

34. Lucia and Third Secret Silenced (1960)

The Father Fuentes controversy was the first example of “dueling Lucia’s,” that is, Lucia contradicting herself. Facts and the passage of time make it highly probable that Lucia’s apparent self-contradiction was due to the Coimbra chancery manufacturing a quote by her and publishing it. There would be many more “dueling Lucia’s” episodes during the last twenty-five years of her life, where Churchmen would attribute statements to Sister Lucia that contradicted what she had said about Fatima (or related matters) in the past. Father Alonso, who was in a position to know, declared: “Lucia no longer had meetings which were reported accurately in publications.”¹

Since Sister Lucia was forbidden from speaking about Fatima publicly, there wasn’t much she could do about people putting words in her mouth. And after her meeting with Father Fuentes, Lucia’s list of visitors not needing express authorization from the Holy See grew quite short: family members.

Her old confessor, Father Aparicio, came to Portugal from Brazil in 1960. He was aged and wished to visit his spiritual daughter, whom he had not seen since 1938. In a letter he wrote:

“I will go to Coimbra. I will not be able to speak with Sister Lucia because she is isolated. By order of the Holy Office in Rome, she may not communicate with anyone. The bishop judges that he does not have the authority to allow Sister to speak...I will wait until she calls me.”

Lucia did not call, and Father Aparicio returned to Brazil. He explained: “I have not been able to speak with Sister Lucia because the Archbishop could not give the permission to meet her. The conditions of isolation in which she finds herself have been imposed by the Holy See. Consequently, no

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

one may speak with her without a license from Rome."²

Father Aparicio died in 1966, without seeing Sister Lucia. It is likely that their regular correspondence continued, since Lucia revered Aparicio for the counsel he had given her over the decades. She had felt comfortable with him since meeting him in 1925, during her Dorothean postulancy. Over the years Sister Lucia had bared to him her soul. Once she wrote:

"I am grateful for the salutary counsels which you have kindly given me. They encourage me to continue to lead my life uniquely and exclusively for the love of our good God. A new counsel from Your Reverence is always a new spark which comes to ignite the small fire of my soul, sometimes almost extinguished...I have so much need of you and I owe you everything."³

It is likely Father Aparicio's 1960 trip to Portugal was related to the anonymous press communiqué from the Vatican concerning the release — actually, the non-release — of the Third Secret. In February of that year, in the face of fervent expectation around the world that the Third Secret would be revealed as Sister Lucia said Our Lady had requested, a Portuguese news agency published this press release:

"According to Vatican sources, the Secret of Fatima will never be disclosed.

"It has just been stated, in very reliable Vatican circles...that it is most likely that the letter will never be opened, in which Sister Lucia wrote down the words which Our Lady confided as a secret to the three little shepherds in the Cova da Iria.

"As indicated by Sister Lucia, the letter can only be opened during the year 1960.

"Faced with the pressure that has been placed on the Vatican, some wanting the letter to be opened and made known to the world, others, on the supposition that it may contain alarming prophecies, desiring that its publication be withheld, the same Vatican circles declare that the Vatican has decided not to make public Sister Lucia's letter, and to continue keeping it

rigorously sealed.

“The decision of the Vatican is based on various reasons: 1. Sister Lucia is still living. 2. The Vatican already knows the contents of the letter. 3. Although the Church recognizes the Fatima apparitions, she does not pledge herself to guarantee the veracity of the words which the three little shepherds claim to have heard from Our Lady.

“In these circumstances, it is most probable that the Secret of Fatima will remain, forever, under absolute seal.”⁴

Small wonder Father Aparicio wanted to see Sister Lucia face to face, to console her and offer the same sort of counsel that had guided her all her religious life. For the anonymous press release was a dagger thrown, not at Lucia, but at the beautiful Lady who, in all solemnity and maternal warmth had prophesied the future of the Church and the world to three unwashed Portuguese mountain children.

The press release is so replete with untruths and incoherence that it is perhaps better to dismiss it than to analyze it. Let a few brief points suffice.

First, it was untrue that the Secret was under seal. Pope John XXIII had read the Secret in 1959, and talked about it with his confessor and other advisors.⁵ Moreover, only Pope John had the authority to authorize such a press release, which explains why it is anonymous: The Pope could not have honestly maintained the Third Secret was unopened and unread.

Second, the reasons given for not revealing the Third Secret are almost nonsensical. The disclosure did not depend on whether Sister Lucia was alive or dead, or whether the Vatican knew the contents or not. What matters is that the Blessed Virgin had requested it be revealed in 1960.

The third ‘reason’ provides a glimmer of understanding. The Vatican refused to “guarantee the veracity” of the seers, but no one was requesting this. It was not the seers’ message. It was the message of Heaven transmitted *through* them. Now, one can reasonably assume Heaven would pick a messenger who could keep the message straight, so the Vatican’s anxiety over the seers’ comprehension is

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

misplaced. In fact, it may be a polite way of saying that the Pope did not believe Heaven's message.

Pope John's suppression of the Third Secret was a damaging blow to the Fatima Message. Father Alonso remarked: "Simple folk waited up until May 13 when it was believed that the revelation would be made. Later, people felt a profound disenchantment and disappointment which did great harm to devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, both inside and outside Portugal."⁶

The respect and deference shown to the Fatima Message, and to Sister Lucia, were now in the past. Sister Lucia never craved human respect, but she longed for Our Lady's message to be received and acted upon by the Church. This was her initial mission, but she would have done it anyway, out of love for the beautiful Lady. Her anguish concerned the disrespect shown the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the plight of souls who would never know that the Message of Fatima showed them how to save their souls.

CNN didn't ask Sister Lucia for her reaction to the press release. She wasn't invited to appear on Crossfire. She wouldn't have appeared anyway, of course, as this would have been disobedient. She was a cloistered nun, and she continued her well-regulated religious life. A hint of her cross appears in a letter: "Due to the present state of things, and the lamentable events, this year has been very sad for us."⁷

In 1967 Pope Paul VI went to Fatima, and requested that Lucia come too, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Blessed Virgin's first apparition at Fatima. Sister Lucia's last visit to Fatima was in 1946, and it was a joyous occasion for her. One might think that being invited back to Fatima by a Pope would have thrilled Lucia. Canon Barthas knew otherwise:

"Lucia had obstinately refused to obey the order which the Bishop of Coimbra had transmitted to leave her cloister on May 13th to go to Fatima. Finally she telephoned, herself, the Nuncio in Lisbon who informed her that she would gravely disobey the Holy Father if she didn't go there. If that had only been a wish of the Holy Father, and not a command, she would have preferred to stay in the convent."⁸

Sister Lucia

When Lucia's preoccupation with praying "very much for the Holy Father," her scrupulous obedience to her religious superiors, and her joyful trip to her hometown in 1946 are remembered, her 'obstinate refusal to obey orders' and go to Fatima to meet the Pope is remarkable.

At Fatima she knelt long at Jacinta's grave, praying and weeping. Paul VI stayed in the Basilica, choosing not to visit the Cabeco, Valinhos, or even the Chapel of the Apparitions, built to commemorate the spot the beautiful Lady appeared to the three children fifty years ago. On the one hand, his appearance at Fatima seemed to give credibility to the apparitions; on the other hand, Paul barely mentioned Fatima, choosing instead to dwell on man and his talents, aspirations, and dreams.

Although Paul VI had commanded Lucia to appear at Fatima, he had not scheduled a private audience with her. He did give her Holy Communion. Afterwards, the Pope's interpreter, Father Almeida, recalled:

"Sister Lucia met the Pope only on the podium and at his seat, near the altar where he had just celebrated Mass. The Pope was seated and Sister Lucia knelt down before him. Everything happened voluntarily in public, everyone could hear and see and there is no secret.

"Sister Lucia presented to the Holy Father, not an envelope, but a kind of chestnut colored screen, no doubt of leather, a square silver box. And as Sister Lucia did not succeed in opening it, she took out a penknife to try and open it; in vain, for she was too excited. I was the one who opened the little screen and I presented it to the Pope, who was always smiling.

"At one moment Lucia manifested a wish to tell the Pope something for him alone (other accounts have Lucia insisting over and over, "I wish to speak with you alone"), but the Pope replied, 'You see, it is not the time. And then, if you wish to communicate something to me, tell your bishop; it is he who will communicate it to me; be trusting and very obedient to your bishop.'"⁹

Seeing the two together in conversation, the throng began

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

chanting: "Lucia, Lucia, Lucia." She was led to the front, and a large cheer welled up. Sister Lucia faced the crowd and wept. Were her tears due to gratitude and joy after meeting the Pope and the adulation of the masses? Probably not, since Lucia had not wanted to meet Paul VI, and had always avoided "stardom" like the plague.

It is more likely Lucia wept from grief: grief that the Holy Father would not speak with her or listen to her. Perhaps she also wept for the masses, deprived of the truth. Most of all she wept for the beautiful Lady, whose message was securely hidden by the Church it had been entrusted to. That all this was occurring at Fatima, near where the beautiful Lady had appeared six times, must have left Sister Lucia with an acute spiritual desolation.

On the plane back to Rome that night Paul VI said of Lucia, "A very simple girl! She is a peasant without complication. The people wanted to see her, I showed her to them."¹⁰

Back at Coimbra, Lucia's thoughts were her own. One day, possibly, we will know them.

Notes

1. As quoted in FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit., p. 129.
2. Ibid., pp. 33-34.
3. Ibid., pp. 38-39, fn 77. The quote is a composite of two letters.
4. As reproduced in TWTAF, Vol. III, op. cit., pp. 578-579.
5. Ibid., pp. 555-558.
6. TWTAF, Vol. III, op. cit., p. 591.
7. FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit., p. 71.
8. Ibid., p. 120.
9. FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit., pp. 121-122.
10. Ibid., p. 120.