

The Vatican Can

The Vatican has at last revealed the third of the three Secrets of Fátima, and it turns out to have been a vision of the attempt to kill Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981.

The revealing was done as through a glass, darkly, by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican secretary of state:

“That text contains a prophetic vision similar to those found in the sacred scripture, which do not describe with photographic clarity the details of future events, but rather synthesize and condense against a unified background events spread out over time in a succession and a duration which are not specified. As a result, the text must be interpreted in a symbolic key.”

See what the cardinal means? He sincerely hopes not.

No church with two thousand years in the miracle business is going to pin itself down to a prediction anybody could understand. Leave that to the rookie cults, like Heaven’s Gate or that doomsday bunch in Uganda.

No, what you want to do with visions vouchsafed by the Virgin Mary unto three Portuguese shepherd girls in 1917 is just what the Vatican did: sit on the things unless and until one or more of them can be made to seem more or less true.

The first two, while lacking in photographic clarity, were eventually seen to have referred to the World Wars and the rise of communism. They were released once those events had safely occurred.

But the third vision—a white-robed bishop shot down as he crosses a field of corpses—remained under seal. Nothing remotely like this had, after all, yet happened.

One of the few who knew the Third Secret was Karol Wojtyla, who was let in on it after his installation as Pope John Paul II in 1978.

Three years later in St. Paul's square a Turkish gunman nearly killed John Paul as he was celebrating the 64th anniversary of the Fátima revelations—an excellent day, many of us might think, for him to have stayed indoors. But then he hadn't been a bishop since 1964 and no corpses were in sight. That's the trouble with symbolic keys.

After the pope's near death it seemed to him that his life had been spared by “a motherly hand which guided the bullet's path.” President Reagan, too, is said to have thought that the Lord spoiled John Hinckley's aim. And both men may be right, for all anyone knows

But to follow their way of thinking to its logical conclusion, always a mistake where religion is concerned, God must have guided a great many other bullets as well. Among them Lee Harvey Oswald's and James Earl Ray's.

Also those that killed Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador while he was celebrating mass in a white robe a year before the attempt on the pope. Unfortunately for the archbishop's prospects of sainthood, his bullets came from an anti-communist death squad guided by the fatherly hand of a butcher named Roberto D'Aubuisson, a good Catholic boy.



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