



THE VISUAL SOLAR MIRACLE AT FATIMA

Posted on March 1, 2023 by Dennis Bonnette



We are happy to provide this excerpt from Dennis Bonnette's latest book, [*Rational Responses to Skepticism: A Catholic Philosopher Defends Intellectual Foundations for Traditional Belief*](#), in which he answers the various charges made against Catholic belief. The strength of Dr. Bonnette's book is that he counters the spirited attacks made by skeptics, agnostics and atheists—by giving a reasoned response which uniquely defends the Catholic faith.

This excerpt also provides a new and very different validation of the famous "miracle of the sun" at Fatima. We have published versions of this defense previously, which you may also [wish to read](#).

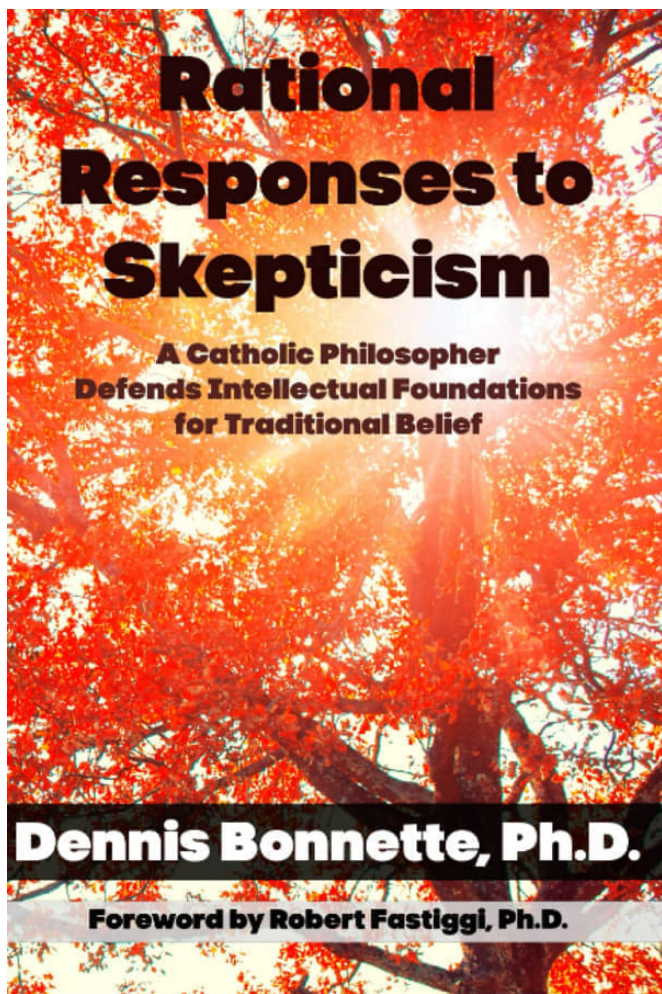
Please support Dr. Bonnette's important work [by purchasing a copy](#) and spreading the word.



The number of people—skeptics as well as believers—who gathered at the Cova da Iria at Fatima, Portugal, on 13 October 1917 is estimated to range from 30,000 to as high as 100,000. While many books and articles have been published about Fatima, of special interest is a small work by John M. Haffert, [*Meet the Witnesses of the Miracle of the Sun*](#) (1961). He took depositions from some 200 persons, thereby offering us eyewitness testimony some four decades after the miracle, but still within the lifetime of many witnesses. This book contains detailed eyewitness recounting of events by over thirty persons.

The book summarizes seven significant facts widely documented. They include that (1) the time, date, and place of the miracle was predicted in advance, (2) an extraordinary light that could be seen for many miles sending out "shafts of colored light" that tinted ground objects, (3) what looked like a great ball of fire fell toward earth, causing tens of thousands to think it was the end of the world, (4) the prodigy stopped just before reaching earth and returned to the sky, (5) it left and returned to the place of the sun, so that viewers thought it was the sun, (6) the mountain top where this happened had been drenched with rain for hours, but was completely dried in minutes, and (7) tens of thousands witnessed these events over an area of six hundred square miles (Haffert, 15).

Some online sources also give detailed eyewitness accounts.



It was quickly pointed out by skeptics that no such solar behavior could have actually occurred, since no observatory detected it and, following the rules of physics, such actual solar movements would have caused mass destruction on planet Earth!

Although the vast majority of witnesses reported seeing something they took to be the sun performing roughly similar amazing movements—even though some observers were miles away from the Cova da Iria, it should be noted that multiple sources report that some people at the Cova said that they saw nothing unusual at all.

The fact that the people saw amazing solar displays and even frightening movements of a silver-pearl disc that began its movements from the actual location of the sun—while the real sun could not have actually been so moved in space—demonstrates that massive visions were being experienced by tens

of thousands of people simultaneously. This is reinforced by the reports that "...others, including some believers, saw nothing at all." Certainly, any real extramental visual phenomena—even if they were not from the real sun itself — would have been seen, not just by some, but by all present.

While it is possible that some visual phenomena that day may have followed the normal laws of nature, what is clear is that the most extraordinary Fatima visual phenomena appear to have been in the nature of visions -- possibly even "individually adjusted" to fit the sometimes diverse experiences of different observers.

Since the "solar" phenomena were not all reported to be the same and since not all present even appear to have seen it at all, it must be that whatever took place was not extramentally real as visually apprehended. Rather, it is evident that the phenomena was seen as extramental, but must have been caused by some agent able to produce internal changes in the observers, such that they believed they were witnessing actual external events. This is essentially what marks the experience of a vision. One writer calls it a "miracle of perception."

Also, purely physical explanations based on some sort of optical phenomena fail to account for the overwhelming fear induced by seeing the "sun" appear to be about to crash into the earth, causing many to fall to their knees in the mud and some to actually call out their grievous sins for all to hear, since there were no priests available!

What critics badly miss is that variances in accounts actually strengthen the case for a miracle, not weaken it. Such a rich diversity of reports supports the case for all the visual aspects being visions that differ in each person. Consider the fact that some were said to see nothing at all. This would support the claim that no external physical changes actually took place in the "dance of the sun." Rather, *this must be a case of massive individual visions* -- making the case for an extra-natural explanation only greater.

The plain fact is that tens of thousands of people do not make up a "collective lie," especially when they cannot even get their story quite straight. Moreover, the plain fact is that the vast majority of those tens of thousands of people experienced analogously similar extraordinary behavior by the sun or by a silvery disc that emanated from the sun. Tens of thousands of people do not have collective hallucinations or anxiety attacks — especially, when the sea of humanity present included believers and non-believers, Catholics and atheists, secular government officials and skeptics alike.

However one explains one of most massively eye-witnessed events in recorded history, it must be accepted that the vast majority of those present experienced what surely looked like the greatest public miracle in history -- even as reported in the atheistic secular newspapers in Lisbon, including *O Seculo*, whose 15 October 1917 edition published a front page headline, reading, "*Como O Sol Bailou Ao Meio Dia Em Fatima*," that is, "How the sun danced at noon in Fatima."

Could such massive phenomena have been caused by natural agents, space aliens, or even demons? Physicist and theologian, Stanley Jaki, S.J., offers an explanation based on the natural formation of an "air lens" at the site of the solar phenomena. But his explanation immediately confronts multiple difficulties. Even looking directly at the sun through an air lens would damage the eye, and no reports of ocular damage were recorded after the event. Moreover, I have already pointed out that the existence of somewhat conflicting descriptions of the phenomena, as well as the fact that some saw nothing unusual at all, prove that the solar experiences must have been internal visions of externally experienced events — not the result of Jaki's air lens hypothesis.

Finally, Jaki claims that the heating effect of the lens could have dried the people's clothes and the wet ground. Unfortunately, while this may work in theory, the amount of energy needed to produce such rapid drying in a natural manner would have simply incinerated everyone involved! Instead, the people only felt comfortably dry. Jaki's hypothesis appears to be simply false.

This "drying" miracle alone so contravenes the laws of nature that neither space aliens nor even demons could have produced it.

Natural agency of the visual "sun miracle" is ruled out because the phenomena were not external — as I have just shown, but rather, these were visions caused by internal changes in the witnesses. While space aliens might have mastered the technology of holograms, so as to produce some external physical display, that does not explain the number of witnesses who clearly saw nothing abnormal at all. The effects had to be internal and individualized in order to explain variances in what was seen, and especially, what was totally not seen by a number of people. Thus, the effects were not produced by visiting space aliens. Indeed, they were at least preternatural, if not, supernatural in nature.

On the dubious hypothesis that these effects were preternatural, and not supernatural, could they have been produced by angels or demons? Here, a moral analysis suffices.

If somehow done by angels, then they were at the direction of God anyway. But, if done by demons, one is confronted with a message to humans to stop sinning, repent, and pray. I don't think any further proof is needed to show that demons did not do this.

Finally, while preternatural effects are accomplished by producing a natural effect in an unnatural way, such as a body levitating with nothing seen to be lifting it, these optical phenomena entailed changing the internal vision experiences of tens of thousands of persons simultaneously. Whether merely preternatural powers could produce such an effect is highly debatable. In any event, the previously-given demonstrations show clearly that the "dance of the sun" at Fatima could have been produced solely through the infinite power of the God of classical theism, since it clearly exceeds the power of either man or space aliens to produce such individualized internal visions and moral analysis excludes the agency of spiritual agents other than, possibly, those following God's command.

Dr. Dennis Bonnette retired as a Full Professor of Philosophy in 2003 from Niagara University in Lewiston, New York, where he also served as Chairman of the Philosophy Department from 1992 to 2002. He received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Notre Dame in 1970. He is the author of three books, [Aquinas' Proofs for God's Existence](#), [Origin of the Human Species](#), and [Rational Responses to Skepticism: A Catholic Philosopher Defends Intellectual Foundations for Traditional Belief](#), as well as many scholarly articles.
