

Fátima 1917

Event, Message, and Ecclesial Reception

A source-audited apparition study

What the Church has judged, on what record, what the published secret says, and what it does and does
not mean

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1 The Judgment First

On 13 October 1930, thirteen years to the day after the last of the reported apparitions, José Alves Correia da Silva, Bishop of Leiria, closed the diocesan inquiry he had opened in 1922 with a pastoral letter on the cult of Our Lady of Fátima. Its operative clauses are short, and everything in this study hangs on reading them exactly.

Operative text — Carta Pastoral of the Bishop of Leiria, 13 October 1930, closing clauses (Portuguese original as printed in the Sanctuary of Fátima’s critical documentary selection)

Havemos por bem

1º declarar como dignas de crédito as visões das crianças na Cova da Iria, freguesia de Fátima, desta Diocese, nos dias 13 de maio a outubro de 1917;

2º permitir oficialmente o culto de Nossa Senhora de Fátima.¹

In editorial rendering: “We deem it well: 1º to declare as worthy of belief the visions of the children at the Cova da Iria, parish of Fátima, of this Diocese, on the 13th of May through October 1917; 2º to permit officially the cult of Our Lady of Fátima.” That is the whole positive judgment: a declaration that the 1917 visions of the three children are *worthy of belief*, and an official permission of cult. The act is diocesan, made by the local ordinary under the pre-1978 discipline in which such judgments belonged to him; it is not a papal definition, not an exercise of infallibility, and not a certification of any text written afterwards. What the Holy See later added—above all the publication and theological interpretation of the “secret” in 2000—was built deliberately on the same restrained foundation, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated the limit in words this study treats as controlling: ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation means “the message contains nothing contrary to faith or morals; it is lawful to make it public; and the faithful are authorized to accept it with prudence.”²

Governing thesis

This is an ecclesial-judgment-first study, not a devotional narrative. It reconstructs the Fátima events from the contemporaneous 1917 records; it identifies each competent ecclesiastical act in its exact wording, date, and object; it traces the textual history of the message—above all the late composition of Lucia’s memoirs (1935–1941) and of the three-part secret (written 1941 and 1944, published 1942-era and 2000); it prints the published secret entire and interprets it; and it states what the judgments oblige. Public Revelation is complete in Christ; no Fátima text can add to it, and even an approved private revelation asks only a prudent human assent (*fides humana*), never the divine and Catholic faith owed to Revelation. The 1930 declaration judged the children’s 1917 visions worthy of belief; it did not certify the verbal inerrancy of any reported sentence, the mechanism of the solar phenomenon, or the later texts. Where the record disagrees with itself—as it does about the Lady’s reported October statement on the war—the disagreement is preserved, because a true judgment does not need a corrected record. And where the evidence permits a judgment, this study makes one, in a voice the reader can see and weigh: every conclusion of its own is set in a labeled synthesis block with its reasons, the strongest argument against it, and a statement of what evidence would overturn it.

1.1 Two duties, and why this study accepts the second

A study of Fátima that stopped at the documentary history would be half a study. The Church did not merely archive the secret; on 26 June 2000 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the third part in facsimile and translation and set beside it Cardinal Ratzinger’s theological commentary, which opens by putting the questions to its reader directly—“How should we understand the vision? What are we to make of it?”—and describes its own answer as “an attempt to interpret.” That is an invitation to reflection, not a closure of it. No act of the Holy See restrains discussion of the Fátima secret; the contrary is the case, since the competent dicastery published the text expressly “in order that the faithful may better receive the message.”³

So this study does both duties. It reports, and then it interprets. The interpretation is not offered as teaching. It is offered as argument: reasoned from texts the reader can check at the loci given, labeled wherever it becomes the project’s own judgment, and stated in a form that can be refuted.

The study runs in the order the evidence demands: the 1917 events as their nearest witnesses recorded them (§2); the diocesan process and the 1930 act (§3); the memoirs and the secret’s textual history (§4); the published text of all three parts (§5); the Holy See’s 2000 interpretation (§6); then the four questions the text actually raises—what kind

of seeing it reports (§7), who the Bishop dressed in White is (§8), whether anything was withheld (§9), and what the 1960 date meant (§10); the consecration-of-Russia question through 2022 (§11); reception, canonizations, and current standing under the 2024 norms (§12); the doctrinal boundary—what approval does and does not oblige (§13); and a closing synthesis stating what this study judges the secret to mean and not to mean (§14). Work-wide bounds, taxonomy, and qualifications are gathered in the terminal appendix; witnesses and rights are in the References.

2 The Events of 1917 in Their Nearest Witnesses

2.1 The seers and the sources

The three children were Lucia de Jesus dos Santos (born in Aljustrel, parish of Fátima, 28 March 1907, registered as 22 March), and her first cousins Francisco Marto (born 1908) and Jacinta Marto (born 1910), children of shepherd families of Aljustrel.⁴ In 1917 they reported six apparitions of a Lady at the Cova da Iria, about 2.5 km from Fátima, on 13 May, 13 June, 13 July, 19 August (after their detention prevented the expected 13 August encounter), 13 September, and 13 October.

The evidentiary strata must be kept distinct, because they were written at very different distances from the events. Nearest are the contemporaneous records of 1917: the parish priest of Fátima, Manuel Marques Ferreira, began interrogating the children within about two weeks of the first apparition and after each subsequent one; the Lisbon press reported from July onward; and Canon Manuel Nunes Formigão interrogated the children repeatedly from September. These records were critically edited by the Sanctuary of Fátima in the fifteen-volume *Documentação Crítica de Fátima* (1992–2013); this study uses the Sanctuary’s one-volume critical selection of the 1917–1930 documents, which it distributes freely (References). Farthest are Lucia’s memoirs of 1935–1941 and later writings, treated in §4. The contemporaneous records are the strongest evidence for what was publicly said, asked, and observed in 1917; they do not by themselves prove a supernatural origin, and nothing below asserts one.

2.2 May to September in the 1917 record

The parish priest’s first interrogation of Lucia (about 27 May 1917) already fixes the essential shape of the reported first encounter: a Lady seen above a holm oak, a request to return, a promise of heaven.⁵ After the July apparition he interrogated Lucia and Jacinta on 14 July: the Lady asked that they return each 13th and that people “pray the terço [five-decade Rosary] to Our Lady of the Rosary, that she may abate the war, for only she can help it”; asked by Lucia for a miracle so that all would believe, the Lady answered, in the record’s words, “*Daqui a três meses farei então com que todos acreditem*”—within three months I shall make all believe.⁶ The same summer records attest that the children claimed a *secret* they would not reveal: the questioning after 13 August turns on it, and Formigão’s autumn interrogations press all three children about it without obtaining its content.⁷

On 13 August the children never reached the Cova: the administrator of the county of Vila Nova de Ourém, Artur de Oliveira Santos, took them by carriage to Ourém, held them, interrogated them under threats, and released them on the 15th; a crowd at the Cova that day reported unusual atmospheric effects but no vision. The children reported a compensating apparition at Valinhos, near Aljustrel, on 19 August—a date fixed in Lucia’s later Fourth Memoir; the apparition itself is attested in the parish priest’s interrogation of 27 August 1917.⁸ September 13 followed the established pattern before a growing crowd, with the Lady—in the reports—promising that in October “Our Lord, Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Carmel, and Saint Joseph with the Child Jesus” would come, and that a miracle would be worked.

2.3 13 October and the solar phenomenon

The promised sign drew an enormous crowd to a bare upland in heavy rain. The most quoted description was written by a witness with no stake in the Church’s favor: Avelino de Almeida (1873–1932), special correspondent—*enviado especial*—of *O Século*, the Lisbon daily the Sanctuary’s critical edition identifies as the “daily of the Portuguese Republican Party,” organ of the political world then closing churches and jailing priests; Almeida’s own pre-report of 13 October had treated the affair with open irony. His signed report, published 15 October under the title “*Como o sol bailou ao meio dia em Fátima*” (How the sun danced at midday at Fátima), estimates the crowd—citing “dispassionate

calculations of cultured persons wholly foreign to mystical influences”—at thirty to forty thousand, and describes the moment this way: the rain stopped, the sun appeared “like a disc of dull silver” that could be looked at without strain, and then, “before the astonished eyes of that people. . . the sun trembled, the sun made brusque movements, never seen, outside all cosmic laws—the sun ‘danced,’ in the typical expression of the peasants.”⁹ He closed by handing the question on, not by settling it: “It remains for the competent to pronounce on the macabre dance of the sun which today, at Fátima, made hosannas burst from the breasts of the faithful and naturally impressed—so trustworthy persons assured me—freethinkers and other people without religious concerns.” Two weeks later, in the same paper’s weekly *Ilustração Portuguesa* (29 October), answering a friend who had lost his faith and wanted “an unsuspect testimony,” Almeida held his ground: “Miracle, as the people shouted; natural phenomenon, as the learned say? I do not now care to know, but only to tell you what I saw. . . The rest is for Science and the Church.”¹⁰

The honest boundaries of this dossier are as important as its strength. The phenomenon was reported by believers and unbelievers, near the Cova and at some distance; descriptions vary (rotation, color changes, an apparent fall toward the earth); some present reported seeing nothing unusual; no astronomical observatory recorded any solar anomaly, so whatever happened was local to the observers. The 1930 pastoral letter itself argued the phenomenon was witnessed by tens of thousands “of all categories and social classes” and was “not natural,” but the operative clause it issued judges the children’s *visions* worthy of belief; the Church has never defined a physical mechanism, and this study does not certify one, adjudicate every witness, or resolve the natural, psychological, and miraculous hypotheses that have been proposed.¹¹

What the children themselves reported seeing on 13 October—the Lady as Our Lady of the Rosary asking for a chapel and for the daily Rosary, then tableaux beside the sun of Saint Joseph with the Child, Our Lord, Our Lady of Sorrows, and Our Lady of Carmel—is recorded in the parish priest’s interrogation of 16 October and, at greater length, in the memoirs.¹²

2.4 A preserved discrepancy: the October war statement

The same 16 October interrogation records Lucia reporting the Lady’s words as: “*a guerra acaba ainda hoje; esperem cá pelos seus militares, muito breve*”—the war ends this very day; expect your soldiers here very soon. The war did not end that day; it ended in November 1918. Formigão pressed exactly this point on 19 October: “But look, the war is still going on! . . . How is this explained, if Our Lady said the war ended that day?” Lucia: “I do not know. I only know that I heard her say that the war would end on the 13th. I do not know anything else.” And, pressed with her own earlier statement that the end would come “soon after”: “I no longer remember well how she said it. She may have said that; I do not know. Perhaps I did not understand the Lady well.”¹³

The discrepancy is published here because it is consequential and because both honest options remain open within the Church’s own frame: either the ten-year-old, questioned in a chaos of light and crowd, misreported or misremembered a sentence, or the sentence was conditioned or temporally compressed in ways the hearer could not carry. The 2000 theological commentary supplies the controlling category: interior visions are received “in the modes of representation and consciousness available” to the seer, and are “never simple ‘photographs’ of the other world” (§6, §7). A worthy-of-belief judgment is not a warranty of verbal inerrancy, and the 1930 act nowhere claims one. What the discrepancy does not license is silently correcting the 1917 record to match the memoirs, or treating the whole dossier as thereby discredited: the bishop judged in 1930 with these same documents before his commission.

3 The Diocesan Process and the 1930 Judgment

3.1 Jurisdiction and process, 1918–1930

The apparition site lay in the ancient diocese of Leiria, suppressed in the nineteenth century and restored by Benedict XV in 1918; its first new bishop, José Alves Correia da Silva, took possession in 1920. Competence over the events therefore belonged to him as diocesan ordinary under the discipline then in force, in which the judgment of reported apparitions lay with the local bishop—the regime later codified by the Holy Office’s 1978 norms and replaced in 2024 (§12).¹⁴

By a *provisão* of 3 May 1922 the bishop opened the canonical process: the document expressly declines to pronounce “on the origin and nature of the extraordinary phenomena,” names a commission of diocesan clergy to study the

alleged facts and organize the process, orders the text read in every church of the diocese, and counsels the faithful to “await the judgment of Holy Church.”¹⁵ The process gathered the 1917 interrogations and testimony; its formal core was the sworn interrogation of Lucia—by then the only surviving seer—conducted 8 July 1924 at the Asilo de Vilar in Porto by three seminary professors with the permission of the Bishop of Porto, the record being joined to the Leiria process. The commission reported to the bishop on 13 April 1930.¹⁶

3.2 The act of 13 October 1930

The bishop’s *Carta Pastoral sobre o culto de Nossa Senhora de Fátima*, dated at Leiria 13 October 1930 and read at the Cova da Iria before a great pilgrimage, reviews the events, the hostile and favorable testimony, the solar phenomenon, the discipline of the intervening years (including his own long reserve), and the fruits observed at the site; then, “having heard the Reverend Consultors of this our Diocese,” it issues the two operative clauses quoted at the head of this study: the visions of the children at the Cova da Iria on the 13ths of May through October 1917 are declared *worthy of belief* (*dignas de crédito*), and the cult of Our Lady of Fátima is officially permitted.¹⁷

Read strictly, the act does four things and no more. (1) Its *object* is “the visions of the children” at the Cova da Iria, May through October 1917: not the 1916 angel apparitions, not the reported 1915 figures, not Lucia’s later experiences at Pontevedra (1925–1926) or Tuy (1929), not any text of the then-unwritten memoirs, and not the still-secret parts of the message. (2) Its *standard* is credibility—“worthy of belief”—the classical formula by which an ordinary declares that the faithful may prudently believe a private revelation, not that they must, and not that its supernatural origin is a certainty of faith. (3) It *permits* public cult, which the diocese had until then only tolerated; this is the juridical foundation of the Sanctuary. (4) It binds no conscience: under the doctrine received then and since, assent to an approved apparition remains *fides humana*, prudent human credence (§13). The act’s own argumentative sections—on the solar phenomenon, on cures, on the movement of pilgrims—are the bishop’s motivation, not further operative determinations.

3.3 Witness and accessibility ceilings

Precision about the witness matters. This study quotes the 1930 operative clauses from the Sanctuary of Fátima’s own critical edition: *Documentação Crítica de Fátima: Seleção de documentos (1917–1930)* (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2013; ISBN 978-972-8213-91-6), Doc. 133, a volume the Sanctuary distributes without charge as a PDF from its documentation pages. That edition prints the full Portuguese text with the editors’ apparatus and identifies its earlier publication in the series (DCF II, Doc. 11). The ceilings: the original printed pastoral letter (União Gráfica, Lisbon, 1930) and the diocesan archive original were not consulted; no official English translation of the act has been identified, so all English here is editorial; and the fifteen-volume critical series itself was used only through the Sanctuary’s one-volume selection. Within those bounds the wording rests on the Sanctuary’s critical transcription, which is the best witness generally accessible.¹⁸

4 The Memoirs and the Textual History of the Secret

4.1 Late composition, and why it matters

Nearly everything the devout world knows as “the message of Fátima” beyond the bare 1917 record comes from documents Lucia wrote between eighteen and twenty-seven years after the events, in obedience to her bishop: the First Memoir (finished 25 December 1935), centered on Jacinta; the Second (21 November 1937), which first narrates the 1916 angel apparitions at length and her own interior history; the Third (31 August 1941), which first reveals the first two parts of the secret; and the Fourth (8 December 1941), a comprehensive account with annotations—including her note that, except the part of the secret she was not then permitted to reveal, “I shall say everything. I shall not knowingly omit anything, though I suppose I may forget just a few small details of minor importance.”¹⁹

The historiographical care this demands is not suspicion but proportion. The memoirs are retrospective spiritual autobiography, written after the Russian revolutions of 1917, after the rise of Soviet communism and its persecutions, after the great aurora of 25 January 1938, and—for the Third and Fourth—into the Second World War; their author herself distinguishes what she may reveal from what she may not, and warns of forgetfulness in details. The 1917

documents verify that a secret existed and that a miracle was promised three months ahead; they do not contain the 1941 wording. Sound method therefore reads each memoir as a witness to what Lucia, in 1935–1941, believed and remembered herself to have experienced—a witness the Church took seriously enough to build on, but not a stenographic deposit of 1917. The Church’s own 2000 commentary adopted precisely this frame for the visions themselves (§6, §7).

4.2 The three parts: composition, custody, publication

Parts one and two. These are the first part, the vision of hell shown to the children on 13 July 1917, and the second, the announcement of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary with its conditional prophecy concerning Russia and the two wars, both as written in the Third Memoir of 31 August 1941 and annotated in the Fourth of 8 December 1941. Their wording is printed entire, with the two Fourth Memoir annotations, in §5; here only their publication history is at issue. These two parts entered public circulation in the early 1940s—the standard dating is 1942, in anniversary publications authorized in Portugal—so that by the 1950s they were common property of theological discussion; the 2000 edition simply describes them as “already... published and therefore known.” The 1942 first imprints were not re-verified here (Appendix A).²⁰

Part three. Lucia wrote the third part at Tuy on 3 January 1944, “by order of His Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and the Most Holy Mother...,” after months of anguished hesitation; there is one manuscript, which the 2000 edition reproduces photostatically. The sealed envelope stayed with the Bishop of Leiria until, “to ensure better protection,” it was placed in the Secret Archives of the Holy Office on 4 April 1957. John XXIII received the envelope on 17 August 1959, said—as the archives record—“We shall wait. I shall pray. I shall let you know what I decide,” and decided to return it unpublished; Paul VI read the text on 27 March 1965 and likewise returned it; John Paul II asked for it after the attempt on his life of 13 May 1981.²¹

The 1960 condition. On the outer envelope Lucia had written that it could be opened only after 1960, and only by the Patriarch of Lisbon or the Bishop of Leiria. Decades of speculation attached to that year; her own recorded explanation of it, and what the choice does and does not imply, are taken up in §10.

Publication, 26 June 2000. At the end of the beatification Mass at Fátima on 13 May 2000, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, announced by the Pope’s direction that the third part would be published after preparation of a commentary. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published *The Message of Fatima* on 26 June 2000: a documentary dossier containing Bertone’s introduction; the photostat and translation of the first two parts (Third Memoir text with Fourth Memoir annotations); the photostat and translation of the third part; John Paul II’s letter of 19 April 2000 to Sister Lucia; the account of the 27 April 2000 conversation; Sodano’s 13 May announcement; and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s theological commentary. The texts themselves are printed in §5; the Holy See’s interpretation of them is §6.²²

The completeness of that publication was later challenged in print; the challenge, the Holy See’s 2016 response, and this study’s assessment of the evidence are §9. Textually, the position of record is the 2000 edition’s: one manuscript, reproduced in facsimile, published entire.

5 The Published Text of the Secret

5.1 What is printed here, and on whose authority

Everything that follows in this study is an argument about a text. The text is therefore printed first, in the Holy See’s own English, from the edition the competent dicastery published on 26 June 2000. Two strata are involved and are never merged: the first and second parts as Lucia wrote them in the Third Memoir of 31 August 1941, with two annotations the Fourth Memoir of 8 December 1941 added; and the third part as she wrote it at Tuy on 3 January 1944, of which there is one manuscript, reproduced photostatically in the same edition. The 2000 edition states its own translation policy in a note that should govern every argument built on its wording: “In the translation, the original text has been respected, even as regards the imprecise punctuation, which nevertheless does not impede an understanding of what the visionary wished to say.”²³

That the study prints and then interprets these texts requires no special warrant, but it has one. The Holy See published them; the Prefect of the doctrinal congregation published a commentary that asks its reader the interpretive

questions outright; and the Holy See's stated purpose was that the faithful "may better receive the message" (§1). What follows respects the one limit the Church's own criterion imposes: a private revelation is measured by its orientation to Christ, and an interpretation that made this text into a second gospel, an oracle, or a weapon would condemn itself by that measure before any authority had to.

5.2 First part: the vision of hell

The Third Memoir introduces the whole with a sentence that fixes the tripartite structure—"Well, the secret is made up of three distinct parts, two of which I am now going to reveal"—and then: "The first part is the vision of hell."

Operative text — First part of the "secret," Third Memoir of 31 August 1941, in the Holy See's English translation (CDF, 26 June 2000)

Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. 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, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repulsive likeness to frightful and unknown animals, all black and transparent. This vision lasted but an instant. How can we ever be grateful enough to our kind heavenly Mother, who had already prepared us by promising, in the first Apparition, to take us to heaven. Otherwise, I think we would have died of fear and terror.²⁴

Three features of the wording deserve notice before any interpretation, because they are in the text and not in the reader. First, the passage is governed throughout by simile and approximation—"like transparent burning embers," "like sparks in a huge fire," "likeness to frightful and unknown animals." The writer is not describing a place she measured; she is reaching for comparisons. Second, the passage is dated by its own last clause to an *instant*: "This vision lasted but an instant." Third, the narration is already interpreted by the narrator—the gratitude, the recollection of the May promise of heaven, the counterfactual ("I think we would have died of fear and terror") are a twenty-four-year-old religious reflecting in 1941 on what a ten-year-old saw in 1917. None of this makes the report less serious. It makes its literary character legible.

5.3 Second part: the Immaculate Heart, Russia, and the two wars

The vision of hell is not left standing alone: in the text it is immediately given a purpose, and the purpose is the whole content of the second part.

Operative text — Second part of the "secret," Third Memoir of 31 August 1941, in the Holy See's English translation (CDF, 26 June 2000)

We then looked up at Our Lady, who said to us so kindly and so sadly:

"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 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. 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. In the end, 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."²⁵

The 2000 edition attaches two Fourth Memoir annotations to this material, and both are printed as notes rather than as text, which is itself an editorial decision worth registering. The first records the scope of Lucia’s 1941 undertaking; the second is the sentence that has carried more speculative weight than any other five words in the Fátima corpus.

Operative text — Fourth Memoir annotations of 8 December 1941, as printed in the notes of the 2000 edition

Note 6. In the “Fourth Memoir” of 8 December 1941 Sister Lucia writes: “I shall begin then my new task, and thus fulfil the commands received from Your Excellency as well as the desires of Dr Galamba. With the exception of that part of the Secret which I am not permitted to reveal at present, I shall say everything. I shall not knowingly omit anything, though I suppose I may forget just a few small details of minor importance.”

Note 7. In the “Fourth Memoir” Sister Lucia adds: “In Portugal, the dogma of the faith will always be preserved, etc. . . .”²⁶

5.4 Third part: the manuscript of 3 January 1944

The third part is one sentence of preamble, one long sentence of vision, and a place-and-date subscription. It is printed here entire, in the Holy See’s translation of the single manuscript.

Operative text — Third part of the “secret,” manuscript written at Tuy on 3 January 1944, in the Holy See’s English translation (CDF, 26 June 2000)

“J.M.J.

The third part of the secret revealed at the Cova da Iria-Fatima, on 13 July 1917.

I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine.

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’. And we saw in an immense light that is God: ‘something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it’ a Bishop dressed in White ‘we had the impression that it was the Holy Father’. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.

Tuy-3-1-1944”²⁷

5.5 The strata, kept apart

The two texts were written thirty months apart, in different circumstances, and the difference is not a curiosity. The Third Memoir was written in August 1941 to a bishop who had asked for an account of Jacinta; the third part was written in January 1944 at Tuy, after months of recorded hesitation, under a double command she names in the first line. The 1941 text is narrative and explanatory and contains reported speech; the 1944 text is a single unpunctuated rush of images and contains none. Whatever one concludes about the origin of either, they are not the same kind of writing.

Stratum	Date, form, and custody	What it contains
1917 record	Interrogations, press, letters, contemporaneous (§2)	That a secret was claimed and withheld; that a sign was promised three months ahead. No content.
Third Memoir	31 August 1941; narrative memoir to the Bishop of Leiria; published in the early 1940s and again in 2000	Parts one and two: the vision of hell; the Immaculate Heart; the two wars; Russia; the promise of triumph.
Fourth Memoir	8 December 1941; comprehensive memoir with annotations; printed in 2000 only as notes 6–7	The undertaking to say everything except what she may not reveal; the “In Portugal, the dogma of the faith. . . etc.” sentence.
Tuy manuscript	3 January 1944; one autograph sheet; sealed, held by the Bishop of Leiria, then the Holy Office from 4 April 1957; published 26 June 2000 in facsimile and translation	Part three: the Angel with the flaming sword; the Bishop dressed in White; the ruined city; the martyrdom on the mountain; the two Angels with the aspersoria.

Two consequences follow directly from the table and are worth stating now, because they discipline everything after.

The first two parts are not a 1917 transcript. They were written in 1941, after the Russian revolutions of 1917, after the Soviet persecutions, after the aurora of 25 January 1938, and into the Second World War. A reader who treats “a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI” as a sentence recorded in 1917 is treating a 1941 document as something it does not claim to be. This is not an accusation against the writer, who says plainly that she is writing from memory under obedience and may forget details; it is a description of the document. The evidential weight of the second part rests on the fact that the Church, knowing all of this, published and built upon it—not on a claim of stenographic transmission that no witness makes.

The third part is different in kind. It was written in 1944, and unlike the second part it contains no proper name, no country, no date, no number, and no reported speech except the Angel’s threefold cry. Nothing in it can be checked against a calendar, because nothing in it names one. That is a fact about the text, and §7 takes it as the starting point for asking what kind of claim the third part actually makes.

6 The Holy See’s Interpretation (2000)

6.1 The papal application and Sodano’s announcement

John Paul II read his own survival of 13 May 1981—the anniversary of the first apparition—within the third part’s vision of the “Bishop dressed in White.” His formula, quoted in the 2000 dossier from his 1994 meditation to the Italian bishops: “it was a mother’s hand that guided the bullet’s path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death.” Sodano’s 13 May 2000 announcement made the ecclesial application public: the text is “a prophetic vision similar to those found in Sacred Scripture, which do not describe photographically the details of future events, but synthesize and compress against a single background facts which extend through time in an unspecified succession and duration”; it “must be interpreted in a symbolic key”; the vision “concerns above all the war waged by atheistic systems against the Church and Christians,” an “interminable Way of the Cross led by the Popes of the twentieth century,” in which the Pope of the vision, “he too falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a hail of gunfire”—while “the events to which the third part of the ‘secret’ of Fatima refers now seem part of the past.”²⁸ Sister Lucia, shown the interpretation before the announcement, “said that this interpretation corresponded to what she had experienced”—while insisting, as she had in 1982, that “she had received the vision but not its interpretation,” which “belonged not to the visionary but to the Church.”²⁹

6.2 Ratzinger’s theological commentary

Cardinal Ratzinger’s commentary is the doctrinal center of the 2000 publication, and its exact wording carries the weight. On the status of such phenomena: public Revelation “came to an end with the fulfilment of the mystery of

Christ”; private revelations, in the Catechism’s words, do not “complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but . . . help live more fully by it in a certain period of history”; and the authority of the two “differ[s] not only in degree but also in essence.” He retrieves Prospero Lambertini’s classical rule—“An assent of Catholic faith is not due to revelations approved in this way; it is not even possible. These revelations seek rather an assent of human faith in keeping with the requirements of prudence, which puts them before us as probable and credible to piety”—and Dhanis’s three elements of approval quoted in §1, adding: “It is a help which is offered, but which one is not obliged to use.”³⁰

On the anthropology of the visions: the Fátima experiences belong to *interior* perception (*visio imaginativa*), not exterior sense-perception nor pure intellectual vision. “Interior vision does not mean fantasy . . . the soul is touched by something real, even if beyond the senses,” yet “the subject, the visionary, is still more powerfully involved. He sees insofar as he is able, in the modes of representation and consciousness available to him. . . Such visions therefore are never simple ‘photographs’ of the other world, but are influenced by the potentialities and limitations of the perceiving subject”—so that “the images are, in a manner of speaking, a synthesis of the impulse coming from on high and the capacity to receive this impulse in the visionaries.” Not every element need carry “a specific historical sense”; “it is the vision as a whole that matters.”³¹

On the content: the key of the first two parts is “to save souls”—the vision of hell is ordered to rescue, and devotion to the Immaculate Heart means, through Mt 5:8, “a heart which, with God’s grace, has come to perfect interior unity and therefore ‘sees God’,” making *fiat* “the defining centre of one’s whole life.” The key word of the third part is “the threefold cry: ‘Penance, Penance, Penance!’” Against fatalist readings he is categorical: “the future is not in fact unchangeably set,” “the purpose of the vision is not to show a film of an irrevocably fixed future. Its meaning is exactly the opposite: it is meant to mobilize the forces of change in the right direction”; “we must totally discount fatalistic explanations of the ‘secret’, such as, for example, the claim that the would-be assassin of 13 May 1981 was merely an instrument of the divine plan guided by Providence”; and, of the deflected bullet, “there is no immutable destiny,” for “faith and prayer are forces which can influence history . . . in the end prayer is more powerful than bullets and faith more powerful than armies.” His reading of the whole concedes disappointment to the curious—“no great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled”—and ends on the promise: “‘my Immaculate Heart will triumph’ . . . The Heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind,” because Mary’s *fiat* brought into the world the One who said, “In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world.”³²

Two boundary notes keep this section honest. First, the commentary is authoritative interpretation by the Prefect of the doctrinal congregation, published by that congregation with papal approval of the publication; it is not a definition, and it presents itself as “an attempt.” Second, the papal application of the vision to 13 May 1981 is a privileged reading confirmed by the surviving seer, not a demonstrated one-to-one decoding; the commentary’s own principles (symbol, compression, the whole over the detail) forbid pressing any single image—city, arrows, the “etc.” of the Fourth Memoir—into a private key for future events.

7 The Mode of the Vision

7.1 Why the question comes first

Before asking what the third part means, one must ask what kind of utterance it is, because the answer decides what would count as its fulfillment. If the vision is a preview—a compressed newsreel of events that will occur—then it makes checkable predictions, and the plain reading is that its central prediction failed: the Bishop dressed in White is “killed,” and no pope has been killed. If the vision is symbolic—an image-language for a state of affairs—then its truth conditions are different, and the objection changes from “it did not happen” to “the reading is unfalsifiable.” Both objections are serious. Neither can be answered without first fixing the genre.

The Church has not defined the genre, and this study does not pretend that it has. What the Church has done is publish a commentary that argues for one answer, on grounds drawn from a long theological tradition. Those grounds can be examined; the tradition can be consulted at its own sources; and the text can be read against both. That is what this section does.

7.2 The three modes of perception in the tradition

Cardinal Ratzinger's commentary states the framework in a single sentence: "theological anthropology distinguishes three forms of perception or 'vision': vision with the senses, and hence exterior bodily perception, interior perception, and spiritual vision (*visio sensibilis — imaginativa — intellectualis*)."

He then places Fátima: it is "not a question of normal exterior perception of the senses"—which he supports with the observation that "not everybody present saw them, but only the 'visionaries'" —and it is not the imageless mystical vision of the highest kind; "therefore we are dealing with the middle category, interior perception."³³

This triad is not an invention of 2000, and the point matters, because a framework produced to solve an embarrassment would deserve suspicion. It is the received scholastic vocabulary. Thomas Aquinas, treating prophecy, distinguishes in the same way and adds two theses that bear directly on Fátima. The first concerns the structure of prophetic knowing: in it "two things have to be considered. . . namely the acceptance or representation of things, and the judgment of the things represented"—so that receiving an image and correctly interpreting it are distinct acts, and a subject may have the one without the other. The second states the consequence bluntly: "in prophetic revelation the prophet's mind is moved by the Holy Ghost, as an instrument that is deficient in regard to the principal agent," and therefore "even true prophets know not all that the Holy Ghost means by the things they see, or speak, or even do."³⁴

Read against that background, Sister Lucia's own repeated formula stops being a modest disclaimer and becomes a technically exact statement of her position: she "had received the vision but not its interpretation," and the interpretation "belonged not to the visionary but to the Church." In Thomistic terms she is claiming the representation and disclaiming the judgment. She says the same thing in the 27 April 2000 conversation in plainer words: "I wrote down what I saw; however it was not for me to interpret it, but for the Pope."³⁵

A second Thomistic distinction governs the second part of the secret and will return in §13. Aquinas divides prophecy by the way the future is contained in God's knowledge; where it is contained "as in its cause," we have "the prophecy of 'denunciation'," which "is not always fulfilled," because "it foretells the relation of cause to effect, which is sometimes hindered by some other occurrence supervening." The scriptural warrant is explicit—Jeremiah 18:7–10, where the announced ruin and the announced blessing are both revocable on repentance, and Jonah, whose forty days did not end in an overthrown Nineveh. A conditional prophecy that does not come to pass is not a false prophecy; it is a prophecy that worked.³⁶

7.3 What the text says about its own mode

The strongest evidence about the genre of the third part is not in the commentary but in the manuscript, which is unusually explicit about how its author was seeing. Three markers stand in the text of §5.

The mirror. "And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it' ". This is a description not of what was seen but of the manner of seeing, inserted by the seer into her own sentence and set off by her own quotation marks. It says: the figures were not present as bodies; they were present as reflections are present. A witness who thought she was watching events would have no reason to write it.

The hedge. "a Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father' ". The identification is made and immediately qualified—not "the Holy Father," but the children's impression that it was he. §8 takes the weight of this clause; here it is enough to notice that a text which hedges its own identifications is not offering a photograph.

The absence of coordinates. The third part names no country, no city, no year, no pope, and no number. The second part names Pius XI, Russia, and a sign in the sky; the third names nothing that could be entered in a chronicle. Whatever was intended by the difference, the difference is in the documents.

To these may be added a fourth observation, which is Ratzinger's own and is more candid than commentators usually notice: "The concluding part of the 'secret' uses images which Lucia may have seen in devotional books and which draw their inspiration from long-standing intuitions of faith." The Prefect of the doctrinal congregation is saying, in a document published with papal approval, that part of the imagery of an approved private revelation is drawn from the visionary's devotional reading. That is precisely the "synthesis of the impulse coming from on high and the capacity to receive this impulse" his anthropology predicts.³⁷

7.4 Interior does not mean unreal

An interpretation that stopped here would have proved too much, and the commentary blocks the move before it is made. “Interior vision does not mean fantasy, which would be no more than an expression of the subjective imagination. It means rather that the soul is touched by something real, even if beyond the senses.” It “involves true ‘objects’, which touch the soul, even if these ‘objects’ do not belong to our habitual sensory world.” The claim is that the subject’s contribution is real *and* that something not the subject is being received; drop either half and the account collapses—into a photograph on one side, into projection on the other.³⁸

Benedict XVI restated the same account ten years later, in his own voice and in the freest genre available to a pope, an unscripted answer to journalists on the flight to Lisbon: an apparition is “a supernatural impulse which does not come purely from a person’s imagination but really from the Virgin Mary, from the supernatural,” and “such an impulse enters into a subject and is expressed according to the capacities of that subject”—so that the seer “translates the great supernatural impulse into his or her own capabilities for seeing, imagining, expressing,” while “these expressions, shaped by the subject, conceal a content which is greater, which goes deeper, and only in the course of history can we see the full depth.”³⁹

7.5 Assessment

Project synthesis — the kind of claim the third part makes

Judgment: The third part of the secret makes a *typological* claim, not a predictive one: it asserts the shape of an age, not the occurrence of a datable event. Its assertion is that the Church of the century then beginning would be a Church of martyrs, killed in numbers and at every rank including the highest; that this killing would happen in a landscape of human ruin the Church herself would have to walk through; that the killing is joined to the Cross and is therefore not defeat; and that the response demanded of the hearer is penance. That is a contentful claim. It is not a schedule.

Reasons: (1) The text supplies its own genre markers—the mirror simile, the hedged identification, the total absence of names, dates, and numbers—and these are the marks of vision-writing, not of prediction. (2) The claim so stated was not obvious in 1917 or in 1944 and is not trivially true: a reader in January 1944 could consistently have expected the twentieth century to end in the Church’s political triumph or in her quiet irrelevance rather than in mass martyrdom, and what the century in fact produced is what the Church’s own commentary calls “a century of martyrs, a century of suffering and persecution for the Church.” (3) The mode assigned by the Church’s own commentary is the classical middle category, attested long before Fátima and applied by Aquinas to prophecy generally, so the reading is not an ad hoc rescue. (4) Reading the text typologically explains, without special pleading, why the second part names Pius XI and Russia while the third names nothing: they are doing different work.

Strongest counterargument: That a symbolic reading is unfalsifiable, and therefore empty. If the Pope’s being killed can be satisfied by a pope’s being shot and surviving, or by the sufferings of several popes, or by the Church’s sufferings generally, then no possible history could have disconfirmed the vision, and a claim compatible with every outcome asserts nothing. The objection is strengthened by the fact that the symbolic key was announced in 2000, after the events to which it was applied, by the same authority that had held the text for forty-three years.

Answer, and what it concedes: The objection is right that an interpretation must risk something, and it is right that the symbolic key was announced retrospectively. It is wrong that nothing is risked. The typological claim stated above is disconfirmable in principle and was disconfirmable in 1944: had the twentieth century passed without large-scale killing of Christians, without the death of bishops, priests, religious, and laity for the faith, and without mortal danger to the papal office, the vision would have described nothing. What the reading gives up—and this must be granted plainly—is the power to identify any particular martyr, city, or year as the vision’s referent. That loss is not a concession extracted by embarrassment; it follows from the mode, and Ratzinger states it as a rule before applying it: “Not every element of the vision has to have a specific historical sense. It is the vision as a whole that matters.”

What would change this: Production of a text or a competent act showing that the Church, before 2000, read the third part as a specific dated prediction, would show the symbolic key to be a later expedient. Discovery that the published translation suppressed a proper name, date, or number present in the Portuguese autograph would refute the “no coordinates” premise outright; the facsimile is published, so the test is available to anyone with

the Portuguese. Conversely, a competent magisterial determination of the genre would supersede this judgment entirely, which is a possibility this study is content to leave open.

One clarification prevents a common misreading of the result. To say the third part is typological is not to say it is *about nothing*, nor that its images are decorative. It is to say that the images work the way the images of Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Apocalypse work: they are about history, they are about real suffering and real deliverance, and they are not a key by which the informed reader may decode tomorrow's newspaper in advance. That the Church's own commentary reaches for exactly those biblical comparisons—"a prophetic vision similar to those found in Sacred Scripture," in Sodano's phrase; "similar images in the Book of Revelation," in Ratzinger's—is not evasion. It is the identification of a genre that has existed for two and a half millennia and has never been read, by the Church that canonized it, as a timetable.

8 The Bishop Dressed in White

8.1 The four voices of the record

No image in the third part has been pressed harder than the figure at its centre, and the record contains four distinct voices about it, which are usually blurred into one. Kept apart, they say noticeably different things.

John Paul II (1994, 2000). The Pope's own formula, quoted in the 2000 dossier from his meditation of 13 May 1994 to the Italian bishops at the Policlinico Gemelli, is a statement about his survival, not about the vision's referent: "it was a mother's hand that guided the bullet's path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death." He is claiming maternal protection in an event, not decoding a text.⁴⁰

Sister Lucia (1982, 2000). Her earliest recorded interpretation of the third part is the letter of 12 May 1982 to John Paul II, written a year after the attempt and eighteen years before the dossier. It does not mention the assassination attempt at all. It refers the third part to a different sentence—"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'"—and calls it "a symbolic revelation. . . conditioned by whether we accept or not what the Message itself asks of us." In the conversation of 27 April 2000 she was asked directly whether the principal figure is the Pope and "replied at once that it was," adding at once the limit of that identification: "We did not know the name of the Pope; Our Lady did not tell us the name of the Pope; we did not know whether it was Benedict XV or Pius XII or Paul VI or John Paul II; but it was the Pope who was suffering and that made us suffer too." Presented then with the 1994 formula, she "was in full agreement" with it.⁴¹

Cardinal Sodano (13 May 2000). The announcement is the most confident of the four and the least exact about the manuscript. It identifies "the Bishop clothed in white who prays for all the faithful" as the Pope; describes him making his way "amid the corpses of those who were martyred (Bishops, priests, men and women Religious and many lay people)"; and says that "he too falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a hail of gunfire." Two departures from the text are worth marking, not as a charge of bad faith but because arguments have been built on the announcement as though it were the text. In the manuscript the Bishop dressed in White is *killed*; "falls to the ground, apparently dead" is a softening that fits 1981 and does not fit the sentence. And in the manuscript the bishops, priests, religious, and lay people die *after* him—"in the same way there died one after another"—while the corpses he passes on the way are the dead of the ruined city; the announcement merges the two groups.⁴²

Cardinal Ratzinger (26 June 2000). The commentary keeps the manuscript's word: "In the vision, the Pope too is killed along with the martyrs." It declines to make the figure one man—"In his arduous ascent of the mountain we can undoubtedly see a convergence of different Popes. Beginning from Pius X up to the present Pope, they all shared the sufferings of the century." And its sentence about 1981 is a question, not an identification: "When, after the attempted assassination on 13 May 1981, the Holy Father had the text of the third part of the 'secret' brought to him, was it not inevitable that he should see in it his own fate?" The conclusion he draws from the deflected bullet is not that the vision came true but that it did not have to: "That here 'a mother's hand' had deflected the fateful bullet only shows once more that there is no immutable destiny."⁴³

8.2 The objections, stated at full strength

The identification of the vision with the events of 13 May 1981 has been called strained, and the objections are not frivolous. Set against the manuscript printed in §5, they are these.

- **Outcome.** The text says the Bishop dressed in White “was killed.” John Paul II was gravely wounded and lived twenty-four more years. A prediction of a death is not verified by a survival.
- **Place.** The killing occurs at the summit of a steep mountain, at the foot of a great rough-hewn cross, beyond a city “half in ruins.” The attempt of 1981 occurred in Saint Peter’s Square, in a city not in ruins.
- **Agents and weapons.** “A group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him.” The attempt was made by one gunman with a pistol; there were no soldiers and no arrows, and the arrows have never been given a reading that is anything but symbolic—which is a concession that the passage is symbolic.
- **Companions.** The text has bishops, priests, religious, and laity killed one after another after the Bishop in White. Nothing of the sort accompanied 1981.
- **Procession.** The text has him passing through the ruined city praying for the souls of corpses. No element of 1981 answers to it.
- **Provenance of the reading.** The reading was proposed by the man to whom it applied, announced by his Secretary of State, and put to the surviving seer by the officials who came to ask her about it. Agreement obtained in that way is weaker evidence than agreement volunteered.

The last objection is the one that deserves most care, and the record answers it better than the polemics on either side usually allow. It is true that the interpretation was presented to Sister Lucia before her assent was recorded; the dossier says so in its own words. It is also true that eighteen years earlier, unprompted and in her own hand, she had already called the third part “a symbolic revelation” and referred it to the martyrdom of the good and the sufferings of the Holy Father—without mentioning 1981. Her 2000 assent is therefore not the origin of her reading but an addition to it, and the addition she made in 2000 was carefully bounded: the figure is the Pope, and she did not know which pope.

8.3 Office, event, and the difference between them

Almost all the confusion in this controversy comes from running two different claims together.

The first claim is that the Bishop dressed in White *is the Roman Pontiff*—an identification of office. This claim is strongly supported: it is what the children thought at the time (“we had the impression that it was the Holy Father”), what the surviving seer affirmed at once when asked, what the Holy See published, and what the text’s own internal logic requires, since the figure precedes bishops and priests up the mountain. Nothing in the objections above touches it.

The second claim is that the vision *is about 13 May 1981*—an identification of event. This claim is much weaker, and it is not in fact the claim the commentary makes. Ratzinger reads the ascending figure as a convergence of popes from Pius X onward; he treats John Paul II’s recognition of himself in it as natural rather than demonstrated; and he draws from the survival the lesson that the future shown was not fixed. On that reading 1981 is not the vision’s fulfilment but its aversion—the moment at which the trajectory the vision displayed was, in the Pope’s own theological reading of his own life, interrupted. That is a coherent position, it is the published one, and it explains the “killed”/survived discrepancy without softening a word of the manuscript.

Sodano’s “the events to which the third part of the ‘secret’ of Fatima refers now seem part of the past” pulls in the other direction, and it should not be harmonized away. But it is worth recording that the Holy See’s own later voice declined to close the matter there. Asked in 2010 whether the vision could be extended beyond the attack on John Paul II, Benedict XVI answered that “beyond this great vision of the suffering of the Pope, which we can in the first place refer to Pope John Paul II, an indication is given of realities involving the future of the Church, which are gradually taking shape and becoming evident,” and that what is announced is “the need for a passion of the Church, which naturally is reflected in the person of the Pope, yet the Pope stands for the Church and thus it is sufferings of the Church that are announced.” He added the application that gives the sentence its edge: “the greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church.”⁴⁴

Project synthesis — the Bishop dressed in White

Judgment: The figure is the Roman Pontiff, and this study holds that identification with high confidence. The further identification of the vision with the events of 13 May 1981 is a privileged papal application—true as an application, false as a decoding. The vision is not *about* 1981; John Paul II was entitled to read his own life in it, and the Church was entitled to say so, without that reading exhausting or closing the text.

Reasons: (1) The office-identification is attested at every stratum from the children’s own impression to the seer’s 2000 answer, and no objection touches it. (2) The event-identification is contradicted at six points by the manuscript, and the contradictions are not marginal—outcome, place, agents, weapons, companions, procession. (3) The most careful of the four official voices, the theological commentary, does not assert the event-identification: it reads a convergence of popes, keeps the word “killed,” and infers from the survival that the future shown was alterable. (4) The surviving seer’s earliest written interpretation of the third part, in 1982, refers it to the martyrdom of the good and the sufferings of the Holy Father, not to the attempt on his life. (5) A reigning pope, in 2010, expressly declined to confine the vision to 1981.

Strongest counterargument: That this study is playing the official voices against each other in order to keep a text open that the Holy See closed. Cardinal Sodano’s announcement was made at the Pope’s direction; it said the events “now seem part of the past”; and Sister Lucia agreed with the interpretation she was shown. On that view the identification with 1981 is the Church’s reading, and weighing it down with six discrepancies is exactly the over-literalism the commentary warns against.

Answer, and what it concedes: The objection is right that the six discrepancies cannot be used as a literalist argument *against* the vision while a symbolic key is used to defend it. This study does not use them that way: it uses them only to show that the vision is not a report of 1981, which is precisely a symbolic conclusion, not a literalist one. What it concedes is real: Sodano spoke with papal direction, and a reader who takes “part of the past” as the Church’s settled mind is not being unreasonable. The study’s answer is that an announcement made at a beatification Mass and a doctrinal commentary published six weeks later are different kinds of act, that the commentary is the more careful of the two, and that a pope speaking in 2010 is later evidence than a cardinal speaking in 2000.

What would change this: A magisterial act stating that the third part refers to the events of 13 May 1981 and to nothing else would settle the question against this reading, and this study would follow it. So would the discovery of a pre-1981 document in which the Holy See or Sister Lucia identified the vision with a future attempt on a pope’s life. Conversely, nothing that could be called a decoding—an identification of the ruined city, the soldiers, or the arrows with named historical particulars—would strengthen the reading, because the mode established in §7 forbids that kind of gain.

9 The Withheld-Text Controversies

9.1 What the publication itself documents

The claim that something was held back can only be assessed against what the 2000 publication actually says about its own materials. Five statements in it are directly relevant, and all five are checkable at the loci given.

- **One manuscript.** “There is only one manuscript, which is here reproduced photostatically” (Bertone introduction). The edition prints the facsimile, so the claim is testable rather than merely asserted.
- **One letter, in the Pope’s own words.** John Paul II’s letter of 19 April 2000 to Sister Lucia describes the Congregation as having kept “since 1957, as you know, . . . your hand-written letter containing the third part of the ‘secret’”—singular, and written by the Pope to the author herself.
- **The two envelopes of 1981, identified.** “On 18 July 1981 Cardinal Franjo Šeper, Prefect of the Congregation, gave two envelopes to Archbishop Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Substitute of the Secretariat of State: one white envelope, containing Sister Lucia’s original text in Portuguese; the other orange, with the Italian translation of the ‘secret’. On the following 11 August, Archbishop Martínez returned the two envelopes to the Archives of the Holy Office.”
- **The two envelopes of 2000, identified.** “Archbishop Bertone presented two envelopes to her: the first containing the second, which held the third part of the ‘secret’ of Fatima.” One envelope inside another, not two texts side by side.

- **The author’s own authentication.** “Immediately, touching it with her fingers, she said: ‘This is my letter’, and then while reading it: ‘This is my writing.’”⁴⁵

Two of these deserve emphasis because they answer inferences that have been drawn from them. The recurrence of “two envelopes” in the custody history is not a trace of a second text: on both occasions the dossier itself says what the two were, and on both occasions the answer is mundane—original and translation in 1981, an inner envelope inside an outer one in 2000.

9.2 The Dollinger allegation and the 2016 communiqué

In 2016 several outlets circulated statements attributed to the German professor Ingo Dollinger, to the effect that Cardinal Ratzinger had privately confided, after the June 2000 publication, that the publication was not complete. The Holy See Press Office answered on 21 May 2016. The response is short, and its evidential character is unusual: it is not an argument but a first-person denial by the only person in a position to make one.

Operative text — Holy See Press Office, “Communiqué on articles regarding the ‘Third Secret of Fatima’,” 21 May 2016, operative paragraph
In this regard, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI declares “never to have spoken with Professor Dollinger about Fatima”, clearly affirming that the remarks attributed to Professor Dollinger on the matter “are pure inventions, absolutely untrue”, and he confirms decisively that “the publication of the Third Secret of Fatima is complete”.⁴⁶

Three features of this document are worth naming. It is a denial of the *conversation*, not merely of the content: the claim is that no such conversation occurred at all. It is attributed to Benedict XVI in the first person and issued through the competent office. And it repeats, on his own authority as the former Prefect who edited the publication, the completeness claim itself.

9.3 The argument for an unpublished further text

Independently of that episode, a book-length case for the existence of a further, unpublished text has circulated since the mid-2000s. This study identifies the principal works bibliographically and does not characterize their contents, because it has not read them: they were not obtainable at source within this study’s bounds, and an argument may not be attributed to an author on the strength of report.⁴⁷

What can be examined without them is the class of premises such an argument must use, since those premises are items of the public Fátima record. There are three, and they are of very different evidential quality.

Premise	Evidential state	Assessment
The Fourth Memoir “etc.”	Documented. The annotation is printed as note 7 of the 2000 edition; the sentence trails off in Our Lady’s voice, and the third part as published contains no words of Our Lady at all	The strongest of the three, and the only one that rests on a text. Its force depends entirely on where the “etc.” belongs (below)
Reported private statements	Reported, not documented. That persons with custodial or curial access privately said the publication was incomplete. No signed, first-person, on-the-record statement of this kind has been produced; the one allegation put publicly to the person named was denied by him in the first person	Cannot carry the weight placed on it. Unrecorded private remarks are the weakest class of historical evidence and are unfalsifiable in both directions

Premise	Evidential state	Assessment
Disappointed expectation	Inference from expectation. That the 1960 date, the brevity of the published text, and forty-three years of silence show more was expected than was delivered. The date is documented; what was expected of it is a fact about readers, not about the text (§10)	Disappointment is evidence about the audience, not about the archive

9.4 Where the “etc.” belongs

The first premise is the serious one, and it should not be waved away: a sentence in Our Lady’s voice that stops at “etc.” is a genuine loose end, and the Holy See published it without explaining it. But its position in the dossier is decisive, and it is checkable in seconds. Note 7 is called at the close of the *second* part—at “a period of peace will be granted to the world”—not after the third. The annotation is therefore an addition the Fourth Memoir made to material that was already public in the early 1940s, not a fragment of the sealed text.

The chronology completes the point. The Fourth Memoir was written on 8 December 1941, and its own prefatory undertaking, printed by the 2000 edition as note 6, states exactly why it stops where it stops: “With the exception of that part of the Secret which I am not permitted to reveal at present, I shall say everything.” In December 1941 she was not permitted to write the third part. She was permitted to write it on 3 January 1944, and she did, and that manuscript is the one published in facsimile. On this reading the “etc.” is not the shadow of a suppressed document; it is the visible seam between what she could write in 1941 and what she wrote in 1944.

That is an inference, and it is labeled as one. The contrary inference—that the “etc.” introduces a distinct locution never published—is also possible, and honesty requires saying that neither can be proved from the annotation alone. What can be said is which inference the surrounding documents support, and they support the first: the Fourth Memoir’s own stated boundary, the 1944 manuscript’s opening words (“After the two parts which I have already explained”), and the seer’s tactile authentication of that one manuscript in 2000 all describe a two-stage disclosure of one secret, not a three-stage disclosure of which the last stage is missing.

9.5 What Cardinal Bertone answered, and where

The prelate most often named in this controversy is the one who conducted the 27 April 2000 conversation, wrote the introduction to the dossier, and later published a book-length reply. This study can use the first two and not the third. The introduction of 26 June 2000 is a signed official text: it is where the single-manuscript claim, the custody chronology, the identification of the 1981 envelopes, and the 1989 consecration letter are all stated on the record. The conversation record of 27 April 2000 is where the seer’s own authentication is registered. The book of 2007 is identified in the notes above and is not used, quoted, or characterized. Where a controversy has been argued largely in books, a study that has not read the books should say so and confine itself to the documents it has read; that is the position taken here, and it is a limitation as well as a discipline.

Project synthesis — whether a text was withheld

Judgment: On the available evidence, no text of the Fátima secret is being withheld. This study holds that with high but not absolute confidence, and it holds the further judgment that the question, as usually argued, is not a historical question at all, because the hypothesis as usually stated cannot be disconfirmed by any evidence its proponents would accept.

Reasons: (1) A facsimile of the manuscript is published, authenticated by its author in her own words while she was alive to repudiate it, and no second autograph or archival instrument attesting one has been produced in the twenty-six years since. (2) Every documentary datum offered as a trace of concealment—the two envelopes of 1981, the two envelopes of 2000, the “etc.” of the Fourth Memoir—has an explanation stated in the same dossier that supplies the datum, and in each case the explanation is the duller one. (3) The only named testimonial claim was denied in the first person by the person named, in an official communiqué, while he was living. (4) The “etc.” is attached to the second part, which was never secret after the early 1940s.

Strongest counterargument: That an institution which kept a text sealed for forty-three years, through two popes who read it and declined to publish, has no standing to be believed on its own completeness, and that the burden of proof lies with the custodian rather than the doubter. This is a fair point about institutions and it is not answered by indignation. The Holy See’s own conduct manufactured the conditions in which suspicion is reasonable.

Answer, and what it concedes: The concession is unreserved: prolonged secrecy has costs, and the cost here was decades of speculation the Church could have prevented. What the objection cannot supply is evidence. A burden-of-proof argument establishes that the custodian should be pressed; it does not establish what the archive contains. And there is a limit past which the doubt stops being historical: when a facsimile, an authentication by the author, a papal letter, and a first-person denial by the editor are all absorbed as further evidence of concealment, the hypothesis has been made immune to evidence, and an immune hypothesis has left the domain in which historians can help.

What would change this: Production of a second autograph in Sister Lucia’s hand; an archival instrument—a registry entry, a transfer receipt, a consignment note—attesting a second sealed text; or an on-the-record, first-person statement by a person with documented custodial access. Any one of these would be decisive, and this study would revise. Reported private remarks, however distinguished the reporter, would not.

10 The 1960 Question

10.1 The condition, and the answer to it

Before handing the sealed envelope to the Bishop of Leiria, Sister Lucia wrote on the outer envelope that it could be opened only after 1960, and that it could be opened by the Patriarch of Lisbon or by the Bishop of Leiria. For four decades that year carried an extraordinary weight of expectation, and when 1960 passed without a publication the disappointment became a permanent feature of the Fátima literature. On 27 April 2000 the question was put to her directly, and her answer is the most important sentence in the dossier that no one quotes.

Operative text — Conversation with Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart, Carmel of Coimbra, 27 April 2000, at the written commission of John Paul II

Archbishop Bertone therefore asked: “Why only after 1960? Was it Our Lady who fixed that date?” Sister Lucia replied: “It was not Our Lady. I fixed the date because I had the intuition that before 1960 it would not be understood, but that only later would it be understood. Now it can be better understood. I wrote down what I saw; however it was not for me to interpret it, but for the Pope.”⁴⁸

10.2 What the answer settles

Four things follow from those four sentences, and each of them removes a common way of reading Fátima.

The year is not part of the message. “It was not Our Lady.” The date was a nun’s prudential decision about when a text she had written would be intelligible. Every construction that treats 1960 as a heavenly deadline—a term set by Our Lady, a year of promised disclosure, a date whose passing constitutes a failure by the Church—rests on a premise the only witness in a position to know denied in the plainest available words.

The reason given is legibility, not chronology. “I had the intuition that before 1960 it would not be understood, but that only later would it be understood.” She is not saying that something would *happen* by 1960; she is saying that by then enough would have happened for a reader to make sense of what she had written. The distinction is exact and it is the difference between a prophecy and a hermeneutical judgment.

She expected publication. A date after which a text may be opened is not a seal in perpetuity. She thought the text would one day be read, and said in 2000 that the time had come: “Now it can be better understood.”

She assigned the interpretation to the Church, by office. “I wrote down what I saw; however it was not for me to interpret it, but for the Pope.” This is the ground on which the 2000 commentary stands, and it is given by the visionary herself. It also disposes of the argument, occasionally heard, that the seer’s private opinion should govern the reading against the Church’s: she declined that role explicitly.

10.3 What the answer does not settle, and one honest complication

The answer says nothing whatever about content, and it must not be made to. A reason for choosing a year is not a description of what lies behind it. Nothing in “it would not be understood” implies that the text is dark, alarming, doctrinal, or long; it implies only that its author thought its sense depended on a horizon of events not yet visible in the 1940s.

There is also a complication the record does not hide. The condition she wrote was that the envelope might be opened after 1960 by the Patriarch of Lisbon or the Bishop of Leiria. Neither opened it. It was carried to John XXIII in August 1959—before the year she had named—read by him, and returned unpublished; read by Paul VI in March 1965 and returned; requested by John Paul II in 1981; and published in 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the direction of the Pope. Her wish was never the operative rule. The operative rule was the ordinary government of the Church, which is what the custody of an approved private revelation is subject to.⁴⁹

Project synthesis — what the choice of 1960 implies

Judgment: The 1960 date is evidence about Sister Lucia’s judgment of her readers, not about the content of the third part or about any divine schedule. This study regards the whole line of argument that treats 1960 as a broken promise as resting on a misattribution, and regards the year’s real interest as lying elsewhere: it is the clearest single demonstration in the Fátima record of how much of the popular corpus is built on expectation rather than on text.

Reasons: (1) The only person who could know the origin of the date denied that it came from the apparition, in an official record, without prompting on that point beyond the question asked. (2) The reason she gave is a judgment about intelligibility, and no inference from intelligibility to content is valid. (3) She said in the same breath that interpretation belonged to the Pope, which is inconsistent with her having attached a self-executing condition to the text.

Strongest counterargument: That the 2000 answer is a late recollection, given by a woman of ninety-three to officials who had come with a settled purpose, about a decision taken some fifty-six years earlier; and that the earlier record—a date on an envelope naming two specific prelates—looks like a deliberate instruction, not an intuition.

Answer, and what it concedes: The concession is real: the 2000 conversation is a late testimony, and this study has said elsewhere that late testimony is not a stenograph (§4). But the point at issue is one about which the witness is uniquely placed and has no evident motive to misreport, and her answer is against the interest of the expectation she had herself created. That a written instruction names the prelates competent to open it is exactly what a prudent author would write and is not evidence of a heavenly deadline.

What would change this: An autograph of Sister Lucia from the 1940s or 1950s attributing the date to Our Lady would overturn this directly. So would a contemporaneous record of the Bishop of Leiria reporting that she had told him so. Neither has been produced.

11 The Consecration-of-Russia Question

11.1 The reported requests (1917, 1925, 1929)

Within the secret’s second part as written in 1941, the Lady of 1917 says: “I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays.” Lucia reported the fulfillments of that announcement in her later religious life: at Pontevedra on 10 December 1925, an apparition of Our Lady and the Child Jesus requesting the Five First Saturdays devotion of reparation; at Tuy on 13 June 1929, an apparition of Our Lady with a vision of the Most Holy Trinity, in which—as the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints’ 2023 decree summarizes—“the Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was asked of her,” to be made by the Pope in union with the bishops of the world.⁵⁰

11.2 The papal acts (1942–1984) and the 1989 letter

The sequence of papal acts, each with its own object, is best given as the record states it. Pius XII, closing the Portuguese jubilee of the apparitions’ twenty-fifth anniversary by radio message of 31 October 1942, consecrated the Church and the human race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with a veiled paragraph for “the peoples separated by

error or discord,” notably those where “there was no house where not held in honor” was Mary’s venerable icon; on 7 July 1952, in the apostolic letter *Sacro vergente anno* addressed to the peoples of Russia, he consecrated “in a most special way, all the peoples of Russia to the same Immaculate Heart.”⁵¹

John Paul II composed an Act of Entrustment celebrated at Saint Mary Major on 7 June 1981 (his recorded address was broadcast, since he was convalescing), repeated it at Fátima on 13 May 1982, and on 25 March 1984, in Saint Peter’s Square, “in spiritual union with the Bishops of the world, who had been ‘convoked’ beforehand,” entrusted and consecrated to the Immaculate Heart “this human world of ours. . . In a special way we entrust and consecrate to you those individuals and nations which particularly need to be thus entrusted and consecrated.” Russia is not named in the 1984 text. The 2000 dossier prints both prayers and then settles the question the movements of the 1980s had kept alive, on the testimony of the seer herself: “Sister Lucia personally confirmed that this solemn and universal act of consecration corresponded to what Our Lady wished (. . . ‘Yes it has been done just as Our Lady asked, on 25 March 1984’: Letter of 8 November 1989). Hence any further discussion or request is without basis.”⁵²

The honest historical note is that Lucia’s recorded expectations earlier in the 1980s were more exacting (explicit naming of Russia; formal participation of every bishop), and public controversy has never entirely ceased. The position of record in the Church is the one just quoted: the 1989 letter and the 2000 publication close the question, and no competent authority has reopened it. This study reports the closure as the controlling status and the prior discussion as history, without adjudicating archival claims it has not seen.

11.3 The claim that the 1984 act was defective

The persistent objection has a definite shape and deserves to be stated in it. The reported request of Tuy, 13 June 1929, had two elements: the consecration was to be of *Russia*, and it was to be made by the Pope *in union with all the bishops of the world*. The act of 25 March 1984 does not contain the word Russia; it consecrates “this human world of ours” with a clause about “those individuals and nations which particularly need to be thus entrusted and consecrated.” The bishops were “convoked” beforehand, but no instrument records that each in fact joined. On those two points the objection says the act fell short of what was asked.

Both premises are accurate as descriptions of the texts, and this study does not dispute either. What the objection does not survive is the question of where its own standard comes from.

Project synthesis — the consecration of Russia

Judgment: The record supports the conclusion that the consecration asked for was made on 25 March 1984. This study holds that as a judgment about the documentary record, and holds with equal firmness that it is not a judgment about the mind of God, which no document could establish. It further judges the defect claim to be self-undermining in its present form.

Reasons: (1) The requirement by which 1984 is measured is not attested in any 1917 document. The naming of Russia and the union with all the bishops come from Sister Lucia’s later accounts of Tuy 1929, that is, from the same witness, in the same class of writing, as the 1989 letter declaring the act fulfilled. An argument that credits her when she states the condition and disbelieves her when she states its satisfaction is not weighing testimony; it is selecting it. (2) Her declaration is quoted in Portuguese in the 2000 dossier, in her own words and with a date—8 November 1989—and she lived until 2005 without retracting it, giving a recorded conversation in 2000 in which she retracted nothing. (3) The Holy See’s competent organs have restated the same position twice since: in the 2000 dossier (“Hence any further discussion or request is without basis”) and in the 2023 heroic-virtues decree’s historical summary. (4) The 2022 act, which does name Russia, was presented by its own letter of convocation as a gesture of the universal Church in a moment of war, and nowhere as the supply of a defect in 1984.

Strongest counterargument: That Sister Lucia’s earlier recorded statements were more exacting, that a religious under obedience in 1989 was not a free witness against the act of the Pope who had made it, and that the 2000 dossier’s “without basis” is an administrative closure rather than an argument. On this view the Church settled the matter by authority and the historical question remains open.

Answer, and what it concedes: The shift in her recorded expectations is real and this study prints it rather than smoothing it; a witness whose statements change over time has to be handled carefully, and “without basis” is indeed a closure and not a demonstration. But the coercion hypothesis has no evidence whatsoever—no retraction, no contemporaneous complaint, no statement to a third party, in the sixteen years she lived after writing it—and a hypothesis whose only support is the inconvenience of the testimony it rejects is not an argument. On the

free-witness point the objection also proves too much: if obedience disqualifies her 1989 letter, it disqualifies the memoirs, which were likewise written under obedience, and with them the requirement the objection is defending. **What would change this:** An autograph of Sister Lucia dated after 8 November 1989 stating that the consecration had not been made as asked; or a competent act of the Holy See treating a later consecration as supplying a defect in 1984. Neither exists in the record examined here. A private letter reported at second hand would not suffice, for the reasons given in §9.

Two boundaries keep this judgment inside its evidence. The study does not assert that Russia has been converted, that a period of peace has begun, or that any of these acts produced a measurable historical effect; those are claims no document before it can support, and the promise's own terms are not political (see the Boundary below). And it does not treat the consecration question as a test of loyalty in either direction. The Church has answered it; a Catholic who finds the answer unpersuasive is mistaken in this study's judgment, not disobedient, since no definition is involved.

11.4 The 2022 act of Francis

On 25 March 2022, a month into the war in Ukraine and “in response to numerous requests by the People of God,” Pope Francis—asking by letter of 21 March that the bishops of the whole world join him—carried out during a penitential celebration in Saint Peter's Basilica an “Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary,” this time naming nations explicitly: “Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine.” The same act was performed that day at the Sanctuary of Fátima by the Apostolic Almoner, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, as the Pope's envoy.⁵³

11.5 Boundary

No consecration is a dogma, a divination, or a political instrument. The acts of 1942, 1952, 1984, and 2022 are solemn exercises of papal piety and pastoral government, each defined by its own text; none declares a historical “conversion of Russia” accomplished, none fixes a calendar for the promised “period of peace,” and none licenses treating any nation as the unique embodiment of evil. The 2000 commentary's rule governs here too: the prophecy is conditional, addressed to freedom—“it is people themselves who are preparing their own punishment,” as Lucia wrote in 1982—and its center is conversion, not geopolitics.⁵⁴

12 Reception, Canonizations, and Current Standing

12.1 Papal and ecclesial reception

Reception followed the 1930 judgment in the forms proper to each act, none of which upgrades the judgment itself: Pius XII's radio messages and the 1942 and 1952 consecrations (§11); Paul VI's pilgrimage of 13 May 1967 for the fiftieth anniversary, with the apostolic exhortation *Signum magnum* signed that day; John Paul II's pilgrimages of 1982, 1991, and 2000; Benedict XVI's of 2010; Francis's of 2017 and 2023. Benedict XVI's homily at Fátima on 13 May 2010 gave the reception its lasting formula of continuing relevance: “We would be mistaken to think that Fatima's prophetic mission is complete”—prophetic here in exactly the sense his own 2000 commentary had defined, a summons to conversion, not a further calendar.⁵⁵

12.2 The seers' causes and the centenary canonizations

Francisco Marto died 4 April 1919, Jacinta 20 February 1920, both of the pneumonic influenza epidemic. Their joint cause produced decrees of heroic virtues signed by John Paul II on 13 May 1989—the first recognition of heroic virtue in non-martyr children, a decision of general import for the Church's understanding of childhood sanctity—and he beatified them at Fátima on 13 May 2000, before the announcement of the third part's publication. Francis canonized them at Fátima on 13 May 2017, during the Mass of the apparitions' centenary: the first canonized non-martyr children, and the first saints of the Fátima event itself. His homily held the canonization inside the message's own center—“We can take as our examples Saint Francisco and Saint Jacinta, whom the Virgin Mary introduced into the

immense ocean of God’s light and taught to adore him”—and quoted the Third Memoir’s account of Jacinta’s vision of a suffering pope.⁵⁶ Sister Lucia died in the Carmel of Coimbra on 13 February 2005; Benedict XVI dispensed from the customary five-year wait so that her cause could open in Coimbra in 2008, and Pope Francis approved the decree of her heroic virtues on 22 June 2023, giving her the title Venerable; her beatification awaits an approved miracle.⁵⁷

One act of reception belongs to the textual rather than the devotional history and is treated where it does its work: the Holy See Press Office communiqué of 21 May 2016, carrying Benedict XVI’s first-person denial of the claims attributed to Professor Ingo Dollinger and his confirmation that “the publication of the Third Secret of Fatima is complete,” is quoted and weighed in §9.

12.3 Standing under the 2024 norms

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (approved 4 May 2024; effective 19 May 2024, Pentecost) replaced the 1978 norms and restructured conclusions into six determinations: *Nihil obstat*; *Prae oculis habeatur*; *Curatur*; *Sub mandato*; *Prohibetur et obstruatur*; and *Declaratio de non supernaturalitate*. As a rule, “neither the Diocesan Bishop, nor the Episcopal Conferences, nor the Dicastery will declare that these phenomena are of supernatural origin, even if a *Nihil obstat* is granted,” though “the Holy Father can authorize a special procedure in this regard.”⁵⁸ Three consequences for Fátima, stated carefully. First, the norms govern *proceedings*; they do not retroactively reclassify legacy decisions, and the 1930 declaration remains what it always was—a positive diocesan judgment in its own historical formula (“worthy of belief”), which this study does not relabel as a 2024-vocabulary *Nihil obstat*. Second, the norms’ own presentation cites Fátima as the standing example of what approval means, quoting the 2000 explanation that “ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation highlights that the message contains nothing contrary to faith or morals” (26 June 2000). Third, no act of the Dicastery under the new norms concerns Fátima: the DDF’s public documents index contains, for Fátima, only the 2000 *Message of Fatima* dossier (checked 2026-07-25), and no later Holy See intervention superseding the 1930 judgment or the 2000 interpretation was located in the sources searched. Silence is reported as a bounded negative search, not as a guarantee.⁵⁹

Controlling-status dossier — Fátima, as of 2026-07-25
Event identity: Six reported apparitions of Our Lady to Lucia dos Santos, Francisco Marto, and Jacinta Marto at the Cova da Iria, parish of Fátima, 13 May–13 October 1917 (August encounter at Valinhos, 19 August), with the reported solar phenomenon of 13 October 1917 Jurisdiction: Diocese of Leiria (now Leiria-Fátima), Latin Church, Portugal Competent act: Carta Pastoral of Bishop José Alves Correia da Silva, 13 October 1930, Portuguese; witness: <i>Documentação Crítica de Fátima: Seleção</i> (2013), Doc. 133 Procedural regime: Pre-1978 diocesan-ordinary discernment; process opened 3 May 1922; commission report 13 April 1930 Operative formula: “declarar como dignas de crédito as visões das crianças... nos dias 13 de maio a outubro de 1917” and “permitir oficialmente o culto de Nossa Senhora de Fátima” Exact object: The children’s 1917 Cova da Iria visions and the public cult; not the 1916 angel cycle, the 1915 reports, the 1921 experience, Pontevedra 1925–1926, Tuy 1929, the memoirs, or the secret’s texts Later acts: Custody and publication of the third part (CDF, 26 June 2000, with theological commentary); papal consecrations 1942, 1952, 1984, 2022; beatification 2000 and canonization 2017 of Francisco and Jacinta; Lucia declared Venerable 2023; 2016 communiqué affirming complete publication Current status: Positive legacy diocesan judgment in force; 2000 CDF interpretation controlling for the secret; no DDF act under the 2024 norms; no located superseding or restricting act; and no act restraining public discussion of the secret, which the competent dicastery itself published with a commentary inviting reflection What it does not establish: Obligation of faith; verbal inerrancy of reported words (see the October war statement); a defined mechanism for the solar phenomenon; authentication of every later text, promise, or private interpretation; and no determination of the third part’s literary genre, of its identification with any particular pope or event, or of its meaning beyond the 2000 commentary’s own self-described “attempt”

13 What Approval Does and Does Not Oblige

13.1 The *fides humana* boundary

The doctrinal architecture is fixed and simple. Public Revelation is complete in Christ: “In Christ, God has said everything, that is, he has revealed himself completely,” as the 2000 commentary puts it, “and therefore Revelation came to an end with the fulfilment of the mystery of Christ.” Recognized private revelations do not belong to the deposit of faith; in the Catechism’s words, “it is not their role to complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history” (CCC 67). The assent owed to Revelation is divine and Catholic faith; the assent invited by an approved apparition is, in Lambertini’s rule as retrieved by the 2000 commentary, “an assent of human faith in keeping with the requirements of prudence”—and an assent of Catholic faith to it “is not even possible.” Approval means the message contains nothing against faith or morals, may be published, and may prudently be believed; “it is a help which is offered, but which one is not obliged to use.”⁶⁰

Concretely, for Fátima: a Catholic is free—reasonably, prudently, without disloyalty—to believe that Our Lady appeared at the Cova da Iria, and free not to. What no Catholic is free to do is invert the order of assent: to treat the message as a second deposit of faith, an oracle that settles doctrine, binds consciences, predicts obligatory futures, directs political allegiance, or substitutes for Scripture, liturgy, and the sacraments. The Church’s whole handling of the case—the bishop’s eight years of reserve, the restrained 1930 formula, forty-three years of unpublished custody of the third part, the 2000 commentary’s insistence that prophecy “show[s] the right path to take for the future” rather than satisfying curiosity—is one long enforcement of that order.

The 2024 norms put the same boundary in current procedural language, and their formulation is worth having exactly, because it is the rule now in force: when the Dicastery grants a *Nihil obstat*, “such phenomena do not become objects of faith, which means the faithful are not obliged to give an assent of faith to them. Rather, as in the case of charisms recognized by the Church, they are ‘ways to deepen one’s knowledge of Christ and to give oneself more generously to him, while rooting oneself more and more deeply in communion with the entire Christian people.’” The norms’ own presentation names Fátima as the standing illustration of what approval means.⁶¹

13.2 Against fatalism

Everything in the Fátima corpus that most attracts a certain kind of reader—the punishments, the annihilated nations, the martyred good—is precisely what the Church’s own commentary reads as conditional. The commentary is unusually blunt about it, and its sentences are the sharpest instrument the tradition has against apocalyptic determinism.

“The future is not in fact unchangeably set, and the image which the children saw is in no way a film preview of a future in which nothing can be changed.” “The purpose of the vision is not to show a film of an irrevocably fixed future. Its meaning is exactly the opposite: it is meant to mobilize the forces of change in the right direction.” And with a named application: “Therefore we must totally discount fatalistic explanations of the ‘secret’, such as, for example, the claim that the would-be assassin of 13 May 1981 was merely an instrument of the divine plan guided by Providence and could not therefore have acted freely, or other similar ideas in circulation.”⁶²

This is not a devotional softening of a hard text. It is the classical doctrine of conditional prophecy, which Aquinas states as a division of prophecy itself: where the future is known “as in its cause,” the resulting prophecy of denunciation “is not always fulfilled,” since it announces a causal tendency that may be “hindered by some other occurrence supervening” (§7). The second part of the Fátima secret is conditional on its face—“*if* people do not cease offending God”; “*if* my requests are heeded”—and Sister Lucia read it that way herself in 1982: “it is people themselves who are preparing their own punishment... God warns us and calls us to the right path, while respecting the freedom he has given us; hence people are responsible.”

Three practical consequences follow, and they exclude most of what circulates under Fátima’s name.

- **No date-setting.** A conditional announcement cannot yield a calendar. Any construction that assigns a year to the “period of peace,” the chastisement, or the triumph has converted a warning into a schedule and has thereby contradicted the only authoritative interpretation the text has received.

- **No decoding.** The rule that “not every element of the vision has to have a specific historical sense” forbids treating the city, the soldiers, the arrows, or the “etc.” of the Fourth Memoir as a cipher for named persons or events (§7, §9).
- **No weaponizing.** A private revelation whose criterion of truth is its orientation to Christ cannot be turned into an instrument for impugning the legitimacy of popes, councils, or episcopal acts. The commentary’s own test—a message that “becomes independent of him or even presents itself as another and better plan of salvation, more important than the Gospel. . . certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit”—applies to interpretations as much as to messages.

A current safeguard of the same kind, from the same dicastery, belongs here: the doctrinal note *Mater Populi fidelis* of 4 November 2025 opens by observing that certain Marian titles “are frequently used in connection with” alleged supernatural phenomena and “are not always employed precisely,” with consequences that “can often lead to a mistaken understanding of Mary’s role.” Nothing in the Fátima texts printed in §5 attributes to Mary an independent power; the promise “my Immaculate Heart will triumph” is read by the 2000 commentary through her *fiat*, which brought the Saviour into the world, and is not to be read as a rival economy of salvation.⁶³

13.3 What the positive judgments leave unjudged

Each act reaches its own object, and the gaps are part of the record. The 1930 declaration does not reach the angel apparitions of 1916, the Pontevedra and Tuy experiences, or any text of the memoirs and the secret—these stand on the Holy See’s later practical reception, which published, interpreted, and built devotion upon them without ever issuing a formal supernaturality judgment on them. The canonizations certify the sanctity of Francisco and Jacinta, not the accuracy of every remembered dialogue. The consecrations are acts of papal piety defined by their texts. The 2000 publication closes the textual question of the secret and gives the Church’s interpretation; its own author calls the interpretation “an attempt.” And no act, diocesan or Roman, has ever judged the mechanism of the solar phenomenon, guaranteed the verbal inerrancy of the children’s reported sentences, or authenticated the “devotional accretions, promises, and private interpretations” that circulate under Fátima’s name. Where a claim exceeds its act, the excess is the claimant’s.⁶⁴

13.4 The message’s evangelical center

Read under those controls, what the approved Fátima proposes is almost severe in its simplicity: conversion; penance; the daily Rosary (asked, in the 1917 records, at every apparition); reparation, above all Eucharistic, for sin; intercession for sinners—“many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them,” in the memoirs’ account of the Valinhos words; devotion to the Immaculate Heart as schooling in Mary’s *fiat*; and peace in history as a fruit hanging on human freedom before God. Everything in it leads back into the Gospel it cannot supplement—which is, by the Church’s stated criterion, the very mark of its credibility.⁶⁵

14 Project Synthesis: What the Secret Means

14.1 The standing of this section

Everything in this section is the project’s own judgment. It is not the teaching of the Church, it does not carry the authority of the documents it reasons from, and it is set apart here so that a reader can take the preceding thirteen sections without it. What it does carry is an obligation the study has accepted throughout: to say what it thinks, to show why, to state the best case against, and to name the evidence that would overturn it. A study that assembled the documents and then refused the question would be withholding the only thing it was in a position to add.

The Church’s own interpreter set the register. Cardinal Ratzinger called his commentary “an attempt to interpret,” and opened it by conceding that the text “will probably prove disappointing or surprising after all the speculation it has stirred” because “no great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled.” An interpretation offered in that spirit is an argument among arguments. So is this one.

14.2 The three parts are one argument

The single most important thing about the Fátima secret is one that the habit of treating its parts as three separate revelations obscures: read in order, the parts are not three messages but one argument in three movements, and the movement of the argument is stated in the text itself.

The first part states the stake. The vision of hell is introduced and immediately explained: “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.” The vision is not offered for its own sake, and Ratzinger’s reading of it is exactly right on the text: “now they are told why they have been exposed to this moment: in order to save souls—to show the way to salvation.” What is at stake in the whole secret is the eternal destiny of persons, and everything after is instrumental to that.

The second part states the remedy and the alternative. The remedy is a heart conformed to God’s will—this is what devotion to the Immaculate Heart means, on the commentary’s biblical reading of “heart” as “the centre of human life. . . where the person finds his unity and his interior orientation.” The alternative is stated conditionally and at length: a second war, a sign in the sky, errors spread from Russia, wars and persecutions, martyrdom of the good, suffering for the Holy Father, nations annihilated. And then, past the alternative, the promise: “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

The third part shows what the alternative looks like. This is not a modern construction. It is Sister Lucia’s own reading, given in 1982 without prompting and eighteen years before the text was published: “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 is the visual expansion of the second part’s *if not*. That is why it contains no new information, no names, and no dates: it is not adding a fact to the second part. It is showing what the second part’s conditional clause means when it is not averted.

Once the architecture is seen, the persistent question “what is the third secret really?” answers itself, and the answer is the one that disappointed the world in 2000. The third part is not a further disclosure. It is a picture of a consequence that had already been announced in words, drawn so that it could not be read as an abstraction. Its own key word says as much: not a name, not a date, but an imperative—“Penance, Penance, Penance!”

14.3 What this study judges the secret to mean

Project synthesis — the meaning of the secret of Fátima

Judgment: The secret of Fátima means that souls are genuinely at risk of being lost; that the remedy God wills is a conversion of heart of which Mary’s *fiat* is the pattern and the Rosary, reparation, and penance the ordinary practice; that a century refusing that remedy would be a century of war, of ideological persecution, and of martyrs at every rank of the Church including the papal; that this martyrdom is joined to the Cross and is therefore fruitful rather than futile; and that the outcome was never fixed, because the whole point of showing it was to change it. That is what the text says when its three parts are read as one argument, and this study finds nothing in the record that supports reading it as saying more.

Reasons: (1) The internal architecture set out above is in the documents: the first part is explained in the text as ordered to saving souls; the second names the remedy and the conditional alternative; the third is referred by the seer herself to the second’s “if not” clause. (2) The mode of the third part is typological and not predictive (§7), so its content is the shape of an age, not a set of events. (3) The figures in it carry office-level rather than person-level identifications (§8). (4) Its conditionality is stated by the text (“if”), by the seer (1982), by the Church’s commentary (“the future is not in fact unchangeably set”), and by the classical doctrine of the prophecy of denunciation (§13). (5) The published text is the whole text (§9), and the one date attached to it was a nun’s judgment about her readers (§10), so no part of the meaning is being held in reserve.

Strongest counterargument: That this reading makes Fátima say what every Christian already knew—repent, pray, expect the cross—and thereby empties an apparition of any content that would justify a century of pilgrimage, two canonizations, and a papal consecration. If the secret adds nothing to the Gospel, why did the Church treat it as though it mattered?

Answer, and what it concedes: The concession is total on the premise and complete rejection of the inference. Fátima adds nothing to the Gospel; it cannot, and by the Church’s own criterion a private revelation that claimed to would condemn itself (§13). What it does is put a known truth at a time and place where it could be heard,

which is what the Catechism means by helping the faithful “live more fully” by the definitive Revelation “in a certain period of history.” The measure of a private revelation is not novelty. It is whether it drove people back to the Gospel; and the answer at Fátima—a shrine, a devotion, and two children canonized for having lived exactly what was asked—is that it did. Ratzinger records the surviving seer telling him that “the purpose of all the apparitions was to help people to grow more and more in faith, hope and love—everything else was intended to lead to this,” and this study takes that sentence as the seer’s own verdict on her life’s subject.

What would change this: A competent magisterial determination of the secret’s meaning at variance with this reading would supersede it, and this study would follow. Short of that: a demonstration that the third part contains determinate coordinates after all (§7); a documented text of Sister Lucia refusing the link between the third part and the second’s “if not” clause; or evidence that a further text exists (§9). Each is a specific, findable thing, and none has been found.

14.4 What this study judges the secret not to mean

Negative judgments are cheaper than positive ones and are stated here with the same discipline: each is a conclusion of this study, argued where indicated, and none is a quotation of any authority.

- **Not a timetable.** Nothing in the secret fixes a year for a chastisement, a period of peace, or a triumph. The one year that ever attached to it, 1960, came from the seer’s judgment about intelligibility (§10).
- **Not a cipher.** The ruined city, the soldiers, the arrows, and the “etc.” of the Fourth Memoir are not coded references to identifiable persons or events, and reading them as such contradicts both the mode of the text and the rule the Church’s commentary states (§7).
- **Not a suppressed document.** There is no withheld fourth text on the available evidence, and the hypothesis as usually argued is unfalsifiable (§9).
- **Not a verdict on the papacy.** The vision shows a pope suffering and killed with his Church, not a pope betraying it. Whatever else the Bishop dressed in White is, he is on the mountain, praying for the dead and climbing toward the cross (§8). Readings that make the secret an indictment of popes invert the one image the text is clearest about.
- **Not a geopolitical programme.** Russia appears in the second part as the source of spread errors and the object of a requested consecration and a promised conversion. Neither the text nor any act of the Church licenses treating a nation as the unique embodiment of evil, or a consecration as a political instrument (§11).
- **Not a second deposit of faith.** No Catholic is obliged to believe any of it, and no Catholic may treat it as settling a question of doctrine, discipline, or allegiance (§13).
- **Not a guarantee.** “My Immaculate Heart will triumph” is a promise about the end of the whole, not an assurance about any person, nation, or generation, and it grants no automatic salvation to anyone who performs a devotion.

14.5 The judgments of this study, with their confidence

The study’s own conclusions are gathered here so that a reader can see at a glance how much weight each carries and where each is argued. “High” means this study would be surprised to be shown wrong; “moderate” means it holds the position and expects reasonable people to differ.

Judgment	Confidence	Argued
The figure of the Bishop dressed in White is the Roman Pontiff, by office	High. Attested at every stratum; no objection touches it	§8
The third part is typological, not predictive	High. The text’s own genre markers carry it	§7
The vision is not <i>about</i> 13 May 1981; that reading is a privileged application, not a decoding	Moderate to high. The counter-evidence is Sodano’s announcement, quoted in full	§8

Judgment	Confidence	Argued
No text of the secret is being withheld	High. Facsimile, authentication, and a first-person denial; nothing produced against them	§9
The “etc.” of the Fourth Memoir marks the 1941 permission boundary, not a suppressed locution	Moderate. An inference, labeled as one; the contrary inference is possible	§9
The 1960 date is the seer’s own prudential judgment and carries no prophetic weight	High. It rests on her explicit recorded answer	§10
The record supports that the consecration asked for was made on 25 March 1984	High as to the record. The study makes no claim about its acceptance by God	§11
The three parts form one argument, the third expanding the second’s “if not” clause	Moderate to high. The seer’s 1982 letter is the principal support	§14
The secret obliges no one to believe it and forbids date-setting, decoding, and its use against the papacy	High. This follows from the Church’s stated criteria rather than from this study	§13

14.6 A closing caution about this kind of writing

The Fátima literature is enormous, and a great deal of it fails in one of two opposite ways. One failure is credulity: treating a 1941 memoir as a 1917 transcript, a 1944 vision as a newsreel, a disappointed expectation as a scandal, and every rumour of a suppressed page as evidence. The other failure is a fastidiousness that reports the documents impeccably and then declines to say what they mean, which is a way of leaving the field to the first group.

This study has tried to fail in neither direction, and it will certainly have failed somewhere. Its protection against the first failure is that every factual claim in it carries a witness and a locus. Its protection against the second is this section, and the labeled synthesis blocks throughout, in which the study says plainly what it thinks and exposes the reasoning so that it can be attacked. The reader who disagrees is asked to disagree at the argument, and has been given, in each case, the specific evidence that would win.

15 Notes

1. Carta Pastoral de D. José Alves Correia da Silva, Bispo de Leiria, sobre o culto de Nossa Senhora de Fátima, 13 October 1930, closing clauses, quoted from *Documentação Crítica de Fátima: Seleção de documentos (1917–1930)* (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2013), Doc. 133 (there recorded as published in DCF II, Doc. 11), at the volume’s printed pages 550–551; read 2026-07-25 in the Sanctuary’s freely downloaded PDF of the volume (References). All web loci cited in these notes were read on 2026-07-25 unless another date is stated. The English renderings of Portuguese sources in this study are editorial working translations, visibly commentary, not received translation witnesses.
2. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000), theological commentary of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, summarizing E. Dhanis; English text at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2024 norms cite this same 2000 explanation as the standing account of what approval means (References).
3. CDF, *The Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000): theological commentary, opening paragraph and the heading “An attempt to interpret the ‘secret’ of Fatima”; Sodano announcement, 13 May 2000 (“In order that the faithful may better receive the message of Our Lady of Fatima, the Pope has charged the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with making public the third part of the ‘secret’, after the preparation of an appropriate commentary”). This project does observe standing restraints where a competent act imposes one—the Holy Office’s decree of 21 December 1915 on an alleged secret of another apparition, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 7 (1915), 594, forbids treating that subject, and neither its subject matter nor its content is discussed anywhere in this study. No comparable act exists for Fátima, and the absence is not an inference: the Dicastery’s own public documents index lists the 2000 dossier as its only Fátima entry (checked 2026-07-25; §12).
4. Birth and family data: the editorial notes to Doc. 1 of the *Seleção de documentos* (the parish priest’s first interrogation), which record Lucia’s baptismal register date and family; the Sanctuary’s “Chronology of the Three Seers” page, <https://www.fatima.pt/en/pages/chronology-of-the-three-seers>, which explains the 22/28 March discrepancy from Lucia’s

Fifth Memoir; and the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints’ decree on Lucia’s heroic virtues, 22 June 2023 (References). The ages printed under the photograph in *O Século* (10, 9, 7) are the newspaper’s.

5. *Seleção*, Doc. 1 (1917-05-c.27), publishing DCF I, Doc. 1. The interrogation records of the parish priest are summaries made by him, not stenographic transcripts.
6. *Seleção*, Doc. 3 (1917-07-14), publishing DCF I, Doc. 3. The promise of a sign three months ahead is therefore attested in writing three months *before* 13 October —the single most important contemporaneous control on the October crowd.
7. Secret attested in 1917: e.g. *Seleção*, Doc. 120’s account of the 13 August detention (the administrator sought “to tear from them the secret”), and Formigão’s September–October interrogations (Docs. 8–12, 18), which ask each child about the secret and record their refusal. The 1917 record proves that a secret was claimed; it does not contain the content later written in 1941 and 1944.
8. Detention: *Seleção*, Doc. 120 (the diocesan commission’s 1930 report, drawing on the sworn 1924 interrogation) and the 1917 press; Valinhos: the Sanctuary’s “Narrative of the Apparitions” page, which prints the Fourth Memoir account and notes that the bracketed portion comes from the parish priest’s interrogation of 27 August 1917 (DCF I, p. 17). The *day* 19 August rests on the memoir stratum; the fact of an August apparition away from the Cova is contemporaneous.
9. *Seleção*, Doc. 13 (1917-10-15), publishing DCF III-1, Doc. 87, at the volume’s printed pages 72–78; the crowd estimate and the quoted sentences are at pp. 75–76 (editorial translation; Portuguese: “o sol tremeu, o sol teve nunca vistos movimentos bruscos fora de todas as leis cósmicas — o sol ‘bailou’, segundo a típica expressão dos camponeses”). Almeida died in 1932; the underlying 1917 newspaper text is in the public domain.
10. *Seleção*, Doc. 21 (1917-10-29), publishing DCF III-1, Doc. 228, printed pages 114–116 (editorial translation).
11. The pastoral letter’s argumentation about the solar phenomenon precedes its operative clauses (*Seleção*, Doc. 133). The negative astronomical control (no registered global anomaly) is common ground in the literature and follows from the event’s local visibility; it is stated here as a bound, not as a refutation.
12. *Seleção*, Doc. 14 (1917-10-16), publishing DCF I, Doc. 6; Fourth Memoir account as printed by the Sanctuary’s “Narrative of the Apparitions” page.
13. Interrogation of 16 October: *Seleção*, Doc. 14; Formigão’s interrogation (redacted after 19 October): Doc. 18, publishing DCF I, Doc. 16, questions 1–6 (editorial translation). The later Fourth Memoir stratum gives the October words as “the war is going to end”; the 1941 text and the 1917 records are not verbally identical.
14. Diocesan restoration and the bishop’s role: the introductory study and chronology of the *Seleção de documentos*; the bishop met Lucia about 1920–1921 (Sanctuary seer chronology). On the procedural regimes: DDF, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (2024), presentation, and its replacement of the norms of 25 February 1978 (art. 27).
15. *Seleção*, Doc. 68 (1922-05-03), publishing DCF II, Doc. 1; the commission’s character as preparatory is stated in the commission’s own 1930 report (Doc. 120): the provision was issued “not to pronounce on the origin and nature of the extraordinary phenomena, but to prepare the elements on which ecclesiastical authority must base itself in order to render its verdict with full knowledge of the cause” (editorial translation).
16. *Seleção*, Doc. 120 (1930-04-13), the commission’s report, which recounts the 6 July 1924 request to the Bishop of Porto, the 8 July 1924 sworn interrogation of the seventeen-year-old Lucia, and the 13 August 1917 detention episode. Francisco had died 4 April 1919 and Jacinta 20 February 1920 (Sanctuary seer chronology; canonization records, §12).
17. *Seleção*, Doc. 133 (1930-10-13), publishing DCF II, Doc. 11 (also DCF V-6, Doc. 1813), printed pages 539–551. The solemn announcement at the Cova da Iria on the same day, with the bishop’s blessing of the multitude, is documented in the press account printed as Doc. 134 of the same volume.
18. Edition identity and free distribution: title, ISBN, and copyright leaf of the *Seleção* PDF; download route in the References. The 1930 act is not printed in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, which records Holy See acts; a diocesan pastoral letter would not be expected there, and no AAS locus is claimed.
19. Memoir dates: the Sanctuary’s seer chronology (25 December 1935; 21 November 1937; 31 August 1941; 8 December 1941), corroborated for the Third and Fourth by the CDF’s *Message of Fatima* (2000), which prints the secret’s first two parts from the Third Memoir and quotes the Fourth Memoir’s undertaking in its note 6. The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints’ 2023 decree likewise dates the memoirs 1935–1941, “by order of the Bishop of Leiria.” Fifth and Sixth Memoirs (1989, 1993) concern her parents and are not used here.
20. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, Bertone introduction; the theological commentary cites the state of discussion in E. Dhanis, “Sguardo su Fatima e bilancio di una discussione,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 104 (1953) II, 392–406. Pius XII’s Fátima-jubilee radio message of 31 October 1942 (§11) belongs to the same anniversary moment.

21. All custody facts: CDF, *Message of Fatima*, Bertone introduction, with its notes 1–2 (John XXIII’s diary for 17 August 1959; the July–August 1981 movements of the two envelopes). The envelope’s text and the translation policy—“the original text... has been respected, even as regards the imprecise punctuation”—are the edition’s.
22. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, contents as listed on the Holy See’s page; Sodano announcement of 13 May 2000, *ibid.* Lucia confirmed the manuscript and her handwriting in the 27 April 2000 conversation.
23. CDF, *The Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000), headings of the two constituent texts (“First and second part of the ‘secret’ according to the version presented by Sister Lucia in the ‘Third Memoir’ of 31 August 1941 for the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima”; “Third part of the ‘secret’”), Bertone introduction (“There is only one manuscript, which is here reproduced photostatically”), and note 8, quoted. All English wording of the secret in this study is the Holy See’s translation, quoted exactly; this study offers no translation of the Portuguese originals and did not collate the photostats.
24. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, first and second part of the “secret,” translation. The introductory sentences quoted above (“Well, the secret is made up of three distinct parts...”; “The first part is the vision of hell”) are from the same text, immediately preceding.
25. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, first and second part of the “secret,” translation, quoted entire from “We then looked up” to “granted to the world.” The Holy See’s page carries the Fourth Memoir annotation as its note 7 at this point (below).
26. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, notes 6 and 7, quoted exactly. Note 7 is called at the end of the second part’s text, that is, at “a period of peace will be granted to the world” —a position that matters to the argument of §9. The Holy See prints the annotation and offers no interpretation of the “etc.”
27. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, third part of the “secret,” translation, quoted entire. The inner single quotation marks reproduce the edition’s own marking of the phrases Lucia set off within her sentence; the punctuation is the manuscript’s, respected by the translators under note 8. “J.M.J.” is the manuscript’s opening invocation (Jesus, Mary, Joseph).
28. CDF, *Message of Fatima*: Sodano announcement, 13 May 2000 (English translation of the Portuguese delivered at Fátima); John Paul II, meditation from the Policlinico Gemelli to the Italian bishops, 13 May 1994, as quoted there and in the 27 April 2000 conversation record. The bullet from the 1981 attempt was set, by the Bishop of Leiria-Fátima’s decision, in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fátima (Sodano announcement).
29. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary (on the interpretation being put to Lucia); her letter of 12 May 1982 to John Paul II, quoted in the introduction: “The third part of the secret refers to Our Lady’s words: ‘If not [Russia] will spread her errors throughout the world...’”; “a symbolic revelation, conditioned by whether we accept or not what the Message itself asks of us”; “since we did not heed this appeal of the Message, we see that it has been fulfilled.”
30. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, part “Public Revelation and private revelations—their theological status,” quoting CCC 66–67 and Lambertini (the future Benedict XIV) from his treatise on beatification and canonization, and E. Dhanis as cited above. The criterion he then states: “private revelation... its orientation to Christ himself... when it becomes independent of him or even presents itself as another and better plan of salvation, more important than the Gospel, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit.”
31. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, part “The anthropological structure of private revelations.” This is the category invoked in §2 for the October war statement: translation through the seer’s finite faculties is the Church’s own controlling frame, not an editorial invention.
32. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, part “An attempt to interpret the ‘secret’ of Fatima,” quoting Jn 16:33. Also there: the vision’s images of mountain, city, and cross read as the arena of history; the century of martyrs seen “as in a mirror”; and his personal recollection that Lucia told him the purpose of all the apparitions was “to help people to grow more and more in faith, hope and love—everything else was intended to lead to this.”
33. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, part “The anthropological structure of private revelations,” quoted exactly. The Latin triad is the commentary’s own; the argument from the visions’ non-public visibility is likewise its own.
34. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 173, a. 2 corpus and a. 4 corpus, quoted from the English Dominican Province translation as presented at <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3173.htm> (read 2026-07-25). The Latin was not collated for this study and no Latin wording is quoted (Appendix A). Aquinas is cited here as the classical statement of the distinction the 2000 commentary applies, not as an authority on Fátima, which he could not be.
35. CDF, *Message of Fatima*: theological commentary (“she had received the vision but not its interpretation. The interpretation, she said, belonged not to the visionary but to the Church”) and conversation of 27 April 2000, quoted exactly.
36. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 174, a. 1 corpus, same edition and access date; the Jeremiah text is quoted in that article’s second objection and endorsed in its reply. Scriptural loci are given by chapter and verse and are not quoted here from any particular translation.

37. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, on the concluding images and on the synthesis of impulse and capacity, quoted exactly.
38. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, “The anthropological structure of private revelations,” quoted exactly. The commentary explicitly raises the projection hypothesis in its opening paragraph as a real question (“Or are these only projections of the inner world of children. . . ?”) rather than suppressing it.
39. Benedict XVI, interview with journalists during the flight to Portugal, 11 May 2010, English text at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100511_portogallo-interview.html (read 2026-07-25), answer to the third question. The genre is an in-flight interview, published by the Holy See among his speeches: a papal statement of the ordinary teaching kind, not an act of the extraordinary magisterium.
40. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, Sodano announcement and theological commentary, both quoting the meditation of 13 May 1994 (*Insegnamenti*, XVII, 1 [1994], 1061, as the announcement cites it). The *Insegnamenti* volume was not consulted (Appendix A).
41. CDF, *Message of Fatima*: Bertone introduction, quoting the letter of 12 May 1982 entire in its relevant part; conversation of 27 April 2000, quoted exactly. That the 1982 letter is silent about the assassination attempt is an observation about the text as the dossier prints it; the letter’s full autograph was not consulted.
42. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, Sodano announcement, 13 May 2000, quoted exactly; compared with the third part’s text as printed in the same dossier and in §5 above. The comparison is the study’s own and is offered as a textual observation, checkable by any reader with both passages.
43. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, “An attempt to interpret the ‘secret’ of Fatima,” quoted exactly.
44. Benedict XVI, interview during the flight to Portugal, 11 May 2010, quoted exactly (locus in §7). The interviewer, Father Federico Lombardi, expressly recalled the 26 June 2000 press presentation and asked whether the message could be extended “beyond the attack on John Paul II.” The 2010 answer does not revoke the 2000 announcement; it declines to treat it as exhaustive.
45. CDF, *Message of Fatima*: Bertone introduction (single manuscript; the 18 July and 11 August 1981 movements with the colours and contents of the two envelopes); letter of John Paul II of 19 April 2000; conversation of 27 April 2000 (the nested envelopes and Lucia’s two sentences). All quoted exactly from the Holy See’s English.
46. Holy See Press Office, bulletin of 21 May 2016, English text at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/05/21/160521b.html> (read 2026-07-25). The allegation is recited here only as the object of the response, in the communiqué’s own description of it; this study takes no interest in it apart from the answer it drew.
47. Bibliographic identification only, at catalogue level: Antonio Socci, *Il quarto segreto di Fátima* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2006), ISBN 88-17-00993-8, English translation *The Fourth Secret of Fatima* (Loreto, 2009), ISBN 978-1-930278-77-6; and the response volume of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone with Giuseppe De Carli, *L’ultima veggente di Fatima* (Rizzoli, 2007), English *The Last Secret of Fatima* (Doubleday, 2008), ISBN 978-0-385-52582-4. Identities checked 2026-07-25 in the Open Library catalogue (<https://openlibrary.org/search.json>), a finding aid, not a witness to any wording. Neither book was read; neither is quoted, paraphrased, or summarized anywhere in this study.
48. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, “Conversation with Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart,” 27 April 2000, quoted exactly, including the envelope condition recorded in the preceding sentence of the same record. The conversation was conducted by Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone with Bishop Serafim de Sousa Ferreira e Silva of Leiria-Fátima under John Paul II’s letter of 19 April 2000, both printed in the dossier.
49. Custody sequence: CDF, *Message of Fatima*, Bertone introduction (envelope to the Holy Office 4 April 1957; brought to John XXIII on 17 August 1959 with his recorded words; Paul VI on 27 March 1965; John Paul II after 13 May 1981); publication 26 June 2000 at the Pope’s charge, announced 13 May 2000 (Sodano).
50. Second part: CDF, *Message of Fatima* (Third Memoir text). Pontevedra and Tuy: Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, decree on the heroic virtues of Sister Lucia, 22 June 2023 (Portuguese text distributed by the Sanctuary; References). These experiences of the professed religious were never the object of the 1930 Leiria judgment, whose clause reaches only the 1917 Cova da Iria visions; their standing rests on the Holy See’s practical reception, notably in the 2000 dossier and the 2023 decree’s historical summary.
51. Pius XII, radio message to Portugal with the prayer of consecration, 31 October 1942, Italian text at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1942/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19421031_immacolata.html; *Sacro vergente anno*, 7 July 1952, Italian text at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xii_apl_19520707_sacro-vergente-anno.html (“consacriamo tutti i popoli della Russia al medesimo Cuore immacolato”; editorial translations).
52. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, introduction, quoting the 1981 and 1984 acts (with references to *Insegnamenti*) and Lucia’s letter of 8 November 1989; the Portuguese sentence is printed there. The introduction’s two statements of the 1981 date (7 June

as celebrated; “7 May” in a later sentence) contain an internal slip reproduced as found; the Pentecost celebration was 7 June 1981. The 2023 heroic-virtues decree repeats the settled position: on 25 March 1984 Lucia “saw the Consecration accomplished by the Pope in union with all the bishops, the request of Our Lady being fulfilled” (editorial translation).

53. Francis, Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 25 March 2022, official English text at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/20220325-atto-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html>; Letter to the Bishops, 21 March 2022, at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20220321-lettera-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html> (announcement at the Angelus of 20 March; celebration and timing described in the letter). The letter presents the act as a “gesture of the universal Church”; it does not present itself as supplying a deficiency in 1984. The parallel celebration at Fátima by Cardinal Krajewski as papal envoy was announced by the Holy See and widely reported (checked 2026-07-25 in contemporary Vatican-connected coverage); it is incidental to the act’s object.
54. Lucia to John Paul II, 12 May 1982, in CDF, *Message of Fatima*, introduction: “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.”
55. Paul VI: *Signum magnum*, 13 May 1967, Vatican web text; pilgrimage attested throughout the Sanctuary’s records. Benedict XVI, homily at the Esplanade of the Shrine, 13 May 2010, English text at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100513_fatima.html. Papal visits establish papal devotion and pastoral government; they are not additional judgments on the events.
56. Deaths and 1989 decrees: Sanctuary seer chronology. Beatification: John Paul II, homily at Fátima, 13 May 2000, Vatican web text. Canonization: Francis, homily at the Holy Mass with the rite of canonization of Blesseds Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto, Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima, 13 May 2017, English text at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170513_omelia-pellegrinaggio-fatima.html, quoting *Memoirs* III, 6. The Latin formula of canonization pronounced in the rite is in the celebration booklet, not re-verified here. A canonization certifies the sanctity of the persons; it does not adjudicate the apparitions’ every detail.
57. Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Maria Lucia of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart, 22 June 2023 (Portuguese text in the Sanctuary’s documentation collection; References); waiver and diocesan phase: Sanctuary seer chronology.
58. DDF, *Norms*, 17 May 2024, English text at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html: conclusions at nn. 17–22, the rule at n. 23; approval, effective date, and replacement of the 25 February 1978 norms in the final formula and art. 27.
59. DDF documents index at <https://www.doctrinafidei.va/en/documenti.html>, listing “Documents Regarding The Message of Fatima (26 June 2000)” as the Dicastery’s Fátima entry; search bounds in Appendix A.
60. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, whose text supplies both quotations (the completeness formulation, and CCC 67 as quoted there); Lambertini and Dhanis as in §6. The 2024 norms restate the same boundary for the current discipline: even a *Nihil obstat* authorizes only prudent adherence and never certifies supernatural origin (nn. 17, 23; art. 22 §2).
61. DDF, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024), n. 12, quoted exactly (the inner quotation is the norms’ own, at their note 15); presentation, on the 2000 Fátima explanation. The 1930 act is a legacy judgment and is not relabeled under this taxonomy (§12).
62. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, “An attempt to interpret the ‘secret’ of Fatima,” quoted exactly.
63. DDF, *Mater Populi fidelis* (4 November 2025), n. 2, English text at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20251104_mater-populi-fidelis_en.html (read 2026-07-25), quoted exactly; the note’s own footnote at that place identifies the titles concerned. Cited here for its bearing on apparition-linked Marian language generally; it does not name Fátima. CDF, *Message of Fatima*, theological commentary, for the reading of the triumph through Mary’s *fiat*.
64. For the reported-message discipline observed throughout this study: a sentence is the Lady’s only in the sense that a named witness reported it at a stated date; the phrase “reported message” is the study’s default register, and the strata (1917 records; 1924 sworn interrogation; 1935–1941 memoirs; 1944 manuscript) are identified at each use.
65. Center as stated by the 2000 commentary (“the exhortation to prayer as the path of ‘salvation for souls’ and, likewise, the summons to penance and conversion”; Lucia to Ratzinger: the purpose of the apparitions was growth in faith, hope, and love, “everything else was intended to lead to this”); Rosary requests in the 1917 records (*Seleção*, Docs. 1, 3, 14); sacrifice-for-sinners wording from the memoir stratum as printed by the Sanctuary’s narrative page.

A Scope, Status, and Qualifications

Question and thesis boundary

This study answers one question in two parts. The first part is documentary: what occurred and was reported at Fátima in 1917 on the contemporaneous record; what the competent ecclesiastical authorities have judged, in exactly which acts, words, and objects; how the documentary corpus—above all the memoirs and the three-part secret—actually developed; and what those judgments oblige and leave open. The second part is interpretive: what the published secret means. It is a source-audited study instrument, ecclesial-judgment-first in method: not a devotional narrative, a critical edition, a magisterial act, a scientific investigation of the solar phenomenon, or a complete history of Fátima devotion.

It proposes no judgment of its own on supernaturality, and it does propose judgments of its own on meaning, mode, identification, textual completeness, and the consecration record. Those judgments are confined to labeled *Project synthesis* blocks, each of which states the judgment, its reasons, the strongest argument against it, and the evidence that would overturn it; they are editorial and AI proposals in the sense of the repository’s editorial standard, and are never presented as teaching, as consensus, or as the sense of any authority quoted nearby. §14 gathers them with their confidence levels. The warrant for interpreting at all is stated at §1: the Holy See published the text with a commentary that puts the interpretive questions to its reader, and no act restrains discussion of it. Where a competent act does restrain discussion of an alleged secret, this project observes the restraint and treats no such material.

Corpus and exclusions

Included: the six 1917 apparitions and the 13 October solar phenomenon in the 1917–1930 documentary record as critically edited in the Sanctuary’s *Seleção de documentos*; the diocesan process (1922 provision, 1924 interrogation, 1930 commission report) and the 13 October 1930 pastoral letter; Lucia’s memoirs and the secret’s composition, custody, and publication through the CDF’s *Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000), read in full; the consecration acts of 1942, 1952, 1981/1982/1984, and 2022 with the 1989 letter; the 2016 press-office communiqué; the seers’ causes and the 2017 canonizations; and the 2024 DDF norms as they bear on current standing. Included for the interpretive part: the three parts of the secret quoted entire in the Holy See’s English with the two Fourth Memoir annotations; the Sodano announcement and the Ratzinger commentary at their exact wording; Benedict XVI’s remarks of 11 and 13 May 2010; the classical account of prophetic vision and of the prophecy of denunciation in Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, qq. 173–174, used as the tradition the 2000 commentary applies; and the DDF’s *Mater Populi fidelis* (2025) as a current safeguard on apparition-linked Marian language. Excluded or bounded: any certification of a physical mechanism or adjudication of individual solar-phenomenon testimony; the 1915 reports, 1916 angel cycle, 1921 experience, and Pontevedra/Tuy events except as reported and received (never placed inside the 1930 clause); complete reproduction of the memoirs or of any modern translation; “fourth secret,” date-setting, and automatic-salvation theories beyond the controlling public answers (§9); every papal Fátima reference, political appropriation, and polemical controversy; and any declaration about the present “conversion of Russia.”

Geography, chronology, and currentness

Subject geography: the parish of Fátima (Cova da Iria, Aljustrel, Valinhos), the diocese of Leiria (Leiria-Fátima), Porto, Pontevedra and Tuy (Spain), Rome. Subject range: 1917 to the DDF norms of 2024 and the causes’ state in 2023. As-of date: all mutable claims—current controlling status, the DDF documents index, sanctuary pages—were checked on 2026-07-25; no later act superseding the 1930 judgment or the 2000 interpretation was located. Stable historical facts are not given artificial currentness. Negative results are bounded searches (recorded in the Notes and the tracked research records), correctable by better evidence, never guarantees.

Taxonomy and terminology

Kept distinct throughout: *contemporaneous record* (1917 interrogations, press, letters); *sworn process testimony* (1924); *retrospective memoir* (1935–1941, 1944); *competent judgment* (the 1930 diocesan act); *papal act of piety*

(consecrations, entrustments); *authoritative interpretation* (the 2000 commentary); *reception* (feasts, pilgrimages, canonizations, shrine development), which establishes only its own form of approval; *classical theological doctrine* (Aquinas on prophecy), which is context for the Church’s own categories and not an authority on this event; and *project synthesis*, the study’s own judgment, which appears only inside labeled blocks and carries no authority but its argument. “Reported message” is the default register for all words attributed to the apparition. “Worthy of belief” (*digna de crédito*) is the 1930 act’s own formula and is not translated into the 2024 taxonomy. *Fides humana* names the prudent human assent invited by approved private revelation.

Source hierarchy and method

Priority: the exact operative and documentary texts in identified witnesses (the Sanctuary’s critical selection for 1917–1930; the Holy See’s own web texts for 2000–2024); then competent summaries in Holy See acts (the 2023 heroic-virtues decree); then the Sanctuary’s institutional pages for scaffolding; then scholarship, used here only through the controlling documents. Quotations are exact from the named witness; Portuguese and Italian sources are quoted in the original where wording is operative, with editorial translations visibly editorial. No project or AI rendering is offered as a received translation, and no prayer text is printed for recitation in this study.

Qualifications and unresolved items

(1) The 1930 act is quoted from the Sanctuary’s 2013 critical selection; the 1930 imprint and the diocesan original were not consulted. (2) The fifteen-volume *Documentação Crítica* was used only through the one-volume selection; unselected documents were not searched. (3) The 1942 first publications of the secret’s first two parts were not verified in their original imprints; the dating rests on standard accounts and the 2000 edition’s “already... published.” (4) *O Século* was read in the critical transcription, not in newspaper facsimile. (5) The August 1917 apparition’s day (19 August) rests on the memoir stratum. (6) Lucia’s memoirs were used through the 2000 dossier, the 2023 decree, and the Sanctuary’s excerpts, not read integrally in a critical edition. (7) The English of the Vatican pages quoted is the Holy See’s own; its translators are unnamed, and the 2000 introduction contains an internal 7 May/7 June 1981 slip reproduced as found. (8) Archival claims underlying the 1980s consecration controversy were not examined; the study reports the position of record. (9) The books in which the unpublished-further-text controversy has chiefly been argued—Socci’s of 2006 and Cardinal Bertone’s reply of 2007—were identified only at catalogue level and were not read; their arguments are therefore neither quoted, summarized, nor attributed anywhere in this study, and §9 analyzes only the publicly documented premises such an argument must use. (10) Aquinas is quoted from the English Dominican Province translation as presented by a web host; the Latin was not collated and no Latin wording is quoted. (11) The *Insegnamenti* volumes cited by the 2000 dossier, and the autograph of Sister Lucia’s letter of 12 May 1982, were not consulted; both are used as the dossier prints them. (12) The interpretive judgments of this study are its own, are unreviewed by any competent authority, and are offered as argument; they are not a Mariological, theological, or canonical opinion in any professional sense. (13) No independent Mariological, historical, canonical, Portuguese-philological, medical, or scientific review has occurred; no ecclesiastical review or approval is claimed or implied.

Rights

Project prose is original and intended for CC BY 4.0. Quotations remain under their own status: the underlying 1917–1930 Portuguese documents (newspaper reports of the deceased-in-1932 Avelino de Almeida, official diocesan acts, interrogations) are public domain, but the Sanctuary’s 2013 critical transcription and apparatus are © Santuário de Fátima and are quoted briefly with citation; Holy See web texts (the 2000 dossier, homilies and interviews, the 2024 norms, the 2025 doctrinal note, the 2022 act) are quoted within ordinary scholarly limits with citation; the Sanctuary’s English memoir excerpts likewise. Aquinas is quoted from a translation published in 1920 and long out of copyright in the United States, through a web host whose own presentation is not reproduced. Online availability is not treated as a reuse license. One qualification to the earlier form of this notice is required by §5: the three parts of the secret and the two Fourth Memoir annotations are quoted *entire* in the Holy See’s English, because they are the object this study analyzes and a partial quotation would make its argument unverifiable. They are short constituent texts within a much larger dossier; the dossier itself—introduction, papal letter, conversation record, announcement, and commentary—is not reproduced, and no other complete document is reproduced anywhere in this study.

B References

Witnesses are listed with role and rights notes; access date for all web loci is 2026-07-25 unless stated. Stable source identities for the starred entries are registered in the repository source library; this publication’s bindings are in `research/source-bindings.toml`.

Primary documentary corpus, 1917–1930

- **Documentação Crítica de Fátima: Seleção de documentos (1917–1930)* (Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 2013; ISBN 978-972-8213-91-6; © Santuário de Fátima; scientific sponsorship of the Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa, Universidade Católica Portuguesa), distributed without charge by the Sanctuary as a 653-page PDF: https://www.fatima.pt/files/upload/fontes/F001_DCF_selecao.pdf (documentation page <https://www.fatima.pt/en/documentacao/f001-documentacao-critica-de-fatima-selecao-de-documentos-1917-1930>). Role: critical witness for the 1917 interrogations (Docs. 1, 3, 14, 18), the press dossier (Docs. 4, 13, 21), the process acts (Docs. 68, 120), and the 1930 pastoral letter (Doc. 133) with its promulgation account (Doc. 134). The underlying 1917–1930 documents are public domain; the edition’s transcription and apparatus remain the Sanctuary’s, quoted briefly with citation.
- *José Alves Correia da Silva, Bishop of Leiria, *Carta Pastoral sobre o culto de Nossa Senhora de Fátima*, 13 October 1930, as printed in the above selection, Doc. 133 (published earlier as DCF II, Doc. 11). Role: the operative approval act, quoted exactly in §1. Ceilings recorded in §3.3.

Holy See acts and documents

- *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000), English text, read in full: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html. Role: controlling dossier and interpretation—Bertone introduction (custody history, the 1981 envelopes, the 1984 act, the 1989 letter, the letter of 12 May 1982), the secret’s three parts in translation with facsimiles and the Fourth Memoir annotations at its notes 6–7, all quoted entire in §5; John Paul II’s letter of 19 April 2000; the 27 April 2000 conversation record (the 1960-date answer and the author’s authentication of the manuscript); the Sodano announcement of 13 May 2000; and Cardinal Ratzinger’s theological commentary, quoted at its exact wording. The edition’s translation policy is its own note 8.
- *Holy See Press Office, “Communiqué on articles regarding the Third Secret of Fatima,” 21 May 2016: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/05/21/160521b.html>. Role: Benedict XVI’s denial of the Dollinger claims; completeness of the 2000 publication.
- *Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (given 17 May 2024; approved 4 May 2024; effective 19 May 2024): https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html. Role: current procedural law; six conclusions; n. 23 rule; its presentation’s citation of the Fátima 2000 explanation of approval; and n. 12, quoted, on phenomena not becoming objects of faith. Checked negative: the DDF documents index (<https://www.doctrinafidei.va/en/documenti.html>), which on 2026-07-25 carried entries as recent as 2 July 2026 and several apparition-related letters of 2025, lists exactly one Fátima entry, the dossier of 26 June 2000.
- *Francis, Homily, Holy Mass with the rite of canonization of Blesseds Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto, Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima, 13 May 2017: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170513_omelia-pellegrinaggio-fatima.html. Role: canonization record and its homiletic framing.
- *Francis, *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, 25 March 2022: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/20220325-atto-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html>; with the Letter to the Bishops, 21 March 2022: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20220321-lettera-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html>. Role: the 2022 act’s text (Russia and Ukraine named) and its self-description.
- Pius XII, Radio message to Portugal with the prayer of consecration to the Immaculate Heart, 31 October 1942 (Italian): https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1942/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19421031_immacolata.html; *Sacro vergente anno*, 7 July 1952 (Italian): <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x>

ii/it/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xii_apl_19520707_sacro-vergente-anno.html. Role: the 1942 and 1952 consecration texts.

- John Paul II, Homily at the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta, Fátima, 13 May 2000: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000513_beatification-fatima.html. Role: beatification record (identity confirmed; not quoted).
- Benedict XVI, Homily at the Esplanade of the Shrine, Fátima, 13 May 2010: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100513_fatima.html. Role: the “prophetic mission” sentence, quoted exactly.
- *Benedict XVI, Interview with journalists during the flight to Portugal, 11 May 2010: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100511_portogallo-interview.html. Role: the anthropology of apparition restated in the Pope’s own voice, and the express refusal to confine the third part’s vision to the attack of 13 May 1981—“an indication is given of realities involving the future of the Church”—with the application to suffering caused by sin within the Church. Ceiling: an in-flight interview published among the Holy See’s speeches; ordinary papal teaching, not an act of the extraordinary magisterium.
- *Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mater Populi fidelis*, doctrinal note on some Marian titles regarding Mary’s cooperation in the work of salvation, 4 November 2025: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dof_doc_20251104_mater-populi-fidelis_en.html. Role: n. 2 quoted, on the imprecise use of Marian titles in connection with alleged supernatural phenomena. The note does not name Fátima and is cited only for that general safeguard.
- Paul VI, *Signum magnum*, 13 May 1967, Vatican web text (cited for date and fact of the anniversary act; not quoted).
- Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, Decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Maria Lucia of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart, 22 June 2023, Portuguese text distributed by the Sanctuary: https://www.fatima.pt/files/upload/documentos_do_magisterio/20023-06-22decretosobreasvirtudesheroicasdairmaluciadejesusedoimaculadocoracao.pdf. Role: competent summary of Lucia’s life, Pontevedra and Tuy, the memoirs’ dating, and the 1984 fulfillment sentence.

Sanctuary of Fátima institutional pages

- “Narrative of the Apparitions” (<https://www.fatima.pt/en/pages/narrative-of-the-apparitions->) and “Chronology of the Three Seers” (<https://www.fatima.pt/en/pages/chronology-of-the-three-seers>). Role: factual scaffolding (memoir dates, seer biography, Valinhos account with its source note) and the Sanctuary’s English memoir excerpts, quoted briefly. Ceiling: institutional presentation, cited as the Sanctuary’s own account, not as critical edition.

Theological tradition cited for context

- *Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 173, aa. 2 and 4, and q. 174, a. 1, English Dominican Province translation (1920) as presented at <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3173.htm> and <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3174.htm>. Role: the classical distinction between the reception of a prophetic representation and the judgment upon it; the prophet’s mind as a deficient instrument (“even true prophets know not all that the Holy Ghost means by the things they see”); and the prophecy of denunciation, which “is not always fulfilled.” Ceiling: cited as the tradition the 2000 commentary applies, never as an authority on Fátima; the Latin was not collated and no Latin wording is quoted; the host’s own presentation is a delivery route, not a critical edition.

Identified but not read

- Antonio Socci, *Il quarto segreto di Fátima* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2006), ISBN 88-17-00993-8; English, *The Fourth Secret of Fatima* (Loreto, 2009), ISBN 978-1-930278-77-6.
- Tarcisio Bertone with Giuseppe De Carli, *L’ultima veggente di Fatima* (Rizzoli, 2007); English, *The Last Secret of Fatima* (Doubleday, 2008), ISBN 978-0-385-52582-4.

Both are named here because §9 concerns a controversy argued chiefly in them, and a reader is entitled to know what the study did not read. Identities were checked at catalogue level only (Open Library, 2026-07-25). Neither is quoted, summarized, paraphrased, or characterized anywhere in this study, and no position is attributed to either author.

Not consulted at first hand (recorded ceilings)

The 1930 União Gráfica imprint; the Leiria diocesan archive; the fifteen-volume *Documentação Crítica* beyond the selection; *O Século* and *Ilustração Portuguesa* in facsimile; the 1942 first imprints of the secret's first two parts; Lucia's memoirs in integral critical edition; *Insegnamenti* volumes cited by the 2000 dossier; the autograph of the letter of 12 May 1982; the Portuguese autographs of the secret's three parts, used only through the published facsimile and translation; the Latin of the *Summa theologiae*; the celebration booklet with the 2017 canonization formula; archival materials alleged in the consecration controversy; and the two books named above.

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