

FATIMA:
THE GREAT SIGN

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Fatima's central role in the Church, expounded by popes,
cardinals, bishops and eminent theologians

by

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DEDICATION

To my dearest wife,
Joyce

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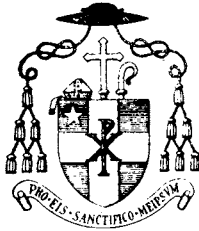
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Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima,
13 May 1979

COMMENDATION BY THE BISHOP OF LEIRIA-FATIMA



Alberto Cosme de Amaral, Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, thanks and praises all those who strive to make the message of Fatima better known and thereby lived. Among these is Mr. Francis Johnston, whose book *Fatima: The Great Sign* is destined to do much good to all who read it.

17 October 1979

Fatima has come to be a chosen place for extraordinary encounters of Faith, like so many others in the Old and New Testament. A Covenant was made, in the manner of a sacred commitment, between God and His people, through the hands of Mary, as if repeating the words of Ezekiel 36: 26-28: "I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep My laws and sincerely respect My observances . . . You shall be My people and I will be your God." . . . Here was built a changing, praying city, made up of living stones united to the Mystical Christ, the Head of the Church, the city which has come down from Heaven, from God (Apoc. 21:2). Here has been established the Tabernacle of God among men. (Apoc. 21:3).

From the homily delivered by Cardinal Vilela of Sao Salvador de Baia, Brazil, on 13 May 1979 at Fatima, in the presence of Cardinal Seper, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and 208 archbishops, bishops and priests before an estimated 1,300,000 pilgrims from all over the world.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

OVER six decades have now passed since the Mother of God spoke to the twentieth century from her pulpit at Fatima. And despite the awesome nature of her intervention, which many leading churchmen believe was a fulfillment of Apocalypse 12, her endeavour to save our civilisation from spiritual and physical ruin still remains a sign of contradiction to many of those to whom her words were addressed. While millions around the world respond to her pleas for prayer and penitence to attain the spiritual regeneration of our age and world peace, others, seemingly ignorant of Fatima's extraordinary biblical and eschatological¹ significance, and contrary to the insistent exhortations of successive popes, persist in relegating the apparitions to a level where they can be safely minimised or disregarded altogether.

It is to the latter that this Introduction is especially addressed and it is my earnest hope that if they do no more, they will at least carefully weigh the words that follow against their own views on Fatima. For, before developing the main theme of this book, which is to expound the positive and indeed crucial role of Fatima today in the economy of salvation for all men, it needs to be demonstrated that the objections one hears against Fatima are entirely without foundation.

It is claimed that since Fatima is a private revelation, no one is obliged to pay serious attention to it. Others erroneously maintain that the several so-called difficulties inherent in the story undermine its validity, that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which the Fatima message inculcates, is offensive to ecumenism, is an obstacle to union with Christ ("our sole mediator"), and has no place in this surging, post-conciliar Church. Still others regard Fatima as an essentially Portuguese affair, with only minor implications for the rest of the world. Many of these critics find the severe penances performed at Fatima repelling — though these should be viewed in the light of the extraordinary penances undertaken by the three visionary children of Fatima after seeing the vision of Hell. Finally, there is widely lacking, not a knowledge of the facts of Fatima, for these are already fairly well known, but a *realisation* of what these facts mean, of their crucial bearing on the enormous problems and perils facing the world, of the compelling need to follow through all that the remedial message of Fatima entails. It is therefore imperative that we correct these serious misconceptions and open up the profound core of Fatima (which is

still relatively unknown to many in the Church), to enable us to come to close and urgent grips with the great sign given by God to our age.

It is assumed that most readers are already conversant with the basic story of Fatima.² Three Portuguese children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, had a series of visions of an angel in 1916, and of the Blessed Virgin at monthly intervals from 13 May to 13 October 1917, in a sheep pasture near the village of Fatima, some 80 miles north of Lisbon. The children were entrusted with a message for mankind: pray and do penance for the “countless sins” of the modern world in order to save it, or Divine Justice would be compelled to punish humanity with a Second World War and the global spread of Communism in which entire nations would be “annihilated”, before Russia was finally converted. The apparitions were confirmed on 13 October by the awesome miracle of the sun — as far as is known, the only time in history (excluding the Resurrection), that God had performed a public miracle at a predicted time and place to prove something. An up-to-date account of the Fatima story is given later in this book.

Before we proceed further, it is essential that we correct the dangerous error that since Fatima is a private revelation, it can be safely ignored. Shortly before his election to the papacy as Pope John Paul I, Cardinal Luciani wrote in the Italian Blue Army magazine *Il Cuore della Madre*, January 1978:

“Someone may ask: so the cardinal is interested in private revelations. Does he not know that everything is contained in the gospel, that even approved revelations are not articles of faith? I know all that perfectly well. But the following is also an article of faith contained in the gospel: ‘Signs will be associated with those who believe.’ (Mk. 16:17). If it is the fashion today to examine the signs of the times . . . I think I may lawfully be allowed to refer to the sign of 13 October 1917, a sign to which even unbelievers and anti-clericals bore witness. And behind the sign itself, it is important to be attentive to the elements which this sign contains . . .”

One of the Church’s leading theologians, Dr. Rudolf Graber, Bishop of Regensburg, dealt with this issue in detail during his address to the Fatima Congress at Freiburg, Germany, on 23 September 1973.

“Frequently, objections are made to Fatima as being a sort of magic word in theology. Fatima, they say, is after all only a private revelation and is therefore not binding in conscience, except for the person to whom it was given. We only accept the great revelation of God which ended definitively with Christ and the Apostles. Why then such an outcry because of Fatima?

“It is to be noted that this objection comes principally from

those who neither respect the great revelation of God, nor of Christ, and who even want to eliminate some fundamental truths of Faith, such as the virgin birth of Jesus, His Resurrection, His miracles, and even His very Divinity . . . It is absolutely certain that revelation as such was completed with Christ and His Apostles. What happens then if these private revelations confirm and emphasise certain truths that are found in this great revelation? This is exactly what happens with Fatima. Fatima confirms the existence of angels and of demons that Modernists try to eliminate. Fatima confirms the mystery of the Eucharist which Modernists have stripped of all meaning. Fatima confirms the existence of Hell, which is simply denied today. Fatima requires prayer and penance, values to which people today feel themselves far superior and from which they consequently dispense themselves. Nevertheless, all through the Old and New Testament, this penance is spoken of . . . Today, much is spoken about fraternity, which naturally is not understood so much on a supernatural level, but almost exclusively in the social field and in technical developments.

“Once again we affirm that revelation proper ended with Christ and His Apostles. But does that mean that God has to remain silent, that He can no longer speak to His elect? Does it mean, as some believers think, that He should remain apart and leave the world abandoned to itself? Would not this be a very strange kind of God indeed! Did He not expressly say through His prophet that He would ‘pour forth of His Spirit on all flesh, that sons and daughters would prophesy, that old men would have visions in dreams. Even upon servants and handmaids, He would pour forth of His Spirit.’ (Acts 2:17; John 3:1-5). Is such a prophecy to be limited only to the first Pentecost? Certainly not. Wherefore hear the word of the Prophet Amos: ‘The trumpet sounds in the street, men do well to be afraid: if peril is afoot in the city, doubt not it is of the Lord’s sending. Never does He act, but His servants, the prophets, are in the secret.’ (Amos 3:6). Should we not thank God with our whole heart, Who even today speaks to us, especially when any danger is approaching?

“At an opportune moment, an eminent theologian called attention to the fact that we ought to distinguish exactly between private revelations which are given only to a privileged person, and others that contain a message for the Church or even for the whole world. We need not preoccupy ourselves with the first kind, but we should take serious account of the latter, since to reject them or not to be interested in them would mean a reprehensible despising of the Word of God, and a grave lack of responsibility towards the world. For these, the word of the prophet holds good: ‘But what if the sentry, when he sees the invader coming, sounds

no alarm to warn his neighbour? Here is some citizen overtaken by the enemy; well, his guilt deserved it. But for his death, I will hold the sentry accountable.' (Ezekiel 33:6).

" . . . Fatima represents . . . the great eschatological sign, the answer of God to the errors of the present time. The world finds itself on the eve of tremendous happenings breaking forth from the East. Hell seems to be let loose. The maternal Heart of Mary offers to save the world . . . May this depreciatory allegation, 'these are only private revelations,' not become the norm for dismissing the subject. Naturally Mary's words at Lourdes and Fatima are not on the same level as the general revelation . . . But this does not mean that God and Mary are prohibited from speaking again. God speaks once more today and in a manner all the more intelligible as His second coming draws nearer, and this is precisely what Fatima seems to indicate."

Other notable theologians echo the same theme. The Dutch priest G. Van Noort wrote in his masterly book *Dogmatic Theology* (vol. 3, p. 215):

"Such a revelation ought to be believed by both the one who receives it and by those for whom it is destined. The rest of the faithful cannot outrightly deny it without some sort of sin."

Agreeing with this truth, Fr. William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., of the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C., wrote in a letter to the *North American Voice of Fatima* (10 November 1963):

"There are other things besides the solemn teaching authority of the Church that bind a person to accept something. A creature endowed with reason is obliged by his own intelligence to bow to evidence when it is present. To resist evidence is obstinately anti-intellectual. Furthermore, when reliable witnesses testify to an event or fact which seems incontrovertible, a reasonable man must give assent. To say he may refuse assent without blame is a questionable position. When a person of such outstanding authority as the late Pope Pius XII says 'the time for doubting Fatima is past; it is now time for action', then reasonable men must stop and question whether good evidence offered by reliable witnesses is behind the conviction. For a Catholic to deliberately close his mind to such a statement can hardly be without blame. If the evidence guaranteeing the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima is examined with an open mind, the conclusion is reached that these apparitions can be accepted reasonably . . . A reasonable man accepts the evidence of reliable witnesses. When he refuses to do so, he does violence to his own reason."

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly sent the prophets to remind His people of their eternal destiny, to warn them and even punish them when they strayed from the path of salvation. Today, he sends the Queen of Prophets herself, entrusted with the same

basic message: 'Pray, do penance for your sins, amend your lives, or God will be compelled to let fall the arm of His Justice.' Says Professor A. Martins, S.J. of Portugal, in his foreword to the first edition of Lucia's Memoirs:

"Fatima reminds us that wars and cataclysms are God's punishment for our sins. Does not Holy Scripture say that Sodom was destroyed because there were not ten just men in it? And Jerusalem, because it had not understood the message of peace? And what is meant by the Flood and the forty years of God's people in the desert and the captivity in Babylon? God has not changed and moreover, cannot change. Therefore what happened in the past will be so until the end of the world. Men are looking for pleasure with increasing refinements; they easily forget the lessons of history and God's commandments . . . Fatima is an alarm signal to men to amend their lives. It is also a loving invitation for sincere contrition, an indispensable way to obtain pardon of God our Father . . ."

As for several alleged difficulties contained in the Fatima story, possible answers can be put forward, as we shall see later. Those who take exception to these problems, one of which involves the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, should remember that the Bible itself contains a number of mysteries which scholars have been pondering over for nearly 2,000 years and are likely to continue doing so until the end of time. Yet no one would suggest that we reject the Word of God because certain points are incomprehensible to us. Rather we should accept what we cannot understand in Holy Writ with humility and child-like trust, remembering how Christ warned that such truths would be concealed from the wise and learned and revealed to "little children".

It is highly significant that God selected three illiterate children to convey his message to the world at Fatima. Their souls were unencumbered by the pride and prejudice that much learning can bring: they were like a white canvas on which the Divine Artist could portray His words with undimmed clarity. Similarly, an illiterate young girl who had never studied a word of theology was recently proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.³ In the Fatima story, there are several striking examples indicating why God nominated uneducated children to proclaim His message. One of them is particularly revealing. Jacinta, the youngest of the three children, was told by Our Lady that "the sins which lead most souls to Hell are sins of the flesh." She was incapable of understanding this statement but spoke of it to her mother with the same candour and certitude that St. Bernadette had relayed the words: I am the Immaculate Conception.

The revelations of Fatima were aptly defined by Cardinal Cerejeira, Patriarch of Lisbon, as "the manifestation of the Immacu-

late Heart of Mary in the world of today in order to save it.” From a theological viewpoint, the cult of the Immaculate Heart of Mary represents, not one more devotion to the Mother of Jesus, but the sum of all the others since it signifies the symbol of her maternal love, the expressed aspect of her person. The historical and doctrinal elements of this devotion will be covered later: our purpose for the moment is to outline the role of the Blessed Virgin in the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, to enable us to appreciate more clearly the enormous significance of her intervention at Fatima. As Cardinal Marty of Paris observed on 13 August 1977 at Fatima: “There is a profound connection between Christ, the Church, the Gospel and Mary.”

From the moment in Bethlehem when she gave birth to the Redeemer, Mary became the mother of all the regenerated children of Adam. Since she brought forth the Head of the Mystical Body, she also brought forth its members — all those who have been born again and those who are called to incorporation with Him. This means that in becoming the Mother of Jesus according to the flesh, she became the mother of men according to the spirit. This dignity of hers was confirmed by Christ on the cross when he said: “Woman, behold your Son. Son, behold your Mother.” (John 19:27). An ancient tradition originating at the time of Origen regarded these words as a declaration that all Christians are the spiritual children of Mary.

Beginning at Pentecost, Mary has undertaken a maternal mission to her spiritual children — that of leading them to union with her Divine Son. “Her greatness lies in her being wholly Christ’s and in her role of leading humanity to Christ,” explained Cardinal Rossi of São Paulo, Brazil on 13 May 1969 at Fatima. It would be impossible for us to visualise Our Lady as a true mother unless she discharged this maternal role. As Vatican II stated: “Mary is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 63). The early Christians understood her salvific role well and nourished a growing devotion to her.⁴ There is irrefutable historical evidence that the well known prayer, *We fly unto your protection, O holy Mother of God*, was in wide usage in the third century.⁵ The cult was developed over the centuries, both in the East and in the West, like the grain of mustard seed, thus fulfilling Our Lady’s prophecy: “All generations shall call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48). As Fr. (now Cardinal) Luigi Ciappi, O.P., personal theologian to Pope Paul VI, expressed it at the Blue Army International Seminar at Fatima in August 1971: “The person and the mission of Mary, prefigured in the Old Testament, presented and illustrated with few but incisive lines in the pages of the New Testament, have gone on to acquire, in the conscience of the Church, ever greater splendour, thanks to

the homogeneous development of the dogmas and the other Marian truths in the Ecumenical Councils, in the holy Fathers and the Doctors of the Church, in the theologians and, finally, in the solemn and ordinary magisterium of the Roman Pontiffs. With reason, therefore, can we apply to the development of Mariology the test of the book of Proverbs: 'But the path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day.' (4:18)."

Since all Christians are brothers in Christ, it follows that the spiritual motherhood of Mary relates to Protestants as well as to Catholics and Orthodox members. "The redemption itself was conditioned upon the consent of the Virgin Mary to become the Mother of God," said Archpriest John Mowatt, former director of the Byzantine Centre, Fatima, at the above seminar. "The physical birth of our Saviour meant the moral regeneration of mankind. In Holy Scripture, St. Paul teaches that we become the spiritual brethren of Christ by Baptism. (Rom. 8:29 and Heb. 11:11-17). If this is true, then those who are baptised are *ipso facto* spiritual children of Mary. The cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of her unique position as the Mother of God (*Theotókos*) has been a part of the Christian tradition since apostolic times. Both East and West honour the Virgin Mary with prayers and hymns and even with liturgical and para-liturgical offices . . . But there is no over-shadowing of Christ by His Virgin Mother, for Mother and Son are inseparable in their relationships to humanity."

When Mary gave us Jesus, she gave us all graces. This she continues to do through the mediation of her Divine Son, thus emphasising the importance and richness of His own mediation with the Father. It need hardly be repeated here that her role as mediatrix with Christ in no way conflicts with His role as our sole and natural mediator with the Father. Her mediation is clearly a secondary one which is derived from the grace of Christ. It is not an end in itself, but merely a means to an end and depends entirely on her divine motherhood by which she is a bridge between God and man. "Jesus is the only mediator of justice who can ask in His own Name and in consideration of His own merits and His own rights," said St. Bernard nearly 1,000 years ago. "Mary herself obtains what she asks through the merits of the Saviour and in virtue of prayer made in the Name of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, such is the order freely determined by God, that Mary's mediation always intervenes in the dispensation of grace. This order admirably restores the plan vitiated and destroyed by sin, for as a man and a woman concurred in our loss, a man and a woman ought to labour together to redeem us."⁶

Crossing the centuries, we come to the declaration of Vatican II

on this important doctrine. "We have but one mediator, as we know from the words of the apostle: 'For there is one God and mediator between God and man, Himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.' (1 Tim. 2:56). The maternal duty of Mary towards men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. They flow from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on His mediation, depend entirely on it and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather they foster this union." (*Lumen Gentium*, 60).

Devotion to Mary occupied an important place in the traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and continues to flourish with undiminished vigour in the latter. Contrary to the teaching of Vatican II, there has been a certain downgrading of her cult in some areas of the Catholic Church. The Orthodox view this de-emphasis as scandalous and a serious barrier to unity. It is significant that the hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate in the World Council of Churches have repeatedly emphasised to their Protestant colleagues that the Blessed Virgin has an important place in discussions concerning Christian unity. Marian devotion, they stress, is not an exclusively Roman practice, but an ancient and genuine tradition having its roots in apostolic days. Russia itself has an almost unrivalled tradition of devotion to Mary, and before the 1917 revolution there was scarcely a house that did not display her icon. It is a wonderful reality that one of the most venerated of all icons in Christian Russia, that of Our Lady of Kazan, was for a time enshrined at Fatima. It now waits for the day when it can return to a converted Russia, which Our Lady promised in 1917. Originally, the Basilica of Our Lady of Kazan in Moscow stood adjacent to Red Square. In 1921 it was demolished by the communists to prove that there was no God. Since then, a number of strange mishaps have occurred, preventing another building from being erected on the site. Today the place is marked by a vacant grass plot, as if waiting for the foundations of a new basilica.

The maternal role of Our Lady has seldom been manifested so strongly as at Fatima. Later, we shall see how her intervention bears a striking resemblance to the Woman clothed with the sun in the Apocalypse. She came in 1917 to a world which had rebelled as never before against her Son and which, in consequence, is now threatened with the greatest punishment in history. But she promised to save it, by her mediation with Christ, if mankind heeded her pleas for prayer and penitence. We cannot avoid noticing here that the more her children are ailing, the more she

manifests her concern for them. "Mary implores us to accept her Son's law," said Cardinal Hoeffner of Cologne on 13 October 1977 at Fatima. "She asks us to obey His law of love, mercy, purity, humility, justice and peace. The Virgin Mother is even today *the great sign in Heaven*." (Apoc. 12:1). In effect, Our Lady of Fatima echoed the Divine call to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:32), namely, for the ten just men of this permissive age to stand up and save the city of the world.

The significance of this was underscored by the glittering star which she displayed near the hem of her dazzling white garment in all her apparitions at Fatima. This star almost certainly points to the Old Testament story of Queen Esther. The name Esther means star and she has always been regarded by the Church as pre-figuring Our Lady. In the book of Esther we read how this Jewish Queen intervened on behalf of her people when they were threatened with destruction on the thirteenth day of the month. At Fatima, Our Lady intervened not once, but six times on the thirteenth day of the month in a supreme bid to save our civilisation from ruin.

"The apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima," said the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon on 13 May 1972, "are an eloquent expression for our times of the role the Virgin Mary fulfills in the mystery of the Word Incarnate and of the Mystical Body. She is the messenger from Heaven who points the way to Jesus Christ, the only way, the truth and the life. She is the motherly heart who offers refuge to her children, to lead them to God by prayer and by penance. She is the cry of supplication who begs of men not to offend God anymore, for He is already too greatly offended. The Virgin of Fatima is, after all, the Virgin of Nazareth, of Bethlehem, of Cana, of Galilee, of Calvary and of Pentecost, ever eager to give Christ to the world and the world to Christ."

Tragically, there are many Catholics today who, whether by design or accident, overlook the tremendous significance of Our Lady's intervention at Fatima and convince themselves that the present dangerous world crisis can be contained and perhaps resolved by physical action such as *détente*, disarmament, pacifism, economic aid and so on. They fail to recognise that the crisis is essentially a spiritual one which can only be solved by the sword of the spirit. For instance, while it may be salutary to deplore the crushing burden of the arms race, the answer is not to campaign for unilateral disarmament, which would expose us to even greater peril, but to strive to remove the cause of the arms race, which is sin.

Speaking at the above seminar, the celebrated philosopher Abbé André Richard, D.D., editor of France's prestigious newspaper *L'Homme Nouveau*, said: "It is important to affirm that

reconciliation between Christianity and Soviet Russia, from points of contact and meeting ground that we have accepted, is made impossible by communist rulers. This has its roots in the heart, not in reason. And it is to be found in our Western countries as a communist export. It can only be explained by that power which Jesus indicated as the Liar, homicidal from the beginning. It does not want God to exist because it does not wish to depend on any power outside itself.

“We can overturn this satanic position only in the spirit and the participated grace of the Immaculate Heart of Mary expressed in these words: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). The Virgin came to Fatima to offer us the power of a humble heart full of love and of obedience with which Jesus endowed the Heart of his Mother. The reparative Communion of the First Saturdays of the month and the consecration of the world, so expressly implored by her, have that profound significance. Jesus wishes that the Heart of His Mother and His be honoured. And we priests of the Church sometimes do so little to bring this about! We try to fight Satan without the necessary spiritual arms . . . For it is to every bishop, to every priest, and to every member of the faithful, that the Mother of Jesus addressed herself. She asked us for a renewed and personal intimate union to her Heart, that Heart which the Holy Spirit has joined indissolubly to the Heart of Jesus in order that the life of the Father could be communicated to every creature according to the perfect mode of the unity of the family of God.

“Thus, in the presence of a supernatural call consonant with traditional Christianity and the exhortations of the authorities of the Church, every one of us must ask himself: On the spiritual battle-front (that of prayer, of intimate offering in union with the two hearts, of true conversion), what do I bring to my beloved Russian brothers? In what can they count on me in order that the grip of Satan (which our sins have given a free hand) can at last be loosened from them? What am I doing in order that Soviet rulers might acknowledge the right of every Russian to religious information, in order that all our brothers of Russia, penetrated by a knowledge of the gospel, may realise their great apostolic potential energy for the reign of God?”

The apparitions of Fatima have long received the official approbation of the Church. On 13 October 1930, the Bishop of Fatima, Dom José Correia da Silva, published his Pastoral Letter on the cult of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima which completed seven years of painstaking enquiry by an official canonical commission of investigation. After briefly summarising the events of 1917 and the reasons for his decision, he ended:

“We judge it well:

1. To declare worthy of credence the visions with which the children were favoured at the Cova da Iria, in the parish of Fatima, diocese of Leiria, on the 13th of each month from May to October 1917.

2. To authorise officially the cult of Our Lady of Fatima."

The following year, 300,000 people made a national pilgrimage of thanksgiving to the growing shrine and the entire Portuguese hierarchy solemnly consecrated their country to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. On 13 May 1938 they renewed the consecration in the presence of 20 prelates, over 100 priests and half a million pilgrims in thanksgiving for Portugal's preservation from the Spanish Civil War. Pope Pius XI manifested his belief in the apparitions on a number of occasions, but it was left to his successor, Pope Pius XII, to take the first formal step towards compliance with Our Lady of Fatima's request for the consecration of Russia by the Pope in union with all the world's bishops. Known as the 'Collegial Consecration', this unprecedented act was promised to be the means by which Russia would be converted. Since this important subject has engendered much controversy and misunderstanding, we shall be clarifying it at length later in this book.

On 31 October 1942, Pope Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Two years later the Pontiff, who admitted that "Fatima is the summation of my thinking" and who was called "the Pope of Fatima", instituted the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and on 13 May 1946, solemnly crowned a statue of Our Lady of Fatima and proclaimed her Queen of the World. During the closing ceremonies of the 1950 extended Holy Year at Fatima, Cardinal Tedeschini, the papal legate, told the immense crowd gathered at the shrine that the Pope had seen a repetition of the 1917 solar miracle in the Vatican on the eve and octave of the promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption.

"Was this a reward?" His Eminence asked. "Was this a sign of sovereign Divine pleasure for the definition of the Assumption? Was this a heavenly testimony authenticating the connection between the wonders of Fatima and the centre, the head of Catholic truth and teaching authority? It was all three together."

A few days later, the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* of 17 November 1951 commented:

"It is not our task to formulate deductions from these singularly analagous events (the original solar miracle and its repetition for the Holy Father), but the intervention of the Most Blessed Virgin is frequent in the gravest days of the history of the Church, even with intimations to the successor of Peter personally".

The following year on 7 July 1952, Pope Pius XII consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, though without the

participation of the bishops. His successor, Pope John XXIII, instituted the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima and termed the apparitions "the centre of all Christian hopes." On 21 November 1964, Pope Paul VI solemnly renewed the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the presence of all the bishops assembled at the Second Vatican Council, and announced a mission to convey the Golden Rose to Fatima. Three years later, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the apparitions, His Holiness journeyed to Fatima "as a humble pilgrim" to "pray for peace" in the presence of a million pilgrims from all over the world.

Today, Fatima stands as a shining symbol of hope in a world dominated by the spectre of mass apostasy from God and its awful shadow of the nuclear bomb. "Our only hope for world peace is found in the message of Fatima", declared Douglas Hyde, the ex-communist journalist.⁷ Echoing his words, Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote shortly afterwards: "Devotion to Our Lady of Fatima is actually a petition to save man from nature made destructive through the rebellious intellect of man."⁸ And again: "How shall we overcome the spirit of Satan except by the power of that Woman to whom Almighty God has given the mandate to crush the head of the serpent?"⁹

This, then, is the setting for the awesome drama that constitutes the theme of this book.

NOTES

1. Eschatological — dealing with the four last things: death, judgement, Hell and Heaven.
2. The most authoritative account of the Fatima story is Lucia's Memoirs, published as *Fatima in Lucia's own words* by the Postulation Centre, Fatima, Portugal, in 1977, and available in the U.K. from Augustine Publishing Co.
3. St. Catherine of Siena.
4. cf., *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* by John Henry Newman, Section 2, Chap. 4, which cites many examples.
5. cf., 5th Mariological Congress, University of Lisbon, 2 August 1967, under the Presidency of the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon.
6. This teaching is particularly stressed by St. Bernard in *Sermo in Dom. Infra Octav. Assumptionis*, No. 2. The doctrine was confirmed in January 1921 by an Office and Mass in honour of Mary Mediatrix, which Pope Benedict XV granted to the dioceses of Belgium and to all the dioceses of the world that should request it.
7. Address in Lisbon, 10 October 1951.
8. *Life is Worth Living*, Second Series, "Fatima", p. 87n.
9. *The World's First Love*, Chap. 22.