



BLESSED FRANCISCO AND JACINTA MARTO

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FATIMA AND MODERNITY — PROPHECY AND ESCHATOLOGY

Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, who is now Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, was formerly Rector of the 'Universidade Pontificia Urbaniana', which, in accordance with its academic tradition, wished to mark the 70th birthday of this «outstanding scholar and churchman».

Well-known scholars from various parts of the world and from a number of different Universities were invited to reflect on, and explore further into, the various subjects in which Cardinal Saraiva Martins has specialised, and the resultant studies have now been collected into a book entitled *Veritas in Caritate (Truth in Charity)*.

We give below, to be continued in the next issues of the *Bulletin*, the study by Don António dos Santos Marto, auxiliary Bishop of Braga.

«Lightning and thunder need time, starlight needs time, deeds need time in order to be seen and heard» (Nietsche)

Although this phrase by Nietsche originally referred to a totally different context, it can equally well be applied to the message of the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima in 1917. Only at this distance in time, at the beginning of a new century, are we fully able to comprehend the greatness, depth and relevance of this message.

An English historian, G. J. Hobsbawn, has defined the 20th century as the "short century". He makes it begin with the first World War in 1914 and end in 1989 with the collapse of the Berlin wall. And this is the period of time which is framed in a special way by the message of Fatima.

Apparitions derive their significance from the historical, social, political and religious moment to which their challenge is directed, and which they seek to illuminate with their message. According to the teaching of St John of the Cross, apparitions are the wrapping round the message. It is, however, the message of love which is of primary importance. Apparitions are deemed by the Church to be «private revelations» which can in no way be compared with the Revelation contained in Sacred Scripture. Their aim is not to provide a basis for faith, but to serve it. They add nothing to the one and only Revelation, but they can be a humble appeal. They constitute perceptible signs whereby God communicates Himself, according to the capacity of the person receiving the sign. Their



After ten long years of preparation, the famous Russian painter Ilija Glasunow displayed, in an exhibition in Moscow, a canvas measuring 6 m x 3 m entitled «The Mystery of the 20th Century», depicting the problems of Christian civilisation in this moving and catastrophic century. The picture is a composition in which one can recognise well-known people and places such as: Tolstoy, Tsar Nicholas II, Lenin, Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, Roosevelt, Einstein, Stalin, Kennedy, the Beatles, Solzhenitsyn, Mao, a naked woman, the Brandenburg Gate, the mushroom of the atomic bomb, an enormous foetus and, hovering above and shedding light on everything else, the risen Christ. The Russian Art Commission wished to withdraw the picture from the exhibition but Glasunow declared «This painting represents my philosophy. Without this picture, my exhibition would be like a body without a soul».

role can be compared to that of icons which, according to Eastern theology, are a «true objectification, inspired by the Holy Spirit [...] which both generates and bears a presence». They belong to the order of charism, that is, they are a gift of God to a member of the Body of Christ for the good of the whole Body. Like all charisms of an exceptional character, they must not be sought for, but welcomed thankfully, with discernment and prudence.

According to Karl Rahner, a private revelation does not represent an innovation, that is, a new interpretation of the realities of our faith; it is, rather, the revelation of an evangelical imperative in a particular historical situation in the Church and in the world, an imperative to be implemented urgently in a precise moment called for by the historical situation, and in accordance with the general principles of official revelation and ecclesial faith.

Hence, a private revelation is a passing implementation, a historical application of the basic revelation at a particular time in history, in order to cause this basic revelation to penetrate into minds and hearts, and into the culture of the time, as grace, promise, existence and judgement. As a result, those who hear and receive the message are confronted by a direct call from God, summoning them to the obedience of faith.

The [Fatima] apparitions are a sign from God for our own generation. And Mary appears as the Servant of the Lord, at the service of the Church in the world. They also seek to prepare the Church for the future, at times in apocalyptic terms.

I feel it is necessary to include this preamble by way of introduction because, where the apparitions are concerned, one is frequently aware of a kind of unhealthy curiosity which risks concentrating on minor details without taking in the main essence of the message.

Apparitions and the consequent revelation must not overshadow the dramatic historical situation in which the Christian community is placed. Hence, only to the extent to which apparitions are seen in relation to the history of the time, and the great provocations arising from humanity, can one conclude that one is faced with a message that has been given to arouse a faith which has become tepid and indifferent.

Theological reflection on this point must include a careful analysis of the socio-cultural context in which the apparitions occur, as, for example, the particular circumstances in which the Church is placed at a particular moment in time.

1. *On the horizon of Modernity*

It is clear that the message of Fatima refers to the new era of modern times, with particular reference to the period of the two great conflicts which mark the history of the 20th century, with all the context surrounding these conflicts, of which they are an expression.

The first and second World Wars constitute, as it were, a prism of the evil in this century in which the principal facets of evil and its perverse effects are reflected:

- the tragic novelty of political totalitarianism, in the typical forms of Nazism and Stalinism which this took in the 20th century;
- the recourse to systematic lying in the fabrication of a ‘truth’ and the rewriting of history;
- a determined effort to deny God and expunge Him from

public life and from people’s consciousness by means of militant atheism and laicism;

– the annihilation and death of the human person and a total disregard for the dignity of the person, as evidenced by the tens of millions of victims, in the name of the radical purity of ideology, revolution or race, raised to the level of new divinities:

– the novelty of what eventually came to be known as ‘total war’ which, by infringing traditionally accepted codes of conduct, opened the way for the liquidation of innocent people and civilians, using all the most modern scientific and technical instruments. This represents the extreme of arbitrary power which knows no limits of any kind.

– the collective phenomenon of hatred and violence which took possession of people and peoples.

In a theological reading of the signs of the times, world war and total war represent (that is make present) a concentration of evil, a real symbol of the *globalisation of sin* experienced for the first time in its monstrosity, horror and terror at the level of the entire planet. They reveal both *the forms of organised evil* of which our century is unfortunately full, and *the acceptance of the normality and banality of evil*, which is now rationally justified and legitimised, as well as scientifically and technically programmed and executed.

Looking back, from this distance in time, we can today see more clearly the metamorphosis, the rupture and the degeneration of modernity and of its potentially destructive results.

Strictly speaking, the novelty of modern times does not consist in the fact of human beings having decided to use their reason freely and publicly, according to Kant’s motto. This motto has its roots in Christianity, in the conviction that human beings were created in the image of God, capable of creative knowledge.

What really marks the epoch-making rupture is the fact of modernity presenting itself as an ambitious project of the salvation of man by man. This had its extreme theoretical expression in the 19th century with the so-called «Masters of Suspicion» and their message, of which the great heir was Marxism: God must die so that human beings can live. The 19th century left this gaping wound in the general consciousness, which was carried on into the 20th century: a resentment of God as the enemy of man that found its ultimate expression in the death of man.

To sum up, in the words of John Paul II: «This message (i.e., the Fatima message) is addressed in a particular way to the men and women of our century, marked as it is by wars, by hatred, by the violation of fundamental human rights, by the immense suffering of men and nations, and above all by the battle against God to the point of denying his existence.»

The message of Fatima reflects with clarity and deep regret on this tumultuous and dramatic period in history. After the condemnation contained in the Scriptures themselves, it constitutes perhaps the strongest and most impressive condemnation of the sin of the world, summoning the Church and the world to make a serious examination of conscience. Only those who have a deep sense of the dignity of man before God, and of his eternal destiny, can understand the greatness of the tragedy of sin, and how the loss of a sense of sin is, in the deepest sense, the loss of a sense of everything that is truly

human. «With the elimination of God from human consciousness, man himself is in danger. At the end of the century, what is at stake and at risk is not only the existence of God, but also the dignity of man.»

Faced with this situation of wounded humanity, the message of Fatima speaks in the voice of all the victims, and becomes a summons to read history from the point of view of these victims, to pause before the mystery of man confronted by the mystery of God. It expresses once more the ancient and abiding question of Genesis: «Adam, where are you?» (Gen. 3, 9) – that is, where is man? Where is man in the world of the concentration camp of Auschwitz or that of the gulags of Soviet Russia? «How can one believe in man, or rather, how can one believe in humanity – what a pretentious word to use in this connection – when in Auschwitz one came face to face with that of which man is all too terribly capable?» Is not the cynicism of oppressors in our own day the expression of the *cruelty* of the modern world and of its horrendous lack of respect for, and abandonment of, God? Who will save man from man himself?

(to be continued)

THE APPARITIONS OF THE ANGEL

Jesus Christ came on earth to bring the one and all-sufficient Message [of Salvation] which is contained in his Gospel and in the official teaching of the Church. But men are distracted and forgetful, and so, as time goes on, they try to put aside the less palatable parts of the divine Message. It is then that God, in his mercy, condescends to remind people precisely of these less popular aspects of his Message, which are in danger of being watered down or adulterated by the customs and mentality of each epoch, or even openly contradicted by the arch-enemy, the Devil. Sometimes Our Lord himself intervenes to convey to us, by means of private revelations, parts of the universal Message of Salvation which are in danger of being forgotten, and therefore need to be repeated. Such was the case, for example, of the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St Margaret Mary Alacoque. At other times, the Lord allows his blessed Mother to come on his behalf. Rarer still, if not unique in the history of the Church, is the case of Our Lady having sent an Angel ahead of her to pave the way for her own coming. She thus provided for the events in Fatima a kind of prelude which at once plunged the protagonists into a supernaturally charged atmosphere in which they learnt the coordinates of what was to constitute the essence of her Message: God is offended, we must do penance and change our lives.

We give below Lucia's own account of the three appearances of the Angel, which were witnessed only by herself and her two cousins, Francisco and Jacinta.

«The dates I cannot set down with certainty, because, at that time, I did not know how to reckon the years, the months, or even the days of the week. But I think it must have been in the spring of 1916 that the Angel appeared to us for the first time in our *Loca do Cabeço*... we climbed the hillside in search of shelter. After having taken our lunch and said our prayers, we began to see, some distance off, above the trees that stretched away towards the east, a light, whiter than snow, in the form of a young man, transparent, and brighter than

crystal pierced by the rays of the sun. As he drew nearer, we could distinguish his features more and more clearly. We were surprised, absorbed, and struck dumb with amazement.

On reaching us, he said:

“Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.”

Kneeling on the ground, he bowed down until his forehead touched the earth. Led by a supernatural impulse, we did the same, and repeated the words which we heard him say:

“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You!”

Having repeated these words three times, he rose and said:

“Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.”

Then he disappeared.

The supernatural atmosphere which enveloped us was so intense, that we were for a long time scarcely aware of our own existence, remaining in the same posture in which he had left us, and continually repeating the same prayer. The presence of God made itself felt so intimately and so intensely that we did not even venture to speak to one another. »

Eah one of the words of the Angel and of Lucia's narrative could be commented on at length and meditated on with profits to our souls. This we will do at an opportune time.

The second Apparition must have been at the height of summer, when the heat of the day was so intense that we had to take the sheep home before noon and only let them out again in the early evening.

We went to spend the siesta hours in the shade of the trees which surrounded the well that I have already mentioned several times. Suddenly, we saw the same Angel right beside us.

“What are you doing?” he asked. “Pray! Pray very much! The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High.”

“How are we to make sacrifices?” I asked.

“Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. You will thus draw down peace upon your country. I am its Angel Guardian, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with submission, the suffering which the Lord will send you.”

These words were indelibly impressed upon our minds. They were like a light which made us understand who God is, how He loves us and desires to be loved, the value of sacrifice, how pleasing it is to Him and how, on account of it, He grants the grace of conversion to sinners. It was for this reason that we began, from then on, to offer to the Lord all that mortified us, without, however, seeking out other forms of mortification and penance, except that we remained for hours on end with our foreheads touching the ground, repeating the prayer the Angel had taught us. »

«It seems to me that the third Apparition must have been in October, or towards the end of September, as we were no longer returning home for siesta... we went one day from *Pregueira* (a small olive grove belonging to my parents) to the *Lapa*, making our way along the slope of the hill on the side facing *Aljustrel* and *Casa Velha*. We said our Rosary there and the prayer the Angel had taught us at the first Apparition.

While we were there, the Angel appeared to us for the third

time, holding a chalice in his hands, with a host above it from which some drops of blood were falling into the sacred vessel. Leaving the chalice and the host suspended in the air, the Angel prostrated on the ground and repeated this prayer three times:

“Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly, and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference with which He Himself is offended. And, through the infinite merits of His most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.”

Then, rising, he once more took the chalice and the host in his hands. He gave the host to me, and to Jacinta and Francisco he gave the contents of the chalice to drink, saying as he did so: “Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God.” Once again, he prostrated on the ground and repeated with us three times more, the same prayer “Most Holy Trinity...”, and then disappeared.

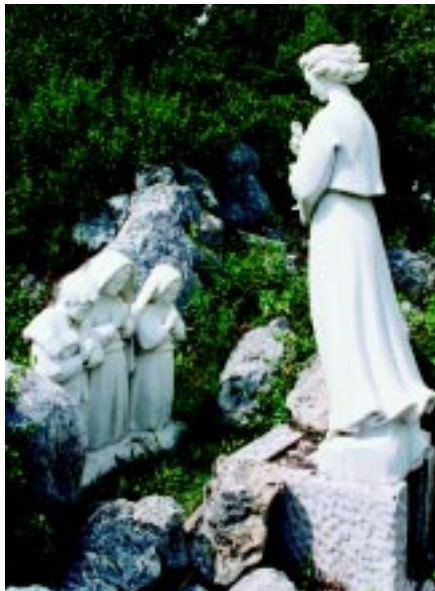
Impelled by the power of the supernatural that enveloped us, we imitated all that the Angel had done, prostrating ourselves on the ground as he did and repeating the prayers that he said. The force of the presence of God was so intense that it absorbed us and almost completely annihilated us. It seemed to deprive us even of the use of our bodily senses for a considerable length of time. During those days, we performed all our exterior actions as though guided by that same supernatural being who was impelling us thereto. The peace and happiness which we felt were great, but wholly interior, for our souls were completely immersed in God. The physical exhaustion that came over us was also great. »

This little story told in all simplicity by the narrator who was herself the protagonist, gives us one of the most extraordinary scenes from the whole of the history of humanity in its dealings with the supernatural. The words, the gestures, the scene are dense with doctrine and of profound significance, which we leave to the study and consideration of those who understand and are capable of bringing them to a practical conclusion and application.

Due to the limited space at our disposal, we can only quote a few more remarks of Lucia on another occasion referring to this apparition.

«In the third Apparition, the presence of the supernatural made itself felt more intensely still. For several days even Francisco did not venture to speak. Later he said:

“I love to see the Angel, but the worst of it is that, afterwards, we are unable to do anything. I couldn’t even walk. I don’t know what was the matter with me.”



Loca do Cabeço where the Angel appeared twice to the little Shepherds.

In spite of that, after the third Apparition of the Angel, it was he who noticed that it was getting dark, and who drew our attention to the fact, and thought we should take our flocks back home.

Once the first few days were over and we had returned to normal, Francisco asked:

“The Angel gave you Holy Communion, but what was it that he gave to Jacinta and me?”

“It was Holy Communion, too” replied Jacinta, with inexpressible joy. “Didn’t you see that it was the Blood that fell from the Host?”

“I felt that God was within me, but I did not know how!”

Then, prostrating on the ground, he and his sister remained for a long time, saying over and over again the prayer of the Angel

“ Most Holy Trinity...”»

Let us have the courage to follow in the footsteps of the Little Shepherds

Human holiness consists in sharing in the holiness of God. It was for this reason that Jesus said: «Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy». Sharing in God’s holiness is achieved by sanctifying grace.

Holiness in human beings manifests itself primarily in their love for God, and is expressed in two ways: the avoidance of sin and the practice of virtue.

To do something for the love of God requires supernatural strength.

The little Shepherds received the gift of sanctifying grace in Baptism. Owing to their tender age, they had no passions nor particular trials, and so they did not need to be given any special strength to overcome them. How, then, did they show and practise their supernatural life? By means of the countless occasions and opportunities for making sacrifices which they offered in reparation for the offences committed against God and the Immaculate Heart of Mary and, in addition, the prayers — especially the Rosary — which they recited in response to the invitation of the Angel and of our Blessed Lady herself.

By means of the prayer taught to them by the Angel: «My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you...», the children practised the divine virtues and the highest form of love by asking for pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love God. In this way they lived their love for God and human beings and so attained the glory of sanctity.

When we feel ourselves to be truly poor, with nothing to offer to God as we enter into His presence, let us have the courage to tread the way of holiness followed by the little Shepherds, loving God, adoring Him, singing his praises and offering Him our sacrifices in reparation for the sins of all human beings, after the example of the Blessed Francisco and Jacinta.

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