

## Book Review: *The Last Secret of Fatima*

Article for *The Catholic Servant*

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April, 2009

*The Last Secret of Fatima* is, for the most part, a book-length interview of Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, the Vatican Secretary of State, conducted by Italian journalist Giuseppe de Carli. It delves into our Lady's apparitions to the three shepherd children in Fatima in 1917 and the "three secrets," especially the last secret and the controversies and endless speculation that surround it. Pope Benedict XVI is prominent in the book: he not only wrote the foreword, but his theological commentary, which accompanied the text of the last secret when it was made public by Pope John Paul II in June of 2000, is also included in the appendix. The book's content is based largely upon discussions that took place between Sr. Lucia and Cardinal Bertone when he visited her three times between April 2000 and December 2003. A primary objective of the book is to illuminate the Holy See's interpretation of the message of Our Lady of Fatima, particularly the third secret, and to confirm Sr. Lucia's personal conviction regarding its accuracy.

Cardinal Bertone, in his capacity as the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) under then-Prefect Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, was sent by Pope John Paul II to meet with Sr. Lucia at her Carmelite convent in Coimbra, Portugal. This visit was in preparation for the imminent release of the last secret of Fatima. After the secret's public disclosure, in response to an outcry from several factions alleging that portions of it had been withheld, Cardinal Bertone returned to Coimbra in November 2001. Sr. Lucia confirmed that the Fatima message, as published by the Vatican in the CDF document entitled *The Message of Fatima*, had been entirely revealed. She expressed dismay about the rampant speculation of so many people, sadly saying: "If they would just devote their energy to living out the real essence of the message, which has already been revealed.... All they care about is what hasn't been said, rather than the fulfillment of our Lady's request for prayer and penance." (pp. 56-57)

Cardinal Bertone describes Sr. Lucia as "humble and obedient" and sensed in her a "radiant awareness of having received a very definite mission" from our Lady. He perceived her to have an "absolutely accurate" memory and a determined persistence to give a full explanation of the Fatima message entrusted to her. Cardinal Bertone's impression of Sr. Lucia can perhaps best be summed up by his statement: "... if I am called upon to offer testimony on behalf of Sister Lucia's heroic virtues, I'll be most happy to oblige." (p. 113)

*The Last Secret of Fatima* includes a timeline of the events surrounding the revelation of the Fatima secret and Sr. Lucia's written text for each of its parts. The first part was the vision of Hell seen by the three shepherd children; the second part includes our Lady's request for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart, worldwide devotion to her Immaculate Heart in reparation for sin, and the consequences that would occur if her requests were not heeded. Cardinal Bertone confirmed with Sr. Lucia that Pope John Paul II's *Act of Entrustment to Our Lady* on March 25, 1984, in St. Peter's Square, completely "satisfied Mary's wishes." (p. 82)

Cardinal Bertone focuses particularly on the third part of the secret and its imagery, and clearly expresses the Holy See's belief that "the events to which the third part of the 'secret' of Fatima refers now seem part of the past" (p. 152)—i.e., the prophecy was fulfilled in the life of John Paul II. He discusses Pope John Paul II's conviction that he survived the attempt on his life on May 13, 1981, as a direct result of the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima and how that event, along with the text of the third part of the

secret, which he read for the first time while recovering in his hospital bed, influenced the remainder of his papacy. Cardinal Bertone also discussed three requests that Sr. Lucia made of Pope John Paul II in a lengthy letter: the beatification of Jacinta and Francisco; that the Rosary be proclaimed a liturgical prayer; and for permission to publish *Calls from the Message of Fatima*. One can only wonder what influence her letter may have had on the Holy Father's decision to proclaim the Year of the Rosary and his introduction of the Luminous Mysteries.

The book contains many interesting sidelights: the significance of the number 13 in the events surrounding Fatima, Sr. Lucia's meeting with Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I) prior to his election to the papacy, Cardinal Bertone's personal reflections on Medjugorje, and what Fatima means to Islam. *The Last Secret of Fatima* also discusses Pope Benedict XVI's address at Regensburg and how his remarks were taken out of context and misreported by the media in both Europe and the U.S., causing so much unnecessary tension. Even a brief account of Pope Benedict's visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey finds its way into the book's pages. Readers expecting to find only topics in direct keeping with the book's title may question the relevance of these timely, yet seemingly unrelated digressions.

The central message that the book seeks to convey is that the essence of the "secret of Fatima" is the Gospel call for us to live lives of prayer, penance, and faith—that the message of Fatima is above all a call to conversion, a call to renewal for the Church. As stated in the theological commentary in the appendix: "Those who expected exciting apocalyptic revelations about the end of the world or the future course of history are bound to be disappointed." (p. 152) Our Lady's threefold call for "Penance, Penance, Penance!" in the third part of the secret should be our focus. Those with their heart set upon truly *understanding* and *living* the message of Fatima will find the book to be informative, interesting, and compelling.