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PRESENTATION

In 2017 the Church was particularly blessed with the celebration of the Centenary of the Fatima apparitions. The “White Lady” came to speak — from May to October 1917 on the thirteenth of each month — to three little shepherds, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. The last two were canonised last 13th May by Pope Francis, while the process for the canonisation of Lucia is still in progress. Of all the private revelations approved by the Church, Fatima is one of particular significance given its theological vision of history. Our Lady not only delivered a supernatural message — a call to penance and prayer for rescuing sinners from eternal perdition in hell — but also foretold what would happen if her call was unheeded. As a celestial appeal, Fatima is not something belonging to the past, but a prophecy for the Church today.

* * *

It is extremely interesting to revisit what Pope Benedict XVI said at Fatima in his homily during the Mass on the 13th May 2010, which sounded to many like a “correction” of what he had previously said as Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith, when in giving the official theological explication of the third part of the Secret (revealed in the year 2000), he declared that the vision of a city half in ruins with corpses of bishops, priests, religious and lay people lying on the ground, was something referring to the great persecution of the Church in the 20th century; and therefore, something already

accomplished. As Pope, Benedict put forth a new scenario stating:

“We would be mistaken to think that Fatima’s prophetic mission is complete. [...] In sacred Scripture we often find that God seeks righteous men and women in order to save the city of man and he does the same here, in Fatima, when Our Lady asks: ‘Do you want to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the sufferings which he will send you, in an act of reparation for the sins by which he is offended and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?’” (*Memoirs of Sister Lúcia*, I, 162).

Fatima tells us that it is God who guides the course of history; his Divine Providence leads all events to a salvific end, though the personal judgement is different: eternal happiness for those who accept to do God’s Will, but perdition for those who freely choose to reject God and remain in the state of mortal sin. The history of mankind is not a place where conflicting human interests and powers of all kinds meet and fight each other, but the place of human events guided by God’s love. If He is cast out of society — like it is nowadays — history can be but a very dark scenario: either the occult strength of a fate will determine the will of men or a pessimistic vision of a collective non-sense will take over and be truly overwhelming. Historical events are not pre-fabricated and unavoidable situations; they can change if man changes: if he converts and returns to God with all his heart. This opening of one’s heart to God is the beginning of a change that affects more people and finally the whole of society. Penance, conversion and prayer are the means of a true revolution in history and is precisely what Our Lady asked for.

In fact, when she appeared on the 13th July 1917, she revealed the so-called “Secret of Fatima” in three parts perfectly linked with one another. The first is the vision of hell, “*where the souls of poor sinners go.*” In the apparition of August, Our Lady also said why many souls go to hell: “*because there is no*

one to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.” According to some theologians, the visions of Fatima are more imaginative than corporal. Out of all of these, the vision of hell would be the main fantasy that the children imagined, mentally composing the tremendous reality of perdition with images, words and catechetical teachings, drawn by previous experiences that the children and particularly Lucia had. All spiritual authors and theologians that embrace this hypothesis, in fact, refer to K. Rahner’s theory, according to which: if in general a supernatural vision was corporal, we should then conclude that it is not real but only apparent (*Scheinleib*). How, in his opinion, could one see for example Baby Jesus as a corporal Baby, if Jesus himself is now glorified in heaven? In most cases, and surely at Fatima, one must apply to a vision only the category of “imaginative,” that is — as said above — a vision worked out by the person’s own imagination. As a result, the vision of hell would be more of a children’s representation — rather than the tangible reality of eternal perdition — with accents that we find also in the Gospels, such as burning fire, despair, etc. From this to denying that hell is real perdition — implying as well the condemnation of bodies — the distance is very short. However, especially in relation to the Fatima visions, some questions have to be carefully answered: how can it ever be humanly possible that three children of a different age had the same imaginative vision of hell? Moreover, how is it humanly possible that these three children were ready to die, even by being boiled one-by-one, rather than reveal the Secret if that vision was only the fruit of their imagination? How can an imaginative (subjective) vision support the unique ministry that the children received to offer themselves up for the sake of humankind?

After this terrifying vision of hell, Our Lady gave the little children an important mission — the very heart of the Fatima Message: “*Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners.*” In order to counter an easy fall of souls into eternal perdition, Our Lady revealed the divine remedy:

“To save them, God wishes to establish devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to 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.”

The theological vision of history here is very clear. A different way of approaching human events is laid down; yet there is a remedy to implore a change for these tragic events. The “White Lady” continued:

“To prevent this, I shall 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.”

Once again, the prophetic role of Fatima among all Marian revelations is outlined here. The outbreak of a new World War and the spread of ideological errors, such as materialism and atheism, would have been halted by two Marian devotions: consecration of Russia, of all Nations, and of every single person to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; and the Five First Saturdays of the month in reparation for sins and outrages committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Two humble practises would have changed the course of events! Of course they still will — if we only accept this Message and put it into practise.

However, as a new World War broke out, so too did the materialism of Russian Communism spread — a condition to be truly human, living without God. In her request to consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart, Our Lady was pointing not only to the collapse of the Soviet Empire of terror and atheism — according to some authors this is the sign that the consecration carried out by John Paul II in 1984 was

definitively fulfilling the heavenly request — but specifically to the end of the diffusion of that ideology in the world. Unfortunately, the evil of materialism spread from Russia to all over the world; a sign instead that the consecration of Russia could be made more faithfully by the Popes?

Interesting papers in this book will make a point on that.

* * *

The devotion to the Five First Saturdays of the month was also as important as the call to consecrate Russia, so as to cause a change of events: to build a dike to prevent the spread of atheism and effect the conversions of many hearts. Here, one can easily say that the responsibility for the fragile dike erected, lies on the lack of human response to this last heavenly appeal, which in fact was and still is taken so little into consideration by all the faithful. That is true, but a question unavoidably arises: if the appeal for reparation through the practise of the Five First Saturdays of the month was so vital, why have the Popes not said anything of magisterial value so as to address officially the whole Church? The problem cannot be only in the response of the faithful. The facts before our sorrowful eyes confirm that there was a failure in answering Our Lady's request, both from the Magisterium and the people. Even today, Fatima is still a devotion among many others, in spite of its great foresight.

Materialism in its many faces — not least the gender theory teaching that man is creator of himself — is like a “dogma” in public as well as in private affairs of nations and of our Europe in particular. Where is God? Where is the faith in Him? This tragic loss of faith was foreseen at Fatima; faith is like a hinge between the second and the third part of the Secret with these very emblematic words: *“In Portugal the dogma of faith will be preserved,”* as if to say that in many other lands and hearts that dogma would not have been preserved. What about inside the Church? Is this not our present situation? That “Portugal”

might be — beside the Portuguese nation — also every heart that welcomes the Message of Fatima and consecrates itself to the Immaculate Heart. God is present where the Immaculate Heart of Mary is, at the centre of faith and devotion, because He can only abide where purity and grace are kept. God is in this Immaculate Heart, and through it He wishes to reign among us. This is the meaning of the words spoken during the apparition of June, when Our Lady said: “*He [God] wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.*” This devotion together with Marian consecration is a bulwark where true faith is genuinely held. Devotion and consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary are still meant to reach out to the *whole* world; the hope is that this goal may be achieved by promoting a fresh theological-historical-spiritual study of this Message, with the hope that the Magisterium would do more to make it known. Fatima is indeed at the heart of the faith and the Church.



This new study of the Fatima Message — from different perspectives — is the book that our reader has now in his hand. It collects the papers of a two-day conference held at Buckfast Abbey in Devon on the 12th and 13th October 2017 where all these aspects were investigated. The keynote speech was given by Cardinal Raymond Burke on the relationship between Fatima, the faith and the Church. Other important theologians, lay scholars and well-known clergy from across the UK have outlined — in a theological as well as spiritual way — the grandeur and actuality of Fatima. The conference aimed at giving a new theological contribution to the study of Fatima and at promoting on a devotional-spiritual level the knowledge and practise of this grace-filled Message. Conferences were followed by presentations focussing on several spiritual topics, such as the First Five

Saturdays Devotion, the importance of the Holy Rosary, and the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

* * *

“In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph” — this is the great promise of Our Lady; the hope is that individual and national consecration to Her will hasten this moment, so as to shower the Church with heavenly graces. She will triumph over errors and enkindle the gift of faith into all hearts, after a necessary purification and chastisement — *“The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated”* — the great hope of this triumph was described as so by Sister Lucia: *“In time, one faith, one baptism, one Church, Holy Catholic and Apostolic. In eternity, Heaven!”*

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