



HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

Nº 220 - February 2026

*The World's Greatest
Moral Force*

What Is More Desirable on Earth than this Union?

How shall I now speak of the closeness between Therese and Celine?... How?...

“A garden enclosed”; and I would add: “a sealed fountain” (cf. Sg 4:12), but the fountain was not sealed, it flowed freely: From our hearts rushed “rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38) which spread forth, leading our souls towards Jesus, the divine Ocean... [...]

Our union of soul became so intimate that I will not even attempt to describe it in the language of this earth, because to do so would be to disfigure it. This flower is the secret of the “garden enclosed” of which only Jesus, the sole Beloved of our hearts, knew the fragrant exhalations...

Nevertheless, inactivity is not proper to human nature; therefore, the fountain of this “enclosed” garden, as I said just earlier, was “open” to the ardour of love,

an impetuous ardour that devoured our hearts... [...]

[Therese’s heart] opened itself to me entirely, and that marked the start of our immense intimacy which, as she used to say, was no longer a mere union but indeed a unity... She liked to repeat to me that we had but one soul between us. [...]

I enjoyed a happiness of which I still feel the sweetness, I experienced the delights of the most perfect union. What could be more desirable on this earth? Yes, all joys are eclipsed in the face of union of hearts; as compared with it, fortune, honours, and health vanish, and only have value inasmuch as they hold it as queen.



Celine and Therese Martin in 1881

MARTIN, OCD, Celine.

Autobiographie de la sœur et novice de la Petite Thérèse. Toulouse: Éditions du Carmel: 2022, p.90-95

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Send your questions to Fr. Ricardo, by email:
ourreadersask@heralds.org



✉ Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP

I have a question about the author of the Pauline letters: I read in another Catholic magazine about doubts regarding the authorship of these letters – that St. Paul did not write them! However, the Doctors of the Church and many other scholars over the centuries have never questioned the authorship of these important teachings.

Renata Garcia – Via email

All Catholics should exercise great caution when reading studies on the Holy Scriptures. Unfortunately, in many circles there is a certain naturalistic, positivist and rationalist spirit that causes confusion in people's minds.

Pope Benedict XVI warned against this in one of his audiences on the great Doctor of the Bible, St. Jerome: "We should never read Scripture alone because we meet too many closed doors and could easily slip into error. [...] For St. Jerome, an authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmonious accord with the faith of the Catholic Church" (*General Audience*, 14/11/2007).

I would like to ask about the fact that some passages in the Old Testament sound very "harsh" today. I am still maturing in my faith, but with God's grace I believe in everything that the Holy Church teaches us, and I would be eternally grateful if you could help me.

Your question, João, is very good, because it shows faith, humility and great submission to God, qualities that are rare in our days...

It could be rephrased as follows: "There are passages in the Old Testament that I do not understand, but if the Lord did so, it can only be good. I would just like to understand the wisdom that led Him to act in this way."

The first thing to avoid is to consider that there are two "gods," one in the Old Testament and another in the New Testament, or that the Most High changed His "way of being" with the Incarnation.

As St. James says, "with whom [God] there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17).

Let us consider that in the Old Testament there are moving manifestations of divine goodness: "Who is a God like Thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger for ever because He delights in steadfast love" (Mic 7:18);

With regard to the letters of St. Paul, the one whose authorship is most questioned is the Epistle to the Hebrews. A complete explanation of the discussion on this subject would be very lengthy, but, in summary, we can assert that there are serious elements, supported by internationally renowned scholars, to affirm that all the so-called Pauline letters have St. Paul as their author or direct inspirer, including the Epistle to the Hebrews.

José María Bover maintains that it was inspired by Paul and that the Apostle personally commissioned a writer – probably formed in Alexandria – to write it (cf. *Teología de San Pablo*. 4th ed. Madrid: BAC, 1967, pp. 18-41).

I would like to ask about the fact that some passages in the Old Testament sound very "harsh" today. I am still maturing in my faith, but with God's grace I believe in everything that the Holy Church teaches us, and I would be eternally grateful if you could help me.

João Zuchetto – Via email

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is 49:15).

The word mercy appears more than two hundred times in the Old Testament, to make it clear that God has always been "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 103:8), and his longanimity with the chosen people is admirable, amid so many infidelities.

The difference with the New Testament lies in the pedagogy used with those hard-hearted people (cf. Mt 19:8). God wanted to show the ancient peoples the seriousness of sin, for their iniquities made them cruel to others and to their own countrymen.

The "regime of grace" (Rom 6:14), inaugurated with Our Lord Jesus Christ, had not yet begun.

Thus, the "harsh" passages of the Old Testament must be interpreted as infinitely wise actions of a benevolent God, who knows how to show the justice appropriate to each situation.

LEO XIV AND THE UNITIVE WAY

Le Christ commanded everyone to be “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14), the Supreme Pontiffs are the veritable beacons of civilization. Whether in the apostolic or medieval era, in modern times or in our own day, the Papacy remains the north star of human aspirations.

Its power does not proceed from human intelligence, for even demons surpass that; nor from military might, for its struggle is transcendent; nor from territorial extension, although through charity it embraces the entire globe. Its power is based on the authority to unite earth with Heaven, a dignity not even granted to the Angels.

Christ built His Church solely on Peter, and it was only for him that Jesus prayed in such a special way: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:32). As the object of such exalted graces of state, he is required to show distinguished love: “do you love Me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). Simon remained a mortal man; Peter, however, became an institution.

The Holy Father is the vicar of Christ, the mystical continuator of the, God-Man on this earth, applying the merits of the Redemption in time, as a renewed victim on Calvary. It is from the height of the Cross that Peter’s chair becomes unshakeable, for from there, with the Saviour, he draws all to himself.

Over the centuries, many have tried to reduce this rock to ruins. In the Protestant Reformation, everyone would be Pope; in the French Revolution, with the proscription of the Church, there would be no more Pontiffs; in autocratic revolutions, tyrants would take all power, including that of the Prince of the Apostles. However, as M. Thiers, intellectual heir of the anticlerical Voltaire, confessed, “here is a lesson from history: whoever devours the Pope succumbs.”

The Successors of Peter are sons of their time, and Pope Leo XIV is no exception. In every Pontiff there is a kind of “primordial light,” a unique vocation, which makes him illuminate a special facet of the Petrine ministry.

What shines most in the current visible head of the Church?

Undoubtedly, something related to the Augustinian motto of his pontificate: *In illo uno unum* – In the one [Christ], we are one. St. Augustine does not refer to an amorphous unity, complacent with evil. Jesus was unequivocal: “He who does not gather with Me scatters” (Mt 12:30).

Christ is one, head and body united. Now, all members of His Mystical Body must seek only what is necessary, in imitation of St. Mary Magdalene (cf. Lk 10:42). This is the *only* vocation of the Christian: to unite oneself to Jesus, the source of all individual vocations.

Also, the fullness of spiritual life is called the *unitive way*, a transforming union that belongs especially to the Bishops and in particular to the Holy Father. This way has as its goal not only perfection, but the state of *exercizing perfection*, a task that today belongs to Pope Leo, who is called, like Peter, to confirm his brothers in unity (cf. Lk 22:32).

Exactly a quarter of a century ago, through the pontifical approval received on February 22, 2001, the Heralds of the Gospel acquired an enduring bond with the Petrine See. Like Silvanus of old, they seek to be a “faithful brother” (1 Pt 5:12) to the Successors of Peter, seeking to walk with them on the path of unity in order to collaborate in the recapitulation of all things in Christ. For the Heralds, as for Leo XIV, the model of such union is found in the Mother of Good Counsel, who, through her maternal intercession, united the Saviour to humanity in the person of John. ♣



Pope Leo XIV
during the Holy
Mass of the
Solemnity of
St. Peter and
St. Paul, on
29/6/2025

Photo: Vatican Media



Does the Pope's Power Have Limits?

The Roman Pontiff in fact has the “sacra potestas” to teach the truth of the Gospel, administer the Sacraments and pastorally govern the Church in the name and with the authority of Christ, but this power does not include *per se* any power over the divine or positive law.

MISSION TO PRESERVE THE CATHOLIC FAITH STAINLESS

[Our] first safety is to guard the rule of the right faith and to deviate in no wise from the ordinances of the Fathers; because we cannot pass over the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church”... [Mt 16:18]. These [words] which were spoken, are proved by the effects of the deeds, because in the Apostolic See the Catholic religion has always been preserved without stain.

ST. HORMISDAS. *Libellus fidei*, 11/8/515: DH 363

A COMMITMENT THAT WOULD BE TREASON TO VIOLATE

We can therefore understand why the Catholic Church, yesterday and today, attaches such importance to the rigorous preservation of authentic Revelation, considering it an inviolable treasure, and has such a severe awareness of its fundamental duty to defend and transmit the doctrine of the Faith in unequivocal terms. [...] The command of the Apostle Paul – *depositum custodi* (1 Tm 6:20; 2 Tm 1:14) – constitutes for her such a commitment that it would be treason to violate it.

The teaching Church does not invent her doctrine; she is a witness, guardian, interpreter, and intermedi-

ary; and, with regard to the truths proper to the Christian message, she can be said to be conservative and uncompromising. And to those who urge her to make her faith easier, more relative to the tastes of the changing mentality of the times, she responds with the Apostles: “*Non possumus* – We cannot” (Acts 4:20).

ST. PAUL VI.
General Audience, 19/1/1972

GUARD AND FAITHFULLY EXPOND THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH

For the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by His revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by His assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of Faith transmitted by the Apostles.

BLESSED PIUS IX.
Pastor Æternus, First Vatican Council, 18/7/1870: DH 3070

MAGISTERIUM IN CONFORMITY WITH REVELATION

When either the Roman Pontiff or the Body of Bishops together with him defines a judgement, they pronounce it in accordance with Revelation itself, which all are obliged to abide by and be in conformity with, that is, the

Revelation which as written or orally handed down is transmitted in its entirety through the legitimate succession of bishops and especially in care of the Roman Pontiff himself.

ST. PAUL VI. *Lumen gentium*, Second Vatican Council, 21/11/1964

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD OF GOD

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

ST. PAUL VI. *Dei Verbum*, Second Vatican Council, 18/11/1965

POWER SUBJECT TO DIVINE AND POSITIVE LAW

The Roman Pontiff in fact has the *sacra potestas* to teach the truth of the Gospel, administer the sacraments

and pastorally govern the Church in the name and with the authority of Christ, but this power does not include per se any power over the divine law, natural or positive.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Speech, 21/1/2000

GUARANTEE OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD

The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the Pope's ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to His Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God's Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism.

BENEDICT XVI.
Homily, 7/5/2005

BOUND BY THE PROVISIONS CHRIST ESTABLISHED FOR HIS CHURCH

The qualification of absolute monarch also does not apply to the Pope in ecclesiastical matters, since he is subject to divine law and bound by the provisions established by Christ for His Church. He cannot modify the constitution given to the Church by its Divine Founder in the same way that a temporal legislator can modify the constitution of the State. The constitution of the Church is founded, in all its essential points, on a divine disposition beyond the reach of human arbitrariness. [...]

As the Vatican Council stated in clear and distinct terms, and as follows from the very nature of the thing, it [papal infallibility] refers only to a quality of the supreme magisterium of the Pope: this extends exactly over the same scope as the infallible magisterium of the Church and is linked to the content of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, as well as to the doctrinal deci-

sions previously issued by the Ecclesiastical Magisterium. In the exercise of the Pope's power, nothing is therefore modified.

BLESSED PIUS IX. *Replies to the circular of Chancellor Bismarck*,
Jan.- Feb./1875: DH 3114; 3116

MEANS TO CONSERVE THE FAITH OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE AND CHURCH UNITY

By His [Jesus Christ] own laws and institutions He founded and re-enforced this holy city which is His Church. To it He entrusted, as it were, the deposit of faith in Him to be preserved piously and without contamination. He wished it to be the bulwark of His teaching and truth against which the gates of hell would never prevail. We, therefore, the overseers and guardians of this holy city, must preserve the magnificent heritage of Our laws and faith which has been passed down intact to Us; We must transmit it pure and sound to our successors.

If We direct all our actions to this norm found in sacred scripture and moreover cling to the footsteps of our ancestors, We will be best equipped to avoid whatever could weaken and destroy the faith of the Christian people and loosen in any way the unity of the Church.

CLEMENT XIV. *Cum summi apostolatus*, 12/12/1769

SAME DOGMA, SAME MEANING, SAME JUDGEMENT

The doctrine of faith, which God revealed, was not proposed as a philosophical discovery to be perfected by human minds, but was entrusted to the Bride of Christ as a divine deposit, to

be faithfully guarded and infallibly declared by her. Hence, one must always maintain that meaning of the sacred dogmas which Holy Mother Church once declared, and never, not even under the guise of a higher intelligence, is it permitted to depart from this meaning.

"Let intelligence, science, and wisdom grow and multiply abundantly, both in each one and in all, both in the individual and in the whole Church, according to the progress of ages and centuries, but only in its proper kind, that is, in the same dogma, in the same meaning, and in the same judgement" (St. Vincent of Lérins. *Commonitorium primum*, c.XXIII, n.3).

BLESSED PIUS IX.
Dei Filius, First Vatican Council,
20/10/1870: DH 3020

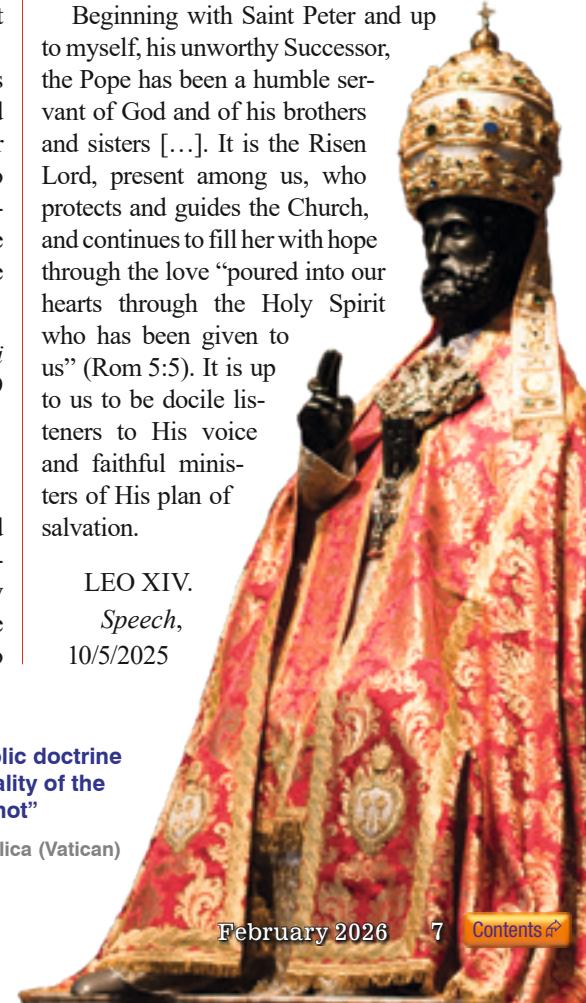
DOCILE LISTENERS AND FAITHFUL MINISTERS

Beginning with Saint Peter and up to myself, his unworthy Successor, the Pope has been a humble servant of God and of his brothers and sisters [...]. It is the Risen Lord, present among us, who protects and guides the Church, and continues to fill her with hope through the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). It is up to us to be docile listeners to His voice and faithful ministers of His plan of salvation.

LEO XIV.
Speech,
10/5/2025

To those who wish to conform Catholic doctrine
to the tastes of the changing mentality of the
times, we respond: "We cannot"

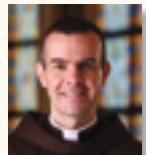
Statue of the Fisherman - St. Peter's Basilica (Vatican)





February 1 – 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

We Thank You, Lord, for Persecutions!



⇒ Fr. Leandro Cesar Ribeiro, EP

*Persecution
is a blessing!
Therefore, we
are in an age
when being
Catholic is
equivalent to
being blessed*

How many saints expressed their gratitude to God for being persecuted, giving unequivocal proof that they understood this Sunday's Gospel! In it, we encounter the most sublime preaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ: the Sermon on the Mount. The most sublime, yes, and the most radical. Only divine lips could affirm that blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn and the merciful (cf. Mt 5:3-7)...

However, it is only at the end of His discourse that the Saviour presents the most striking beatitude: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Mt 5:10-11).

Persecution is a blessing! And so, we are in an age when being Catholic is equivalent to being blessed.

On an individual level, what true Christian today does not experience persecution? At work, they endure ridicule for being honest. In conversation, they are left out because they do not soil their lips with indecent words. Everywhere they become the victims of cold stares and insincere greetings from those who see them as strange beings who pray, go to Mass, and are not enslaved to fashion.

In an institutional context, what can be said about the widespread persecution against the Church? It suffices to enumerate the Catholic churches that have been vandalized or burned down in recent years.

It suffices to recall that our era rivals that of the Romans in terms of the number of martyrs. Never have so many martyrdoms been so little taken into account. And never has so much persecution been so evident... and so forgotten.

What should we do, then? Weep? Compromise and give in, so as not to lose? Allow ourselves to be crushed? None of that!

First and foremost, we must give thanks. God is writing our injured names in the Book of Life: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven" (Mt 5:12). Thank You, Lord, because we are persecuted! Thank You for counting us among the elect!

And our gratitude must go further. It cannot remain a mere act of recognition. It must be transformed into boldness.

In fact, not only are we not allowed to weep, compromise or let ourselves be crushed, but on the contrary, we must form the resolution of facing persecution with valour, of raising our heads when, thinking they are insulting us, they call us Catholics. For it is only with heads held high and a robust faith that we suffer with dignity for the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Dr. Plinio stated, "this is the fearless, intrepid Catholic who is not ashamed to follow the Divine Master, to call himself a son and devotee of the Blessed Virgin, to whom he addresses his heartfelt prayer: 'O Mother of mercy, my life, sweetness and hope. Make me the courageous soul that I must be, imbued with a lion-like Catholic strength, apostolic and Roman, filled with Christian boldness! Thus, O Virgin, my praise of You will be the tribute of the man who, above all, believes in divine truths and fights for them; it will be the praise of heroism and epic deeds. Amen.'"¹ ♦

"The Martyrdom of St. Stephen"
by Giorgio Vasari –
Vatican Pinacoteca

Sentinels of Light



✠ Fr. Santiago Canals, EP

Leo XII¹ teaches that one of the duties of Roman Pontiffs is to be watchmen over Christ's flock: to reject the evils that threaten it, as well as to warn the faithful against the snares of the Church's enemies, driving them out and thwarting them with their authority. This is the prophetic mission of those who, like Isaiah in this Sunday's first reading, are charged with being sentinels, defenders and heralds of God's rights.

Indeed, the prophet warns against the danger of turning away from mortification and renouncing the mastery of the passions, and emphasizes the need to purify charity in order to return to the way of God, where the light will shine like the dawn (cf. Is 58:8). How can this be achieved in a paganized world?

It is in the natural order that men support each other in the satisfaction of their basic needs. But this cannot be reduced to mere gestures of philanthropy. Leo XIV reminds us of the union that must exist among men as a factor of true freedom: "All of us are alive today thanks to a relationship, a free and freeing relationship of human kindness and mutual care."² This is the freedom of the children of God, the charity that frees the human heart from the bonds of sin and which, for St. Augustine, constitutes the threshold of the light of truth: "He who knows the Truth knows that Light; and he that knows it knows eternity. Love knows it."³

In this sense, this Sunday's Liturgy could be defined as a prophetic denunciation.

St. Paul proclaims the superiority of divine precepts over human wisdom: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him

crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). We Christians too, thanks to Baptism, must proclaim that the Cross is the true wisdom, in contrast to that of the world. It does not satisfy the desires of the learned and powerful, who consider it madness, but it will fully satisfy the weak and be their strength.

In the Gospel, Our Lord emphasizes the great vocation of His followers: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). And today, more than ever, light should be the motto of Christ's disciples, glorifying the Father through their words and examples.

The theme of light is present throughout biblical revelation. In Genesis, the separation of light and darkness is narrated as the first act of the Creator (cf. Gn 1:3-4), and at the end of the history of salvation, God Himself will be the light of the blessed (cf. Rev 21:24). In the first reading, Isaiah proclaims the light that will shine on the people, as long as they follow the divine will.

In his most recent apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi te*, Pope Leo XIV points to this light as a characteristic of the first monks who illuminated their time "through the fullness of charity."⁴ This is, more than ever, the mission of all those who exercise a prophetic mission, whether they are pastors or faithful, all the baptized, members of the Church. ♣



David Ayusso

Replica of a prophet by Aleijadinho
(the Little Crippled Man) -
Casa Lumen Maris, Ubatuba (Brazil)

¹ Cf. LEO XII. *Quo graviora*, n.1.

² LEO XIV. *Homily*, 1/6/2025.

³ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Confessionum*. L.VII, c.10, n.16.

⁴ LEO XIV. *Dilexi te*, n.57.

*The duty
of all those
who exercise
a prophetic
mission –
pastors or
faithful – is
to be light in
this world
of darkness*



The Obviousness of Truth



Fr. Inácio de Araújo, EP

There is no need to state the obvious.” For centuries, this adage has often been uttered to attest to how redundant and superfluous it is to state what is evident. However, in this time of profound religious relativism and increasing spiritual insensibility, it is imperative to recall that the obvious must in fact be stated.

This is the context in which this Sunday’s Gospel presents us with one of the most forceful statements of the Divine Master, which well reminds us of one of those “obvious truths” that must be stated: “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Mt 5:37).

The early Christians were educated in this school of the “divine obviousness,” where yes meant yes, and no meant no. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No” (2 Cor 1:18). St. James also admonishes categorically: “let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation” (Jas 5:12).

The language of Christ and His Mystical Bride has always been orderly and defined, affirming the immutable principles of the Faith in all their clarity and integrity. For this reason, the Holy Church “can never renounce the ‘the principle of truth and consistency, whereby she does not agree to call good evil and evil good.’”¹

Furthermore, St. Augustine observes in one of his letters: “Truth is sweet and bitter. When sweet, it forgives; when bitter, it heals.”² Contempor-

ary man is not always willing to accept the bitter taste of truth, which often comes in the form of censure or rebuke. That is why he seems to fear not only the truth itself, but also the consequences that derive from obeying its precepts. It is often more convenient to ignore its existence than to explicitly refuse to follow it.

When cornered by evidence, many begin to defend a “third way” between the “yes” and the “no” proclaimed by the Divine Master. In the depths of their hearts, the indispensable coherence of truth is obscured in favour of a relativistic conception of morality and faith. There is no longer truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil; there is no longer any distinction between what comes from God or from the Evil One. And it is of them that the prophet Isaiah speaks: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Is 5:20).

In these times in which we live, the Church must always present itself as the “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). And Catholics must remember that it is not enough to avoid lying. They must also avoid half-truths, so as to not say “yes” with their lips and “no” with their actions. A half-truth is nothing more than a complete lie. Not deciding between God and the Evil One is already a decision. ♣



“The Saviour”, by Luis Borrassá – Church of St. Mary, Terrassa (Spain)

¹ ST. JOHN PAUL II. *Veritatis splendor*, n.95.

² ST. AUGUSTINE. *Epistola 247*, n.1.

Faced with contemporary relativism, it is sometimes necessary to remind the world of truths that are obvious to Christians



From the Malignant Enemy Defend Me!



℟ Fr. Juan Pablo Merizalde, EP

Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent, the liturgical season that prepares us to celebrate the Paschal mystery. These forty days evoke the years of pilgrimage of the Israelite people through the desert towards the Promised Land, as well as the days of fasting and penance of Our Lord Jesus Christ before beginning His public life.

We thus remember how the Church lives through each period of its history as a true spiritual battle, being invited to always choose the path of goodness. Jesus Himself fought such a battle in the desert when He was tempted by satan, as St. Matthew recounts in this Sunday's Gospel.

These are three solicitations from the devil inviting Him to sin, each more serious than the last, summarizing the kinds of temptation that can assail us, for Our Lord wanted to be "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

By unmasking the devil's deceitful perfidy with exemplary wisdom and firmness, the Divine Master became the model of perfect shrewdness against infernal snares.

And He calls us to be attentive, vigilant and bold, to discern the plots of the enemy and his minions to induce us to sin.

Moreover, the Saviour has won for us the graces necessary for our perseverance, including – if, unfortunately, we should succumb – the strength to rise again and continue on the path of holiness. In

deed, the Apostle affirms: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

The Most High permits temptations because they are part of our state of trial. They should not, therefore, sadden us, for they are an opportunity to show Him our love. It is a time for heroism!

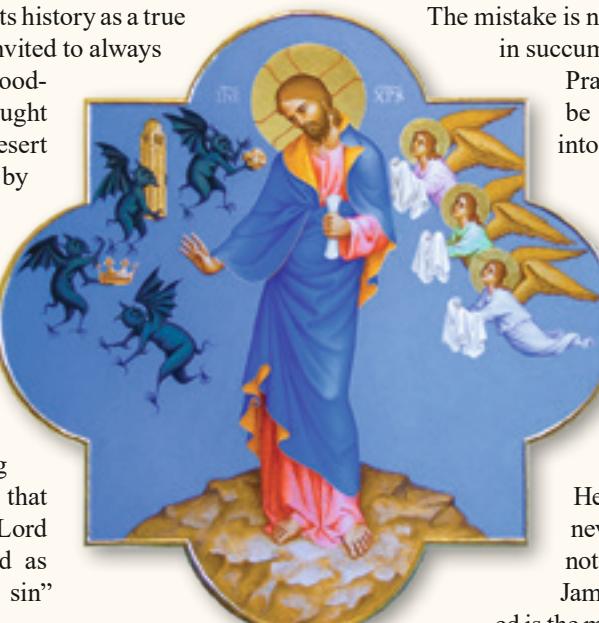
The mistake is not in suffering them, but in succumb to them. In the Lord's Prayer, we do not ask not to be tempted, but not to fall into temptation.

On the other hand, although we feel how much the trial makes us suffer, we end up having a kind of desire to go through it, because we realize how it gives meaning to our lives and makes us deserve Heaven. Those who have never been tempted have not lived. The Apostle St. James rightly writes: "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which

God has promised to those who love Him" (Jas 1:12).

Prayer is the most effective remedy for resisting the temptations and attacks of the devil, for he can do no harm without God's permission. Let us ask today for the grace to firmly reject any invitation to sin, as Jesus Himself showed us, and let us always beseech help from Heaven.

Let us pray confidently to the Divine Redeemer: "Never allow me to be separated from Thee; from the malignant enemy defend me." ♣



Jesus is tempted in the desert

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*Temptations
are part of
our state of
trial. And Our
Lord gave us
an example of
how to act so
as to triumph
over them
magnificently*



“My thoughts are higher than your thoughts”

From the contrast between the criteria of men and those of Our Lord in choosing His first Vicar, we learn an important lesson: human judgement easily errs when considering divine works, if it is not aided by grace.

℟ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

The fame of John the Baptist had marked the history of Israel, and public opinion was still under the influence of that unusual man, who ate locusts and wild honey, dressed in camel skin and a leather belt.

Providence had bestowed graces upon him, and countless comments circulated about him, among which the predominant idea was that he was the Messiah, or someone closely linked to Him and endowed with extraordinary powers.

But if John had caused such an impact, simply by baptizing and without performing any miracles, what enthusiasm did Our Lord arouse in the people? What were the words of the Precursor compared to those spoken by the Incarnate Word? Who could compare to Him?

A gesture of His was a gesture of God; a gaze of His was the very gaze of God; when He breathed – as when He breathed on the Apostles after the Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:22) – His breath infused the Holy Spirit into the depths of their hearts!

The power of the light that radiated from Jesus became very evident at the beginning of His public life, when John the Evangelist and Andrew accompanied Him to where He lived and spent that day there (cf. Jn 1:39).

Undoubtedly, both followed Him physically, but above all they were impelled by a movement of grace, like a ray of light in their souls, inviting them to follow Our Lord! For them, *following* Him meant learning His spiritual and doctrinal teachings, His customs and ways of being, in short, the increment to what they had learned from John the Baptist. If they already felt so awe-stricken by John, what more could this one bring, who was superior to him (Jn 1:30) and whom the former had been indicating?

Human judgement fails in the face of divine works

Jesus of Nazareth was stirring Israel and spreading around Him perplexity, questions and a great mystery ... A mystery that, evidently, everyone wanted to interpret, for mankind always seeks to classify what it sees.

Now, how can we “classify” Our Lord without Revelation? How can we define Him without divine judgement, without heavenly criteria? It is impossible! People used their human intelligence, applied their natural qualities, but forgot to consider the supernatural elements to distinguish in Him the Only Begotten Son of God.

Therefore, while in Cæsarea Philippi, Our Lord asked the question: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?”

(Mt 16:13). He did so not only to make clear who He was, but also to separate the Apostles from the mistaken opinions that existed about Him.

The Creator of grace had been in constant communication with them for three years, illuminating their souls with His light, the *lumen Christi*, to introduce and nourish faith, hope, charity, and other virtues and gifts.

After they had listed the many different concepts that were circulating among the people about Him, the Divine Master then posed the crucial question: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15).

It should be noted that in the first question Jesus called Himself “Son of Man,” and in the second He said “I am,” the name given by God to Himself: Yahweh. Thus, the answer to His question was already almost implied.

Peter then exclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Our Lord affirmed that it was not “flesh and blood” (Mt 16:17) that had revealed this to him, but rather a revelation from the Father. In other words, it was not mere nature, nor human perception or discernment.

At this point, we are led to draw an important conclusion: human judgement is flawed and therefore easily errs in considering divine works if it is not aided by grace.

Who would we suggest to be the ideal Pope?

Let us imagine that we were with the Apostles, and Our Lord were to turn to us and say: "I am going to found my Church and I want one of these twelve to be my first Vicar and sit on the chair of infallibility. However, I also want your opinion in choosing which one of them should be Pope."

In what way would I contemplate the Apostles? What impression of contempt would I have in my spirit regarding the defects of those men? They were unrefined and ignorant men, devoid of any prestige or social importance, dressed in coarse clothing. Their language was that of a lower class, for they spoke with a Galilean accent, their hands were calloused, and their gait lacked elegance... Perhaps I would reply:

"But, Jesus, what are You thinking by choosing such assistants?! What do You expect from these fishermen?

"The first personage I encounter is of Simon Peter. Spontaneous, impetuous, explosive... He does not assess circumstances well, nor does he know how to reflect on what he should say, as happened that night when, in the midst of the darkness, You appeared walking on the water and he immediately cried out: 'Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You on the water' (Mt 14:28). How reckless! After walking on the waves with the power You gave him, he began to sink, putting himself in a ridiculous situation! This one, Lord, is too rash and superficial, he is not fit for the Papacy!

"My eyes turn to Thomas. He does not seem suitable for the position either: he is overly cautious, doubts everything, puts his own criteria first...

"Next, I meet James and John, the 'sons of thunder', who are related to you. John is your closest Apostle, but he is still too young! Both of them have

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a hot-tempered and combative nature, they do not understand what kindness is, they are always eager to destroy and resolve matters quickly, using force and violence. These two are not fit to govern your Church."

And so, going through all the disciples, we would come to one on whom our gaze would linger:

"Ah, my Jesus, this one seems judicious and balanced! He is a quiet man who shows little of himself, for he thinks carefully before speaking. He



When separating the Twelve definitively from the world, Jesus contemplated them in God, as if they were already in the full perfection of eternal glory

Christ with the Apostles, by Andrea di Cione - Galeria Uffizi, Florence (Italy)

has great practical and administrative skills, and he is the only one who has the good sense to remind others not to make unnecessary expenditures and to save money for the poor... Judas Iscariot, in my opinion, would be the ideal Pope!"

Human choices do not coincide with divine choices

We see, once again, how misguided our assessments are, not only regard-

ing God, but also regarding others and ourselves, and how our choices do not coincide with those of Jesus!

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [...] my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:9), says the Lord.

In definitively separating the Twelve from the world and entrusting them with the apostolic mission to establish His Church, Our Lord did not do so only as God, but, as a true Man, using two elements as a basis.

On one hand, He used His practical and experiential knowledge, seeing them in the situation in which they found themselves, with all their shortcomings and deficiencies.

On the other hand, His spirit filled with grace and infused light, through which He penetrated their souls, recognized in them religiosity, dedication, and even a certain virtue, and knew how much they needed to be assisted by the breath of the Holy Spirit and sustained by the Eternal Father.

Moreover, in the highest part of His soul, Jesus contemplated them in God, through the beatific vision, as if they were already in the full perfection of eternal glory.

The divine choice

We can imagine that, in an attitude of humility and obedience, Our Lord wished to present this choice to the Father, speaking with deep consideration and affection about each one:

"O my Father, so revered and beloved, among my dear disciples I present to You, first of all, Simon, son of Jonah. It was You, O Father, who designated him as the foundation of the Church. I will therefore give him the name Peter. He is upright, frank, generous; everything can be expected of him, even heroism! He trusts too much in his own strength,



I know well, but when he falters, he will not persist in his guilt and he will repent.

“Andrew, his brother, was the first to come to me near the Jordan, and immediately brought his brother to Me. He is also ardent, although he possesses a calmer and more serene temperament. I believe that his self-denial can reach admirable heights.

“James and John, along with them, are the very first labourers. They abandoned their aged father for Me. I am impressed by the way John listens to Me: he is pure, has an elevated spirit and a love for the sublime; everything I say is engraved in his memory, and a holy enthusiasm is read in his zealous visage. I see that he will teach My Gospel more profoundly than the others.

“Philip is zealous and speaks simply. As soon as he came to Me, he won over Nathanael. The latter is a sincere Israelite, who knows neither cunning nor duplicity of spirit. He raised objections to Me and submitted to My answers. It seems to Me that he can be counted on.

“Matthew is that Levi who followed Me at a simple nod in passing. Gathering many of his tax collector friends at a feast, he allowed Me to preach justice and repentance to them. He also pays close attention to all My words, however insignificant they may seem.”

And so, after reviewing all the Apostles, the Divine Master must also have spoken to God the Father about the “son of perdition” (Jn 17:12): “Judas! He is the one who will betray Me... How this man wounds My Heart! His hard and immovable soul – I see it – will be taken by Satan. However, I ask that you grant

him all the graces necessary so that he may not follow those paths and may come to seek Me!”

In this tremendous contrast between divine and human opinions, we better comprehend the contempt that the adorable Jesus shows for the rules of the world and the high, grand, and wise design with which He chooses, to form the Apostolic College, these worthless and uncultured fishermen, whom He will later endow with superior wisdom, making them leaders of men, conquerors, heroes, great saints and incomparable martyrs.

More than a simple reparation

In the specific case of Peter, we know that he possessed a high degree of faith, to the point of throwing himself into the sea in search of Our Lord without considering the risks, proclaiming His divinity first. However,

when the time came to affirm that he was His disciple, he denied it three times.

Why did he deny it? It was not for lack of faith, since his faith was robust, but because he still loved himself more than Our Lord and gave greater importance to the opinion of others than to that of Our Lord.

If his surrender had truly been absolute, perhaps he would have died along with the Master on that occasion, for perfect love overcomes the instinct for self-preservation. And thus, there would not only have been two thieves on Calvary, but also the first Pontiff, giving the example of how to follow Jesus Christ to the Cross.

However, Our Lady prayed for him. When the Apostle met Our Lord, after the threefold denial, that divine gaze brought about the conversion of the rock: perceiving as in a mirror the state of his soul, penetrated by pride, vanity, and human respect, Peter went away full of anguish and wept...

When Our Lord resurrected and appeared to him individually, a phase of hope began. But it was also during this period that the Redeemer interrogated him with three identical questions: “Do you love Me?” (cf. Jn 21:15-17). Peter was sad and insecure, believing that Jesus asked three times so that he could atone for his crime.

Indeed, He wanted reparation for the fault previously made by stating the opposite, but not only that. Much more important was to give Peter the opportunity to grow in love, even before the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, at a certain moment a tongue of fire would rest on his head, and he would go



Choosing, by wise design, miserable fishermen to constitute the Apostolic College, Our Lord demonstrates His contempt for the precepts of the world

Msgr. João in August of 2003

out proclaiming what had previously seemed like imprudence to him. By his word, three thousand people would be baptized in a single day, and by his actions and miracles, the Messiah would illuminate the world and change history!

But first, he needed to make the firm resolution to love Our Lord more than himself, with a love greater than that of others: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Therefore, Jesus added: "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep!"

Love is the essence of the Papacy!

From the beginning, when Andrew led his brother to the Lord, Jesus had already chosen him to be the first Pope, saying: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)" (Jn 1:42). Why? Because he was the one who knew the most? No. Rather because, despite his weaknesses, he was the one who loved most!

We see, then, a criterion perhaps to be established in conclaves, or perhaps to be used in turbulent times, for the choice of a Pope: the one who loves most is the one who truly has the capacity to shepherd the flock. For he who knows, teaches; but he who loves, shepherds.

A Pope does not need to be the most prudent and skilful or the best diplomat. Nor does he need to be the most intellectually prepared; nor the most noble or distinguished. If not even faith was enough for the one upon whom the Church was built, how could it suffice for his successors?

Love, yes, is the attribute for discernment, for in matters of merit it is above knowledge itself, as St. John of the Cross affirms: "In the twilight of

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The spirit that visibly presided over the foundation of the Holy Church continues, in an invisible way, to accompany her development over the course of the centuries

St. Peter receives the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven -
Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Kössen (Austria)

this life, you will be judged according to love."¹

In fact, to sanctify, to make fervent, and to unite more closely to the source of grace, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to Mary, Mother of Grace, it is necessary to love. Only those who are detached from themselves instil tranquillity, consolation, and joy, because peace flows from charity. St. Augustine affirms: "Dilige et quod vis fac – Love and do what you will";² and we can add that whoever loves is capable of everything, even of being Pope... The selfish person, on the contrary, creates an atmosphere of bitterness, friction, and disquiet around them.

God directs His work with an omnipotent hand.

Here is an impressive lesson, which leads us to the following conclusion: God's works must be directed by His omnipotent hand, or no human quality will be able to make them endure.

Contemplating the Holy Church in the current situation, we must avoid any thought of discouragement, or perhaps even bitterness, regarding the deficiencies and imperfections existing in the visible element of this divine institution. We believe that the spirit that visibly presided over the foundation of this work continues to invisibly accompany its development throughout the centuries, to the present day.

Just as the Church was erected on such an insufficient foundation from a human point of view, but later took over the world, we believe that, if today it is going through difficulties, the apex of its history has not yet come; rather, it is about to arise in a marvellous and magnificent way! The current miseries or defections, as in times past, far from shaking our faith, are useful in making evident to all the ever-miraculous action of Him who with a simple act of will created the universe.

Let us have serious and firm confidence in the future of the Church: the Lord will bring this ship to safe harbour! ♣

Excerpts from oral expositions given between 1992 and 2010

¹ Cf. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. *Dichos de luz y amor*, n.59. In: *Vida y obras*. 5.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1964, p.963.

² ST. AUGUSTINE. In *Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus decem. Tractatus VII*, n.8. In: *Obras*. Madrid: BAC, 1959, p.XVIII, p.304.

Guide, Model, and Hope

Over the centuries, the role of the Roman Pontiff has become increasingly clear and important. Infallible and supreme, does the Pope represent even more to the faithful?



⇒ Miguel Ferrari

No one is a good judge in their own cause,” as the saying goes. Or, to use the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: “If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true” (Jn 5:31). The reader may have already applied this principle, even unintentionally, or heard it applied by someone else – possibly a non-Catholic – to the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Indeed, it seems to be a closed circuit for the Pope to affirm: “Since everything I say is inerrant, I declare that I cannot err.” That is, the only guarantee of his infallibility lies in his own word. It would sound like the “*quia nominor leo*” of the old Roman fable.

But the reality proves to be quite different. Firstly, because it was not a Pope who created the dogma of papal infallibility; secondly, because not everything the Pope says is infallible. Let us clarify...

Roman primacy throughout the centuries

To begin, we must consider that from the very beginning of the Church, the Pope has been considered the supreme authority in the Church.

The first testimony that the Roman Church has dominion over all others is found in the writings of a non-Roman author from the 1st century. St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the faithful of the community of Rome, calls it “[the Church] which also presides in the

place of the region of the Romans [...], and which presides over charity.”² It should be noted that some theologians interpret the word *charity* as a reference to the universal Church; others, however, affirm that it means the totality of supernatural life and, in this way the Roman Church would have the authority to guide and direct everything that refers to the essence of Christianity.³

Also, St. Jerome, while in Syria, writes to Pope St. Damasus to consult him on some questions relating to the Arian heresy and declares: “I meantime keep crying: ‘He who clings to the chair of Peter is accepted by me.’”⁴ In the same vein, St. Irenaeus explains that it has always been necessary for the whole Church, that is, the totality of the faithful, to be united to the Roman See, “on account of its preeminent authority.”⁵ And, throughout the centuries, the expression of St. Ambrose became famous: “*Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*”⁶

Finally, we will spare the readers a long list of references to the Fathers and Doctors who defended the sovereignty of the Pope in the Church, as well as the biblical foundations of such doctrine. This is well summarized by the First Vatican Council, citing the Council of Ephesus, held in 431:

“For no one can be in doubt, indeed it was known in every age that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the Apostles, the pillar of

faith and the foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the Kingdom from Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of the human race, and that to this day and for ever he lives and presides and exercises judgement in his successors the bishops of the holy Roman see, which he founded and consecrated with his blood.”⁷

Gold and silver emerge amidst thunder

Having reached the 19th century, despite the numerous revolutions, schisms, and heresies through which the Church passed, one truth could not be removed from the hearts of the faithful: the highest earthly authority of the Mystical Body of Christ is the Pope.

Nevertheless, of what does this authority consist? Some exaggerated, believing it to be absolute in all areas. Others feared that a dogmatic definition in this regard would result in an abuse of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium.

Indeed, throughout the centuries the Holy Father was not always a model of holiness; the sovereign of the Catholic Church sometimes held inappropriate political opinions; the captain of the Barque of Peter made mistakes...

The moment had therefore arrived, after nineteen centuries of implicit faith, to elucidate this doctrine. Blessed Pius IX occupied the Papal Throne. Having already spent twenty-three years in this ministry – his pontificate

was one of the longest in history – he clearly perceived that, in such a delicate situation, there would be no better way to proceed than to convene an ecumenical council, that is, a meeting of Bishops from all over the world to discuss a vital matter of the Church.

Pius IX wanted a council worthy of the subject matter; he desired that as many bishops as possible participate in this historic moment. Thus, more than seven hundred ecclesiastical dignitaries entered in solemn procession on that December 8, 1869, under a sky that, like at Mount Sinai, offered its thunderous homage to the new tablets of the Law, which, despite being rock-solid, were now represented by the gold and silver of the Fisherman's Keys.

Thus began the First Vatican Council, which, having begun with the greetings of celestial storms, was destined to end attacked by earthly ones...

The initial plan of the council, manifested in the outline *Supremi Pastoris*, aimed to speak of the Church and the primacy of the Pope. It was only later that Pius IX added the topic of infallibility, which was put on the agenda on March 7. After numerous discussions and difficulties, almost all the conciliar fathers voted for papal infallibility – only two prelates voted against – and it was solemnly proclaimed on July 18, once again with a thunderous celestial accompaniment.

On July 19, the Pope suspended the conciliar sessions for a few months; soon after, however, the Franco-Prussian War broke out and the French troops withdrew from Rome, leaving the way clear for the Italian liberals to invade the Papal States. Un-

able to continue the Council, in October Pius IX suspended the sessions indefinitely, but the most important aspect had already been achieved: the proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility.

This confirms what we stated above: no Pope created this dogma – it was already alive in the Tradition of the Church, based on Scripture, and was made explicit and proclaimed by the decision of an ecumenical council. It suffices to analyse exactly what was defined.

Is the Pope truly infallible in everything?

The answer to the question above is simple: no.

A curious paradox surrounds this doctrine: infallibility is guaranteed for the *person* of the Roman Pontiff, although one cannot properly speak of *personal* infallibility.

In other words, the Pope, head and leader of the universal Church – that is, as a *public person* – possesses infallibility, but the private person of the Bishop of Rome does not enjoy this privilege.⁸ This is why, for example, if he were to renounce this office, he would immediately lose the exceptional assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Pope is infallible only when he uses his authority, in an act in which he manifestly invokes this privilege, that is, symbolically seated in his pontifical chair – hence the Latin expression *ex cathedra* – and not when he expresses his personal opinions.

Furthermore, the subject matter must concern Divine Revelation, that is, matters of faith or morals. Therefore, a papal pronouncement on political, social, ecological, etc., issues will not be infallible.

Guide, model and hope

Having made these considerations, a doubt may remain: we know that the Pope is not a tyrant who invents doctrines at his whim, and we have seen that he is infallible only under certain conditions – which are so restricted that few truly infallible pronouncements have been made since Pius IX; do we conclude, therefore, that a faithful Catholic can live disconnected from the Roman Pontiff, as long as he follows the infallible doctrine proclaimed throughout the centuries? Not at all!



The Prince of the Apostles received from Our Lord Jesus Christ the Keys of the Kingdom, and he presides forevermore over the Church in his successors

Pius IX declares the dogma of the Immaculate Conception –
Church of Saint-Sauveur, Planoët (France)

THE WORLD'S GREATEST MORAL FORCE

Written in the early 1940s, with images typical of that time, Dr. Plinio's article, partially transcribed below, reveals the perennial power of attraction of the Vicar of Christ on earth.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

Peter, the first Pontiff, upon receiving the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven from the Master, first received His Divine Heart. Possessing the Heart of Christ, capable of loving all humanity, Peter could be Christ on earth. [...] This is the august mystery that makes the Roman Pontiff the universal Father of peoples, the provident distributor of the bread of truth, the sure guide on the tortuous paths of peace and justice.

For twenty centuries humanity has recognized him as such. Despite the struggles, persecutions, and aberrations of all times, individuals and peoples, great and small, in moments of sorrow and misfortune, turn to Rome, appealing to the one who, without distinction of caste or race, hears all, welcomes all, consoles all, and blesses all. The moral strength of the Pontiff is the same as always, today, yesterday, and throughout all periods of history. He is the point of attraction

for all intelligences and all hearts. His majesty, sublime and exalted above all, surpasses the human, and reaches the divine. King of a tiny State, he is seated on a throne that is the guarantee of all thrones, because he is the great infallible moral authority that, more than the trappings of power and the valour of armies, defends order.

Whoever, wishing to know the real moral power of the Pontiff, need do no more than to stand, one day, on the first steps of the staircase that leads to the Vatican. "Who is passing by?" He would ask, at every moment, enmarvelled. It is a rich gentleman, from overseas. He has travelled around the globe; he has visited all the wonders of the world. He has reserved the greatest of all for last: before returning to his British Isles, or to his America capitals, he wants to see the Pope of Rome. "Who is passing by?" It is a Sister of Charity, with her white veil fluttering in the wind. She left an orphan-

Although papal infallibility is restricted to matters of faith and morals, and the Roman Primacy refers to the discipline of the universal Church, the Pope is not merely a sort of guideline that must be followed only to avoid going astray.

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against

The faithful have the right to look to the Bishop of Rome as a guide, a model and a source of hope

St. Peter - St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican; in the background, the church interior

it" (Mt 16:18); "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). These words of the Divine Master to St. Peter show him not only as the holder of authority, as judge and arbitrator. They reveal that the Supreme Pontiff is also – and, we would venture to add, primarily – the Supreme Shepherd, the father of all the faithful, the sweet Christ on earth.

The faithful, therefore, have the right and the duty to look to the Bishop of Rome as guide, model, and hope.

Guide, because through his magisterium – not only the infallible, but also the ordinary magisterium – he is a source of teachings relating to the Faith.

Model, because the Holy Father not only has the obligation to be holy, like

age, a shelter, a school in the most isolated rural area of India: she comes to kiss the feet of the Holy Father, to return, happy, among her orphans and consecrate her whole life to him. "Who is passing by?" It is a venerable prelate, with white hair and aged, worn down by cares. He comes from Canada, from the Rocky Mountains or from the immense grasslands of South America. He comes to see the Holy Father, to implore his blessing. "Who is passing by?" It is the ambassador of the most powerful sovereign in the world. He is Protestant, but he does not hesitate to honour the septuagenarian, who is king only of a tiny state, but who is the universal Father of all peoples. "Who is passing by?" It is a missionary from Japan, a religious from Spain, a missionary from Africa. They come to report to the Vicar of Christ the success of their efforts, the fruit of their apostolic labours. "Who is passing by, with all this pomp, with all this retinue?" It is a Christian prince, an august descendant of the ancient warriors who repelled the barbarians, who waged the crusades. Bearing in his veins the blood and in his heart the sentiments of his ancestors, he does not fail to come and place at the feet of the sweet Christ on earth the tribute of his affection, the homage of his subjects. "Who is passing by?" It is a pilgrim from Poland, a monk from Armenia or Syria, a man of letters, a humble daughter of the people, a freethinker, a naval captain. All anxiously climb those stairs. They impatiently traverse the halls of the Vatican, to see the elderly man dressed in white, to kiss his hands and feet, to hear his voice, to receive his blessing.

And then, radiant with joy, they descend, blissfully returning to their lands, to their homes, to their tasks – never to forget that auspicious day.

This is the story of every day, of every week, of every month, of every year. This is the story of every century. Such is the mysterious force, the centre of the new Rome, which, emanating from the Vatican, radiates throughout the world, touches hearts, penetrates everything, moves all. And when an afflicted or devoted soul does not have the good fortune to approach the Holy Father to present a grievance or proclaim his love, behold, even from distant lands, it casts a glance and a cry in the direction of the Dome of St. Peter, towering as a beacon of justice.

Philip Augustus, King of France, intending to repudiate his legitimate wife, Ingeborg, Princess of Denmark, unites himself to Agnes of Merania. The unfortunate queen, finding herself alone in exile, far from her own, repudiated and rejected by her unfaithful husband, gives a cry of anguish, but also of unparalleled sublimity: "Rome! Rome!" Oh, how beautiful is that cry of the oppressed soul, of innocence, of the victim, invoking justice from Rome. [...]

This is the moral strength of the Pontiff. The same yesterday as today; the same in the past as in the future, the only one capable of saving the world. ♣

The Pope, Vicar of Christ. The Greatest Moral Force in the World. In: *Legião*. São Paulo. Year XV. No.496 (March 15, 1942), p.1

all other baptized people, but, as Vicar of Christ, the Saviour Himself grants him superabundant graces so that his life may be a model for the sheep. It is sufficient for him not to resist divine action.

Hope, because in a chaotic and destabilized world like ours, where so many blind guides and so many false

models are presented, where truth is distorted or hidden, good is denied and beauty is defiled, where, finally, faith seems excluded from institutions and souls, we remember the words of the Saviour: "Simon, Simon, behold, [...] I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have

turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31-32).

In other words, it is the duty of all Catholics to devote their best sentiments to the happily reigning Pope, and to pray that he may always be the "beacon that illuminates the dark nights of this world."⁹ ♣

¹ From the Latin: "Because I am called the Lion".

⁴ ST. JEROME. *Epistola XVI. Ad Damasum Papam*, n.2: PL 22, 359.

² ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTOCH. *Lettre aux romains*, Salutation: SC 10, 125.

³ Cf. QUASTEN, Johannes. *Patrologia*. 3.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1978, v.I, p.78.

⁵ ST. IRENAEUS OF LYON. *Adversus haereses*. L.III, c.3, n.2: PG 7, 849.

⁶ From the Latin: "Where Peter is, there is the Church" (ST).

AMBROSE OF MILAN. *In Psalmo XL*, n.30: PL 14, 1082).

⁷ FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL. *Pastor aeternus*, c.2: DH 3056.

⁸ Cf. GASSER, Vincentius. *Relatio in caput IV emendationes eiusdem*. In: MAN-

SI, Johannes Dominicus. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*. Graz: Akademische Druck, 1961, v.LII, col.1213.

⁹ LEO XIV. *Homily*, 9/5/2025.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Over the course of two thousand years, more than forty men have attempted to usurp the Papacy for personal gain or in favour of impiety. Their story is one of the most beautiful proofs of the invincibility of the Church.



✉ Pedro Gusson

Impostor: someone who lives in a dream world, believing himself to be something he is not, with the candour of a child and the malice of a demon. The impostor wants his

word to be believed and even his authority to be acknowledged. In him, hypocrisy masks the truth, dissimulation camouflages his actions, and cunning attempts to give the appearance of goodness to evil deeds.

In the succession of the supreme hierarchs of the world – the Roman Pontiffs – some personages presumed to attract the attention of their epoch. Such impostors, dressed in white, passed into posterity with the black title of antipopes: those who usurped the title and functions of the Bishop of Rome, in opposition to the legitimate Pope.

An antipope... who is a saint?

The case of St. Hippolytus, the first antipope, is particularly curious. Coming from Alexandria, in the year 170 he arrived in the Eternal City, where



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St. Hippolytus - Church of St. Nicolas, Châteaubriant (France)

Some personages, dressed in white, passed into posterity with the black title of antipopes: those who had usurped the title of Bishop of Rome

he was ordained by Pope Victor I. The new priest was a man who found it difficult to bow his head. Could a great theologian submit to the unsophisticated Bishops of Rome? And how would he accept the excessive mercy they showed to penitents?

When, in 217, Callistus was chosen as Peter's successor, Hippolytus' supporters separated from the Church and elected him invalidly. Almost twenty years passed until the persecution of Maximinus ravaged the Church and several dignitaries were expatriated.

According to pious tradition, while in exile, the antipope Hippolytus bowed before Pope Pontian, then reigning, recognizing his supremacy. Shortly afterwards, both preferred death to apostasy. And, with martyrdom uniting those whom life had separated, Hippolytus was added to the roll of the blessed.¹

Between Peter and Caesar

Of the great temptations that can assail a man, one of the most dangerous is to consider himself a miniature of God. The Roman emperors were not exempt from this danger. In fact, when they saw religion as an opportunity to assert their powers, they defied the Saviour's command: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mt 22:21). And it is not Caesar's place to elect Popes.

Emperor Constantius, in the middle of the fourth century, exiled Pope Liberius to Thrace after theological disagreements. Now, when an imperial official was exiled, he automatically lost his positions. Considering Liberius' functions terminated, Constantius decided that the deacon Felix should succeed him.

The people of Rome did not accept the antipope and staged a revolt. In 365, faced with the untenable situation, the emperor sought a compromise: Felix would share the papacy with Liberius in a kind of diarchy.² Such concessions, however, have the rare quality of pleasing neither side...

Forced to withdraw, Felix would end his days in the suburbs of Rome, still exercising episcopal functions. His comedy, however, taught history a serious lesson: Catholics distinguish the voice of the shepherd from that of the mercenary.

The persuasive force of arms

Since the Bishop of Rome was an authentic sovereign prince with temporal powers, there were also attempts to dominate the Apostolic See for its secular value.

This was the case when Paul I died in the summer of 767, when the climate was heated in every sense. Two parties had formed around his deathbed: that of Duke Toto of Nepi, supported by the army; and that of Canon Christophorus, supported by the Roman nobility. Using the persuasion of arms, Toto seized power and made his brother Constantine, a layman, the invalid successor to Paul I. Christophorus, however, rushed to beg for the help of King Desiderius and managed to impose order on the city. The antipope Constantine was blinded and, after a new attempt to consecrate an antipope, the legitimate election of Stephen III occurred.

“There are evils that come for good.” After a turbulent election, the new Pontiff convened a synod in 769 to delib-



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Deposition of Pope Benedict IX in the Synod of Sutri - edited

No shortage of men attempted to dominate the Apostolic See for its secular value and not a few hoped to buy the Throne of Simon Peter

erate, among other issues, on papal elections. From then on, only the clergy would have the right to vote, and only cardinals would be candidates.

How much does it cost to be Pope?

The case of Benedict IX, whose name appears three times on the list of Popes, is exceptional. Elected in 1032, he was forced to flee the revolutions

that shook Rome in 1044, resulting in his deposition and the election of Sylvester III as Pontiff. Less than a year later, he returned to the papal throne... but only briefly, as after two months he sold the position for fifteen hundred pounds of gold.³

What a sad price Benedict placed on the Throne of Simon Peter! In fact, he proved to be an ally of another Simon – the Magician – who, in the early days of the Church, sought to buy divine power for money (cf. Acts 8:18-23), thus inaugurating the shameful list of men who would engage in the commerce of spiritual goods.

Despite such egregious simony, Benedict IX was re-elected in November 1047. Tired, however, of such a turbulent existence, he resigned definitively the following year, not without leaving the mark of his bad example on history. From thence arose a long dispute between supporters of the



German emperors and defenders of the Roman clergy. Capitalizing on the conflict, ten antipopes appeared over the course of a century.

In order to prevent a recurrence of such disasters and to reaffirm that the Church is in the world but not of the world, Nicholas II issued a decree on April 13, 1059 concerning the election of the Pope.⁴ Although the emperor was consecrated by the Pope, he could not appoint the Roman Pontiff.

Everything seemed to be resolved. But man is made of clay.

Three Popes and one Church?

The unrest that followed the death of Gregory XI in 1378 was the first symptom of the acute illness that had infected the Papacy in the decadence of the Middle Ages. After seventy years of Pontiffs exiled in Avignon, the world was divided between those who aspired to a Roman solution and those who longed for a French successor.

The one elected, however, was an Italian, Urban VI, whose exaggerated stance soon served as a pretext for the election of another Cardinal, the Spaniard Pedro de Luna, who took the name Benedict XIII.

Two were elected... Who was the Pope? To solve the problem, the voluntary resignation of both was required. But neither intended to leave his pos-

ition. They tried to resolve the case in Pisa, where, in 1409, an illegitimate council elected Alexander V as Pope. This only complicated the situation further: instead of two, there were now three would-be pontiffs.

Seeking a final solution, a council was convened in Constance. The antipope of Pisa was deposed. The true Pontiff renounced the Papacy. And Benedict XIII, eternally obstinate, would be dethroned. In November 1417, the new Pope was elected: Martin V.

What do the antipopes teach us?

The evil of the antipopes seemed mortally wounded. In fact, Felix V, who seems to have been the last of these impostors recorded by history, would reconcile with the Church in 1449. But was he really the last anti-

pope? We will only be sure at the end of the world...

The papal tiara will always be coveted by ambitious men, avid for all crowns, of whatever kind. The demonic powers, as well, aided by their earthly cohorts, will always seek to seize for themselves the keys of Peter, those keys that can open Heaven and lock the eternal abyss. It would be their greatest triumph... if it were not for the divine promise that the Church will prevail over the gates of hell (cf. Mt 16:18-19).

The more than forty antipopes who have appeared throughout these two thousand years of Christianity – and all others who may yet attempt to usurp the Holy See – have left us, or will leave us, at least one edifying lesson: even if enemy hands seem to steal the helm of Peter's immortal Barque, the jaws of hell will not engulf it. The impostor will die, and the Church will continue to sail the seas of the centuries. ♣

*Even if enemy hands
seem to seize the helm
of Peter's Barque,
the wicked will die
and the Church will
continue to traverse
the centuries*

¹ Cf. PAREDES, Javier (Dir.). *Diccionario de los Papas y concilios*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1998, p.21.

² Cf. Idem, p.36.

³ Cf. Idem, p.153.

⁴ Cf. DANIEL-ROPS, Henri. *A Igreja das catedrais e das cruzadas*. São Paulo: Quadrante, 1993, p.198.



From left to right: antipopes Alexander V, Felix V and Benedict XIII



Why One?

Simply contemplating the work of creation provides man with a prodigious kaleidoscope of divine perfections. As an example, let us consider the migratory movement of Canada geese. Who has not marvelled at the wisdom manifested in them? They cross thousands of kilometres flying always together, in an impeccable "V" formation, so that all benefit from the displacement of air caused by the one leading the expedition! To this one, however, falls not only the great effort of cutting the mass of air, opening the way for those who follow him, but also the responsibility of guiding and "confirming" his "brothers" in the achievement of the common goal.

Did God, who thus ordained the existence of these simple fowl, not accomplish something even more beautiful with the masterpiece of the universe, the Holy Catholic Church? This is what we will now consider, through the eyes of the Angelic Doctor (cf. *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book IV, ch. 76).

It is well known that the Divine Redeemer structured the Church hierarchically: some are shepherds, others sheep. There are those whose mission is to teach, guide, and sanctify, while others called to be taught, guided, and sanctified. However, in the face of the ever-increasing multiplication of shepherds scattered across the vastness of the Earth, the cohesion of the Mystical Body of Christ would be seriously shaken without a fundamental unity, which is that of faith.

How, then, to preserve this essential unity amidst the diversity of peoples and cultures, the clashes of civilizations, the oscillations of spirits, moreover without excluding from this panorama the deleterious factor of the epochs, which inexorably succeed one another until the consummation of history? Only a divine intelligence would be capable of solving such a problem, insoluble for the poor human mind...

This unity of faith, explains St. Thomas, requires that the Church have a single, universal head. That is why

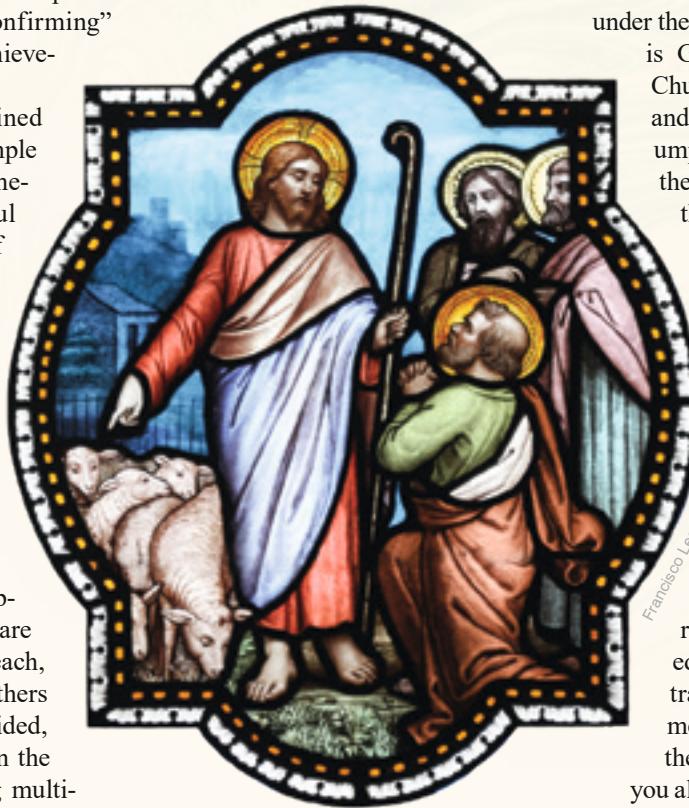
Christ will say to Peter three times: "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). And again: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32). Jesus thus indicated to the first Pope his mission, guaranteeing him special assistance from Providence.

The dignity and uniqueness of Peter's mission are, therefore, immeasurable! To emphasize them, Aquinas resorts to an argument of an eschatological nature: the Church Militant is an extension of the Church Triumphant, which constitutes one flock in Heaven, under the leadership of one Head, who

is God Himself. Likewise, the Church Militant, as an extension and reflection of the Church Triumphant, also needs to be under the leadership of one shepherd, the Supreme Pontiff. Thus,

Peter assumes on earth the position of deputy of the Eternal Father in Heaven!

To all that we have just explained, it could be objected that this hierarchical structure, anchored in the person of Peter, would be restricted exclusively to the initial core of Christ's disciples. Now, St. Thomas replies, the Saviour instituted His Church so that it would traverse the centuries, as the means by which He will fulfil the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). It therefore becomes necessary that the power conferred by Him on the Apostles, particularly on Peter, be transferred to his successors until the consummation of time. ♣



The Church Militant, as an extension of the Church Triumphant, must be under the leadership of one shepherd, the Supreme Pontiff

Jesus entrusts the flock to St. Peter -
Church of St. Clement, Nantes (France)

Francisco Leceras



The Axis of History

For Dr. Plinio, papal infallibility became the reason for his joy and delight. It was the gladness of the faithful person who found the one in whom to place their loyalty, and without whom they would be irremediably sad, for they would have no one to guide their steps.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

On a certain occasion, rummaging around in one of my grandmother's¹ drawers, I discovered something I had never noticed before in a bundle of old papers: a panoramic photograph depicting a papal procession.

It was part of a series of postcards, forming a full-colour brochure, showing St. Peter's Basilica from the front to the back, Bernini's² columns around the altar, and the papal throne.

The photograph of the procession showed, in detail, the Cardinals, the various dignitaries, and the Swiss Guard, in a ceremony held in the Vatican. And, through some of those high windows of St. Peter's Basilica, beams of light entered and illuminated parts of the procession. At the end came the Pope, carried on the gestatorial chair.

They were certainly souvenirs brought from Europe, on the trip my relatives and I had taken in 1912. Those postcards were kept for the children to look at them at some time in the future, but no one had ever looked at them since. I remember being enchanted, enraptured by what I saw! It was truly a thrill!

Comparing those outward appearances with what I already knew from catechism and Sacred History, I thought: "How right this is! Much more: it is sublime! And, more than sublime, it is supremely sublime! I cannot find a word to express what I think about this!"

That is the first remembrance I have of myself contemplating the Papacy.

A boy with defined tastes

Thus, my mentality prepared me for the enthusiastic acceptance of one of the truths that the Church teaches, which touched me more than anything else: the doctrine of papal infallibility.

How was this mentality formed in me?

From an inborn trait: decisiveness. Intellectually speaking, and in relation to anything, my tastes in early childhood were always decisive. I was even

surprised to see that many other children hesitated on various occasions, and I did not understand that they were still defining themselves, while I had already been born defined, like a minted coin.

For example, when it was time to go out to buy a toy, I remember that I already knew at home, *a priori*, what I was going to choose. Arriving at the store, I would do a little searching and say to the cashier:

"I want this!"

It was bought. The other children would wander around the whole store, fluttering about, hesitating, and some-



"My mentality prepared me for the enthusiastic acceptance of one of the truths that the Church teaches: the doctrine of papal infallibility"

The arrival of Pius IX at the opening of the First Vatican Council

times a boy or a girl would call me and say:

“Plinio, come and see!”

I would see them agitated or nervous, and I would reflect: “Don’t they realize they’re wasting their time with all this trouble in choosing? I’ve already chosen beforehand and I’m all set.”

Reflection on the diversity of opinion among people

As I grew older, I began to realize that this uncertainty was felt in a thousand small and minute circumstances of life, and it wasn’t just about choices, but also about opinions.

I also noticed that the older people around me – whom I deeply respected – disagreed on numerous opinions. Each of them thought differently and they never fully agreed. So, I heard many discussions around me and noticed endless disagreement about countless subjects...

And I thought: “Here are reasonably intelligent and well-educated people who disagree with each other on almost everything. Now, where there is much disagreement, one of the parties is wrong. Therefore, if one side is always wrong, and there are many opposing theses, there must be many errors; and if there are many errors, there are numerous very wrong people! I see that the error is in their nature! Where will this end? And if everyone is wrong, what is the point of reasoning?”

In making these considerations, I sensed the idea of chaos and felt tremendous insecurity, overcome by the impression that, deep down, it was not worth thinking because, if in every ten ideas I had, at least one of them was wrong, it would be like someone who was walking and, every ten steps, fell once to the ground.

“So” – I asked myself – “is it worth walking? For what? To hurt myself along the way?”

And I thought: “I don’t know what kind of confidence I will be able to



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**If all men are subject to error, what is the compass that guides the world?
The only solution would be the existence of someone
to whom all others must conform**

Dr. Plinio in 1989

have in myself and my own reasoning when I’m a grown man. I already know beforehand, and I’m realizing that I’m going to be wrong on several points. Where could that lead me? On the other hand, what solution can be given to the world’s problems if everyone makes mistakes? Is this a world of madmen?”

Looking for a flawless person

And my thoughts continued: “It can’t be, because I see that in it there is something that is not crazy: the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church. But is it true that the Church doesn’t err? It’s made of men! Priests are like other people, children of parents who err or have erred! Like father, like son! And the son of people who have erred also errs! So, what is the compass that guides the world? The only solution would be for someone to have the power to command everyone else, who would have to conform to that person. However, it couldn’t be, for example, a man like me, be-

cause I see that I don’t have the stature, substance, or worth to make my personality the norm for others. It’s no use! If that man is like me, he will also end up making mistakes and will be like the blind leading other blind men. Will it all be nothing more than immense blindness? How to choose that man, then? I don’t know, I don’t know... Ah! If only I could rely on a man who didn’t err!”

I longed for someone to contemplate, a person whose elevation surpassed all heights. I knew that God, in the highest of Heavens, is exactly that, just like Our Lady, in the order of mere creatures.

But, for the order of the earth to imitate that of Heaven, it would be necessary that there also be someone like Them.

However, this was not in me such an explicit rationale nor such a conscious search as I am explaining. It was a matter of impressions, arising throughout a thousand episodes of daily life, which always returned to



my mind and formed something like a stalactite and a stalagmite. The first was made up of recent events that came “drop by drop,” while the second was constituted by the remote memory of past facts.

And these impressions, fixing themselves in my spirit, always led me to the same conclusion, albeit implicit.

Explanation of papal infallibility

Later, when I was approaching adolescence, the solution to the problem appeared.

I believe that I had first heard about papal infallibility in catechism classes, during my preparation for First Communion, but I was very young and didn't consider the subject in the context of the problems I was experiencing. Therefore, I didn't have a clear understanding of the topic then.

However, as a student at St. Louis School³ and receiving methodical lessons in Religion, one fine day someone – I don't remember who – explained to me that the Pope is infallible. It must be said that the Jesuits spoke a lot about the Pope and the devotion one should have to him.

I then learned about the Catholic doctrine of infallibility: I was told that the Pope teaches the truth and does not err, because he speaks in the name of Jesus Christ, and God assists him by virtue of a promise made by Our Lord Himself in admirable circumstances, at the most majestic moment of all when He instituted the Papacy.

Thus, whenever the Pope speaks, invoking the power of infallibility and declaring that he makes use of it, only the truth can come from those blessed lips.

Therefore, I understood that if I thought something and the Pope taught the opposite, he was the one who was right, not me.

Hunter Masters / Unsplash

One of life's greatest delights

I remember thinking to myself: “There it is! It's the formula, the solution! How right this is! This is how it should be!”

I cannot express the complete consonance I felt with this doctrine, nor can anyone imagine the well-being of my soul. It was for me a rapture, a flight! I felt something inside me like the pealing of bells, causing me an enormous, extraordinary, incalculable enthusiasm, beyond all limits. It was a marvel! It was a cry from my soul that no one can imagine! Columbus' joy upon discovering America is nothing compared to what I felt when I discovered the dogma of infallibility. I felt in-

enormous relief and at the same time felt free, thinking: “I know I am a human being and I feel my own fallibility. I can err, and with my intelligence alone I cannot find my way. But this path is shown to me by an infallible guide, supported by God, and before whom I can place myself in the position of disciple and subject! I feel like a man who was walking among cliffs, afraid of falling, and suddenly someone told him: ‘Look closely: there is a handrail! Now I am at ease and I can contemplate the panorama. Now I can breathe easily!’”

The stone in the ring and the eagle on the mountain

At that time, I had already won the battle against laziness and was carrying out my plan, which was to be innocent like Jacob and resilient like

Esau (cf. Gen 25:27). And one of the results of the discovery of infallibility was that my natural definition, based on common sense and reasoning, was now supported by a retaining wall.

But I realize that, if Our Lady had not helped me to resolve to be pure and strong beforehand, and if I had not hated the revolutionary chaos that prevailed in so many environments, this definition would have been diluted.

In this way, through interior paths of nature and grace – those that Providence prepares for each person – a state of soul was defined within me that disposed me to receive this doctrine. Just as a ring can be set to have a precious stone placed in it, my mentality was prepared to receive the stone of stones, of inestimable value: the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Knowledge of this dogma rested upon an entire pre-existing psychological construction, like an eagle perching atop a mountain.



Knowledge of this dogma rested upon an entire pre-existing psychological construction, like an eagle perching atop a mountain

wardly illuminated by this joy, which marked an era in my history.

But why did my soul rejoice so much upon learning that Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the Church the charism of infallibility?

Because I understood that the path to truth was accessible to me, since there was an authority that guided me and protected me from my follies. I felt

The key to all human order

From that moment on, the doctrine of infallibility became the reason for my joy and delight. It was the gladness of the faithful person who found the one in whom to place their loyalty, and without whom I would end up being an irremediably sad man, for I would have no one to guide my steps.

On the other hand, this doctrine became the great defence of my mentality and the lock through which all treasures opened for me. And I came to the following conclusion: "Even if I were not Catholic, but knew that there is a religion which maintains that its leader is infallible, for that reason alone I would consider that to be the true Church, the Religion of God!"

I understood that God, in creating a true Church, had to make it infallible, and that the key to all human order, as well as the straight line to reach Heaven, was in the Papacy, for without it, the earth would be madness, a den of confusion and horror.

How to avoid chaos in the world, if chaos is established in ideas? And how can there not be chaos in ideas if there is no government for them? And how is a government for ideas possible if it does not have divine guarantees of infallibility? Necessarily, God had to make someone infallible! The Pope is, therefore, the axis of world history.

It was then that I began to pay more attention to religious ceremonies, gestures, and attitudes.

I understood better that the priest was a representative of the Pope, which, for me, had an extraordinary meaning! I also began to understand more clearly the guidelines, the hierarchy, and the organization of the Catholic Church.

In the end, it was Our Lady who helped a boy – as with every Catholic – to have enthusiasm, veneration, affection, and obedience towards the supreme authority of the Holy Church, as well as every legitimate and Catholic authority, because it was like a shoot, a



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God, in creating a true Church, had to make it infallible, and the key to all human order, like a straight line stretching up to Heaven, was in the Papacy

Proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, on November 1, 1950

branch of the tree of the Church, which extends the trunk without breaking with it.

"The foundation of my firmness"

Thank God, I am a man who possesses much conviction and certainty in what I think, but, in reality, this is because I believe in papal infallibility, the foundation of my firmness. Without this belief, my certainties and my common sense would soften, and I would be less than nothing!

Even at my age,⁴ in everything I affirm, my essential concern is: "What would the Holy See think? Are there documents from the Popes confirming this or that?" And I know that, if I rely on the infallible doctrine of Christ's representatives on earth, I can move forward without danger, because I will not err!

And if the Pope, using the power of the keys, affirmed as true that which would seem contrary to my most evident convictions, I would arise and applaud at length. When the moment of my death comes, I want to be convinced of this more than ever in my life.

When pronouncing the august word "Pope," I seem to hear, from the depths of the ages, the divine voice of Our Lord Jesus Christ proclaiming: "Peter, you are the rock, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (cf. Mt 16:18).

There is nothing in the world that is worth as much as the man to whom God made this promise. ♣

Taken, with minor adaptations,
from: *Notas Autobiográficas*
[Autobiographical Notes]. São Paulo:
Retornarei, 2012, v.III, p.237-248

¹ Gabriela Ribeiro dos Santos, Dr. Plinio's maternal grandmother.

² Dr. Plinio is referring to the baldachin above the Altar of the Confession, a work by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Italian architect and sculptor.

³ School run by Jesuit priests that opened in São Paulo in 1918 and was located on Paulista Avenue.

⁴ This citation is from August 1994. Dr. Plinio was then eighty-five years old.

The Papacy in the Face of the Revolution

⇒ Gabriel Marques



Essentially egalitarian and sensual, the Revolution has rebelled throughout the centuries against all forms of truth, beauty and goodness. Its ultimate goal, doomed to inevitable failure, is to dethrone God Himself.

On the other hand, the Holy Catholic Church has as her mission to perpetuate the presence of the Divine Master among men, leading them to the safe harbour of eternal salvation and always promoting the greater glory of the Creator.

For this very reason, “the great target of the Revolution is, therefore, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, the infallible teacher of Truth, the guardian of natural law and, thus, the ultimate foundation of the temporal order itself.”³

The Counter-Revolution is the daughter of the Church

However, although the character of militance against every of evil is inseparable from the Barque of Peter, the counter-revolutionary struggle constitutes only a limited episode in her two-thousand-year history. It is as limited, from a chronological point of view, as the very “drama of the apostasy of the Christian West”² that constitutes the Revolution.

The Counter-Revolution is therefore the daughter of the Church and lives only to serve her, as the body serves the soul. This is a very important service, all the more so as it seeks to remove the main obstacle to the purpose of the Mystical Body of Christ: “If the

Revolution exists, if it is what it is, it is within the mission of the Church, it is in the interest of the salvation of souls, it is essential for the greater glory of God that the Revolution be crushed.”³

A counter-revolutionary institution par excellence

In this sense, what is said of the Bride of Christ must be said, *a fortiori*, of her Vicar, the Supreme Pontiff. The very institution of the Papacy is, by its nature, the most contrary to the revolutionary spirit: nothing is more anti-egalitarian than the mere existence of a man who is infallible in matters of faith and morals, to whom all must submit.

It is therefore not surprising that so often throughout history the forces of evil have attacked with heinous fury the Sweet Christ on earth.

Let us remember, by way of example, the infamous attack at Anagni on September 7, 1303. On that occasion, emissaries of the King of France, Philip the Fair, attempted to imprison and depose the Holy Father, Boniface VIII. Some say⁴ that one of them even struck the Pontiff in the face! He is said to have responded simply: “Here is my neck, here is my head...”⁵

Fortunately, the attempt was unsuccessful, thanks to the intervention of the local population, who drove the assailants away. However, the Pope's already weakened health was severely shaken: he died about a month later, in Rome, on October 11 of that same year.

However, the Vicar of Christ's attitude was not always one of mere passivity.

Magazine Archive

Statue of St. Peter and portraits of the Popes in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome

The institution of the Papacy is, by its very nature, the antithesis of the revolutionary spirit. It is therefore not surprising that so often throughout history the forces of evil have attacked the Sweet Christ on earth with heinous fury.



Shining examples

In 1077, St. Gregory VII's intransigence in defending the rights of the Holy Church, for example, was responsible for one of the most glorious episodes in the history of the Papacy. As the German emperor, Henry IV, proved obstinate on the issue of investitures, going so far as to absurdly proclaim the Pope's deposition, the latter reacted to this revolt by excommunicating the monarch and releasing all his vassals from their oath of allegiance. Before long, the excommunicated king would be standing at the gates of the fortress of Canossa – barefoot, in penitential garb and under heavy snow – begging for forgiveness from the Holy Pontiff, who was there.

Moving forward to the 16th century, we encounter the eminent figure of St. Pius V. While he fought the Revolution in the ecclesiastical field, zealously applying the reforms of the Council of Trent, he did not neglect external dangers. Faced with the calamitous Mohammedan threat rising from the East, he called on Christian princes to form a Holy League in defence of Christianity. This entirely providential initiative would culminate in the miraculous naval victory of Lepanto in 1571.

The twentieth century, in turn, brings us the memory of St. Pius X's meticulous and tireless reaction against modernism. Like a zealous shepherd who notices wolves advancing on his flock, he went out to meet the enemy

armed with the staff of pontifical authority: his courageous encyclicals, – especially *Pascendi Dominici gregis* – his public and private admonitions and his example of life blocked the path of this disastrous heresy.

Painful queries

However, the study of Ecclesiastical History also provides us with other recollections, capable of causing perplexity.

Would the Renaissance innovations of the 14th and 15th centuries have succeeded in paganizing Christendom without the indifferent, if not approving, gaze of the Roman Pontiffs? Would the pseudo-Lutheran Reformation of 1517 have succeeded in dragging thousands of souls into a tragic rupture with the Holy Church if it had found in its patron Pope Leo X⁶ the sagacity of a St. Pius X or the zeal for the faith of a St. Pius V?

And what about the so unjustly celebrated French Revolution? What would have become of it if, instead of the timid and silent semi-condemnation of Pius VI⁷ it had had to face the apostolic frankness of a St. Gregory VII or the intrepidity of a Blessed Urban II, the Pope of the Crusades?

Surely the Final Judgement will answer these and many other similar questions.

The power of the keys: pledge of victory

In any case – today, as always – we can affirm with Dr. Plinio: "The

Papacy possesses extraordinary resources to impose itself. Provided that those who have these resources in their hands use them, the Papacy enjoys possibilities for action, even in our time, which are completely unexplored and entirely unimaginable."⁸

What these resources may be, Our Lord declares: "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Mt 16:19).

With these words, God Himself – remaining ever sovereign and omnipotent – entrusted to St. Peter and his legitimate successors not only the power of influence over temporal society, so well symbolized by the silver key that is part of the pontifical insignia, but above all the golden custody of grace, the "serene, noble and most efficient driving force of the Counter-Revolution":⁹

Thus, the dynamism of the Counter-Revolution reveals itself, in papal power, infinitely superior to revolutionary might: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

We therefore have this certainty: the Successor of Peter, even alone, holds in his hands the power to break the destructive work of the Revolution. The day will come when the Pope, like the Prince of the Apostles to Tabitha (cf. Acts 9:40), will command Christendom: "Arise!" And it will rise again. ♣

¹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Revolução e Contra-Revolução* [Revolution and Counter-Revolution]. 9.ed. São Paulo: Arautos do Evangelho, 2024, p.207.

² Idem, ibidem.

³ Idem, p.209.

⁴ Cf. LLORCA, Bernardino. *Manual de História Eclesiástica*. 3.ed. Barcelona: Labor, 1951, p.319.

⁵ DANIEL-ROPS, Henri. *A Igreja das catedrais e das cruzadas*. São Paulo: Quadrante, 1993, p.638.

⁶ Cf. DANIEL-ROPS, Henri. *A Igreja da Renascença e da reforma. A reforma protestante*. São Paulo: Quadrante, 1996, v.I, p.241.

⁷ Cf. DANIEL-ROPS, Henri. *A Igreja das revoluções*. São Paulo: Quadrante, 2003, p.23-24.

⁸ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 6/8/1973.

⁹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, *Revolução e Contra-Revolução*, op. cit., p.187.



The Defence of the Mendicants

Persecuted, slandered, unjustly punished... But the friars had in their favour one decisive factor: the omnipotence of the truth.



✉ Sr. Marcela Beorlegui

Church institutions arise organically, without prior planning. This is a habitual “method” of the Holy Spirit: to address the problems of the moment, solving difficulties as they arise.

Thus, over the centuries, the complex structure of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the norms of consecrated life, the various religious orders, and even the regulation of intellectual life emerged.

However, this development did not unfold without impediments. A controversial episode, which attempted to tarnish the indivisible body of the Holy Church, will help us understand how arduous it can sometimes be for a new charism to blossom within this sacred institution.¹

From the Church, universities are born

Throughout the 13th century, various events challenged European Catholics: at times the tense relations between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire generated conflicts, at others the cause of the Crusades required the settling of disputes in order to unite efforts, and still others, heresies divided Christendom. Navigating these stormy seas, the Holy Church was able to guide, govern, and sanctify its children, keeping pace with the changing times.

Perhaps the intellectual field is the most paradigmatic model of this evolution. After the barbarian invasions,

scholarliness took refuge in churches, where palatine, monastic, and episcopal schools originated. But the formation of the cultured man, according to the standards in force in the mid-13th century, made it necessary to adjust the *modus faciendi* of teaching from the previous period, in which the emergence of cathedral schools made study accessible to all social classes and was the mainstay for the formation of new centres of culture. Thus, universities were born.

Mendicant Orders, a new source of grace for the world

At the end of the 12th century, in the most Christian kingdom of France, the University of Paris took on its definitive profile. It did not take long for it to acquire great prestige before the State and the Church. King Philip Augustus granted it the privilege of immunity and ecclesiastical jurisdiction; Gregory IX legitimized it as an international ecclesiastical institution dependent only on Rome and, through the Bull *Parens scientiarum*, granted professors the right to go on strike to defend their interests. With its renowned theological authority, the university could be considered the third power of Christendom, alongside the Papacy and the Empire.

However, medieval Europeans saw much more than intellectual life flourish in Europe. The emergence of

religious orders that kept alive the enthusiasm for Christian perfection was also a catalyst for promising changes.

While monasticism had predominated in previous centuries, new charisms appeared in this historical period, personified by two providential men: Dominic de Guzmán and Francis of Assisi. With them, the Mendicant Orders appeared on the medieval scene in response to the spiritual needs of the time, soon becoming the standard-bearers of ecclesiastical reform. Thus, the human type of the monk who lived in solitude gave way to that of the friar who, throughout the villages and cities, preached, exhorted, and attracted souls by his example.

The enemy enters the scene...

The fruit of the foundations of St. Dominic and St. Francis was a clergy free from attachments, totally dedicated to the Church. They enlightened Christendom with their writings and teachings, living on alms, working for the *cura animarum* and constituting a kind of “guard corps” for the Papacy through their complete submission to the Roman Pontiff.

In their apostolic zeal, the Mendicants won the trust of the people, the protection of the civil authorities and the favour of the Popes, which also earned them routine persecution, the result – as is often the case – of the most sordid envy.

In fact, the mendicant friars, despite living in the world, always rowed against the worldly tide, in favour of the salvation of souls; and it was at the University of Paris that the clash between these two mentalities took place with the greatest vehemence.

The admission of Dominicans and Franciscans to the chairs of the Parisian university generated a violent conflict of interest with the professors from the secular clergy, who considered themselves totally surpassed by the newcomers. A two-decade-long struggle ensued, with regrettable episodes of violence, publicity attacks, slander and defamation hitherto unprecedented in the history of the Church.

Perfidy disguised as “concern”

The virulent and tendentious attacks on the Mendicants focused on three aspects. First, the seculars made it clear that the presence of friars at the university was undesirable because of their way of life. Then, since this mere accusation was not satisfactory, they questioned the legitimacy of their ministry. Finally, they contended the state of perfection for pastors and religious, as well as the admission of young vocations.

Such animosity on the part of the seculars seems frankly absurd to us, almost a thousand years after these events. After all, what was the problem with letting them lecture, if the university was supposed to be a centre of culture for all? Perhaps the holiness of life and the quality of teaching of the friars were a constant thorn in the side of the secular professors, who saw themselves as being overlooked in the students' estimation. But this reality, which we see clearly today, was at the time disguised as “solicitude” for the Church and for the interests of the university...

For the secular professors, the Mendicants were dangerous characters, as they disregarded university statutes and their demands by failing to participate in general strikes. Worse still:

under the “disguise” of mendicancy, they monopolized students – who did not have to remunerate them – and influenced them to join their own religious orders, in an act of outright “proselytism”.

An even more unforgivable attitude on the part of the religious was that they obtained three teaching positions during a prolonged strike by the seculars that lasted for years, during which, of course, the mendicant friars, oblivious to the riots of drunken students and indulgent seculars, continued to lecture. During this period, the Franciscans also achieved the conversion of Master Alexander of Hales and his entry into the Seraphic Order.

The catalyst of all discord

The secular masters quickly set about ensuring that their enemies lost the position they had gained. And the main instigator of the persecution against the religious had a name and surname. It was the canon of Beauvais, William of Saint-Amour, who “could not tolerate the advance of these twin Orders, which were gradually taking over university chairs, previously the exclusive preserve of the secular clergy.

In writing, from the pulpit and from the chair, he began to attack the Mendicants [...]. He attacked their rights and privileges to preach and confess, to bury in their churches; their episcopal and parish exemption, the ideal of poverty in community and even their very existence as religious institutes, ridiculing them mercilessly.”²

Abusing his position as university procurator, William unreasonably diminished the teaching rights of the Mendicants and dragged much of the Parisian secular clergy into the dispute, leading them to believe that their economic income was threatened by the defenceless friars.

The attitude of the seculars, led by William of Saint-Amour, was one of opposition to the novelty and vitality of the Church, in the name of a *status quo* which they considered to be stable forever. They thus rejected the breath of the Holy Spirit manifested in the Mendicants, on the pretext that their lifestyle differed from the old formulas... For them, the friars were intruders who wanted to work in someone else's field, as if pastoral care and the doctrinal formation of the faithful were not also their responsibility.



The mendicant friars always rowed against the worldly tide in favour of the salvation of souls; and it was at the University of Paris that the most vehement clash between two mentalities occurred

The University of Paris in the Middle Ages

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The ultimate goal of the malcontents was nothing less than to suppress the Mendicant Orders or, at least, to hinder their apostolate as much as possible. However, despite constant complaints against the friars and the resulting conflicts, the Church's ruling was favourable to the religious, as the Papacy was pleased by their loyalty and the orthodox education they offered to young people at the university.

The seculars, obsessed, then decided to resort to creativity: they organized a veritable publicity campaign against the Mendicants, sparing no derision, offensive songs, epigrams and defamatory pamphlets, forcing the poor friars to be often escorted by King Louis IX's archers during their classes to protect themselves from aggression. They also promoted other strikes, encouraged fights, attributed heretical writings to the religious, and tried to enact new statutory laws in order to exclude them from teaching.

Such slanderers always ended up defeated by the integrity of those they persecuted, until, lamentably, they dared to take their defamation to the Supreme Pontiff...

The friars lose their privileges

Between 1254 and 1266, William of Saint-Amour finally found a good pretext to accuse his opponents. The publication of *Introductorius in evangelium aeternum*, an enthusiastic treatise on the heretical doctrines of Joachim of Fiore³ written by the Franciscan Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, provided the canon with sufficient arguments to write his *Liber de antichristo et eius ministris*, in which he vigorously condemned the Mendicants as heretics, pseudo-preachers and false prophets.

The complaints of the secular clergy to the Roman Pontiff regarding the discovery of the deviation, allegedly participated in by all the Mendicants – including the Dominicans –

had the expected echo in the ears of the Pope, who regrettably refrained from listening to “the other side”. Thus, on November 21, 1254, Innocent IV published the Bull *Etsi animarum*, which suppressed the prerogatives of the Mendicants in relation to the care of souls, prohibiting them, among other things, from hearing Confessions and preaching, while maintaining a prudent reserve in relation to their functions at the university.

An unexpected turn of events

Two weeks later, on December 7, Innocent IV passed away. While his soul rendered accounts to God, the latter did justice on earth in favour of the friars, through human instruments. Elected as the new pontiff, Cardinal Reinaldo de'Conti di Segni, a well-known protector of the Franciscan Order who took the name Alexander IV, hastened to revoke his predecessor's precipitated decisions. On December 22, he published the Bull *Nec*

insolitum, which annulled *Etsi animarum* and granted new privileges to the Mendicant Orders.

It is easy to imagine Saint-Amour's irritation at the failure of his plans... But he did not desist. In March, he published one of his most famous works, *Tractatus brevis de periculis novissimorum temporum*, using his usual tactics of defamation and sensationalism. In it, he denounced the “dangers of the latter days” before the Antichrist, which had begun with the founding of the Mendicants, who were, in his opinion, a host of false prophets threatening the Church under the guise of knowledge, piety, and renunciation of the world.

The Dominicans and Franciscans had as their mission to attract the world to the practice of the evangelical truths they lived, and the goal of *De periculis* was to destroy their *raison d'être*. Saint-Amour sought to induce society to reject the Mendicant Orders and remove them from teaching and pastoral activities, such as preaching and administering the Sacraments, forcing the friars to renounce alms – a lifestyle that he arbitrarily declared contrary to Divine Law – and to start working the land, like the ancient monastic orders, which meant, in a word, changing their charism and their legal status...

Discerning this perfidious intention with great acuity, Pope Alexander IV condemned the book *De periculis* on October 5, 1256, with the Constitution *Romanus Pontifex de summi*. Shortly afterwards, William was removed from his chair.

Bold and controversial defence of the Mendicants

Throughout this dispute, Saint-Amour and his supporters had to face two great enemies they certainly did not foresee.

The debates at the University of Paris confronted the seculars with two



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The slanderers always ended up defeated by the integrity of those they persecuted

St. Bonaventure - Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne (Germany)

of the greatest Doctors of the Church: the Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas and his comrade-in-arms, the Franciscan St. Bonaventure. Far from watching with stoic passivity the war of destruction against their Orders, they used the weapons with which they had been endowed by the Holy Spirit: preaching, letters, prayer, and the art of debate. Why did they do this? The Angelic Doctor answers us: "Holy men resist their detractors for the love of truth."⁴

United for the same cause, Dominicans and Franciscans admirably explained various aspects of consecrated life, evangelisation and the care of souls, elucidating them as never before.

St. Bonaventure, who held the position of professor at the University of Paris, published in the summer of 1256 a book entitled *De perfectione evangelica*, a true doctrinal monument on the evangelical virtues – poverty, chastity and obedience – which constitute the central core of the religious state; later, he also wrote *Apologia pauperum*, in response to the new attacks against mendicancy initiated by Gerard of Abbeville, an accomplice and continuer of Saint-Amour.

In turn, St. Thomas forcefully refuted Saint-Amour's accusations in his book *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*, demonstrating on the basis of the Gospels how religious life can combine prayer, study, teaching and itinerant preaching.

He also wrote other works of unmatched clarity in defence of the Mendicants: *De perfectione spiritualis*



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**In the heat of the dispute,
the Mendicant Orders brilliantly
explicated their own calling**

St. Thomas Aquinas, by Fra Angelico
State Hermitage Museum,
Saint Petersburg (Russia)

vite, De ingressu puerorum – which justified the admission of young vocations – and *Contra doctrinam retrahentium a religione*.

Faced with this resistance, the canon of Beauvais branded the mendicant friars as rebels, disobedient and inveterately proud... It seemed unacceptable to him that the persecuted should bear witness to their own integrity, resist their detractors and defend themselves in court to prevent the closure of their Orders. Against all common sense, he stubbornly repeated the same calumnies, claiming that the friars were only pretending to lead a virtuous life...

¹ This article is a summary, with adaptations of the author's canonical licentiate in Theology thesis (*summa cum laude*) from the Pontifical Bolivarian University of Medellín (2025): *An inspiring model for the present*

² APERRIBAY, OFM, Bernardo. Introducción general a cuestiones disputadas sobre la

perfección evangélica en San Buenaventura. In: *Obras de San Buenaventura*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1949, v.VI, p.5.

³ Italian abbot and mystical philosopher. His thinking and works gave rise to various mil-

There is one final question: who won this clash of titans? The answer is simple. Suffice it to recall that the Holy Church made Thomism the foundation of its own theology, but as for the names of Saint-Amour and his minions, if they survived for posterity, it was not because of the admiration of Christians...

Truth always triumphs

History is a great teacher. Situations similar to those here described were not uncommon in the life of the Church. In fact, God allowed them to happen in order to further His plan of salvation. In effect, heresies led to the clarification of the truths of the Faith, barbarian invasions encouraged the evangelization of peoples, and persecutions solidified the work of the Holy Spirit. They thus became paradigms of how adverse circumstances can cause the holiness of the Mystical Body of Christ to flourish, like a lily among thorns.

Paraphrasing the Apostle St. Paul, we make bold to affirm at the end of these lines: *oportet controversiae esse* (cf. 1 Cor 11:19); for it was in the heat of the dispute that the Mendicant Orders brilliantly made clear their own calling and proved to future centuries that new charisms do not arise to destroy the treasure of ecclesiastical tradition, but, on the contrary, preserve it with reverence, adding to the Church the light necessary for its growth in grace.

In this sense, the victory of the Mendicant Orders was not only that of their members, but of the Holy Church and of all Christendom! ♣

lenarian philosophical movements, often condemned by the Church.

⁴ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*. Pars IV, c.2, ad 5.



Mother and Mistress of the Papacy

Mother of the Church, Mary has a very special bond with the Papacy and is always ready to strengthen it, extending her maternal hands to the Pontiffs who turn to her with confidence.



↳ Camila Carstens

How many names has the Holy Church affectionately given to the Holy Father throughout history? Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Christ, Successor of Peter... However, one of the most beautiful names, and perhaps the one that best encompasses such a lofty mission, is: the sweet Christ on earth. What could be more sublime than reflecting something of the Son of God Himself, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnate Word?

The Pope is elevated to the most sublime dignity possible on this earth. Monarch of the Church and of souls, he is in a sense the king of the whole world. What would become of us Catholics if there were no supreme hierarch in the Mystical Body of Christ? Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira¹ maintains that the Church would

fall apart, for it would become chaos, a den of confusion. And if this has not yet happened, it is because there is a Supreme Pontiff!

The Papacy was instituted when Our Lord Jesus Christ conferred the power of the keys on St. Peter, uttering the immortal decree: "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in Heaven" (Mt 16:18-19)[DR].

However, the official exercise of this sacred function did not take place immediately, because Our Lord remained among men and, therefore, there was no need to be represented.

Furthermore, some of the first Pontiff's actions, before he was sancti-

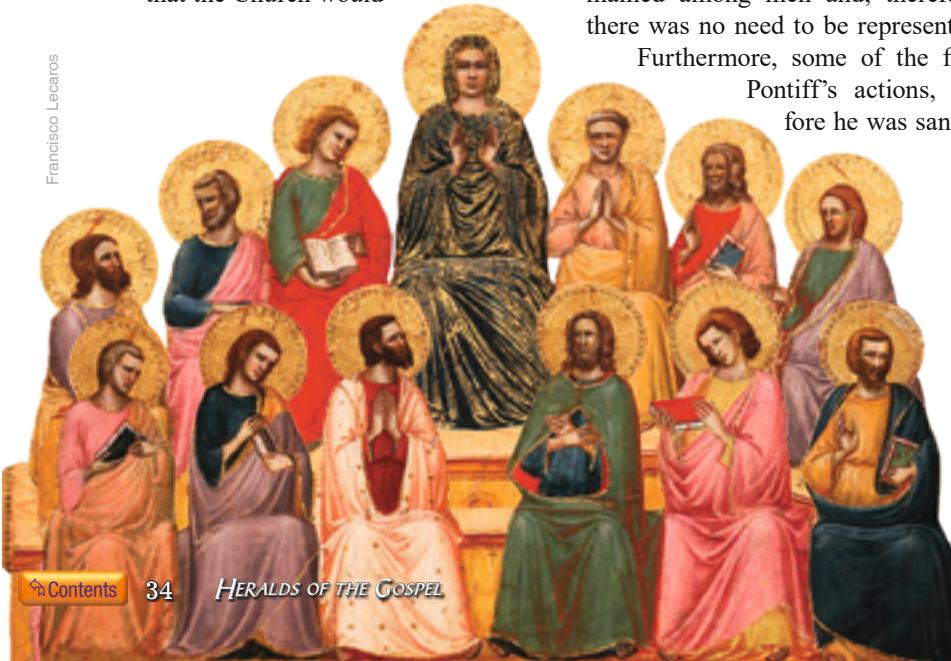
fied by the Holy Spirit, were at odds with his high mission, such as his rebuke of the Saviour after hearing from His divine lips the announcement of His Death (cf. Mt 16:21-22), and the three denials at the supreme hour of the Passion (cf. Jn 18:17-27).

How and when, then, did St. Peter become, with all his prerogatives, the Vicar of Jesus Christ in the nascent Church?

Pentecost: sanctification through Mary

After the Ascension, the Apostles gathered with Our Lady in the Upper Room and spent days in prayer because, deprived of the physical presence of Our Lord, the means of remaining steadfast and persevering consisted, above all, in being united and with their hearts lifted up in ardent supplication.

Who could discern what was going on in the Immaculate Heart of Mary? Msgr. João, based on the reflections of various saints, believed that during those days Our Lady modelled within herself what the Church should be like, from its general aspects to the most concrete details, such as "the various paths of holiness, the beauty of the Lit-



Deprived of the physical presence of Jesus, the Apostles gathered around Our Lady to keep themselves steadfast in their perseverance

Pentecost, by Giovanni Baronio - Barberini Palace, Rome

urgy, the wealth of charisms in the Religious Orders.”² Furthermore, She certainly discerned the mission of each Apostle and prayed to God to keep them faithful, predisposing their souls, without their realizing it, for the descent of the Holy Spirit.³

Imbued with this maternal concern to pray for each one, what must have happened when the Blessed Virgin gazed at the one who had received the power to unite earth to Heaven? Like no one else, She understood the greatness of the mission of the Papacy, and in St. Peter She glimpsed all the splendours of this sacred institution until the end of the world, imploring God for all the Pontiffs of history, that they might always be the perfect image of the Supreme Shepherd.

We may assume that, when their fervent pleas reached their peak, “suddenly a sound came from Heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). Then appeared what looked like tongues of fire, which rested on Mary and then spread to each of the Apostles.

God, who is supremely hierarchical, would be acting against Himself if He granted His gifts equally to all. He therefore did so in different degrees, granting specific graces proportionate to each soul. It can be assumed that, after Our Lady, the first soul to benefit from the flames of the Paraclete was the one who, except for Mary, was closest to God: St. Peter. He benefitted twice, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the presence of Our Lady.⁴

Through her, the Head of the Church was endowed with a new fervour, redoubled apostolic zeal, love of sacrifice and extraordinary charisms. “The Light that terrifies the infernal regions, strengthens the wise and confirms the just, made shine in Peter’s soul the sign of the victory promised by Jesus: ‘I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you



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In Peter, Mary saw a foreshadowing of all the splendours of the Papacy, praying to God for all the Popes of History

Our Lady and St. Peter, by the Master of Vyšší Brod - National Gallery of Prague

have turned again, strengthen your brethren’ (Lk 22:32).⁵

One can conjecture, finally, that on that same day, in addition to receiving the Divine Fire, St. Peter understood that everything he had been granted was due to the intercession of Our Lady, and therefore decided to give himself to her as a slave of love.⁶

Consolidating his union with the Mother of the Church

From this event onwards, it seems reasonable that an unbreakable bond was formed between the Mother of the Church and its cornerstone, through which St. Peter determined to begin his apostolic work under her auspices. When he needed to decide on any matter concerning the direction of the Church, he would immediately turn to Mary, who would resolve everything with the utmost maternal care and clarity.⁷

In turn, there is no doubt that Our Lady would insist that St. Peter always exercise his authority, in order to form him in the role of Supreme Pontiff. Through this mutual intertwining of souls, the Queen of Heaven not only

influenced him, but also guided the Holy Church.

Our Lady’s devotion to the papacy

The relationship between Mary Most Holy and the Prince of the Apostles, however, cannot have been limited to simple protection and support. As stated earlier, there is no higher mission on earth than that of a Pontiff, and therefore She would not fail to render St. Peter the great veneration he deserved.

Let us imagine, for example, that St. Matthew came to Our Lady asking for guidance on how to deal with a group of pagans who, although eager to receive instruction in the Faith, were being maliciously ensnared by some Pharisees. After hearing the whole story, She would undoubtedly advise the Apostle to first bring the matter to Peter, imploring him, as the leader, to indicate the best course of action.

Although She was the Mother and Mistress of the Pontiff, She also acted as his most humble servant, the most loyal of his subjects, setting in the annals of history the perfect example of submission to the Papacy, which all the faithful should imitate until the end of time.

An eternal bond

Now, considering the reflections made so far, there is a risk of thinking that they are nothing more than ramblings, albeit beautiful ones; or that this sublime relationship between Our Lady and the Papacy, even if it existed, was restricted to the early days of the Church and only to the first Vicar of Christ. What an illusion!

In her contact with the one who possessed the key to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Blessed Virgin thought not only of him, but of all those who would succeed him in governing the Church until the end of the world. Assumed into Heaven and crowned Queen of the universe, She is always



Under what ruins with the Church be buried if so many other Popes had not had recourse to Mary's aid? Since they are the rocks upon which the edifice of Christ is built, they will only succeed under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin

Battle of Lepanto, by Jan Peeters the Elder - St. Peter's Church, Antwerp (Belgium); inset, St. Pius V beseeches Our Lady for the victory of the Catholic fleet - Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians, Turin (Italy)

ready to strengthen the bond She established on earth with the Papacy, extending her maternal hands to all the Pontiffs who turn to her and open themselves to her influence.

Mary has an intimate relationship with all Popes because She is the Mother of the Church.⁸ To elucidate this reality, Dr. Plinio⁹ has recourse to a metaphor. It would be monstrous to imagine a mother who considered herself responsible only for part of her child's body. A mother watches over the entirety of the one she gave birth to, and over the head with particular care, because the health of the whole body depends on it. Now, as the Apostle says, Christ "is the Head of the Body, the Church" (Col 1:18), and if the Pope is Christ on earth, he is also the head of the Church, from which it follows that Our Lady supports and assists him in a special way, like a mother with her son.

What would have become of the nascent Church if the first Pope had not sought Mary's guidance and help in the midst of adversity? Buried under what ruins would the Mystical Bride of Christ find herself if St. Pius V had not confidently turned to the Queen of Vic-

tories, imploring her powerful help in the fight against the enemies of Christendom? They and many others, such as St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory VII, Blessed Urban II, Innocent XI, and St. Pius X understood that, being the rocks upon which Christ's edifice was built, they would only succeed under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin.

New heavens and a new earth

Echoing the hope of the Holy Apostles Peter and John, we all "wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3:13) and where the new Jerusalem will descend from Heaven, like a bride adorned for her bridegroom (cf. Rv 21:1-3). This Bride is an image of the sanctified Church, that is, completely configured to the Blessed Virgin; and the new heavens and earth are figures of the Kingdom of Christ that will be established in the world, as the magnificent fruit of the Most Precious Blood shed by Him on the Cross.

However, for this Marian configuration of the Mystical Body of the Redeemer to occur, it must begin with the Head. The Successors of Peter must ar-

dently devote themselves to her and, like the first Pope, become slaves to her love.

When there is a Pontiff who thus gives himself to Mary with all his heart, She will allow herself to be drawn to earth and will finally establish, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the "new heavens and new earth" that we so long for! ♣

¹ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 21/9/1991.

² Cf. CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Mary Most Holy: The Paradise of God Revealed to Men*. Houston: Heralds of the Gospel, 2020, v.II, p.526.

³ Cf. SCHEEBEN, Matthias Joseph. *A Mãe do Senhor*. São Paulo: Cultor de Livros, 2017, p.164.

⁴ Cf. ST. FRANCIS DE SALES. *Sermon pour la fête de Saint Pierre*. In: *Oeuvres Complètes*. Annecy: J. Nierat, 1896, t.VII, p.37-38.

⁵ CLÁ DIAS, op. cit., p.503.

⁶ Cf. Idem, p.530.

⁷ Cf. Idem, p.530-532.

⁸ Cf. SCHEEBEN, op. cit., p.160.

⁹ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 1/11/1966.

...why the Pope chooses a new name?

A man receives a name when he is born into the world by nature, when he is born into grace through Baptism, when he dies to the world through religious vows, and when he dies to himself by virtue of a vocation that confiscates him entirely.

Abram was renamed Abraham after God promised him countless descendants (cf. Gn 17:5). Jacob received the title of Israel after wrestling with the Angel of the Lord (cf. Gn 32:29). Simon was named Peter by Jesus Christ, who assigned him the mission of being the rock of the Church, investing him as head of

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Detail of "Christ glorified in the court of Heaven" (edited),
by Fra Angélico - Florence (Italy)

the Apostolic College (cf. Mt 16:18). He was the first Pope, and the first Pope to change his name.

However, it would be five centuries before another Pontiff would receive a

new name. On January 2, 533, the presbyter Mercury was elected Pope. The carcass of paganism, killed by the Cross, had not yet completely rotted away in the sixth century, and it was therefore extremely inopportune that the Vicar of Christ should be called by the same name as the ancient and false vicar of the Latin gods. Mercury, then, ascending to the papal throne, chose for himself the name John.

Thus began, in a surge of rupture and war with the world, the procession of Popes who would abandon their names to identify themselves with a mission that would consume them entirely. ♦

...why we call the Supreme Pontiff Pope?

Pope: this is the title Catholics use to refer to their father... Yes, father, in the strictest and most etymological sense of the term.

Πάππας – *papas* – was one of the first words babbled by Greek-speaking children. Directed with effusive affection to the father who protected, fed, taught, corrected and guided

them, this domestic expression was equivalent to our *papa*.

The Hellenes, who became children of God and of the Church through Baptism, soon bestowed their πάππας on their progenitors in the Faith, the Bishops. This affectionate epithet was thus applied to all the princes of the Church until the 6th century, when

it became the prerogative of the Supreme Roman Pontiff, the Bishop of Bishops and, for that very reason, the father of fathers.

How wonderful it is to be Catholic! While all the rulers of the world are exalted for their power, influence or wealth, we have the privilege of seeing in our sovereign, above all, a father. ♦

Statue of St. Peter on the eponymous Square (Vatican)

Lucio César Rodrigues





Reproduction

Spouse of Christ Crucified

Extraordinary from beginning to end and permeated with revelations and marvellous charisms, the life of Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich shines with her identification with the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Church.

⇒ Sr. Mary Teresa MacIsaac, EP



With what devotion we should attend Holy Mass! In this sublime Sacrament, the Sacrifice of Calvary is renewed and Jesus makes Himself present every day in the Sacred Species, wherever in the world a priest pronounces the words: "This is my Body," "This is the chalice of my Blood." Thus, after living in this world, the Divine Redeemer ascended to the heavenly abode, but remained among His own, vivifying the Church through the Eucharist.

However, in addition to His sacramental presence, Our Lord wanted to make Himself visible to us through cer-

tain chosen souls in whom He vividly represents His suffering face, women and men in whom He imprints His wounds, making their existence a kind of memorial of His own immolation.

Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich was one of those souls chosen by God to unite herself to the Passion of the Imolated Lamb.¹

A childhood permeated with mystical phenomena

Born in 1774 near Dülmen, Germany, Anne Catherine shared her birthday with Our Lady, September 8. Her childhood was so penetrated by the supernatural that her ordinary childhood life was intertwined with an intense mystical life.

Her family, however, did not notice anything unusual until the child learned to speak. From then on, they had many surprises because every afternoon, when her father returned from the fields and sat by the fireplace, he would put little *Anna Kathrinchen* on his lap, and she would candidly recount the stories she had "seen" that day, the great majority of which were scenes from the Old Testament or the life of the Holy Family.

When she was six years old, St. Joan of Valois appeared to her with an enchanting Boy, the same height as Anne Catherine, at her side. The Saint said to her: "Look at this Boy. Would you like to marry Him?" When she answered in the affirmative, the Saint assured her that she would become a nun and that one day that Boy would espouse her. From that moment on, even at such a tender age, the child decided that she would enter the convent.

Anne Catherine spent her days in the countryside tending sheep. It was there that the Infant Jesus appeared to her, to play with her and keep her company. Through Him, she learned, without anyone in her family telling her, that she would soon have a little brother. She wanted to prepare him a gift to give him as soon as he was born, but she did not know how to sew. So the "Little Boy", as she called the Divine Infant, taught her how to sew a cap and other clothes for the baby, which astonished her mother, as she had not yet taught her such skills.

One day, her Guardian Angel took her to visit Queen Marie Antoinette, who was in prison at the time, and

In addition to His sacramental presence, Our Lord wishes to make Himself visible through certain souls who represent His suffering face

often transported her to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which is why she claimed that these places were more familiar to her than her own home. Blessed with the gift of hierognosis, that is, sensitivity to the sacred, she felt the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, discerned the authenticity of the relics of the Saints, discerned the presence of a priest from afar by virtue of his anointing, and could distinguish holy water from ordinary water.

Betrothal to Our Lord marked by tribulation

However, her mystical life exceeded even these impressive phenomena. Providence had chosen her to carry out a mysterious and sublime mission: to live in herself, as an expiatory victim, the espousal that Christ has with His Church.

Anne Catherine ardently aspired to be a religious, but she needed a dowry to enter any convent, and her family, besides not having the financial means, did not want to help her because they disagreed with her desire. But she understood that the purpose of consecrated life is union with the Heavenly Bridegroom, and that her sufferings, efforts, and mortifications would contribute to the realization of this mystical marriage.

She also realized that she had not received her religious vocation solely for her own benefit, but with a view to the needs of the Holy Church. She was to be a sort of receptacle of the treasures of grace related to the religious state, in order to keep it intact in the Church at a time when the Lord's vineyard was being so devastated.

From that moment on, she began to prepare everything she would need for the betrothal. She worked as a seamstress for three years, with the hope of earning the necessary sum for the dowry, but in vain. Almost always, on the same day she earned something, that amount would be given to the first poor person she met.

Finally, at the age of twenty-eight, she was accepted into the Augustinian convent of Agnetenborg in Dülmen, much to the dismay of the community, whose charity and religious spirit were in a deplorable state, and who did not wish to take in a poor and sick girl who would only cause them trouble.

Suffering in the convent of Agnetenborg

The mediocrity of the nuns of Agnetenborg soon created an atmosphere of vexation, envy, and misunderstanding around the new sister. She suffered when she considered that, unintentionally, she was a cause of sin for the others.

She also saw the breaking of silence and the vow of poverty, as well as the ruinous spiritual effects of inobservance of the rule, and wept for hours in the chapel in sorrow for the imperfections of her sisters in vocation and for the sufferings of the Church.

Anne Catherine suffered from stomach hemorrhages, which caused her to cough up blood. She once fell and broke her hip in several places, which forced her to remain in bed for almost four months. She was the bell

ringer of the convent, but after this accident it was very difficult for her to climb the stairs to perform her duties, and for this reason the community accused her of being lazy and useless. To make her reputation among the sisters even worse, she came down with a very high fever for another two months, during which time she was bedridden again.

In that convent, each sister was required to provide her own breakfast. As Sister Anne Catherine had no means to buy anything for herself, she waited for all the sisters to have their breakfast, then collected any grains that might have fallen on the floor in

God chose Anne Catherine for a mysterious and sublime mission: to live within herself the espousal that Christ has with His Church



A reconstruction of the room used by the Blessed in the final years of her life, with original furnishings - Church of the Holy Cross, Dülmen (Germany); on the previous page, Anne Catherine Emmerich, by Anna Maria Freifrau von Oer



the kitchen and ground them for herself. Several times she found nothing to eat. On some of these occasions, however, when she returned to her cell, which she had locked before leaving, she inexplicably found a few coins on the windowsill.

A sister who lived with her at that time testified that her greatest satisfaction was to give to the needy. This nun asked her why she did not take care of herself. And she replied, "Oh, I always receive much more than I give!" She thus gave a remarkable example of unpretentiousness.

There were countless occasions when there were misunderstandings

She saw Sacred History in visions countless times, from the fall of the Angels from Heaven to the Life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ

between her and the other nuns. As Sister Anne Catherine never justified herself, she was once unjustly accused of theft, among other offences. Without complaining, she knelt before each sister and asked for forgiveness for the offence she had not committed. When, after some time, the opportunity arose to clarify the alleged theft, she sought out the superior, who replied that she would say nothing to the others, as she did not want to think any more about what had been "forgotten", thus leaving Sister Anne Catherine's honour tarnished.

"Am I not enough for you?"

One of her most painful deprivations was the lack of a spiritual director. She begged God to send her someone with whom she could open her heart, for she was very afraid of being deceived by the devil. Fr. Lambert² could not fulfil this role with the necessary ease, as he did not speak German. He tried to reassure her, but her affliction soon returned. One day, while the Blessed was in church, praying for a confessor, she heard a voice ask her: "Am I not enough for you?" It was her Divine Spouse pleading with her

to suffer, like the Church, the lack of spiritual assistance, that is, the lack of holy pastors.

One of the most striking aspects of her life was her recurrent ecstasies. Upon consideration of God's mercy towards sinners or how much He is offended, whether she was in the garden, the cloister, the church or her cell, she would immediately fall to the ground, enraptured. Sometimes, while meditating, she would look up and see God. Other times, her Guardian Angel would order her to exhort the nuns to return to observance. Then, still in ecstasy, she would go among the sisters quoting parts of the rule on silence, obedience, the Divine Office, or the cloister, which so many transgressed. The tepidity of the clergy caused her interior suffering, and she sorrowfully exclaimed: "The consecrated fingers of priests will be recognizable in Purgatory. Yes, even in hell they will be known and will burn with a particular fire. Everyone will see their priestly character and cover the priest with scorn."³

On countless occasions, Sister Anne Catherine saw in visions Sacred History in its entirety, beginning with the fall of the Angels from Heaven, the creation and the deluge, passing through the patriarchs, reaching the life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and penetrating the future by contemplating scenes from the Apocalypse. It was thanks to her visions that archaeologists discovered the remains of the city of Ur in Chaldea and found the house of Our Lady in Ephesus.

Dissolution of the convent

In December 1811, destructive influences from the French Revolution had penetrated Germany, and due to secularization and rationalism the civil authorities dissolved the convent of Agnetenburg.

Jesus carrying the Cross, by Simone Martini - Louvre Museum, Paris



Sailko (CC by-sa 3.0)

Thanks to her visions, archaeologists uncovered the remains of the city of Ur, in Chaldea, and found the house of Our Lady in Ephesus



Hugh Llewelyn (CC by-sa 2.0)

The nuns gradually left the monastery, without any regret, but Sister Anne Catherine did not want to abandon it, and remained there alone, totally helpless, since she was so ill that she was bedridden. It was only the following spring that Father Lambert came to her aid and transferred her to the home of a widow.

Leaving Agnetenburg was extremely painful for her because, faithful to her vow of cloister, she had decided at all costs not to abandon it. On one occasion she said: "When I had to leave the convent, I thought that every stone on the road was about to rise up against me."

She would spend the remaining years of her life practically invalid, amid extraordinary visions and atrocious suffering.

"Suffer as I have suffered"

At the age of thirty-eight, she received the stigmata of the Passion on her hands, feet and side. Two crosses were also imprinted on her chest. Previously, at the age of twenty-four, while praying in the Jesuit church in Coesfeld, she had been favoured with the crown of thorns. She was often unable to get out of bed because her feet were mystically nailed to the cross.

If Our Lord Jesus Christ consummated His sacrifice amid contradictions and persecutions, the sufferings of His spouse would be no different, for He desired to configure her

entirely to Himself. The Blessed felt her body mutilated, burned, gangrenous and in decay; she felt that her fingers had been cut off, and she writhed in pain. The Divine Redeemer showed her more than once that this was the current state of His Mystical Body.

Between February 1818 and April 1823, she dictated her visions to the writer Clement Brentano. He wanted to meet her out of curiosity, having heard stories about her mystical gifts and stigmata, but he was deeply impressed from their very first encounter on.

For her part, she discerned in him the person to whom she should dictate all her visions, confiding after a few weeks: "I am surprised at myself, for I speak to you with such confidence, communicating so many things that I cannot reveal to others. From the first glance, you were no stranger to me." Thanks to the writings of Clement Brentano, the visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich have come down to us.

The extraordinary phenomena that occurred with her, the stigmata, the bleeding, the marks that appeared on her body, the ecstasies, her discernment of spirits, all of this attracted the attention of many doctors and schol-

ars and, against her will, numerous ecclesiastical and scientific investigations were carried out.

In the last year of her life, her pains had intensified to an unimaginable degree. She moaned constantly. On January 15, the Child Jesus appeared and said to her: "You are mine; you are my spouse. Suffer as I have suffered, and do not ask why."

A little less than a month after this vision, on February 9, 1824, Anne Catherine Emmerich gave her soul to God, leaving us, in addition to the accounts of her revelations, an extraordinary example of life. ♣

¹ The biographical data contained in this article were extracted from the work: SCHMÖGER, CSsR, Karl Erhard. *Life of Anne Catherine Emmerich*. Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1867, v.I.

² Father Jean Martin Lambert refused to sign the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution and for this reason took refuge in Germany. He was appointed confessor to Duke von Croy in Dülmen and chaplain to the Augustinian convent in Agnetenburg. Sister Anne Catherine met him while working as a sacristan and came to have great confidence in him.

³ SCHMÖGER, op. cit., p.391.



Filial Love Centred on the Holy Church

The main motive behind Dr. Plinio's love and respect for his mother, Dona Lucilia, far surpassed the natural ties that united them: it was, above all, the result of his identity as a fervent, apostolic and Roman Catholic.

✉ **Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP**

Regarding the relationship between Dr. Plinio and Dona Lucilia, it could be observed that their souls were interwoven in a bond of mutual affection, consideration and esteem. For his part, there was the most deeply ingrained filial affection, acknowledging everything she did for him. She, in turn, possessed every manner of tenderness and devotion; but very careful and measured, for she feared being carried away by sentiment and losing her equilibrium. She did not want to be attached to anything, not even to her own son, but to bear him a love that was entirely disinterested.

“My affection for her was an act of admiration, which is something very laudatory because it is the recognition of a quality. On her part, there was an

attitude of hopefulness in my regard, an invitation to attain that quality. This is the essence of affection”, explained Dr. Plinio.

Beyond natural ties

Nevertheless, there can be not the slightest doubt that, beyond natural ties, there existed between them a sublime and supernatural love, an affinity composed of grace. Called to be the mother of an uncommon man, it is evident that, by a special endowment of the Holy Spirit, Dona Lucilia clearly and profoundly perceived his innocence of soul and the degree of his virtuousness.

She herself, in a letter to Plinio dated April 23, 1950, made manifest her happiness and gratitude to God for having him as a son:

“With all my heart, with all my soul, I thank you for the letter you so affectionately left me, and which brought me so much comfort [...]. I wept, it is true, but thanks be to God, it was from happiness for having received, I, so unworthy and ‘liberal’, the immense gift from the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Most Holy, of such a holy son, so good and devoted, whom I bless with all my soul, and for whom I ask every Divine protection, and the Light of the Divine Holy Spirit.”

There is nothing stronger in the order of creation than the union between souls that love each other, having sanctity as their objective! Compared with this, a diamond itself is like a speck of rice flour.

More than mother, a true Catholic

Moreover, Dr. Plinio was an apostolic Roman Catholic man with such love for the Church that, having a mother such as Dona Lucilia, he carried his detachment to the point of valuing the fact of her being Catholic much more than her being his mother. Let us look at certain passages in which this is made evident:

“If I love Mama so much, it is because she led me to the Church. And if I loved her until the end, it is because I observed her until the end, and until the end I noted that everything in her led to the Catholic Church.”

“I have said many times that I loved and respected Mama. Without a doubt, I respected her as a mother, but that was not the most important thing. The main reason why I loved her was because of this union of souls that existed between us, with sights on God. For her having reflected for me the Catholic Church, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for everything which in her was consonant with

Beyond the natural ties, there existed between them a love made sublime by the supernatural, an affinity made up entirely of grace

me, deliberately placed there by God in order to reflect Him, I was moved to love her in a very special way, more for these aspects than because she was my mother according to nature."

I remember hearing Dr. Plinio relate, during a lunch, an edifying episode that transpired between them. Dona Lucilia was already of a certain age when he posed himself the following question: "To what extent do I love my mother, and to what extent do I love the principles that she represents? If she became a Protestant, would I continue to love her in the same way, or would I have aversion to her? No! I would have aversion, because what I love in her is that which she represents!"

Once, while they were seated at the table, he could not resist. He thought: "It is difficult, but I am going to put her to the test, because I want to see what her reaction will be upon hearing this." And he said to her:

"Mama, do you know what I was thinking the other day? That, God forbid, but if you had the disgrace of ceasing to be a Catholic and become Protestant, I would forsake the house and leave you to live alone. I would continue to maintain you financially, I would take care of all your necessities and I would visit you once a year or every six months, but our relationship would be broken!"

Dona Lucilia accepted this naturally, much as she would if someone had said: "I am thirsty and am going to drink this glass of water." She responded praising his attitude. Years later, Dr. Plinio would comment: "On that day I began to love and admire her



Dona Lucilia with her son Dr. Plinio, in January of 1959

"I loved her until the end because I observed her until the end, and I noted that everything in her led to the Catholic Church"

more than before! Because I had put her to the test, and she had passed with flying colours!"

Were she not his mother, he would love her with the same affection

On the other hand, Dr. Plinio affirmed that, many times during his life, he asked himself a question which appeared to be the opposite of the pre-

vious one, but which was fundamentally the same: "Do I love her so much because she is so good, or because she is my mother?" "If, instead of being my mother, she were my aunt, or a lady of society, or a relation, or an elderly cousin, would I love her as I do? Yes or no?"

And the reply came immediately, leaving no room for doubt: even if she were not his mother and, consequently, there were no natural connection between them, knowing her to be anywhere in the world, he would have loved her with the same tenderness, the same affection, the same esteem and the same appreciation!

"I would want to have her as a mother. And if she were, for example,

my aunt, I would arrange a pretext to go to her house every day; I would find a way for her to be my sponsor, I would do anything to make it explicable that, although her nephew, I would have the same affinity with her that I have with Mama. If she were a cousin, *simile modo*.¹ If she were a lady of society, it would be much more difficult, but I would succeed in the end, arranging things the same way." ♣

Taken, with slight adaptations,
from: CLÁ DIAS, EP,

João Scognamiglio. *O dom de sabedoria na mente, vida e obra de de*
[The Gift of Wisdom in the Mind Life and Work of] Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira.

Città del Vaticano-São Paulo: LEV;
Lumen Sapientiae, 2016, v.I, p.161-166

¹ From Latin: in the same way.

A Song of Praise to the Christ Child

This last December, the Heralds of the Gospel organized hundreds of Christmas concerts in praise of the Christ Child, many of them with the participation of the youth who attend the institution's catechetical projects.

We highlight on these pages the presentations held in Brasília on Ministries Esplanade and in the Pedro Calmon Theatre; in the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo State (ALESP); at Paulo Autran Theatre, in Curitiba; on

the premises of Canção Nova in Várzea Grande; and in the cities of São Paulo, Cuiabá, Maringá, Cotia, Structural City, Joinville, Mairiporã and Campos dos Goytacazes – cities from all over Brazil. Concerts were also held in Toledo Cathedral and in Valencia, Spain; in the Cathedral of Évora and in Guimarães, Portugal; at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Caacupé and the Cathedral of Ciudad del Este, Paraguay; in Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru and Ecuador.







Caieiras (SP) – The Heralds of the Gospel had the joy of celebrating the Lord's Nativity and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, with Bishop Sérgio Aparecido Colombo of Bragança Paulista, who presided over the celebrations at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary on December 25 (photo 1) and January 1 (photos 2 and 3).



Christmas Activities – For the occasion of Christmas, several social activities were carried out by the Heralds of the Gospel, including a visit with the Baby Jesus, enlivened with Christmas carols, to the Base Hospital in Brasília, which was attended by the First Lady of the Federal District, Mayara Noronha (photo 1), to the Holy House of Mercy, in Curitiba (photo 7), and to the Margarita Cruz Ruiz geriatric home, in Guatemala City (photo 5). In addition, food and gifts were distributed at the Parish of Our Lady of Grace, in Caieiras, São Paulo (photo 2), in Cariacica, Espírito Santo State (photo 3), in the community of Tutupali in Tarqui, Ecuador (photo 4), and in the locality of Xitevèle in Boane, Mozambique (photo 6).

Institution of Ministries

On December 19, 2025, sixty-nine members of the Heralds of the Gospel received the ministries of lector and acolyte during the solemn Mass presided over by Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis, Archbishop Emeritus of Aparecida, at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Caeiras (SP).

The ceremony was honoured by the presence of Dr. Fernando Antonio Torres Garcia, then president of the Court of Justice of the State of São Paulo; Dr. Tirso de Salles Meirelles, president of FAESP; the judges Dr. Sulaiman

Miguel Neto, Dr. Erickson Gavazza Marques and Dr. Nino Oliveira Toldo; Dr. Aloisio Pupin, prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of São Paulo; the jurists Dr. João Grandino Rodas and Dr. Dircêo Torrecillas Ramos; State deputies Gil Diniz and Thiago Auricchio, representing the president of ALESP, Deputy André do Prado; Dr. Gilmar Soares Vicente, mayor of Caeiras; Dr. Sonaira Fernandes, councilwoman of the city of São Paulo; and journalist Hugo Roger, from Rede Vida, the channel that broadcast the Holy Mass live.





The “Stone” of Grace versus the Greatness of Man

The blasphemies of the Philistine resounded in the ears of Jesse's young son. What stance should he take in the face of the enemy's insults?



✉ Sr. Diana Milena Devia

The sacred pages contain paradigms for all of history. One of them – and one of the most eloquent – is the duel between a young man who was “ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome” (1 Sam 16:12) and a brutal giant from Philistia (cf. 1 Sam 17).

David had been chosen by God to replace the unfaithful Saul as king of Israel. Since the prophet Samuel had anointed the son of Jesse, the spirit of the Lord had already taken hold of him (cf. 1 Sam 16:13). However, it was necessary for him to gradually gain renown among the people so that, at a certain moment, he would be recognised as monarch. The context for this to occur was not long in coming: the Philistines, seeking revenge for the defeat Saul had inflicted on them, launched a violent counteroffensive.

Audacity, fruit of reason

David served as harpist to the king when the evil spirit took hold, and only the melodies of the shepherd from Bethlehem could relieve him (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23). Thus began his life at court.

When mobilization for war against the Philistines began, his three older brothers enlisted, and he, the youngest of the family, remained at his father's house to tend the flock.

At one point, David was sent by his father to take provisions to his combatant brothers and to obtain news of them. The situation the youth encountered at the camp was most discouraging.

The Philistine and Israelite troops came face to face in the Valley of Elah. Initially, the adversaries presented their best warrior, who proposed a duel with any fighter of the Hebrew army: “give me a man, that we may fight together” (1 Sam 17:10). It was Goliath, a huge man, almost three metres tall. He was clad in armour weighing approximately sixty kilograms and a bronze helmet, and carried a large spear with an iron tip weighing more than seven kilograms!...

Terrified by this giant, the Hebrews cowered, afraid to face him. Who could stand up to this indomitable warrior? The dilemma continued for forty long days, with no solution...

David arrived at the camp as Goliath repeated his challenge, as he had done on previous days. Upon hearing such arrogant words, he was filled with indignation and began to walk among the ranks of soldiers, asking, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel?” Anyone who thinks that the young son of Jesse was motivated by ambition is mistaken;

one need only continue reading to dispel this misconception: “For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam 17:26). His boldness was the product of reason, not emotion. He simply pondered everything before offering to fight the giant!

His stance impressed everyone, especially the king, who, after some hesitation, authorized him to undertake the task. In fact, “Saul did not recognize in him the shepherd from Bethlehem, the skilled musician who had calmed his fury not long before. He had become stronger, his face more manly.”

David's weapons

The young warrior was clad in Saul's armour, the royal sword, a bronze helmet and a breastplate. However, he was not accustomed to such equipment, so much so that he could not even walk! He therefore rejected them immediately. With incredible simplicity, he took his staff, his satchel and his sling, chose five smooth stones and advanced courageously against Goliath.

The practical significance of the stones is that, being smooth, when thrown they do not deviate, as irregular ones do, but rather hit their target accurately. They represent

the five wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ: taking refuge in them and through their merits, there is no evil that we cannot overcome.

The weapons of war, translated into our spiritual life, can represent the great means that the world uses to triumph: prestige, money, oppression, lies... Considering the strength of the enemy, our body trembles, our heart is distressed, fear takes hold of us completely. However, if we take refuge in the Lord God of hosts, fear gives way to the certainty of victory. Thus, the hero of the Most High used the "weapons" of the humble: the stone and the sling, symbols of prayer and trust in the King of Heaven.

Invincibility or camouflaged cowardice?

But if we pay close attention, we will see that beneath the arrogance of the adversary lies a shameful weakness.

Does it not seem strange to the reader that the entire Philistine army hides behind a single man, who stood out for his unusual stature and, moreover, was protected by armour, a shield, and a shield-bearer?... Was Goliath really that strong? Was his invincibility real? Or was it all just a farce? Perhaps all

that display of strength was covering up great cowardice!

This is the stratagem of the world: to use pompous and flashy means to boast, when in reality it has nothing, because it does not have the help of the Almighty. Only those who have God are truly strong and valiant. St. Augustine rightly states: "The world wages a double battle against the soldiers of Christ: it flatters them to seduce them, and it terrorizes them to break their resistance"; however, "even if it presses, it will not oppress, and even if it attacks, it will not prevail."²

We all know the end of the biblical account: David took a stone from his satchel and slung it, striking Goliath on the forehead.

"The same blow that took the life of this proud Philistine instilled such terror in the hearts of all the others that, not daring to try their luck in battle after seeing the one in whom they had placed all their trust fall before their very eyes, they decided to flee."³

A lesson for the new "Davids"

In closing these considerations, it is worth pondering, or rather, questioning our own faith: if David, who was an ancestor of Our Lord and therefore did not yet live under the regime of grace,

was crowned with such a brilliant victory, what epic feats can the children of light accomplish today, strengthened by the merits of the Most Precious Blood of the Saviour and the intercession of our Queen, Mary Most Holy?

May these verses from Sacred Scripture serve as an encouragement to each of us, so that we may not rely on natural strength or be frightened by the threats of evil. Let us rather base our hope on the Almighty, and we will be invincible, as God Himself is invincible! ♣

¹ BERTHE, Augustin. *Relatos bíblicos*. Porto: Civilização, 2005, p.259.

² ST. AUGUSTINE. Sermo 276, n.1-2. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 1984, v.XXV, p.21.

³ JOSEPHUS, Flavius. *História dos Hebreus*. São Paulo: Editora das Américas, 1956, v.II, p.221.



If David achieved such a brilliant victory, what wonders will the sons of light accomplish with the merits of the Passion and Mary's intercession?

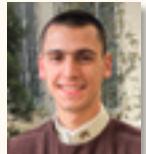
David fights Goliath, by Francesco Pesellino - National Gallery, London



The Mendicant Emperor and the Omnipotent Poor Man

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” But since “the earth is the Lord’s, and those who dwell therein,” what is Caesar’s claim?

→ Angelo Francisco Neto Martins



The scenes illustrated on these pages depict one of the most astounding events in history, not only of the Church, but of civilization itself. It is so emblematic that it marked minds and eras since its occurrence in the 11th century.

Much of this symbolic significance is concentrated in the two protagonists of the paintings. On one side is Henry IV, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the most powerful man of his time, a king of kings. On the other is St. Gregory VII, a simple commoner from northern Italy who had nevertheless been elevated to the See of Peter; he was the Pope.

They were the two supreme potentates of Christendom. And the two most contrasting antagonists.

The Emperor, despite being the sovereign, was a slave to his passions. There was no demand of the flesh that he did not obey, nor any whim of pride to which he did not acquiesce. The Pontiff, on the other hand, was master of himself. A religious from a young age, he was taken from the monastery to guide the ship of Peter; the monastery, however, could never be taken

from him, for he continued to dwell there interiorly through contemplation, humility and detachment.

The ambitious Henry IV would stop at nothing – murder, perjury, theft, or any other crime – to increase his power. But St. Gregory VII also had a holy ambition: that the Church “remain free, pure, and Catholic.” The clash between the two ambitions thus became inevitable.

Henry appropriated the rights of the Church. He appointed and deposed bishops at will, slandered the Pope and persecuted him with arms. To make matters worse, he had the unfortunate idea of electing an anti-pope and “excommunicating” the true Pontiff. But the attack backfired. From the height of the Chair of Peter, the Pontiff solemnly excommunicated the Emperor.

The blow was devastating! Henry’s servants and vassals abandoned him, and from one moment to the next, the great potentate, the ruler of the world, the undefeated conqueror, found himself overthrown...

There was only one way for him to regain his lost throne: to beseech the

Pope for pardon. And so, Henry went to beg at the door of St. Gregory VII, lodged within the walls of Canossa Castle in northern Italy. It was January 1077, and the coldest winter of the century. Barefoot, wearing penitential sackcloth and with tears in his eyes, for three days the imperial mendicant begged the poor monk for favour.

At last, he was received by the Pontiff. On his knees, he declared his unconditional repentance and swore allegiance to the Successor of Peter. He asked for one benefit alone: the lifting of the excommunication that had vanquished him.

Temporal power bowed down to spiritual power. The sceptre recognized the universal dominion of the Shepherd over the entire Catholic flock. Caesar was at God's feet... in his rightful place.

"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). But since "the earth is the Lord's, and those who dwell therein" (Ps 23:1), what is Caesar's claim? In fact, what power does he hold except that which comes from Above (cf. Jn 19:11)? What does he possess that he has not received from God (cf. 1 Cor 4:7)?

The mission of secular governments is none other than to guide civil society towards its natural and supernatural end. And this consists in the glory of the Creator and the eternal salvation of souls.² Legislation that favours sin or prohibits virtue therefore betrays its obligation and is in a state of rebellion against God. Thus, a ruler can only be faithful to his calling to the extent that he kneels before the Lord.

But this is not the only lesson bequeathed to us by the historic event recounted here. By subjugating the Emperor, the Pope made it clear for the centuries to come that it is not the Church that must adapt to the world, but *vice versa*. As the Vicar of Christ, the Pope receives from Him the omnipotence of truth. And St. Gregory



Henry IV before St. Gregory VII, by Taddeo and Federico Zuccari - Apostolic Palace (Vatican); on the previous page, "Henry IV at Canossa", by Eduard Schwoiser - Maximilianeum Foundation, Munich (Germany)

VII knew that it is not by yielding that one conquers for God. ♣

¹ ST. GREGORY VII. *Episitola LXIV. Ad omnes fideles*: PL 148, 709.

² In this regard, St. Thomas affirms: "Since heavenly beatitude is the end of a life well

lived in the present, it is therefore the duty of the ruling class to seek a good life for the masses, as befits the attainment of heavenly beatitude, that is, by prescribing what leads to heavenly beatitude and prohibiting the opposite, to the extent that it can" (ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *De regno ad regem Cypri*. L.I, c.16).

Infuse Us With a Ray of Your Immaculateness

*W*e are children of Mary Immaculate! And if we are fond of our natural mothers, much greater should be our love for the Mother of our supernatural life. Filled with gratitude, let us ask her that, just as She triumphed over sin, She may triumph in our souls, infusing them with a ray of her immaculateness. And that, purified of all our miseries, we may be assisted by her Divine Spouse and transformed into effective instruments for the advancement of another triumph, promised by her in Fatima and so desired by us: that of Her Wise and Immaculate Heart.

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