

Fatima: an overview

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The simplicity of the title – “Fatima: an overview” – reveals my intention. This is not a catechetical homily, nor is it an in-depth theological analysis. It is simply an overview: What exactly happened at Fatima in 1917? What is its meaning for our days? By simply describing the facts, the extraordinary importance of Fatima will become immediately clear. Paul Claudel called Fatima “*the most impressive explosion of the supernatural in a world dominated by materialism.*”¹ Brazilian Catholic thinker Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira considered Fatima “*the most important event in the XXth century.*”² More recently, a Vatican document qualified Fatima as “*undoubtedly the most prophetic of modern apparitions.*”³

Fatima is not merely a Marian devotion, it is an apparition, that is, a concrete historical fact recorded by contemporary chronicles and confirmed by many eyewitnesses, and particularly by the miracle of the sun. In 1919, only two years after the apparitions, the Bishop of Leiria authorised the public cult. The Diocesan canonical process started in 1922 and ended in 1930 with a positive sentence: *constat de supernaturalitate*. Four Popes have been in Fatima as pilgrims. In July 2000, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the document «*The Message of Fatima*» giving the definitive ecclesiastical approval to the apparitions, the authenticity of which we can no longer doubt.

1. A private revelation of a prophetic nature

Let us analyse these apparitions, proceeding with logical method.

¹ Paul Claudel, Introduction to P. Olmi, *Méditations sur les révélations de Fatima*, Éditions Xavier Mappus, 1945.

² Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, *FÁTIMA: o acontecimento capital do século XX*, *Catolicismo*, N° 28 - Abril de 1953

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*, July 2000, Introduction.

Why did Our Lady appear? Of course, because God so wanted. It was an act of Divine Providence directly intervening in human history. Theologically speaking, it constitutes divine revelation of a private nature, to be distinguished from the Public Revelation that contains the *Depositum Fidei*. This latter ended with the death of the last Apostle, and is entirely contained in Holy Scriptures and in Tradition. In his «*Theological Commentary*» to the message of Fatima, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote: “*The teaching of the Church distinguishes between ‘public Revelation’ and ‘private revelations’. The two realities differ not only in degree but also in essence. (...) The concept of ‘private revelation’ refers to all the visions and revelations which have taken place since the completion of the New Testament. This is the category to which we must assign the message of Fatima*”.⁴

According to dogmatic theologian Fr. Manfred Hauke: “*The apparitions of the Mother of God belong to the charism of prophecy.*”⁵ Prophecy has not ended with the Apostolic era. According to St. Thomas Aquinas: “*In no time will there be lack of men with the spirit of prophecy.*”⁶ The Angelic Doctor then explains that prophecy in the life of the Church is not intended to reveal new doctrines of the Faith, but to guide mankind in a particular historical circumstance.⁷

In what exactly that this guidance consist?

Explaining the charism of prophecy, St. Paul teaches: “*One who prophesies speaks to human beings for their building up, encouragement, and comfort*”.⁸

In situations of great spiritual affliction, or of serious deviations in the Faith, when we might be tempted to feel abandoned by Divine Providence, God sends prophets to remind us that He is always among us, lovingly accompanying and guiding every step of our troubled path. Writes St. Paul: “*God is really in your midst.*”⁹ At the dawn of the XXth century, the situation of the world was so grave that God sent not a prophet, but His Most Holy Mother to

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*, July 2000.

⁵ Manfred Hauke, interview in *Die Tagespost*, 15 January 2010.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 174.

⁷ Id., a 3.

⁸ I Corinthians, 14,3.

⁹ I Corinthians, 14,25.

say: “Do not be afraid! You will have much to suffer, but my Immaculate Heart will be your comfort.”¹⁰

This is the first meaning of the apparitions of Fatima: to build up, encourage and comfort the faithful in a world that was precipitating into a horrendous crisis.

The second characteristic of prophecy, according to St. Paul, is to “disclose the secrets of the hearts.”¹¹ The mind of the prophet is enlightened by God. He sees with the eyes of God and judges with the mind of God. The prophet is thus able to make a precise “diagnosis” of the spiritual state of individual souls and of societies, and therefore to guide mankind. A prophetic intervention is always linked to a concrete historical fact or situation.

What was the situation of the world at the dawn of the XXth century? What “diagnosis” did Our Lady provide? This will be the object of the fourth point of my lecture.

The charism of prophecy, finally teaches St. Paul, is given “for the good of men.” The prophet does not merely comfort and diagnose, he makes a call to conversion and indicates a way of solution, promising divine help to those who will embrace it. A prophetic message is, therefore, essentially a message of mercy and hope.

At Fatima, Our Lady not only denounced the horrendous crisis into which the world was precipitating. She also offered the means to overcome it, promising Her motherly help for those who embraced it.

2. Fatima: the place

It is not uncommon to qualify Fatima as “a tiny, unknown, place in the fringes of Europe.” The truth is quite different.

The town of Fatima takes its name from the daughter of the Muslim Emir of Alcacero do Sal, who converted in the XIth century in order to marry the Christian knight Dom Gonçalo Ermigues. Is it far-fetched to see in this a premonition of the conversion of Muslims under the aegis of Fatima? Let us remind that Muhammad’s daughter was called Fatima.

¹⁰ Words of the first apparition, 13 May 1917.

¹¹ I Corinthians, 14,25.

The parish church at Fatima, dedicated to Our Lady, was erected in the early XIIth century by Queen Mafalda of Savoy, wife of Dom Afonso Henriques, first King of Portugal.

Fatima was the core of the Portuguese *Reconquista* against the moors. Around Fatima were built the monastery of Alcobaça, motherhouse of the Cistercian Order, the spiritual bulwark of the *Reconquista*; and the fortress of Tomar, headquarters of the Monks Templar, the military bulwark of the *Reconquista*. “*Fatima – writes historian C. Barthas – was the centre of the anti-Islamic battle, which made of Portugal a true knight of the Cross against the Crescent.*”¹²

In other words, Our Lady wished to appear in a highly symbolic place: the heart of the Christian resistance against Islam.

3. The apparitions

We can now briefly describe some of the apparitions.

The cycle of Fatima was preceded by three apparitions of the Angel of Portugal or the Angel of Peace, in autumn 1916. In them, some central points of the message were already proposed. Unfortunately, I will have to skip them for lack of time.

The first apparition of Our Lady occurred on 13th May 1917. Around midday, the three seers were playing at Cova da Iria when they saw two flashes like lightning, after which they saw the Mother of God above a holm oak. She was, according to the description of Lucia, “*a Lady dressed in white, more brilliant than the sun. Her face, indescribably beautiful, neither sad nor happy, but serious, with an air of mild reproach.*” A dialogue ensued, in which Our Lady invited the children not to be afraid: “*I have come to ask you to come here for six months on the thirteenth of each month at this same hour. Later I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterward, I will return here a seventh time.*”

In the second apparition, 13th June, after repeating the call to pray the Holy Rosary every day, Our Lady said: “*Jesus wishes to use you in order to make me known and loved. He wishes to establish devotion to my Immaculate Heart in the world. I promise salvation to those who embrace it.*”

¹² Cônego C. Barthas e Pe. G. da Fonseca SJ, *Fatima, merveille inouïe*, Fátima, Ed. Toulouse, 1943, p. 20.

The apparitions were accompanied by atmospheric phenomena that even the public perceived: the temperature dropped, the sun became “cold,” the leaves of the little tree bent as if someone were standing on it, etc.

The main apparition was undoubtedly the third one, 13th July, when Our Lady revealed the famous “secret of Fatima.” We shall analyse it later.

In August, Our Lady did not appear on the 13th, since the seers were in jail. The apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima were ferociously antagonised by the liberal Government, which considered them a “Catholic-monarchist conspiracy.” This was not so much off-target, since the shepherds’ families were indeed monarchist and the apparitions were indeed understood by the people as a Catholic affirmation against the ruling Masonic class.

However, the devil tramped on his own tail. The Government’s campaign against Fatima resulted in widespread publicity. For example, we know the details of the miracle of the sun especially through an article written by liberal journalist Avelino de Almeida, who later converted.¹³

Lack of time does not permit me to describe every single apparition. I go directly to the last one, during which occurred the famous miracle of the sun.

It had rained all day. The clouds opened up, revealing the sun as an immense silver disk. It shone with an intensity never before seen. Then it began to “dance,” spinning rapidly like a gigantic circle of fire. Its rim became scarlet; whirling, it scattered red flames across the sky. After performing this bizarre pattern three times, the globe of fire seemed to tremble, shake, and then plunge in a zigzag toward the terrified crowd. All this lasted about ten minutes. Finally, the sun zigzagged back to its original place and once again became still and brilliant. Many people noticed that their clothes, soaking wet from the rain, had suddenly dried.

The miracle of the sun was seen by numerous witnesses up to twenty-five miles away from the place of the apparition.

4. The core of the message

¹³ Avelino de Almeida, “O milagre de Fátima”, *O Seculo*, 15 October 1917.

Thus, we come to the core of my conference: what exactly did Our Lady say at Fatima?

In the first apparition, Our Lady asked: *“Do you wish to offer yourselves to God to endure all the sufferings that He may be pleased to send you, as both an act of reparation for the sins with which He is offended and an act of supplication for the conversion of sinners?”*

From the very beginning, the Mother of God puts us against the great reality of our times: sin; and against our own personal mission: prayer and penance for the conversion of sinners. It is a great call to conversion.

Is Our Lady referring generically to sin? Or rather to a specific sin? This becomes clear in the third apparition, when She revealed the “secret of Fatima”, composed of three parts. The first part was the vision of hell:

“Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear.”

This already teaches us some truths: hell exists, it is not empty, and it should be shown to small children for the good of their souls. Three propositions nowadays politically incorrect. Comments the Mother of God:

“You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If you do what I say, many souls will be saved and there will be peace.”

The first secret refers, therefore, to individual persons who sin. In the absence of conversion, they may be punished with hell. For their conversion, the Mother of God proposes devotion to Her Immaculate Heart. The call for penance and prayer for the conversion of souls is a constant feature throughout the apparitions.

Then comes the second part of the secret, in which Our Lady shifts Her attention to a collective situation of sin.

It must be said, beforehand, that sin can only be practised by persons. Only a person can assume moral responsibility for his deeds. However, as John Paul II teaches, *“we can and*

should speak of social sin, and even of structural sin, but only in an analogical sense since, properly speaking, sin is a personal act.”¹⁴

According to the traditional teaching of the Church, superbly explained for example by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas¹⁵, this type of social or structural sin merits a punishment on this earth, since societies do not have immortal souls. Wars, for example, may constitute a punishment for the collective sins of men.

With this in mind, we can easily grasp the sense of Our Lady’s words in the second part of the secret of Fatima:

“The war will end, but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given 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. Finally, 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.”

According to Our Lady, therefore, the situation of the world is so critical it deserves to be punished with no less than two world wars, and then with the flaw of Soviet Communism, not to speak of the ultimate punishment, yet to come, of which Jacintha warned: *“If men don’t convert, there will be a punishment as never was seen before.”*

What social sin can be so immense as to call upon mankind all these terrible chastisements?

Our Lady Herself gives a hint: the “errors of Russia,” that is, Communism.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Osservatore Romano*, Spanish Edition, November 6, 1984, p. 12. Quoted in Victorino Rodríguez, O.P., *“Pecado Individual y Pecado Colectivo,”* Iglesia Mundo (Madrid), December 1, 1984, p.10.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II^a-II^ae q. 108 a. 1 ad 5.

5. The “errors of Russia”

Communism or, to use its self-serving name, Scientific Socialism, did not just appear from nowhere. It was heir to Utopian Socialism, itself stemming from left wing Jacobinism that, in its turn, was the venomous offspring of the Enlightenment, itself fruit of Humanism. In other words, Communism is a phase, a step in a centuries-old revolutionary process, to which authors refer as the Revolution, with a capital “R.”¹⁶ From the downfall of Medieval Christendom, this Revolution has been advancing through successive steps aiming at the destruction of Christendom and, at the end, of the Church itself. Explaining its spirit, writes Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira:

“Two notions conceived as metaphysical values express well the spirit of the Revolution: absolute equality and total liberty. And two passions serve them: pride and sensuality.”

Beyond its generic significance, valid for all peoples in all times in history, the conversion to which Our Lady of Fatima calls mankind assumes today a very specific character: the conversion of individual souls, rejecting the revolutionary spirit of egalitarianism and liberalism; and the conversion of society, rejecting the revolutionary process and advancing, instead, towards the restoration of Christian civilisation.

Lack of time impedes me from quoting the third secret. Suffice it to say that it consists, again, in a vision that more or less repeats the second secret: a situation of sin, a call to conversion with the menace of a punishment, a chastisement and, finally, the conversion of souls and of society.

In a letter to Pope John Paul II, Sister Lucy wrote: *“The third part of the secret refers to Our Lady’s words: ‘If not [Russia] 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’. The third part of the secret is a symbolic revelation, referring to this part of the Message, conditioned by whether we accept or not what the Message itself asks of us: ‘If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, etc.’. Since we did not heed this appeal of the Message, we see that it has been fulfilled, Russia has invaded*

¹⁶ Cfr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, *“Revolution and Counter-Revolution”*, 1959.

*the world with her errors. And if we have not yet seen the complete fulfilment of the final part of this prophecy, we are going towards it little by little with great strides. If we do not reject the path of sin, hatred, revenge, injustice, violations of the rights of the human person, immorality and violence. And let us not say that it is God who is punishing us in this way; on the contrary it is people themselves who are preparing their own punishment. In his kindness God warns us and calls us to the right path, while respecting the freedom he has given us; hence people are responsible.”*¹⁷

6. Cultural Marxism

Someone may object: Communism is over. It died with the downfall of the Soviet Union and the crumbling of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, Fatima belongs to the past.

Such an objector utterly ignores what Communism is. Just as Soviet Communism had forerunners, it also produced descendants. Already in the 1920's, far-sighted Marxists had begun to explore the next steps of the revolutionary process, the so-called “cultural Marxism,” the phase of the process in which we now are. Let me mention two schools.

One was initiated by Antonio Gramsci, co-founder of the Italian Communist Party. Going beyond the old Marxist idea of economic hegemony, from where comes political and social hegemony, he studied the concept of cultural hegemony, much deeper and insidious. Cultural hegemony encompasses realities as broad as the concept of culture itself. *“It is just in this recognition of the wholeness of the process that the concept of hegemony goes beyond ideology – says British conservative intellectual Raymond Williams – What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole live social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values. Whereas ideology refers to a relatively formal and articulate system of meanings, values, and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a world view. Hegemony includes everything, even trivia.”*¹⁸

In this sense the form of a car, an architectural style, women's fashions, or a popular tune, to the extent that they implicitly reflect a certain value system, that they implicitly convey a

¹⁷ Quoted in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*, July 2000.

¹⁸ Quoted in C.B. Cox, *Education. The Next Decade* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1981), pp. 7-8.

certain spirit, may serve as vehicles for an ideology, that is, as instruments of cultural revolution.

Inverting the Leninist conception of a proletarian revolution that, then, uses the power of the State to subvert culture, Gramsci proposed to first infiltrate and subvert culture, in order to change the mentalities. He especially proposed to infiltrate the media, the arts and education.

Then we have the Frankfurt School, a name given generically to the members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt, in Germany. They explored the new frontiers of Revolution, like for example the manipulation of language and of decoration styles in order to instil a revolutionary spirit.

In particular, they studied the role of the family.

According to them, the structures of “oppression” that plague society have their origin in the family. It is insufficient to enact a political and social revolution. They aimed at the root: the destruction of the family. In this, they were following Friedrich Engels who, in *«The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State»*, wrote that Communism will not be fully implemented until the antiquated idea of family based on “consanguinity” was abolished. He thus proposed promiscuous relationships that included incest.

The Frankfurt School made ample use of Freudism, or rather, of an extremist interpretation of it, in order to explore the means of “liberating” people from the “oppressions” imposed by the family. Whence the current known as “Freudo-Marxism.”

They thus spoke of “sexual revolution.” In 1936, Wilhelm Reich published his famous book *«The Sexual Revolution»*, in which he proposed the liberation of the sexual instinct as a way for the “socialist re-structuring of man.”

The first sexual revolution, indeed, was implemented by Lenin. In 1918 he legalised divorce, in 1920 he legalised abortion, in 1922 he legalised euthanasia. He also abolished the laws regarding sexual relationships, whereby effectively legalising homosexuality. He included notorious homosexuals in his Government.

“*Cultural Revolution* – writes French Marxist thinker Pierre Fougeyrollas – *means a revolution in our ways of feeling, of acting and of thinking, a revolution in our way of life, it is a revolution of our entire civilization.*”¹⁹

What we are now facing – feminism, contraceptives, abortion, homosexuality, gender, and so on – is nothing but this Cultural Revolution heir and continuator of Soviet Communism.

Sister Lucy was very much aware of this. In a 1983 letter to Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, then Archbishop of Ferrara and President of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, the Fatima seer wrote: “*Excellency, there will come a time in which the decisive battle between the Kingdom of Christ and Satan will be fought about marriage and family. Those who work in defence of the family will suffer persecution and turmoil. But you should not be afraid, because Our Lady already crushed Satan’s head.*”²⁰

7. Conclusion

Let me close with the words of Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira:

“*It is good that, closing these reflections, our mind contemplate the last perspectives of the message of Fatima. Beyond the sadness and the punishments that, most likely, will come to mankind, we have before our eyes the sacred lights of the dawn of the Reign of Mary: ‘Finally My Immaculate Heart will triumph!’ It is a great prospect of universal victory of the royal and maternal Heart of the Most Holy Virgin. It is a peaceful, attractive and, above all, majestic and exciting promise.*”

May this Reign of Mary, foreseen by so many saints, from St. Louis of Montfort to St. Maximilian Kolbe, come. *Ut adveniat Regnum Christi, adveniat Regnum Mariae!*

¹⁹ Pierre Fougeyrollas, *Marx, Freud et la révolution totale*, Anthropos, Paris, 1972, p. 402.

²⁰ Interview to *Aleteia*, 22 May 2017.