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Time: A Sacred and Secular Control Mechanism

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Abstract. This article describes how the construct of time can be employed to wittingly or unwittingly control human psychology in the political world.

Recently, the Vatican has divulged the "third secret" of Fatima--i.e., the third of three prophecies allegedly made to three Portuguese shepherd children by an apparition of the Virgin Mary in 1917. The "third secret" was that there would be an attempt to kill a pope.

On the one hand, prophecies can be viewed as phenomena that can support or not support religious tenets. On the other hand, prophecies function as a mechanism to control people in the political world--regardless of the premeditation to control that may or may not concurrently exist within the purveyors of prophecy. Here the political denotes a context of finite resources and needs beyond those resources--with the resources being doled out with a zero sum consequence (of winners and losers.)

Thus, prophecies can be said to function as controlling sacred and secular politics--viz., who's in power and who's not. In this regard, the construct of time seems to be of very significant value. In fact, the construct of time seems to afford prophecies a resistance to being disconfirmed. For example, although prophecies constitute predicting the future, they can be construed as predicting a future that is now the past--as with the recent publicity for the "third secret" of Fatima that "came true" about twenty years ago. Moreover, a future orientation can keep the clock running until an event occurs that bears enough resemblance to the prophecy to validate and become the prophecy's success. (The prophet may have believed that a waiting period would be 50 years, but 500 years will do, especially since the prophet will usually no longer be present to battle revisionists, revanchists, and deconstructionists by asserting to the contrary.) In cases, wherein a prophecy contains a very specific deadline and as that deadline approaches the prophecy seems doomed, a temporal extrapolation from that prophecy can be developed so that what might seem disconfirming becomes confirming. In this case, an additional real world event--observed and/or inferred--is cited to protect the legitimacy of the prophecy. The bottom line here is that a more recent situation requires a more recent prophecy that in its difference from the older prophecy validates the latter even as the latter does not occur.

The shared significance of time for sacred and secular prophecy is exemplified not only in matters of formal religion, but in analytic dream interpretations that mine the archetypal past to direct for the future, in predictions of peace and war (based on "history's lessons") between and among governments, and the most quantitative and complex equations bearing on stock market ups and downs. Such sharing suggests being co-opted by and co-opting magic--an immersion in the supernatural that may be little different from the earliest of human times. And thus, prophecy continues to be a cardinal feature of the political life. (See Cohen, A. (1984). Prophecy and madness: Women visionaries during the Puritan Revolution. *Journal of Psychohistory*, 11, 411-430; Festinger, L., Riecken, H. W., & Schachter, S. (1964). *When prophecy fails: A social and psychological study of a modern group that predicted the destruction of the world*. New York: Harper Torchbooks; Sanada, T., & Norbeck, E. (1975). *Prophecy continues to fail: A Japanese sect*. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 6, 331-345; Tappeiner, D. A. (1977). A psychological paradigm for the interpretation of the charismatic phenomenon of prophecy. *Journal of*

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