace is near and that Russia has at long last returned to the one, true fold of Christ?

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Leper Apostle Asks Plane Gifts From U.S. and Soviet

Paris — (NC) — A French Catholic nobleman has written to the governments of the U.S. and Soviet Russia asking for two bombers to be sold to raise money for lepers all over the world.

Raoul Follereau, founder of the Order of Charity, a group of laymen dedicated to the aid of lepers, wrote a letter to President Dwight Eisenhower and to Nikolai A. Bulganin, president of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union.

"If each of your countries will give up one of your bombers," the letter read, "we shall be able to care for all the lepers in the world... one plane from each of your camps would not seriously affect your strength. You could continue to sleep quietly... and millions of people would sleep without pain."

"Two bombers and we could buy enough medicine to care

for all the world's lepers... You use the benefits of science to build your weapons and bombers, but a great Christian once wrote, 'That science is damned which does not rest on love.'

Count Follereau has announced that the Fifth World Day for Leprosy Victims, sponsored by the Order of Charity, will take place on January 26. He has appealed to "all those who eat three meals a day and imagine that the rest of the world does so, too," to pray and contribute to the work for lepers.

The Frenchman, who is a Commander of the Order of the Holy wherever possible, people visit leper hospitals bringing reassurance and love to the patients.

the 1934 Marian year and those that will be offered in observing the Lourdes centennial this year.

There have been many extensive relief drives to help the world's poor, especially the annual drive conducted by the American Bishops.

THESE FACTS should incline one toward the optimistic opinion that the remaining secret of Fatima concerns an era of peace because of the worldwide re-

sponse that has been given to the message of Fatima by Catholics and other Christians.

It is true that prophecies of doom and terror have the effect of arousing the emotions and the fears of people, but it is the teaching of the Church that they are not matters of faith. Nor does anyone really know if particular predictions by the most saintly of men will actually be fulfilled. Only time will tell.

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