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ANGELUS

A JOURNAL OF ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

INSIDE

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THE SSPX: Interviews
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and Fr. du Chalard

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and the Popes,
by Fr. Iscara
(2010 SSPX Conference)

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of Vatican II

The Lord's Prayer



THE GIFT of THE MAGI

The Defense of Tradition

as transmitted by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre



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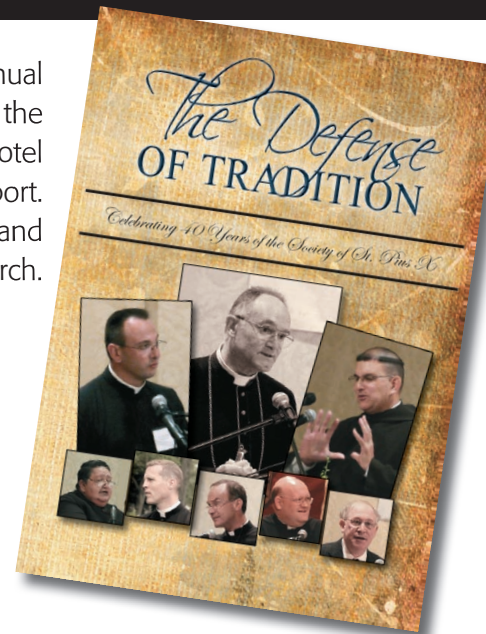
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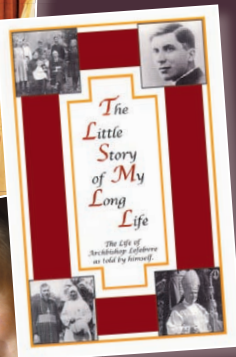
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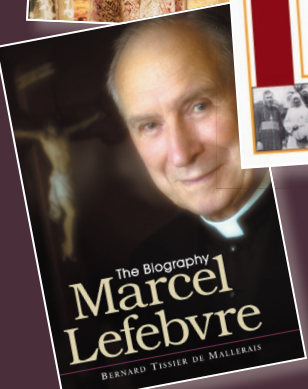
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—Pope St. Pius X

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"Instaurare omnia in Christo — To restore all things in Christ."
Motto of Pope St. Pius X

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Letter from the Editor

Christmas brings to our attention the one and only way that God chose human happiness to be realized: through His Incarnation, through a life of imitating His virtues. Soon after His coming into the world it became clear that the world would not accept Him. This is expressed in the Gospel of St. John: “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (Jn. 1:10-11).

Consequently we find many ways in which the world seeks happiness without God or in a different way than the example of Jesus Christ would suggest. While open atheism might be less common in the West, we often find a new way of seeking happiness which is, in terms of the tradition of the Church, modernist. Modernism is a sign, not only and perhaps not even so much of a wrong theology, but of a new approach to the Christian life. The old Christian truth that the servant is not greater than his master (see Jn. 15:20) has been changed into a theory of human progress that supposedly allows us to combine the world and the “kingdom of Christ” in a new way. In other words, you can live a Christian life without caring too much about the commandments of God, because He is, as they say, a “merciful God who forgives our weakness instead of punishing it.”

This is, broadly speaking, not wrong, but the logical connection is insufficient. God is merciful and He forgives sin on condition that there is an honest intention of repentance and doing amendment. God does not sell out His creation nor does He adapt to human standards. If we are talking about a “church of saints,” we are well aware that the human person is the only being in this world who has to realize “what he is.” We would not tell an animal that it should behave like a monkey or a lion or whatever, because we know that it is doing exactly that by its own nature. There is no threat to the behavior of an animal and, consequently, no moral question involved. This is very different for the human person, who has “to become what he is meant to be.” In other words: for a human being there is a continual danger of missing his true mission, of doing things he should not do—of sinning. Sin is nothing else than missing the fundamental orientation given to human beings by the laws of nature or the laws of God.

Christ came into this world in order to remind us of the orientation of the human being, of the threat for the soul in this world and even, in certain ways, of the anti-Christian character of this world. Any attempt to create a “paradise on earth” is fundamentally compromised by the persecution of the Son of God after His incarnation. There is only one way to happiness, the way which was found and formulated by one of the most famous seekers of God of all times: “...for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*).

We know examples of His persecution: Herod killed the innocent children (since then so often repeated: the innocent have to suffer for the whims of the rulers), the flight into Egypt, the conflict with the religious rulers of the time, and finally the “death of God,” a crime which has haunted, in some mystic way, those who were involved in it ever since.

Does this mean that misery is part of the human condition? Not really, but it means that riches are often dangerous (“It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven”—Mt. 19:24) and might easily divert our direction of life from true goods. “Paradise on earth” is the idea of Lenin, not Jesus Christ. By the way: the communist paradise was the poorest and most brutal of all time.

But communism might only be the most evident example of the failure of a world without God. Our materialistic society is another and probably more important for us. Did Christ not come into this world in order to teach us to be independent from material goods? Yes, he did. And Christmas is the herald of this attitude.

Instaurare Omnia in Christo,
FR. MARKUS HEGGENBERGER

THE DEFENSE OF TRADITION

ARCHBISHOP LEFEBVRE AND THE POPES



At the first Angelus Press conference in October 2010, Fr. Juan-Carlos Iscara gave the opening talk. As the theme of the conference was the 40th anniversary of the founding of the SSPX, Fr. Iscara gave the background of Archbishop Lefebvre's life. Special emphasis is given to the popes who led the Catholic Church in this period.



Many years ago, visiting Italy with a group of seminarians, we happened to be in the ruins of Pompeii in our black cassocks under a scorching midday sun. A group of cheerful Italian nuns, well provided for the occasion with umbrellas and wide-brimmed hats, approached us. Although commiseration and concern for our melting selves were written over their faces, they were thrilled and happy at seeing so many young men readying themselves for the priesthood of Our Lord. We chatted, in broken English and more broken Italian, and soon one of them asked, "What is your congregation?" We proudly answered that it was the Society of St. Pius X. They didn't know it, but realized that it had to be a relatively new foundation. So they asked the next, fateful question, "Who is the founder?" We hadn't finished saying "Archbishop Lefebvre" when the smiles disappeared; they made their hasty, near impolite farewells and left us there alone, baking under an equally unforgiving sun.

As we were already seasoned travellers in modern-day, not-so-Catholic Italy, such a reaction was not unexpected, so when it came, although still hurtful, it did not surprise us much. We well know that, in ecclesiastical circles, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre is widely known as the "rebel, disobedient bishop," branded a

“schismatic” and even a “heretic.” But why are such judgments passed upon him? Certainly not on account of his behavior throughout a life that was apostolic, highly virtuous, edifying—as even his adversaries acknowledge—but only on account of and as a consequence of the positions he assumed during Vatican II, when he denounced the conciliar deviations and foresaw their dechristianizing consequences, and later, in the ensuing conflicts with the promoters and defenders of the Council, the Popes included.

In doing so, Archbishop Lefebvre became truly a “sign of contradiction.” As a recent academic puts it, “the word ‘Lefebvre’ has suffered a trans-signification; it has lost its simple function of surname, to become the definition of a distinctive manner of understanding the Faith, the Church, Catholicism itself.”¹

Today, almost 20 years after his death, 45 after the end of the Council, 40 after the foundation of the SSPX, when the clerical generation of the Council is passing away and a new generation is coming of age—a generation that has received only a distorted view of Archbishop Lefebvre—it is necessary for us, his children and disciples, to present him anew, reminding the Church and the world who he was and somehow still is, in spite of all distortions—a priest, a soldier of Christ, a defender of the Faith and of the Church, and also, appearances notwithstanding, a staunch defender of the pre-eminent role of the Successor of Peter.

Now, even a summary presentation of Archbishop Lefebvre’s event-filled life would be a massive undertaking. Thus, time limitations have obliged us to choose some vantage points from which to contemplate and present anew his life and work. The thread that we will follow throughout this first conference will be the unbroken continuity of a vital bond of fidelity that united him to the papacy and its perennial Magisterium.

To avoid both repetitions in our exposition and losing sight of this line we are trying to follow, let us present in advance what we consider to be some of the salient characteristics of Archbishop Lefebvre’s priestly and episcopal actions, which stand as witness and proof of this unfailing fidelity. Firstly, in marked contrast to the popular perception of his person and work, he was not overwhelmingly attached to his own ideas. He most certainly had his own opinions, judgments, inclinations, but, in fact, he acted many times against them, in obedience to his superiors and to the Pope. As long as only contingent matters—whether administrative, political, or temporal—were at stake, he yielded and submitted, even if he disagreed. But when the Faith and, thus, souls, were endangered, he reacted

vigorously, ever mindful of his episcopal mission, as a successor of the Apostles, a member of the *Ecclesia docens*—“the teaching Church,” entrusted by God with the transmission of the Faith. Secondly, he knew well that the defense of the Faith cannot be merely passive, but requires a corresponding attack against the contrary errors. Thus, keeping in mind the dictum of Card. Pie, “*Destruenda sunt aliena ut nostra credatur*”—“The [contrary doctrines] of others must be destroyed so that ours may be believed”—his reaction was habitually two-pronged, consisting in the exposition of the Faith and the refutation of errors. Thirdly, in all his battles he observed what we may call the “law of proportionality,” that is, he had recourse to the means that were most adequate and proportionate to solve the problem at hand—without going to extremes—doing no more, but no less, than what the problem required.

For facility and clarity of exposition, we have partitioned his life in four great, distinctive chronological periods: first, his years of formation, particularly at the seminary; then, his life as a priest and missionary bishop, and later, as a Conciliar Father; and, finally, what we may call “the SSPX years.” We will take perhaps a little more time in the period before his increased notoriety in the world at large, a period less well known even by traditionalists, but in which the seeds of the future were planted, the directions of a life were traced.

The Years of Formation

His early life was already marked by a strong devotion to the Pope. His own family was intensely ultramontane, that is, devotedly loyal to the Papacy and opposed to the tendencies of episcopal independence from the Holy See, commonly known as Gallicanism, which had so much harmed the Church of France in the past. His father, René Lefebvre, had a well-founded distrust of liberal ideas and institutions, finding in his Catholic faith the certainty that a just society must respect God and the hierarchies instituted by Him. Strongly guided by this spirit that pervaded their family, the two eldest sons considered very early on a vocation to the priesthood. When the time came to follow this vocation, René Lefebvre, aware of the mounting crisis in the diocese of Lille—the renewed penetration of liberalism and modernism under the lenient rule of Benedict XV—insisted upon sending young Marcel to Rome, to be safely formed there for the priesthood.

But, long before that, the first recorded episode in the life-long relationship of Archbishop Lefebvre with the papacy is worthy of the *foretti* of some saint. After making his First Communion, the little Marcel wrote, without knowledge of his parents, a letter of gratitude to St. Pius X for having allowed

¹ L. M. I. Gardaleta, quoted in Siccardi, 9.

In these formative years we see, firmly established and virtuously practiced, the essential attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre towards the popes—an attitude of reverence, submission and gratitude, and an overwhelming desire to collaborate with them.

him to receive Our Blessed Lord at such a young age. If we may be permitted to express a pious wish, we would like to see in this episode the first providential link with St. Pius X, already hinting at what was to come.

From the custody of a father of strong faith, with clear ideas on matters of religion and a very Catholic understanding of politics, a man who discerned in modernistic progressivism and liberalism the root causes of the prevailing temporal and spiritual evils of the times, the young Marcel Lefebvre passed to the custody of a spiritual father, Fr. Henri le Floch, a man equally decided in the combat against liberalism and modernism, who exercised his paternal role by transmitting a doctrinal and spiritual patrimony, the complete wisdom of the Church.

The French Seminary in Rome, in via Santa Chiara, entrusted to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, had been founded in answer to the will of the Pope, to fight against Gallicanism and to form the future bishops of France in complete fidelity and submission to the Holy See.

For the young Marcel Lefebvre “Santa Chiara” was a “revelation” and, later, “a guiding light for his whole priestly and episcopal life.”² The Rector, Fr. le Floch—a friend of the popes, consultant of the Holy Office, defender of the purity of the Faith—taught him who the popes were, what they taught and their absolute continuity in the fight against errors, trying to preserve both the world and the Church from the evils that affect them today. There Marcel Lefebvre learned the “*sentire cum Ecclesia*,”—“to feel, to think with the Church”—to leave aside all personal ideas in order to embrace the mind of the Church, to judge of all things as the Church does, to see all events in the light of the spirit and the unerring papal teachings.³ As the popes had condemned the modern errors contrary to Catholic doctrine, so he learned to condemn them.⁴ There, at the French Seminary, he was taught the cult of truth, and the horror for half-truths, or for diminished or dissembled truths.

Many years later, Archbishop Lefebvre acknowledged, to the astonishment and mild amusement of his seminarians, that when he arrived at “Santa Chiara” he had many false ideas, but, he said: “I was happy to learn the truth, happy to know that I was wrong, that I needed to change some of my notions, and I did this above all by the study of encyclicals of Popes who condemned modern errors.”⁵

He studied a “formally Roman theology,”⁶ that is, a theology insistent on the existence of a visible and living papal Magisterium, on the infallibility of the popes and of the ecumenical councils participating in their ordinary infallibility. He absorbed this Roman creed, making it his own, to the point where, in any discussion or in cases of doubt, it was enough for him to refer to the Magisterium to dissipate any of his hesitations or contrary opinions. This is the “*Romanitas*,” the abiding love for Rome and the submission to its Magisterium, that he has transmitted to his priests and seminarians.

Marcel Lefebvre was shaken and upset by the condemnation of the *Action Française*—a strongly anti-liberal French movement, based upon sound principles of natural law—but he submitted to the papal decisions: “*Roma locuta est, causa finita est*,”—“Rome has spoken, the matter is closed,” although he could foresee the consequences for French politics. And his submission to Pius XI remained unchanged even when informed about the “*absolutely scandalous manner*”⁷ in which the Roman authorities, yielding to political pressures, had dismissed Fr. le Floch from the French Seminary. Many years later, speaking to his seminarians, he would have only words of praise for the doctrine of Pius XI, while limiting his criticism of this pope to a regretful acknowledgement of his entanglements with worldly politics. But still, painful as it was, in this episode there was a providential lesson to be learned, “because it showed the malice and wickedness of the enemies of truth.”⁸

² Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 26.

³ Tissier, 35.

⁴ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 28.

⁵ CONSPEC 36 A, November 30, 1976.

⁶ Abbé Berto.

⁷ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 29.

⁸ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 34.

At “Santa Chiara,” Marcel Lefebvre pronounced for the first time the anti-modernist oath, which he would later repeat on other occasions, when taking office and in his episcopal consecration, and to this most solemn promise before God he remained faithful his whole life: “I firmly accept and embrace each and every doctrine defined by the Church’s unerring teaching authority and all that she has maintained and declared, especially those points of doctrine which directly oppose the errors of our time.”

It was not in his character to take such a promise lightly or to perjure himself.

In these formative years we see, firmly established and virtuously practiced, the essential attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre towards the popes—an attitude of reverence, submission and gratitude, and an overwhelming desire to collaborate with them. Here is the root of his often-repeated “*Tradidi quod et accepi*,”—“I have transmitted what I have received”—seeing himself as a successor of the Apostles, acting in close union with the Successor of Peter, serving thus as a link in the unbreakable chain of the transmission of doctrine until the end of times. Here is the root of Archbishop Lefebvre’s combat, and the source of his distress and subsequent actions in post-Vatican II times, when he witnessed the seismic shift in the understanding of the papacy brought about by the Council and its aftermath, and the consequent dangers for the Faith and for souls.

Life as Priest and Missionary Bishop

His life as a priest and even as a missionary bishop was lived in a spirit of prompt and effective obedience to his superiors. After his first year in a French parish, close to home, he entered the novitiate of the Holy Ghost Fathers, at that time still fueled by the spirit impressed upon it by its founder, the Ven. Francis Libermann, and thus, still characterized by a strong attachment to the Holy See.

Then followed the assignments in Africa, many in few years. He always went where he was sent, whatever his personal inclinations may have been—and in some cases, clearly against his inclinations—but always devoted to the service of the Church, following with docility the directives of his superiors and of the Popes. “As a missionary, he rose steadily through the clerical ranks, but it is clear that he was almost entirely without ambition in this regard, except in so far as he wanted to exercise his missionary zeal.”⁹

In 1944, while still in Africa, he received the news of the death of his father, René Lefebvre, in

the Nazi concentration camp of Sonnenburg. We have never heard Archbishop Lefebvre boast of this veritable martyrdom of his father, because for him remembrance and gratitude were expressed better by an ever closer fidelity to this example of devotion given by a man who spent himself in the service of his faith, of his family, and of his country.

In 1945, he was sent back to France, appointed as rector of the seminary of his congregation in Mortain, an appointment that caused him another “heavy trial,”¹⁰ now that of being torn away from what had become his beloved Africa—but back to France he went.

In Mortain he found the students affected and disoriented by the new, revolutionary ideas that had sprung up during the war years, and tempted by the new experiments being made elsewhere in the world and in the Church. Acknowledging the difficulty to counteract these new tendencies, Archbishop Lefebvre strove to give to his seminarians a solid foundation on the unchangeable, continual exposition of the doctrinal truths by the Magisterium, encouraging them to “*sentire cum Ecclesia*”—“Never to have a thought that is not in conformity with the truth of the Church.”¹¹

In June 1947, Archbishop Lefebvre was nominated as Vicar-Apostolic of Dakar, and a few months later he received the episcopal consecration from Cardinal Liénart in his native parish in Tourcoing. In the reception following the ceremony, Archbishop Lefebvre expressed again his gratitude to Fr. le Floch, “for having given [him] sound principles of the Faith, for having attached [him] to Our Lord in life and in death, and for having helped [him] to understand the drama which the Church was going through, the errors contrary to truth and against Our Lord”¹² and he reaffirmed his own loyalty to the principles learned at the French Seminary. The very liberal Cardinal Liénart rushed to tell everything to the nuncio in Paris, Msgr. Giuseppe Roncalli, the future John XXIII, thus helping to prepare the stage for the drama to come.¹³

Having proven his worth after a year of service in Africa, Pius XII appointed him Apostolic Delegate for French-speaking Africa, with residence at Dakar. In the brief of appointment, signed by Msgr. Giovanni Battista Montini on behalf of the Pope, Pius XII acknowledged and praised the prudence, wisdom, and activity of Msgr. Lefebvre, and his zeal for the reign of Christ.¹⁴ He became thus the representative of the Pope, responsible for 44 ecclesiastical territories in continental and insular

¹⁰ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 55.

¹¹ Quoted in Siccardi, 110.

¹² Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 61.

¹³ Tissier, 155.

¹⁴ Tissier, 205.

⁹ Stephen McNerney, in <http://www.oriensjournal.com/17ghost.htm>.

Pius XII greatly appreciated his Apostolic Delegate, and the sentiment was reciprocated. The Pope is reported to have said to Msgr. Veuillot: “Archbishop Lefebvre is certainly the most efficient and the most qualified of the Apostolic Delegates.”

Africa and for the diplomatic relations with the French government in all matters having to do with these territories. In this position, “he was one of the most important figures in the Church” in his time.¹⁵

The instructions given by Pius XII were clear: to increase the native clergy and to create a native hierarchy; to establish a hierarchy of ordinary bishops and episcopal assemblies; to develop Catholic works, and to incorporate, insofar as it was possible, compatible African customs.¹⁶ Archbishop Lefebvre applied himself to this task with his habitual zeal and thoroughness, tempered with a healthy measure of patience and good humor. He did not hide his own opinions, particularly his misgivings about the assemblies of bishops he was establishing and in which he already foresaw the dangers of collegiality, but nonetheless, he “dutifully carried out his responsibilities by obedience, keeping his own thoughts to himself and representing publicly only the thinking of the Holy See,”¹⁷ thus upholding the authority of the Pope wherever it was contested.

Pius XII greatly appreciated his Apostolic Delegate, and the sentiment was reciprocated. The Pope is reported to have said to Msgr. Veuillot: “Archbishop Lefebvre is certainly the most efficient and the most qualified of the Apostolic Delegates.”¹⁸ Thus trusted, and with his wide experience in the mission field, Archbishop Lefebvre was the foremost advisor of Pius XII for writing the encyclical “*Fidei donum*,” which reinvigorated missionary work worldwide. On his part, Archbishop Lefebvre immediately realized that there was between the Pope and himself “a great union of thought, that [they] were well united in the desire to extend Our Lord’s kingdom and to live truly the Christian and priestly life.”¹⁹ He added: “The Pope was always very friendly with me and provided a lot of support and encouragement. He was a true father, very good, very simple, and at the same time very dignified and very noble. He was a man that

commanded respect in those who had dealings with him.”²⁰

In the years after the war, and more clearly with the beginning of John XXIII’s pontificate, it was clear that European bishops in Africa were becoming “undesirable, a burden.”²¹ First, Archbishop Lefebvre ceased to be the Apostolic Delegate, remaining only as archbishop of Dakar. Later, seeing the drift of events and ideas, he offered his resignation from Dakar, which was eagerly accepted. The Pope transferred him to Tulle, in France, a very small and poor diocese. This could be construed as a “demotion,” and it was most probably due to pressures from the French bishops, who certainly disliked him and were, at that moment, particularly upset over his support of Jean Ousset and the anti-liberal movement of the *Cité Catholique*.²² Archbishop Lefebvre was keenly aware of these undercurrents of hostility towards his person and ideas, and of the dissolving forces already at work—in Africa, in his congregation, in France, and even in the Roman Curia. Nonetheless, he never reacted against the decisions of the Pope, obeying and, as always, encouraging others to a similar obedience.

With his habitual zeal, always docile to the promptings of Providence, he applied himself to strengthen and restore his new diocese, both materially and spiritually.

Practical and objective as usual, when other prelates were having presumptuous dreams about the priests of the 21st century, he took special care of his own clergy, suggesting to his priests to live together in small rural communities to foster their spiritual life.²³

Nonetheless, he had to leave this task unfinished, due to his election as Superior General of his congregation and, at about the same time, his appointment as member of the Central Preparatory Commission for the Council.

¹⁵ Fr. Vincent Cosmao, O.P., quoted in Tissier, 232.

¹⁶ Tissier, 210-217.

¹⁷ Fr. Jean Watine, S.J., quoted in Tissier, 232.

¹⁸ Tissier, 231.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 65.

²⁰ Quoted in Tissier, 229.

²¹ Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 77.

²² Lefebvre, *Little Story*, 78.

²³ Cf. Angles, Biography.

The Council and After

During the Council, his predominant concern was “to put forward the Faith in all its purity and integrity.”²⁴ But, from the beginning, the violent attacks against the Magisterium and its essential organs made clear that one of the progressives’ goals was to modify profoundly the traditional understanding of the teaching authority in the Church. As the Council progressed, the chipping away at the magisterial authority increased. Thus, the infallibility of the Pope was presented in the context of the infallibility of the Church, and in this way somehow diminished the import of the Pope’s personal infallibility. But the deadliest blow was delivered by the approval of the decree on religious liberty, a concept that is, by definition, the direct opposition to a Magisterium that imposes the Catholic truth, morally obliging the subject to accept it.

To deal with the problems arising in the Council, Archbishop Lefebvre followed the “law of proportionality” of which we have spoken, that is, he had recourse to means that were not extreme, but proportional and sufficient to tackle the problem that confronted him. Thus, to the influential, unofficial groups of the progressives, he helped to oppose another group, by coordinating in the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum* the efforts of traditionally-minded Conciliar Fathers. This group, although representative of a minority, was well organized and vocal, and, as such, highly resented by the reformers. And when “Paul VI blessed the adulterous union between the liberal conception of man and society with the Catholic doctrine, [by] reducing systematically the influence of the traditionalists and opposing any declaration which could “hurt” non-Catholics,”²⁵ an implacable persecution started against the members of the traditional *Coetus*. One of the Archbishop’s cousins, on the other side of the doctrinal fence, Cardinal Lefebvre, declared that he could never forgive what the Archbishop did in the Council—that is (we translate), his active and vocal opposition to the winds of change, based upon his fidelity to the perennial teachings of the Popes.

During the Council, Archbishop Lefebvre did what he could to uphold the cause, the authority of the Pope, putting his trust in him to set matters right—and, in the end, being sorely distressed with the realization that Paul VI himself was aiding and abetting, at least by his inaction, the prevailing errors. Romano Amerio has pointed out how the pontificate of Paul VI marked a turning point in

the process of post-conciliar errors. With Paul VI’s understanding of his role as Pope, to which he was conditioned by his personal character, and in the context of the conciliar reforms, came into being a new perception of the Petrine ministry, a shift from governing to admonishing, which was in fact, a renunciation, a non-functioning of the papal authority.²⁶ And this crisis of authority at the top filtered down in the Church, affecting and undermining all other authorities.

The Second Vatican Council became, as Cardinal Suenens put it, “1789 in the Church.” As happened with the events of the French Revolution in 1789, the Council became, indeed, a revolution, a reversal of the existing order—a disorder that constituted a new reality: “the Conciliar Church,” in the expression of Msgr. Benelli, Secretary of State for Paul VI.

In the ensuing doctrinal and disciplinary whirlwind, Archbishop Lefebvre remained steadfast, as he was before—he did not change, although from the outside it may have looked as if he was forcing his way in a contrary direction. For this we have the testimony of Fr. Vincent Cosmao, OP, once prior of the Dominicans in Dakar: “It is the Church which has changed, not Archbishop Lefebvre. He really is the witness of that Church which was certain of her truth, rights and power, and which considered herself alone capable of saying how best to organize society.”²⁷

His work as Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, between 1962 and 1968, was the culmination of his missionary life. Throughout his life, he had directed his students, priests, and missionaries according to the principles of obedience and fidelity that he had applied to his own life.²⁸ In the aftermath of the Council, when those principles were rejected and finding himself unwilling to collaborate in the dismantling of his own congregation, there was no other path open to him than to resign from his post and retire. Of his own accord, he accepted to pass the remainder of his life in obscurity, not demanding or expecting anything for himself—but he retired to Rome, to be as physically close to the See of Peter as he had spiritually been throughout his life.

But with the end of the Council, Divine Providence opened for him a new field of mission, this time within the Church...

²⁴ Letter to the Members of the Holy Ghost Fathers, during the First Session of the Council, quoted in Muzzio, 38.

²⁵ Cf. Angles, Biography.

²⁶ Amerio, 143-150.

²⁷ Tissier, 195.

²⁸ Cf. Muzzio, 34.

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The SSPX

In the preface of his *Spiritual Journey*, Archbishop Lefebvre wrote a mysterious and beautiful paragraph:

Before entering—if it pleases God—into the bosom of the Holy Trinity, I will be allowed to realize the dream of which God gave me a glimpse one day in the cathedral of Dakar. The dream was to transmit, before the progressive degradation of the priestly ideal, in all of its doctrinal purity and in all of its missionary charity, the Catholic priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as He conferred it on His Apostles, just as the Roman Church always transmitted it until the middle of the twentieth century.²⁹

This dream became true in 1970.

Archbishop Lefebvre was always aware that, as bishop, he had been given a mission, he had been charged with a special concern for the common good of the universal Church. In the circumstances in which he found himself then, it was for Divine Providence to show the way, to provide the means for securing this common good. In due time, a way was shown. Again using proportionate means, avoiding extremes, he fulfilled his providential duty by founding, not a “Vatican in exile,” but a religious society, our SSPX, to preserve the “Faith of always,” against all the attenuations and reinterpretations, reductions and negations of Conciliar and post-Conciliar times³⁰—and to form priests at the service of the Church and of the Pope, “priests for tomorrow.”

It would be impossible, in such a short space, to give even a more or less summary exposition of the relations with Rome during the years between the foundation of the SSPX and the Archbishop’s death—years filled with events, ups and downs, hopes and disappointments. As those details are easily available in a number of different publications, we have chosen, as an alternative, to refer to Archbishop Lefebvre’s statements of principle, which were the guidelines for his concrete actions during those years. He always made clear his own fidelity to traditional Rome, to the traditional

Magisterium of the Church, and wherever he went—in lectures, spiritual conferences, sermons, books—he encouraged others to keep the same fidelity.

In his luminous declaration of November 1974 he stated the fundamental distinction that guided his work and still guides us:

We hold fast, with all our heart and with all our soul, to Catholic Rome, Guardian of the Catholic faith and of the traditions necessary to preserve this faith, to Eternal Rome, Mistress of wisdom and truth. We refuse, on the other hand, and have always refused to follow the Rome of neo-Modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies which were clearly evident in the Second Vatican Council and, after the Council, in all the reforms which issued from it.³¹

The sermon of the 30th anniversary of his episcopal consecration, in 1977, summarizes his love and understanding of the Papacy:

It is an extraordinary gift that God has made us in giving us the Popes, giving us precisely this perpetuity in truth, communicated to us through the Successors of Peter. The Deposit of Faith does not belong to the Pope. It is the treasure of truth which has been taught during twenty centuries. He must transmit it faithfully and exactly to all those under him who are charged in turn to communicate the truth of the Gospel.³²

But—he asks—what should we do when, for whatever reason, the Pope fails to fulfill this mission?

We cannot follow error, change truth, just because the one who is charged with transmitting it is weak and allows error to spread around him. We don’t want the darkness to encroach on us. We want to live in the light of truth. We remain faithful to that which has been taught for two thousand years. Never can the Trinity be changed. Never can the redemptive work of Christ through the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass be changed. These things are eternal; they belong to God. How can someone here below change those things? Impossible! This is why, without worrying about all that is happening around us in these times, we ought to affirm our Creed, our Ten Commandments, meditate on the Sermon on the Mount, which is also our law. We must attach ourselves to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to the Sacraments, awaiting the light that will shine around us again. That is all. We must do

²⁹ Lefebvre, *Spiritual Journey*, iii, quoted in Angles, *Short History*.

³⁰ Msgr. Brunero Gherardini, quoted in *Le jugement de Mgr Brunero Gherardini sur le débat théologique entre la Tradition et le Concile Vatican II*.

³¹ Complete text in Tissier, 620-621.

³² In all the quotes taken from this long sermon, we have suppressed the repetitions proper to the spoken style, and slightly abridged the expressions, without altering anything of its substance.

this without becoming bitter or violent in a spirit that is unfaithful to Our Lord.

And so, my dear friends, be faithful—faithful to the Pope, successor of Peter, when he shows himself to be truly the successor of Peter. Because that is what a Pope is and it is in this sense that we have need of him. We are not of those who want to break with the authority of the Church, with the successor of Peter. But neither are we of those who want to break with twenty centuries of tradition in the Church, with twenty centuries of successors of Peter! We have made our choice. We have chosen to be obedient in the real sense. We want to remain faithful to the successors of Peter who transmitted to us the Deposit of the Faith. It is in this sense that we are faithful to the Catholic Church, that we remain within it and can never go into schism. That is what guarantees for us the past, the present and the future. Sustaining ourselves with the past, we are sure of the present and the future.

As the time passed, it is undeniable that there was a perceptible hardening of his expressions, which ran parallel to Rome's hardening in its continued refusal to even consider making what he had called "*the experiment of Tradition*," and which also corresponded to his distress and indignation at John Paul II's ecumenical meeting of religions at Assisi in 1986. But, contrary to what some expected or hoped for, he did not succumb to the sedevacantist temptation.

On the contrary, even when Archbishop Lefebvre proceeded to what is seen as the ultimate act of his so-called "disobedience," the episcopal consecrations of 1988, he reaffirmed the principle that had constantly guided his actions:

There is no question of separating ourselves from Rome, or of putting ourselves under a foreign government, or of establishing a sort of parallel church. It is out of the question for us to do such things. Far from us the miserable thought of separating ourselves from Rome! On the contrary, it is in order to manifest our attachment to Rome that we are performing this ceremony. It is in order to manifest our attachment to Eternal Rome, to the Pope, and to all those who have preceded these last Popes who, unfortunately since the Second Vatican Council, have thought it their duty to adhere to grievous errors which are demolishing the Church and the Catholic Priesthood.

Conclusion

As we said at the beginning, Archbishop Lefebvre's life can be summarized in one word, fidelity. Fidelity to the principles he received at the French Seminary in Rome, fidelity to the spirit of "*Romanitas*," to the spirit of submission to the constant and consistent Magisterium of the Roman See.

Malicious foes and uncomprehending bystanders have considered him a fossil, a relic, stubbornly attached to a past that is now irrelevant, a past that has nothing to say to the world and to the Church of today. To this accusation, Archbishop Lefebvre himself repeatedly answered by paraphrasing St.

John Chrysostom's expression, "I prepare the future by being faithful to the past." He was not simply attached to the Church of the past. He understood that, by preserving Tradition faithfully, he defended not only the Church of yesterday, but also that of today and of tomorrow. The Church cannot break with or deny her past—because for the Church, Mystical Body of Christ, past and future are identified in an atemporal Present.

As Cardinal Pie, who, on the day of his enthronement as Bishop of Poitiers, exclaimed, "I am a bishop, I will speak up!" Archbishop Lefebvre rendered to the papacy his most signal service by refusing to be a "mute dog," by elevating his voice as an echo of the perennial papal teachings, by appealing to Rome, with Rome, against Rome.

Where is the proof of this, our assertion of his unfailing fidelity? We may answer that it is to be found in the present attitude of the SSPX, that is, in our certainty that the solution to the present crisis can come only from Rome, that our Society is only an instrument to be used by the Vicar of Christ for that restoration. If we have and still hold this position, it is because we have received it from Archbishop Lefebvre, from his example and teaching, to which we remain, by the grace of God, still faithful.

Archbishop Lefebvre's so-called "rebellion" was nothing else than the external manifestation and the fulfillment of his episcopal mission of transmitting, as he had received, the doctrinal and spiritual patrimony built up by the Church in almost 2,000 years of a history guided by the Holy Ghost. And in doing so, he has shown himself to be a man of obedience, a faithful son of the Church. His "disobedience" was in fact an act of fidelity, fidelity to the Church and to the Pope. It is ironic that many of Archbishop Lefebvre's most vocal accusers are precisely those who at every step have attempted to thwart, disobey or simply disregard the most Catholic decisions and teachings of the recent Popes.

Archbishop Lefebvre, living his whole life in this unwavering fidelity, has become thus a witness—a martyr, we may say—to the Papacy. His life may thus appear to us as an illustration of the liturgical acclamation, "*Tu es Petrus!*"—an affirmation of Catholic doctrine, maintained against adversaries and reformers, and even against Peter himself, when Peter seemed to forget who he is...

Let us quote the moving, final paragraph of Bishop Tissier's biography of Archbishop Lefebvre:

When God asked, on March 25, 1991³³ what he had done with the grace of his priesthood and episcopacy, what indeed may he have replied, this old soldier for the faith ...? Lord, look, I have handed on everything that I could hand on; the Catholic faith, the Catholic priesthood, and

³³ The date of Msgr. Lefebvre's death.

also the Catholic episcopacy; You gave me all of that, and all of that I handed on so that the Church might continue. Your great Apostle said, *Tradidi quod et accepi* and like him I wanted to say, *Tradidi quod et accepi*. I have handed on what I received. Everything that I received I have handed on.

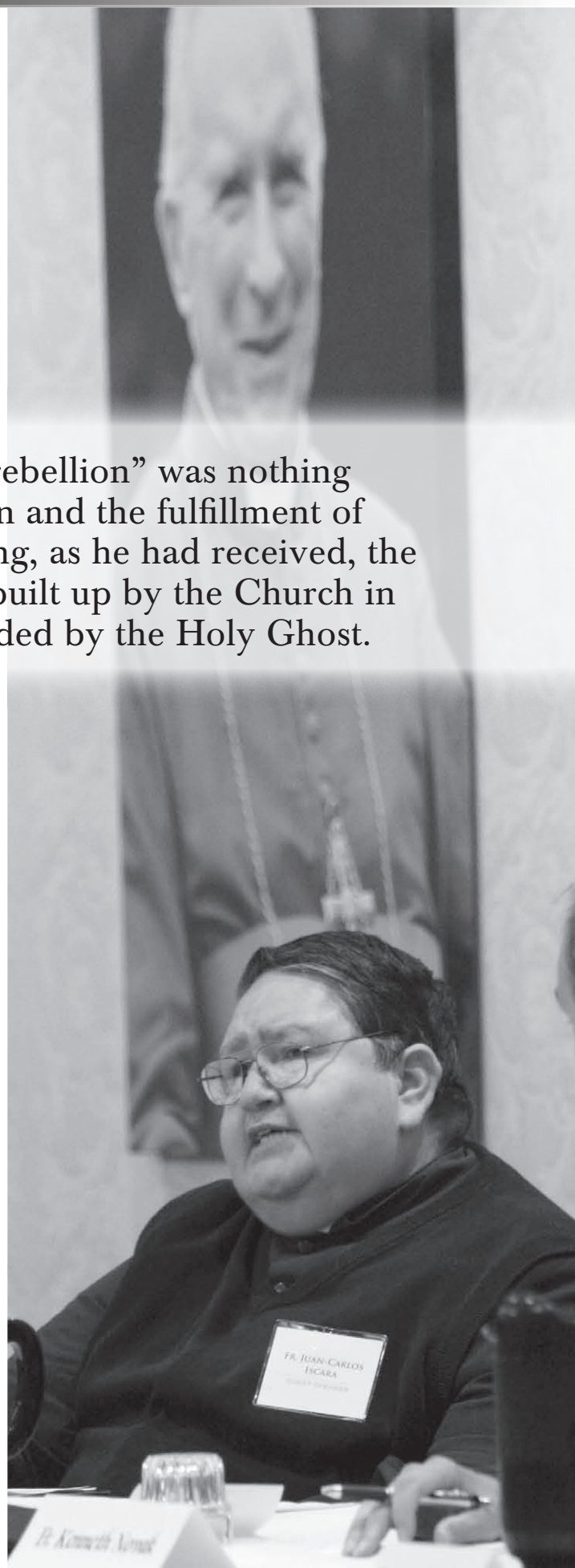
Thus, without advancing a future judgment of the Church, we conclude this conference by expressing our pious wish—no, our pious certainty that he has already heard the answer of Our Lord: “*Euge, serve bone et fidelis...* Good and faithful servant of the Church and of the Papacy, enter into the joy of your Master.” 🙏

Fr. Juan-Carlos Iscara, a native of Argentina, was ordained in 1986 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. For the last nine years he has been teaching Moral Theology and Church History at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Winona, Minnesota.

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“TODAY, WE ARE BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY”

Fr. Franz Schmidberger is District Superior of Germany. After his entry into the seminary in Ecône in 1972, he was Superior General of the Society of Saint Pius X from 1982 to 1994. On the 40th anniversary of the Society, Father recalled the religious context of the 1970s and the development of the relations with Rome.

When and how did you enter the Society of Saint Pius X?

I was living in Munich and studying natural sciences at university. I met a small group of young Catholics under a philosophy professor who had been fighting since the Second Vatican Council to save Latin, stop the spreading betrayal of the Faith, and maintain Tradition. So when I decided to become a priest, I had no doubt as to where I ought to go. I would even go so far as to say I knew where to go even before I knew whether I would go to the seminary! Ecône was the only possibility, since I did not want to be ordained by a bishop who celebrated the New Mass. That was in 1972.

So Ecône and the Society of Saint Pius X were already known in Munich, in Germany, in 1972?

Oh yes! We knew an archbishop had just opened a seminary in Switzerland with the old liturgy. You know, in a group such as ours, after the Council, we were looking for other groups of a similar nature. So then, we were in contact with Catholics in the United States, in France, in Vienna, and thus we knew of each other's existence. We fought for the same ideas, we were engaged in the same fight, even though it was not always as precise, as explicit as it is today. But even so, the general orientation was clear: we wanted at all costs the Mass and the catechism of all time.

What drew you so strongly then to the Tradition of the Church?

In the beginning I did not really understand the whole movement which began at the Council. In my family, which was deeply Catholic, we followed along at the start. But already in 1967, we grasped the importance of the Council's reforms. From that time on, we became part of a fight and, with this group of students, we attacked the modernists head on. I remember having advertisements printed, including some against the Archbishop of Munich [Cardinal Döpfner], who was very progressive and who played a detrimental role at the Council.

But how did you become aware of this war within the Church?

It was really due to our formation in philosophy in Munich. We had a firm foundation in the subject. We knew that truth is unchangeable. We could also see clearly that the development of civil society was going in the wrong direction. And so we were well prepared and when we entered Ecône, with Father Klaus Wodsack, we had clear ideas.

When did you meet Archbishop Lefebvre?

It was on March 12, 1972, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, *Laetare* Sunday. With Father Wodsack, we served the Archbishop's Mass in his house in Fribourg on Route de La Vignettaz. Then we had our meal together, and Archbishop Lefebvre then

told us we were accepted into the seminary. We had already sent our enrollments; he simply wished to get a personal impression. Two weeks later, we spent a few days in Ecône. The following October, we entered the seminary.

What were your first impressions of Archbishop Lefebvre?

Very good, very noble, an extraordinarily balanced character! A truly Catholic man. A man of the Church! Those were only the first impressions. We discovered his entire personality in the following months.

So then, you entered Ecône in 1972. Your first commitment to the Society of Saint Pius X goes back to 1973. What state was it in at that time?

It was small! There were perhaps six priest-members. It was *in statu nascendi*, just in the process of being born! But there was no question about numbers. We had very strong convictions: the New Mass was not good, we did not want it, and on the contrary, we wanted the old Mass at all costs. And that was the core of our conviction. It did not matter how many people adhered to it; it did not matter! We had to work to propagate this Mass again. God had called us by His grace to the priesthood and so we told ourselves we had to work to diffuse the true Catholic Mass again in Germany. It was an apostolic, missionary desire.

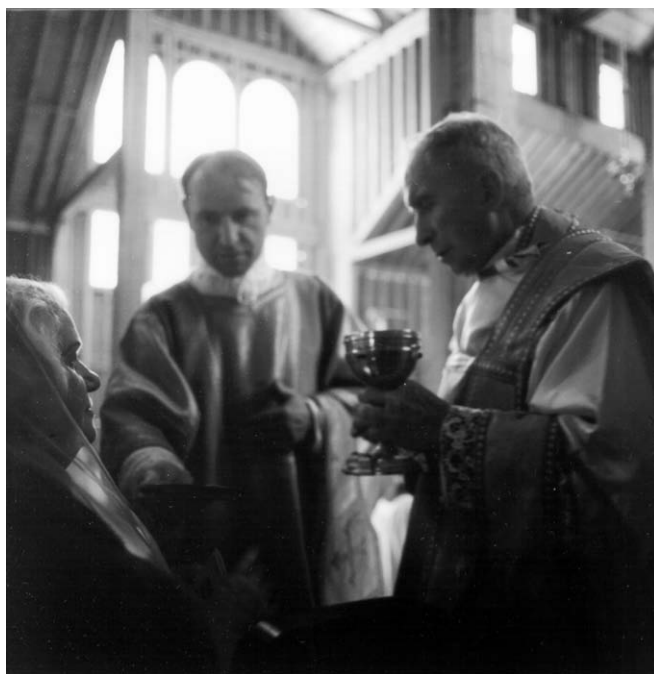
So you thought then that the Society would enjoy such a wide development?

To be frank, I did not think we would spread over the whole world, to Asia, to Africa, *etc.* What was really an unheard-of and completely unmerited grace was that we were able to collaborate in its spread across the world.

Archbishop Lefebvre told me one day, “If the Society remains limited to Europe, that will be a sign that it is not the work of God. For if it is truly the work of God, it must have a Catholic, a universal dimension. It must draw to itself all cultures, all languages, all social classes...” And that is what happened! The Society is truly a work of the Catholic Church. It is universal. It has been established on every continent, in every class, among intellectuals, simple folk, the rich, the poor. That is what we find in the primitive Church, in the Church of all ages. The Church is universal! It speaks to every man, to bring all souls to the Good God.

What does this 40th anniversary inspire in you?

It gives me above all a feeling of deep gratitude towards God. It is a great joy, a profound joy, to be able to collaborate in this work.



The fight continues in the same way?

We can see that our arguments prove ever stronger and more irrefutable. That, even the progressives notice. That is why I would say we even enjoy a certain esteem among our enemies. For it is very difficult to make objections to our arguments.

I remember, when I was Superior General, I went to Rome quite often, and I must say that we were then almost despised: “You are little rascals. What has gotten into your head? How can you imagine that the Pope is not in the right line regarding religious liberty and ecumenism? What is wrong with you that you should turn against the Pope?” We were treated a little like that. Today, we are taken very seriously. And we bear witness to the Catholic Faith in its entirety in Rome.

Our role is firstly to fight against errors, secondly to point out the way to the true solution, and thirdly to put this solution into practice a little. With the seminaries, the schools, the families gathered around our altars, retreat houses, the convents of the different religious groups who are united to us... in this way, we are rebuilding a little Christendom. That is our role. We show the way and we say clearly: the solution is priestly sanctity, it is the Mass of all time, it is the catechism of all time, it is to work for the reign of Our Lord in society. And so, we are bringing that into being. Of course, it is being done in a very limited way, but all the same we are a little army fighting for Our Lord Jesus Christ. ☩

Taken from *DICI*. *DICI* is the official news bureau of the Society of Saint Pius X.



“FOR THE LOVE OF ETERNAL ROME”

Fr. Emmanuel du Chalard (on the extreme right of the photo), arrived at Ecône 40 years ago, almost to the day. Now stationed in Italy, where he has spent the entirety of his priestly ministry, this priest, who was master of ceremonies during his time at the seminary, goes back over the early days of the Society of St. Pius X, the teaching of Archbishop Lefebvre, and the reception his work has received in Rome.

What year did you enter Ecône? How had you heard of the Society of St. Pius X? How did it happen that this choice seemed necessary to you?

In the beginning of September 1970, I arrived at Ecône as a seminarian. There were eleven of us candidates, including Fr. Patrick Groche, for the opening of this first year of spirituality. At the time, one did not yet speak of the Society of St. Pius X, but for those who were thinking about a vocation, the problem was how to find a serious seminary in which they could be formed. My bishop, Bishop Michon, advised against the seminary of Orleans, which was responsible for his diocese of Chartres, for they were losing the Faith. Coming from a profoundly Christian family, there were connections between my parents and the *Cité Catholique*, the Congress of Lausanne, and also the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. At home, we had subscriptions to *Itinéraires*, *L'Homme Nouveau*...

It was in these circles that I first heard of Archbishop Lefebvre's plan to open a seminary. I must admit that when I entered at Ecône, I was completely ignorant of what the future held, be it the very existence of the Society, its development in the world, or the difficulties that would arise with the Holy See.

During these founding years, what were the relations between Archbishop Lefebvre and the seminarians?

If it is true that Archbishop Lefebvre was a bishop, for us in the beginning he was above all a true father, always taking care to ensure for us a good priestly formation, but also attentive to all the little material details, in order that the seminary might be a setting that would allow a life of recollection, prayer, and study. He was a born organizer, and nothing in our daily life escaped him. Above all, he was an example for us; when he was at the seminary, he followed the rule, the schedule, and the offices, and

he took his meals and recreations with us. And of course we looked forward to his spiritual conferences with great interest. That was when he would give us updates on his interviews with the bishops or Roman prelates. Always at our disposition, to receive us and listen to us, we could thus speak freely with him in his office. Throughout all these years spent at Ecône, where difficulties from both within and without were not wanting, what was the most striking was the calm and serenity that His Excellency always preserved.

In 1976 there came what they called “the hot summer”: Archbishop Lefebvre was declared suspended *a divinis* by Rome. Were you not tempted to leave the Society of St. Pius X? What reasons brought you to continue your studies in spite of so many troubles?

“The hot summer” did not arrive unexpectedly. Since 1974 we had already experienced important events that had prepared us not only for these sad and painful condemnations, but especially to understand better the gravity of the Church’s situation and the incompatibility between the reforms coming from Vatican II and fidelity to Tradition. In November 1974, there was the canonical visit of Bishop Descamps and Bishop Onclin, sent by Rome, who scandalized us with their modernist comments. Then, in Rome, there was the meeting between Archbishop Lefebvre and Cardinals Garonne, Wright, and Tabera in February 1975. And the conclusion of this meeting was, according to them, that the famous declaration of November 21, 1974 “seemed unacceptable on all points.”

The years ’74 through ’76 were of a capital importance for an understanding of the position of Archbishop Lefebvre and of the Society of St. Pius X. At the time, Jean Madiran rendered us a priceless service with the publication of *La condamnation sauvage de Mgr. Lefebvre* (“The Illegal Condemnation of Ab. Lefebvre”) in the magazine *Itinéraires*. Archbishop Lefebvre had always taught us and transmitted to us a great love for the Roman Church. It is this love for Rome that made us prefer to remain faithful to Tradition and undergo with sorrow and pain the condemnations of the men of the Church

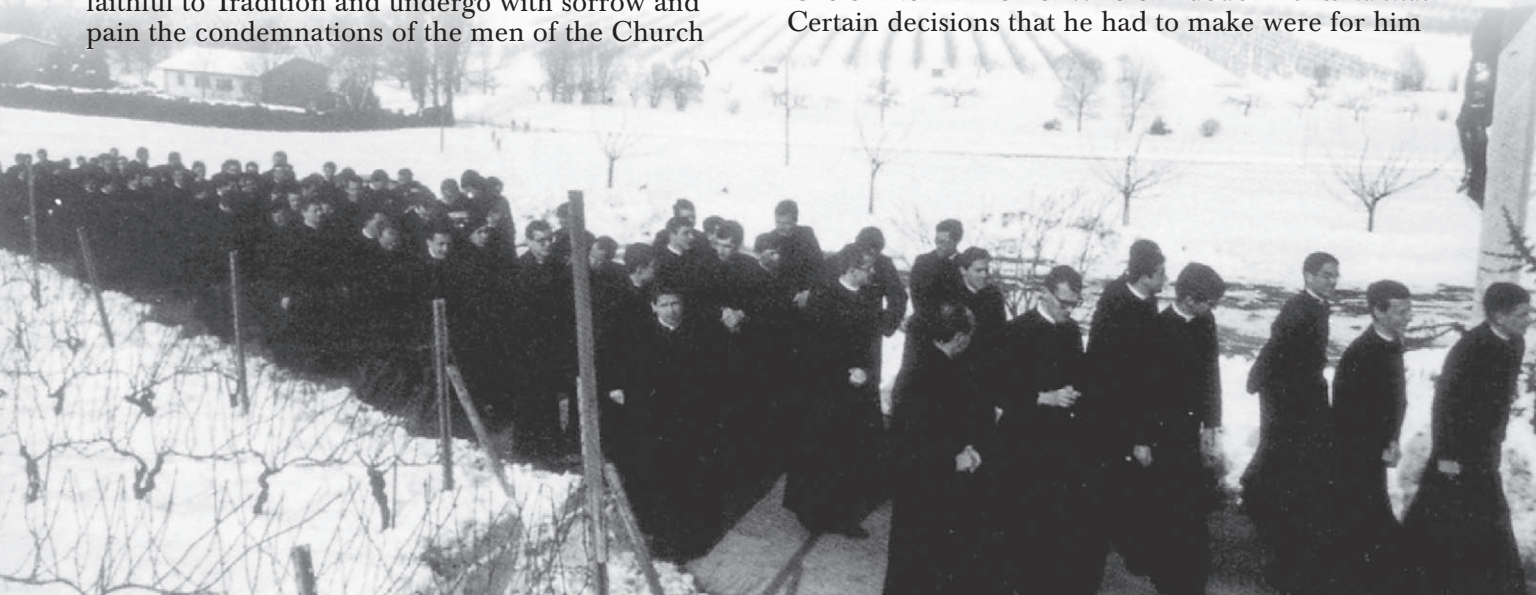
imbued with modernism. Archbishop Lefebvre told us: “We are condemned by those who ought to encourage the work of the Society.” He also added: “The day will come when Rome will thank us for our resistance.”

You were master of ceremonies at Ecône. As such you were by Archbishop Lefebvre’s side when he celebrated the Mass. What was the importance of the traditional Mass and liturgy in his combat for the Church?

I must admit that it was with Archbishop Lefebvre that I discovered all the meaning of the Mass and its importance, even though I had been going to daily Mass for years. His Excellency celebrated the Holy Mass perfectly, that is to say, he conformed himself perfectly to the liturgy of the Roman Church: nothing singular, nothing that was particularly his. The ceremonies were for us the most beautiful and most intense moments of seminary life. He knew how to give us a taste for the holy liturgy. And then, through his sermons and conferences on the Mass, he was able to show us how the Holy Sacrifice is the heart of the Church and how all our apostolate must be built around the altar. One of the great services he has rendered to the Church is certainly that of having transmitted to future generations this love for the Holy Mass.

Since your ordination, you have been stationed in Italy, and very often in Rome. How is the work of Archbishop Lefebvre seen, 40 years after its foundation, by the priests and faithful that you have been able to encounter? Have you seen an evolution?


Before answering this question, allow me to express my personal thoughts on Archbishop Lefebvre. The more time passes, the more we must recognize that this prelate was an absolutely exceptional man of the Church and is among the greatest reformers that the Church has had in the course of her history. A bishop of boundless faith, which brought him to a veritable martyrdom for the love of Eternal Rome. Who can doubt his *Romanitas*? Certain decisions that he had to make were for him



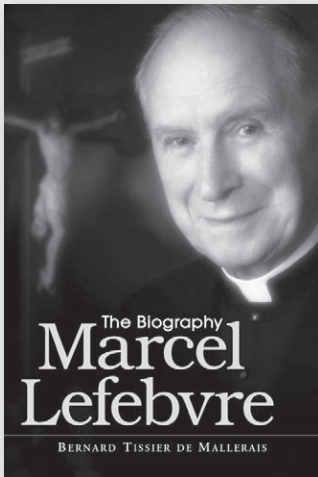
an immolation of his person for the good of the Church. For those who knew him, it is out of the question for him to have had at heart any other interest but the good of the Church and the salvation of souls. And the collapse of the Church today and the vitality of Tradition certainly show that he was right a hundred times over.

How was His Excellency seen at Rome? He always aroused in many a certain admiration because of his prodigious ecclesiastical career and for his absolute selflessness. Today, although many know him only through the written press and television, I must admit that there is an ever-growing interest in his person and his work. This comes from the ever more obvious and catastrophic collapse of the structures of the Church: the closing of seminaries and convents, the decrease in vocations, the weaker and weaker practice of religion...and also from the fact that, in Tradition, there is a growing vitality (vocations, full parishes, large families, a firm faith, *etc.*). This contrast cannot but make those who want truly to serve the Church think. Another fact to be taken into account in the tableau of today's Church is that many ecclesiastics lack formation, not because they have not studied

much, but because many fundamental elements of the traditional doctrine have not been transmitted to them.

Two important acts of the present pontificate have aroused a lively interest in Tradition: the *Motu Proprio* in favor of the traditional Mass and the lifting of the "excommunications." Since then, there has certainly been a desire to discover Archbishop Lefebvre and his work. For proof, take the two publishers that recently published and continue to publish the works of Archbishop Lefebvre: the famous Marietti of Turin that published in Italian *Priestly Sanctity*, which can be found in French from Clovis, and should publish *The Mass of All Time* shortly. Likewise, Sugarco Editions published another life of Archbishop Lefebvre, written by Cristina Siccardi, which has interested a vast public. And within the next few weeks a volume containing a selection of the Archbishop's texts will be available. To find today in so-called Catholic bookstore windows *Priestly Sanctity* or the life of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre is certainly an important sign. 

Taken from *DICI*. *DICI* is the official news bureau of the Society of Saint Pius X.



Marcel Lefebvre

Definitive biography of Archbishop Lefebvre

Bishop Bernard Tissier de Mallerais

This is the definitive biography of the Archbishop, written by one of his closest friends. Influential French Catholic publisher Jean Madiran said, "...the fruit of several years of labor. The book is rich in documentation, often unpublished, and in many theological observations."

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre's (1905-91) life is fascinating. After attending the French Seminary in Rome he joined his brother in the African missions. Consecrated bishop at age 42, one year later he was named the Holy See's Apostolic Delegate for French-speaking Africa. In 1962, he was elected Superior General of the 5,000-member Holy Ghost Fathers. John XXIII made him an Assistant to the Papal Throne and a member of the Preparatory Commission for Vatican II. At the Council, he was a leader of the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*—those bishops who vigorously fought the modernists. In 1968, he resigned his post as Superior General rather than preside over the destruction of his beloved order. He went into retirement in Rome, only to be called on again and again by seminarians seeking his advice on where to get a solid formation. This led to the founding of the SSPX in 1970. All Catholics, particularly those attached to the Tridentine Mass, owe a huge debt of gratitude to this man. We ought to know him better.

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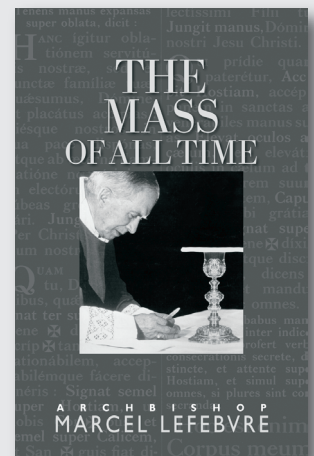
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“Dante and Shakespeare
divide the world between
them; there is no third.”

–*T.S. Eliot*

DANTE

DANTE'S *PARADISO*: READING AND COMMENTARY

CONCLUSION

DAVID ALLEN WHITE

Let us begin the last installment by taking a brief look at Canto 8. One of the main themes of the *Paradiso* is the movement from failure to inadequacy and frustration. One experiences the same sentiment in trying to teach the poem; it is partially the poet's intent but it is also an unpleasant feeling. I will thus allow the poem to speak for itself.

In Canto 8, the Pilgrim has been talking to Charles Martel, from the Anjou family. He is hearing about the doctrine of heredity and how it works. At the end of the Canto, he is talking about the difference between two orders: the cosmic order where God dwells, which we are visiting in the *Paradiso*, which is perfection, and the earthly order, reflected in history and our personal lives, which tends toward disorder. The work contains much political talk as well as criticism of religious disputes of the time; throughout the poem these discussions draw this distinction between the earthly order and the heavenly order, a gulf that remains always with us.

If you are going to study cosmology, not modern astronomy but the medieval idea of order of the spheres, this study of cosmic order will move you to God, Who is perfection. The vision will be complete and perfect if you can grasp it. But if you are going to look at earth, where we live, you are going to see inadequacy, the failures of fallen man, and hence, earthly disorder. The poet expresses this through his

sense of the defeat of language itself to express what he wants to express. In a sense, we cannot reach the ultimate and Dante expresses his own inability to lead us there.

Remember: Dante lived in an age of faith. He still felt he had trouble expressing it. The best the modern Catholic artist can do is give a little hint of the *Purgatorio* vision; that is how far gone we are. For most of us to even attempt to grasp the notion of Paradise seems impossible; it lies so outside our age that we are forced to feel frustration.

In Canto 8, Martel tells the Pilgrim that he is giving him a gift:

Should natural disposition find itself
not in accord with Fortune, then it must
fail as a seed in alien soil must die.

Of course, he here means “Fortune” not in the modern sense, but as Providence.

If men on earth were to pay greater heed
to the foundation Nature has laid down,
and build on that, they would build better men.

But those men bent to wear the sword you twist
into the priesthood, and you make a king
out of a man whose calling was to preach:

you find yourselves on roads not meant for you.

This is a fascinating vision. The point is that gifts can be given, although we are still left with the burden of discerning what those gifts are and using them for their intended purpose.

When we left the Pilgrim, he was moving upwards. We had moved into the sphere of the theologians. Let us go to the opening of Canto 14, immediately after he has spoken to St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. What happens is very interesting: we are entering the Canto that will give us the martyrs and crusaders, who are in the sphere of Mars, appropriately enough. (In classical terms, Mars was the god of war.) But we are seeing movement of whirling lights, figures, and souls into patterns. And these patterns change as we move from sphere to sphere.

One reason the Pilgrim and Beatrice leave the sphere of the theologians is because it gets to be too much for Dante. He is overwhelmed, so she lifts him upward. Remember, there was one circle of lights out of which St. Thomas spoke, another circle of lights out of which St. Bonaventure spoke, and then a third circle. (Again, note the presence of three.) All these lights and circles are rotating at the same time. Before anyone can speak from the third circle, Dante has to be taken out. It is fascinating to note that, at the end of the poem, when the Pilgrim is granted his vision of God, God will be three inter-linking circles of lights. Of course, the theologians, who taught us about God, reflect God in being circles of lights as well—although the theologians are not whole or complete; each soul makes up a circle. So we have the divine creative light coming down and illuminating the theologians, who point us back toward the Creator.

At this point, though, Dante is lifted up into the sphere of the martyrs and crusaders. You will note he is still obsessed with the image of the circles. The beginning of Canto 14 is illustrative of the way the poetry works throughout the *Paradiso*. The Canto opens with an image of concentric rings:

The water in a round container moves
center to rim rippling or rim to center,
when struck first from within, then from without:

this image suddenly occurred to me
the moment that the glorious, living light
of Thomas had concluded its remarks

because of the resemblance that was born
between his flow of words and Beatrice's,
she being moved to speak once he had spoken...

The imagery here is fantastic: light and water, motion outward and motion inward, Thomas and Beatrice. It is a beautiful vision of unity in particulars.

“This man, though he cannot express his need,
and has not even thought the thought as yet,
must dig the roots of yet another truth.

Explain to him about the radiance
with which your substance blooms. Will it remain
eternally, just as it shines forth now?

And if it does remain, explain to him
how, once your sight has been restored, you can
endure the brilliance of each other's form.”

In other words: the light is so great, one wonders
how any of the souls in Paradise can bear to look at
one another.

As partners in a dance whirl in their reel,
caught in a sudden surge of joy, will often
quicken their steps and raise their voices high,

so at her eager and devout request
the holy circles showed new happiness
through their miraculous music and their dance.

Joy, music, dance, light, whirling motion:
Beatrice's question is so excellent that the souls
become excited and can hardly wait to answer it.

Those who regret that we die here on earth
to live above, have never known the freshening
downpour of God's eternal grace up here.

Dante uses the image of rain to represent God's
grace. It is wonderful imagery. But we have to pause
and raise our intellects to the point of understanding
the poetic image. It is not the kind of passionate
imagery from the *Inferno*. The imagery there works
on the lower passions: rivers of blood and men
holding their own heads. The images themselves are
the stuff of the passions. In the *Purgatorio*, we feel and
suffer in human sympathy with those souls. We feel
the weight of the stones on the backs of the proud.
Those images work on us in an emotional way. The
images of the *Paradiso* work on the mind. They are
intellectual and demand that we raise our minds.

That One and Two and Three which never ends
and ever reigns in Three and Two and One,
uncircumscribed and circumscribing all,

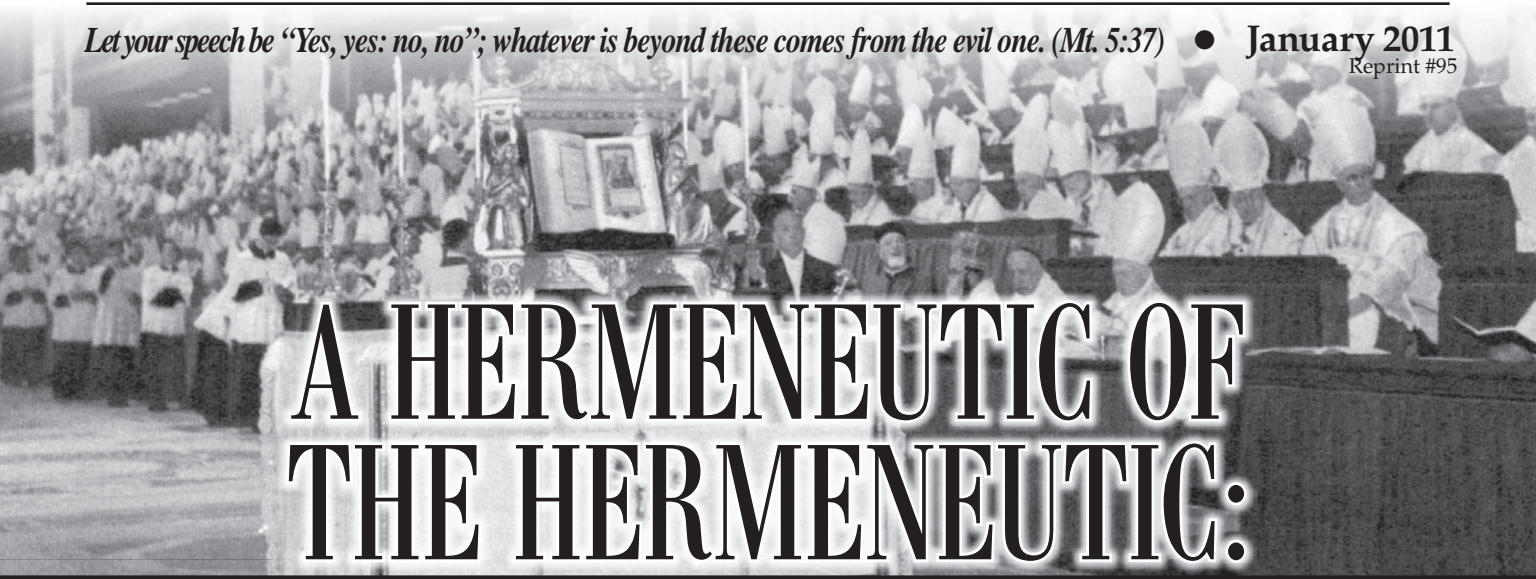
three separate times was sung by all those spirits,
and unbelievably melodious
it sounded—Heaven's consummate reward.

But the poet does not give it to us. He will not
tell us what was sung. There are other moments like
this. Her question is answered, they explain it, we
are told it is glorious, but there is neither attempt to

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Let your speech be “Yes, yes: no, no”; whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37) • January 2011
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A HERMENEUTIC OF THE HERMENEUTIC:

Reflections on the Implications and Ultimate Consequences of the Hermeneutic of Continuity

Benedict XVI’s pontificate has been marked by a few defining moments that have provoked some neither entirely foreseeable nor easily controlled reactions: one need only think of the polemics that ensued after the release of the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*. This act, which occasioned an openly hostile, widespread reaction, was also an opportunity for some to discover the Church’s genuine liturgical patrimony and, through it, they were spurred on to discover an ecclesiology and theological system not only different from, but also incompatible with, that forged over the last 50 years and peremptorily imposed on “the People of God.”

Among the choices characterizing Benedict XVI’s pontificate it seems to me that we can include the principle of the “hermeneutic of continuity,”¹ which was articulated in his famous speech to the Roman Curia of December 22, 2005. The speech was not followed by the explosive reactions that have occurred in other instances, but it did give rise to a current of thought, and to its opposition, that is still with us and merits our attention.

In the following reflections we intend to scrutinize what the principle of the hermeneutic of continuity asserts, and we shall try to situate it in the historical

context of the Church today so as to deduce all of its implications.

A True Principle and an Unproven Presupposition

Forty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Benedict XVI recognizes the fact that situations creating a deep malaise arose after this historic event. He immediately frames the difficulty as a problem in the acceptance of the Council linked to a problem of the interpretation (hermeneutic) of the texts of the Council itself: too often, the Council was interpreted and thus applied in discontinuity with the perennial teaching of the Church, contrary to the objective meaning of its texts and contrary to the intentions of the Council Fathers themselves. The hermeneutic of continuity thus is presented as the proper approach to interpreting the Council authentically, according to its true intention and especially in perfect harmony with Tradition.

Benedict XVI’s intervention has the merit of highlighting a basic principle, namely, that in the Church’s magisterial teaching, there cannot be a break with previous teaching, but only continuity: what the

Church has always taught can neither be surpassed nor set aside; rather, it constitutes the Church's patrimony, which can neither be repudiated nor substantially altered.

We should remark that this truth recalled by Benedict XVI is in one sense quite simple; it pertains to the rudiments of the Faith and to the foundational principles that define the very nature of the Church. Consequently, the fact that he deemed it necessary to outline his papal program in light of this truth constitutes a first significant acknowledgement of the doctrinal crisis in which the Church finds itself. By solemnly reiterating such a simple, elementary truth, which had been set aside in practice and in common teaching, the Pope inevitably provided an objective indicator of the gravity of the current situation.

The usual commemorative orations about the Council were replaced in this speech by a reminder of elementary principles: it constituted an initial acknowledgment that something has not worked. Moreover, it should be recognized that the fact of recalling that there can be no break in the Church's teaching prompted in some individuals, especially priests, a desire to valorize things past and the Tradition of the Church. In many cases this re-evaluation led to the progressive discovery of an absolutely new patrimony, which these priests felt had been denied them. This is certainly the most positive effect of the hermeneutic of continuity.

However, the hermeneutic of continuity stands out, not so much for its intrinsic, abstract value as in the concrete application made of it, as a two-edged sword: it affirms, in effect, that the documents of the Council are in perfect continuity with the Church's perennial Tradition, and when it brings to light an objectively serious problem of a break, it systematically reduces it to a question of the interpretation of the Council itself, to a deviation that occurred in the post-conciliar period. The absolute fidelity of the Council to the previous authoritative teaching of the Church seems to remain as an indisputable postulate. In this way, the "blame" falls upon a heterodox current of thought incompatible with Catholic doctrine and foreign to the Council, but which paradoxically succeeded in steering in large part the application and the concrete results.²

As we now get to the crux of our considerations, we plan to situate the hermeneutic of continuity historically by seeking to grasp every aspect: without entering in detail into specific conciliar teachings, which have been discussed over and over, *we realize that it postulates a series of elements which, instead of saving the Council, indirectly demonstrate its failure.*

I. The Eclipse of the Magisterium

The Finality of the Magisterium

It is helpful first of all to focus our attention on the specific finality of the Church's magisterium, and more particularly, that of a self-described "pastoral" Council. The question is capital insofar as finality represents the purpose of any reality and of all its specific, characteristic elements.

It should be remembered that the magisterium is by definition the proximate rule of faith, that is, the source that must say and explain to me what I must believe and do to be a good Christian and save my soul. In this sense, the magisterium is distinguished from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which, while being the sources of Revelation, are remote rules of faith, that is, they necessitate intermediary explications by the magisterium for a proper understanding of their content. But if the solemn magisterium of a Council does not succeed in making itself understood such that after forty years—the duration of a Biblical generation—a Pope must call for the correct interpretation by seeking to indicate the basic interpretative criteria, that can mean only one thing: this Council failed in its specific finality.

If we then add to this general consideration the fact that the Second Vatican Council was presented from the outset as "pastoral," that the intention was to emphasize its ultimate purpose of making itself understandable by all through the use of language in conformity with the sensibility of modern man; it means that the Council was explicitly and eminently intended to be "hermeneutical" in relation to the points it meant to treat, that is to say, capable of furnishing clear, certain, and accessible answers. But if after forty years a Pope must call for the correct interpretation, it means that the Council also failed in the "pastorality" that should have characterized it.

The Magisterium Is the Sole Interpreter of the Magisterium

Supposing that the problem of the Council can be reduced to a matter of its correct interpretation, a question immediately arises: from whom does the Pope ask for help to guarantee the hermeneutic of continuity? But especially: why does he ask for help? From the tenor of the speech, the Pope seems to denounce certain schools of theology as well as some widespread behavior in the Church. But at the same time, he seems to be asking for the help of theologians rather than the episcopate or other organizations directly subordinate to himself. But if the magisterium must be interpreted, the only competent organ is the Magisterium itself. No one can explain what the teaching authority means more clearly than the

authority itself, and certainly, none has the authority to do so apart from it.

Why, we wonder, in the period after the Council, did not the Magisterium intervene in the manner indicated by the Pope?³ If he did so, why did he not succeed in his intention to make what the Council meant to say correctly understood? Prescinding from all other considerations, can a Council whose interpretation is not clear and a Magisterium that did not succeed in providing the desired clarity during the era inaugurated by this Council be considered trustworthy? The dilemma seems rather simple: if the Council did not fail, then it was the only body truly competent to explicate it that seems to have failed: the Magisterium of the post-conciliar era.

Or else, more simply, they both failed.

The hermeneutic of continuity, by intending to save *a priori* the Magisterium of the Council, indirectly condemns with an intensity in proportion to this intention, the Magisterium that ought to have guaranteed its correct interpretation, and in a certain sense, it declares its incapacity to intervene effectively. Here appears a rather obvious contradiction, result of the “inviolability” of the Council. Consequently, a satisfactory response cannot be furnished until people have the courage to serenely take the Council itself into consideration, by evaluating its finality, its unusual nature, its anomalies, and by redefining its dogmatic scope and the tenor of its contents: *an authentic interpretation should first of all begin with the consideration of what it must interpret*. This day does not seem close, and the present impasse is probably destined to go on somewhat longer.

Until the present, the Council has been systematically explained by the unique, self-sufficient, self-referential and indisputable authority of the Council itself. It is inevitable that with such premises, the problem of continuity with unchanging Tradition cannot be seriously broached and, in the final analysis, it cannot really interest us.

In this regard, the reaction of the bishops to the “wishes” of Benedict XVI should be mentioned as emblematic and extremely suggestive. The generally wary reaction against the prudent invitation to recuperate something from Tradition—naturally without raising the subject of the Council—joined with the indifference of many bishops, shows, alas, that it is the episcopal college itself that has assimilated an aversion to the Church’s past that is humanly speaking incurable, and which embodies in itself and its own conduct this “rupture” of which Benedict XVI would like to limit the damage. Unfortunately, such is the most representative fruit of the Council and the post-Council, slowly ripened over the last 50 years.

As for the theologians, another ripe fruit, it seems that we can state that the fundamental ambiguity of the Council, combined with the

complementary absence of precise dogmatic definitions, produced and continues to produce a considerable number of theological schools, each characterized by its own specific originality. Consequently, the best known theologians after the Council seem to be a diverse group of “gurus,” each in pursuit of his own originality rather than representatives of a systematic theology, coherent and unified. This fact is important: since the Council does not have an official theology, but is upheld by non-homogeneous schools, any theological hermeneutic that would link it to Tradition or anything else would first of all have to justify its “school” before addressing a jungle of diverse and varied theses which would condemn from the outset such an effort to futility.

In this situation, it seems unlikely that the hermeneutic of continuity can rely upon the help of bishops or theologians.

Fundamentally, the Pope seems to be asking others, especially theologians, for a response and a clarity that only he can provide.

Two Significant Icons of the Post-Council

Let us illustrate what we’ve expounded about the relationship between the Council and the post-Council with an example: the liturgical reform. It involves a domain in which debate has taken place recently and, on the occasion of the promulgation of *Summorum Pontificum*, has inaugurated some critique, though very moderate, of the 1969 reform.

The Liturgical Reform

It is a fact universally admitted that Paul VI’s Missal is the first fruit of the Council and the most obvious. This “gift” was imposed on “the People of God” by the application of the Council’s principles to the liturgy, and it was achieved scarcely four years after the Council’s close.

It is undoubtedly legitimate to wonder if the liturgical reform did not go beyond the principles of the Council, as an attentive hermeneutic of continuity might suggest; but in case of an affirmative, it would be necessary to have the courage to ask also who bears the responsibility, be it the heterodox and turbulent theological schools, or those who had the authority to supervise the application of the Council? We shall only remark that the promulgation of the conciliar documents and the new missal bear, unfortunately, the signature of the authority in charge during the Council and after. Consequently, to limit systematically the problems in question to the interpretations of the Council that were given subsequently by creating a discontinuity between the

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Council and the post-Council, does not seem to be a schema that perfectly matches the reality.⁴

The Interreligious Meeting at Assisi

An analogous observation could be made concerning the full significance of the interreligious prayer meeting at Assisi of 1986. It represents the apogee of a long ecumenical and interreligious development and the historical model of every initiative of this kind.

It also represents the blackest day in the Church's history.

It can be said that the meeting at Assisi exaggerated or exceeded the conciliar principles; that may certainly be discussed, but the fact remains that this initiative also bears, alas, like the promulgation of the Council, the signature of a Pope.

In brief, the hermeneutic of continuity leads necessarily to the admission that something did not function properly in the exercise of authority.

A Recent Observation by Msgr. Guido Pozzo

As regards the observations under consideration, we think it is interesting to take a look at the recent lecture of Msgr. Guido Pozzo, already mentioned. The prelate considers the chief cause of the hermeneutic of rupture to be a renunciation of the use of anathemas:

The first factor is the renunciation of the anathema, that is to say, clearly distinguishing between orthodoxy and heresy. In the name of what is called the "pastorality" of the Council, the idea was spread that the Church has renounced the condemnation of error and the definition of orthodoxy in opposition to heresy. The condemnation of errors and the anathemas previously pronounced by the Church on all that is incompatible with Christian truth is set over against the pastoral character of the teaching of the Council, which no longer wished to condemn or censure, but only to exhort, illustrate, or bear witness.

In reality, there is no contradiction between the firm condemnation and refutation of errors in doctrinal and moral matters and the love of those who have fallen into error and respect for their human dignity. On the contrary, it is because the Christian has a great respect for the human person that he expends himself boundlessly to liberate his fellow men from error and false interpretations of religious and moral reality.

Adherence to the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God, to His word and to the mystery of salvation, demands a clear and simple response of faith, such as it is found in the symbols of faith and the *regula fidei*. The proclamation of the truths of faith also implies the refutation of error and the censure of ambiguous and dangerous positions that spread uncertainty and confusion among the faithful.

It would thus be false and unfounded to consider that after the Second Vatican Council, the dogmatic affirmation of the Church's Magisterium should be abandoned or excluded, just as it would be equally erroneous to consider that the

explanatory and pastoral nature of the documents of the Second Vatican Council does not also imply a doctrine that requires from the faithful the level of assent according to the different degrees of authority of the proposed doctrines.

Msgr. Pozzo adopts an observation that has always been expressed by the "traditionalists" about the Council,⁵ but, as a good interpreter of the hermeneutic of continuity, he rigorously restricts it to the post-conciliar period or, to use the same term as he, the "para-conciliar ideology." Naturally, we do not question his good intentions, but this manner of proceeding highlights the fundamental contradiction: in all honesty, to accuse the "postcouncil" of having renounced the use of anathemas seems a rather strained interpretation when the documents of the Council contain not a single one.

On this point, it is obvious that the attitude of the post-conciliar period is in perfect continuity with what the Council expresses (or rather does not express): but both, the Council and the post-Council, represent an entirely new way of acting in comparison with the past; in short, it does not strike us as fair to continue to hunt for scapegoats only among those born after 1965.

Especially, we cannot fail to underline that an anathema can only be formulated by the one who has the authority to do it: in practice, by the one who is also responsible for the magisterium. If then the use of anathemas has been abandoned, it means that the authority mandated to formulate them has been in some way remiss.

Taking into account all these aspects, the hermeneutic of continuity, in the specific usage which has been made of it, appears dangerous to the Magisterium itself: the harder they try to save the Council, the more they risk definitively destroying the authority that should have guaranteed its correct interpretation, and especially the one authority that is currently called upon to bring a remedy to the evils afflicting the Church.

A principle that is good in itself, precisely because of its intrinsic goodness, risks becoming pernicious if it is applied without the requisite discernment; the *a priori* by which the Council is held to be necessarily in continuity with Tradition is a preconception that skews the entire *status quaestionis* and makes clear (with due respect to Msgr. Pozzo) the ideological nature of the approach. The fear of peacefully discussing the Council, with the necessary serenity and intellectual honesty, is nothing else than the umpteenth indicator of its intrinsic weakness.⁶

II. Ultimate Consequences of the Hermeneutic of Continuity

The Hermeneutic of Continuity Proves the Non-Infallibility of the Council

An infallible text by definition cannot be interpreted. If indeed an infallible text requires an interpretation, it is automatically the content of the interpretation that becomes infallible and no longer the original text, insofar as it is the interpretation that expresses the categorical and definitive formulation which is therefore capable of compelling assent. A definition necessarily concerns something definitive: to define what is not definitive would mean defining the indefinable, attempting to render static the flow of becoming.

Consequently, no authority can oblige someone to believe something before one knows what it is or what it expresses (whence the absolute precision of classical dogmatic formulas): it would be tantamount to asking someone to swim without letting him jump into the pool.

The application of this principle becomes even stricter if the responsible authority itself recognizes that an interpretation is seriously needed. Now, if after 40 years, the conciliar documents require a correct interpretation, it is proof that the Council cannot be binding on the Catholic conscience.

Contrariwise, on a purely theoretical level, its correct interpretation could be binding, but we know that for a correct interpretation to be authentic (in the modern sense of the term), it must be continually reformulated so that it can express something still living and therefore still true. In this hermeneutical mechanism, nothing can exist that is dogmatically constraining, for there can no longer be semantically stable dogmatic formulations. This aspect of the problem merits some supplementary reflection.

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We have already alluded to some implications of the “pastorality” of the Council, highlighting how the intention was to employ expressions and language adapted to the sensibility of contemporary man. Consequently, the language of the conciliar documents is nuanced to express the cultural climate, the typical apprehensions and enthusiasms of the sixties. Now, the social, cultural and religious context of the third millennium has undergone a transformation such that, from an honest and really hermeneutical perspective, the pastoral texts of the Council, rather than being reinterpreted, should be replaced by other texts in conformity with and adapted to the man of today. If they really wanted to continue to use them as the basis of an authentic interpretation, they should have the courage to recognize that every interpretation

would have a contingent value, in conformity with the historical moment during which it was formulated, and that it should at the same time continue to face the reality, and so continue to provide adequate and therefore true responses.

The authentic hermeneutic, in the modern sense of the term, presupposes a sustained effort capable of producing new questions, new answers and new expressions, parallel and proportionate with humanity’s evolution, its problems, its expectations, and its life.

In wedding man in his concrete existence, in his *being-in-the-world*, which the Council intended to do, it is necessary to also wed perpetual becoming.⁷

The 2005 speech to the Curia, to take a recent example, is the expression of a precise intention of the Pope formulated and expressed at a precise moment of his pontificate. He would probably reformulate differently today what he expressed five years ago, taking into account what has happened in the Church during the last five years, how his sensibility has evolved and that of his flock...and how his “signals” were received by the bishops.

Getting back to the documents of the Council, if we push to the limit the hermeneutical dynamic described, they end up signifying something indefinable, or else equivocal and even, at the limit, contradictory. In this sense the documents, taken literally, prove to be incapable of signifying a univocal and definitive meaning.

The conclusion may seem exaggerated, but the moral, doctrinal and theological Babel that has invaded the Church today is really comparable to a mingling of true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, absolute and relative, being and non-being..., the result of a basic attitude comprehensible only when it is understood that, by refusing to define anything, the authorities have given up teaching. If things have really reached this point, the Church can no longer—humanly speaking—either receive instruction or be governed. Nothing more can be taught because nothing can be defined in the classical sense of the word. No text or dogmatic formula can pretend any longer to have a meaning that is definitive, intrinsic, universal and eternal.

In the last analysis, this is the snare into which the Church fell with the Council. It is the snare in which the Magisterium itself is caught when it persists in trying to save the documents of the Council. In this scenario, the hermeneutic of continuity supplies a channel of communication with Tradition without, however, being allowed to escape

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the cage into which the Council has pushed the minds of the pupil and the professor.

An Inapplicable Analogy: The Historical Problem of the Acceptance of Councils

Probably for the sake of attenuating the current drama, the difficulties the Church has had in the past when applying the decisions of earlier councils are often mentioned; for instance, the Council of Nicaea or the Council of Trent. In short, when we look at history, we see that we must be patient and continue to hope.

While fully sharing this confidence in Providence, we seem to discern in this reasoning a certain misconception worthy of our attention. It is true that the Council of Trent, for example, met with numerous pockets of resistance, and it certainly wasn't applied in a day; however, the fundamental cause of these difficulties seems to be far removed from the problems of the hermeneutic of Vatican II. The Council of Trent, in effect, met with obstacles precisely because of its doctrinal and disciplinary clarity: its texts were, then as now, self-explanatory, with such a clarity that they certainly frightened the parts of the Church and clergy reluctant to undertake the very necessary Catholic reform and the sacrifices it implied. Vatican II, on the contrary, was received and applied in a climate of general enthusiasm, especially by the most modernist wing of the clergy, now accused of not having understood what the Council meant.

Paradoxically, the comparison with previous Councils shows once more the fact that the problems that followed upon Vatican II must be related first and foremost to its intrinsic deficiency, totally absent from any other council in history.

The Hermeneutic of Continuity and the Council as "Superdogma"

At this point in our reflection, it seems to us particularly enlightening to recall an expression coined by then Cardinal Ratzinger. This expression, "superdogma," has been used regularly by proponents of the hermeneutic of continuity to identify the failure that occurred in the interpretation of the Council.⁸ The Council would have been transformed into a "superdogma," as if everything began with it and every reference to the Church's perennial Tradition had been abandoned. The term is clear and incisive, and it has the merit of attaching a name to the complex problem of the absolutization of the Council. But this expression, like the hermeneutic of continuity it complements, risks eclipsing the root of the problem. In effect, it would once again recast the Council, too "superdogmatized"

in its application and interpretation, yet save all its content. In short, everything would come down to a question of degree but not of substance.

This interpretation seems to leave the question not fully explored, especially if we apply, for argument's sake, a similar treatment to other ecumenical councils. If, for example, the dogmatic decisions of the Council of Trent were absolutized, the Church would not become "tridentine" to the detriment of other truths not treated of directly by the Council of Trent; it would remain perfectly Catholic. If one were to "superdogmatize" the decisions of Nicaea, the Church would remain what it is, even extremely fortified and confirmed in the Faith of all time. This would be so because faith is a theological virtue which, having God for its object, is never too dogmatic in the sense that an "excess of dogma" or "excess of a dogma" error does not exist. If, for example, the dogmas of the Incarnation were "superdogmatized," that is to say, if this dogma were hugely emphasized, this "superdogmatization" would never lead to an error. It would simply augment the explicit knowledge of this dogma and through it the whole dogmatic complex would emerge reinforced. In effect, the Faith is a simple, integral *unicum*, and not the result of the equilibrium of interdependent elements or heterogeneous components.

Consequently, the fact that the "superdogmatization" of the Second Vatican Council has led to the very grave situation we are familiar with and which a Pope recognizes, is a sign that the Council itself intrinsically contains elements that are not in accord with Tradition: its absolutization appears as an inevitable consequence of its lack of a link with the past. This absolutization has but amplified the innovations already present in the Council without creating them *ex novo* and independently of it.

This can be illustrated by the lack of anathemas (mentioned above), which characterizes, in perfect continuity, both the Council and the postconciliar era.

Conclusion

It seems to us that the entire affair that has arisen over the hermeneutic of continuity has the merit of bringing out the fundamental problem of the Council: it is about a structural problem before its being a textual problem:

- The Council does not teach in the classic sense, but juxtaposes ancient and new expressions and contents, things of a dogmatic nature and considerations of a contingent and pastoral nature.
- The result does not have a definitive value, but rather constitutes a platform from which to undertake continually recurring

reinterpretations, ever living and up-to-date, which cannot be anchored in a particular historical moment nor be expressed in irreformable statements.

It is about an irrepressible hermeneutical movement that cannot be stopped until the Council is stopped, that is, when the movement it began is finally ended.

Probably, to arrive at this result, our minds would have to be reconverted to the fact that an absolute truth exists that can be expressed and described by definitive dogmatic affirmations that neither postulate nor necessitate any further hermeneutic.

It is about the classical dogmatic formulations of the unchanging and eternal Tradition of the Church: these, far from constituting an “incomplete and contradictory” notion of Tradition, far from constituting a “petrified” Tradition, are the only vehicle possible for handing on the apostolic Faith till the end of time.

Don David Pagliarani

From the *Tradizione Cattolica*, No. 3, 2010; translated from *Courrier de Rome*, October 2010, pp. 1-6.

¹ The expression “hermeneutic of continuity” is being employed for convenience’ sake, in that it is certainly the most widely used in popular writing to designate the kind of hermeneutic indicated by the Pope in opposition to a hermeneutic of “discontinuity and rupture.” More exactly, the Pope spoke of the “hermeneutic of reform.”

² Msgr. Guido Pozzo, the current secretary of the Ecclesia Dei Commission, in a recent lecture last July 2 at Wigratzbad, Germany, spoke of a “para-conciliar” ideology which “took hold of the Council from the beginning and superimposed itself on the proceedings. By this expression we do not mean something concerning the documents of the Council, nor the intention of the participants, but rather *the general framework of interpretation* in which the Council was placed and which acts as a sort of internal treatment [*conditionnement intérieur*] affecting our subsequent reading of the facts and the texts. The Council is not the same thing as the para-conciliar ideology, but the story about that ecclesial event and about the mass media has served in large part to mystify the Council, and that is precisely the para-conciliar ideology....” The admission is serious, while obviously accompanied by an implicit absolution of the Council.

³ Unfortunately, John Paul II’s only important intervention as regards Tradition does not seem to be favorable to Tradition. It was the condemnation of the Society of St. Pius X in 1988, which was accused of having an “incomplete and contradictory” notion of Tradition. This condemnation, even before being aimed at particular individuals, was directed to a particular type of traditional behavior. It is interesting to note that Benedict XVI relates all the problems of the post-Council to an “interpretation of rupture” with Tradition, while his predecessor systematically ascribed these problems to an inadequate and incomplete application of the Council. On the one side we find error by excess; on the other, by defect.

⁴ The Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, which was intended to be a concrete, exemplary application of the hermeneutic of continuity in matters liturgical, limited itself to bringing together the former rite and the new rite in order to valorize the presumed continuity and to favor their mutual enrichment, excluding any kind of definitive judgment about the quality of the liturgical reform. In this sense, it does not directly bring up for discussion the application of the Council achieved by Paul VI’s reform. But if the new liturgy were already in perfect continuity with the former, their *rapprochement* would not

really make sense and would be merely superfluous, the new rite itself being an expression of continuity. And especially, were it so, it is hard to understand why the former rite was not naturally and simply welcomed back by the universal Church. Once again, they wish to valorize a continuity the loss of which they do not wish to admit.

⁵ The anathemas, namely, the condemnations of the errors opposed to the truths being defined, have always characterized the traditional Magisterium both in the Councils and in other forums. They express the will of the Teaching Church to “define” and consequently to “compel.” Their absence from the documents of Vatican II has always been offered in evidence as a sign of the absence of this will to “impose,” and thus as a proof of the non-infallibility of these texts. The argument rests on the fact that the Church cannot define a truth of faith without at the same time imposing it upon minds as a truth that must be believed.

⁶ Because of the institutional position of the author, Msgr. Pozzo’s lecture merits a few supplementary reflections. He identifies three general factors as causes of the hermeneutic of rupture. The first is the renunciation of the anathema, which has been mentioned. The second is the translation of Catholic thought into the categories of modernity:

The opening of the Church to the concerns and needs begotten by modernity (see *Gaudium et Spes*) is interpreted by the para-Conciliar ideology as a necessary reconciliation between Christianity and modern philosophical thought and ideological culture. This involves a theological and intellectual work that substantially proposes once more the idea of Modernism, condemned at the beginning of the 20th century by St. Pius X.

It must be recognized that Msgr. Pozzo says something quite correct when he sees the current crisis as a reproposal of the modernist project condemned by St. Pius X. But the problem lies elsewhere, and it is much more radical: [the para-Conciliar ideology] could freely say the opposite and it would equally find a place in the hemicycle of the most disparate positions that are justified by appeal to the Council. How is this possible? It is also impossible for this point to be reduced to the problem of a malfunctioning hermeneutic. The Council was intended to face up to the modern world, to modern anthropology, to modern thought, as Benedict XVI explained abundantly in his speech of 22 December 2005: “the Council had to determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era.” But the Council chose to do it without denouncing or condemning the apostate and immanentist spirit of modern thought by trying a novel approach: what was lacking in the Council was precisely these anathemas... It seems rather natural to us that, without using classical definitions and anathemas, the Council opened the way to different and divergent interpretations. To desire to impose one interpretation rather than another 45 years later while maintaining the fundamental ambiguity of the conciliar texts is quite simply impossible. Msgr. Pozzo is free to express himself as above, but other institutional figures can also freely express themselves, like bishops..., who may have decidedly different nuances. The only freedom not granted to anyone is that of suppressing the first cause of the ambiguity, the amphibology, the circiterism (to use a term dear to Romano Amerio), which allows the coexistence of the most disparate positions.

The third factor Msgr. Pozzo identifies is the bad interpretation of the idea of “aggiornamento” [updating]. This theme appears to be linked to the preceding one, even though it has a specific character which we shall show later: “By the term *aggiornamento*, Pope John XXIII wanted to indicate the primary task of Vatican Council II. This term in the thought of the Pope and the Council did not, however, express what has occurred in its name in the ideological implementation of the post-Conciliar period....”

Msgr. Pozzo’s speech is extremely significant, and he quotes the famous description of Paul VI [“Through some crack, the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God...]. Paul VI spoke of a “crack” which, however, still seems not to have been identified in the analysis presented by the prelate. We shall not repeat what we have already noted; as for the origin of this “crack,” it seems obvious.

We simply note that *aggiornamento* signifies a relationship with the

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contingent present which tomorrow will have already have passed: it thus implies a complex relationship between transcendent things and changing things. On this point, too, the Council declined to establish fixed and definitive points (and in a certain sense it could not furnish them because of the contingency of the “present” to which it wished to be linked), but it involved itself in a movement of adaptation that has not yet finished and which, because of the flow of History, will never be finished. It involves an essential aspect of the hermeneutical problem, which we shall analyze during the course of our reflections and to which we refer the reader.

For the moment it will suffice to underline that all that is contingent cannot, by nature, be definitive nor the object of irrefrangible definitions, but strictly concerns the sphere of historical becoming. Now, the Church has always been occupied with adapting itself to new situations, and this is not something exceptional to Vatican II; but the Council seems to juxtapose, without making the necessary distinctions, what belongs to the doctrinal sphere and what concerns historical contingency. This lack of clarity and of necessary distinctions represents a permanent source of confusion and of the dogmatization of what cannot be dogmatized. In general, appeals to the authority of the Council do not address this manifest problem.

⁷ In sum, the hermeneutic of continuity must obligatorily harmonize elements that appear resolutely irreconcilable: Tradition, the documents of the Council, and the present evolution of mankind.

⁸ The expression was used for the first time by Cardinal Ratzinger on July 13, 1988, during a speech to the Chilean bishops, in which the Cardinal, commenting on the “Lefebvre Case,” expounded certain analyses and thoughts in which we find the germ of the fundamental principles of the hermeneutic of continuity. We cite here a short passage:

It is a necessary task to defend the Second Vatican Council against Msgr. Lefebvre, as valid, and as binding upon the Church. Certainly there is a mentality of narrow views that isolate Vatican II and which has provoked this opposition. There are many accounts of it which give the impression that, from Vatican II onward, everything has been changed, and that what preceded it has no value or, at best, has value only in the light of Vatican II.

The Second Vatican Council has not been treated as a part of the entire living Tradition of the Church, but as an end of Tradition, a new start from zero. The truth is that this particular council defined no dogma at all, and deliberately chose to remain on a modest level, as a merely pastoral council; and yet many treat it as though it had made itself into a sort of *superdogma* which takes away the importance of all the rest.

This idea is made stronger by things that are now happening. That which previously was considered most holy – the form in which the liturgy was handed down – suddenly appears as the most forbidden of all things, the one thing that can safely be prohibited. It is intolerable to criticize decisions which have been taken since the council; on the other hand, if men make question of ancient rules, or even of the great truths of the faith—for instance, the cor-

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poral virginity of Mary, the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, the immortality of the soul, etc.—nobody complains or only does so with the greatest moderation. I myself, when I was a professor, have seen how the very same bishop who, before the council, had fired a teacher who was really irreproachable, for a certain crudeness of speech, was not prepared, after the council, to dismiss a professor who openly denied certain fundamental truths of the faith.

All this leads a great number of people to ask themselves if the Church of today is really the same as that of yesterday, or if they have changed it for something else without telling people. The one way in which Vatican II can be made plausible is to present it as it is; one part of the unbroken, the unique Tradition of the Church and of her faith.

In the spiritual movements of the postconciliar era, there is not the slightest doubt that frequently there has been an obliviousness, or even a suppression, of the issue of truth: Here perhaps we confront the crucial problem for theology and for pastoral work today.

(Continued from p. 18)

explain nor apology for not doing so. Let me quote the original Italian, so you can simply hear the music of the language:

Quell'uno e due e tre che sempre vive
e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno,
non circunscritto, e tutto circunscribe,
tre volte era cantato da ciascuno.

The Italian has a wonderful beauty to it that no English translation of any degree can quite catch. If you want Dante in the original language—and I recommend you do this at some time—some versions have the Italian and English side-by-side. I do not know of any side by side with a great English translation, but the original Italian is not hard to find. You do not need to know much Italian to catch the beauty of the poem's sound, of the music of the language.

As we move upward, these circling lights assume different forms. The theologians formed concentric circles. The martyrs and crusaders form a cross. Suddenly the Pilgrim sees a gigantic lighted cross before him. This is appropriate because these souls put forward the cross of Christ on earth. Thus, either having fought for the Faith, or having died for the Faith, they become part of the vision of the Cross in Heaven. Of course, they were the men of action on earth. But when we see them on the Cross, they are singing a hymn (which appears at the end of Canto 14). They are singing "Arise and Conquer," calling for, in some sense, the Pilgrim to keep moving forward, seeking the final conquering of himself, so that he can see the ultimate vision.

Suddenly, a star falls down from the right arm of the Cross; a shooting star. This star begins glowing like fire. Then it speaks to Dante. It turns out to be Dante's great-great-grandfather. After all of these famous figures, he now encounters a member of his own family. Needless to say, he is pleased to meet this former relative of his, Cacciaguida. This relative will dominate Cantos 15 and 16.

So we are at the center of Paradise, the central cantos, and the poem gets very personal. Dante is first told by his great-great-grandfather that his great-great-grandfather is on the first terrace of Mt. Purgatory. This, of course, puts a burden on Dante since he is more aware of his family tradition. Dante is told he must pray for his relative when he gets back to earth. Then we get another lengthy description of Florence and its political problems. Recall that Dante is writing this poem in exile, having been shut out of Florence for almost twenty years. The *Paradiso* is being written at the end of his life; apparently he lived not long after writing its final verses. (In fact, the final cantos were lost for a while. Legend says that his son found them after being shown them in a dream. Great legends are always true.)

The great painting of Dante in the Duomo of Florence shows Dante pointing to the *Divine Comedy* with one hand and pointing upward with the other. The sense is: "Look at my poem, but see where it should lead you." In the background of this painting is the city of Florence with the doors being closed to him. It is, in some sense, an admission from Florence that they exiled their greatest citizen. Dante was a pilgrim in the poem, but a pilgrim in his life as well.

So Cacciaguida, his great-great-grandfather, tells Dante about the mess in Florence and then tells him what is going to happen to him. Remember that the poem takes place in 1300, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. When the great-great-grandfather is telling Dante Florence's future, in the poem's time frame this future has not yet arrived. His ancestor tells Dante of the forthcoming exile and says that he should prepare for suffering. The sense of corruption has gone from the religious orders, criticized by the saints, to political corruption, criticized by Cacciaguida. But it is made clear that Dante will be touched personally.

The Pilgrim then moves upward to Jupiter, the next and sixth sphere, where we meet the righteous rulers. We have just heard about lousy rulers in Florence; now we will encounter some good ones. Specifically, we are going to hear about the glory of what it means to be a good ruler. The form that they take is the form of an eagle, but they do not first appear as such. Dante first sees these lights form a Latin phrase: *Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*. This is from the Book of Wisdom: "Love justice, you who judge on earth." So, one by one, the letters are formed until the last "m" becomes an eagle. We then learn about righteous rule. Mark Musa in the notes to his translation provides actual diagrams of the stages of this formation. The eagle, of course, was the symbol on the standard of the Roman Empire.

As Dante stares at the eagle and speaks with it, the eagle introduces itself. Many of the just rulers speak out of it as well. The eye of the eagle is King David. The image is wonderful. Then there are five lights that form the eyebrow above David: Trajan, Hezekiah, William II of Naples and Sicily, Constantine, and Ripheus: "As the brow guards the eye." All of these figures, including two pagans, speak to Dante. His puzzlement over the appearance of the two pagans in Paradise leads to a fascinating discussion. This ends the visit to the middle heavens and the Pilgrim is taken upward.

Now we come to the upper heavens. The first sphere of the upper heavens is Saturn. This is where we meet the contemplatives. We get something fascinating formed here: a ladder. The contemplatives form a lighted ladder. This is because the contemplative life, placed in the upper heavens where the angels who rule are praising God the Father, is meant to be a ladder for climbing up to

God. The ladder leads them first toward the triumph of Christ, then to the angels praising God, and finally to the vision of the Trinity itself.

It is at this point that we meet St. Benedict. He also complains about his order and gives a brief account of his own life. He hopes that his own order would climb this ladder, but says that men no longer climb. Written in the age of faith, the poem presents a sense that things are already breaking down. But, again, we must recall that the problems come from earthly failures. St. Benedict says all the monastic orders are not what they should be, that they are relaxing their disciplines.

The Pilgrim looks back down through the seven celestial spheres he has already traveled and suddenly sees the earth as puny and insignificant. Then he turns and looks at Beatrice. Now we recall that the first time Dante the Pilgrim looked at Beatrice, in the *Purgatorio*, he passed out. All the way through this heavenly journey, he has been too blinded by light to look upon her fully. Now, having come to the sphere of the contemplatives, after being instructed by St. Benedict, Canto 22 ends thus:

I, turning with the timeless Twins,
saw all of it, from hilltops to its shores.

Then, to the eyes of beauty my eyes turned.

The timeless Twins is a reference to Gemini, whose sphere they are in, the sign under which Dante was born. Dante is looking at Beatrice's eyes after turning away from the visible, physical universe. The eyes of Beatrice represent spiritual beauty. We are about to move upward once again, toward the fixed stars which represent the triumph of Christ. The beauty is now purely spiritual beauty.

Beatrice announces the arrival of the Church triumphant. Dante is actually to see the triumph of Christ. At this moment we have a glorious passage where Dante is granted the first glimpse of the Blessed Virgin herself. This is in Canto 23:

I saw her face aflame with so much light,
her eyes so bright with holy happiness,
that I shall have to leave it undescribed.

Here Dante does it again: the vision is so magnificent that he cannot describe it. He then, however, goes on to give whatever description he can:

As in the clearness of a fullmooned sky
Trivia smiles among eternal nymphs
who paint the depths of Heaven everywhere...

This is a classical vision which Dante knows is totally inadequate. He is toying around, mimicking

classical poetry. The Poem is trying to climb the contemplative ladder to give us an adequate poetic description of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I saw, above a myriad of lights,
one Sun that lit them all, even as our sun
illuminates the stars of his domain;

and through its living light there poured the glow
of its translucent substance, bright, so bright
that my poor eyes could not endure the sight.

O Beatrice, loving guide, sweet one!
She answered: "That which overcomes you now
is strength against which nothing has defense.

Within it dwell the wisdom and the power
that opened between Heaven and earth the road
mankind for ages longed for ardently."

As fire when it expands within a cloud
must soon explode because it has no space,
and, though against its nature, crash to earth,

so my mind there amid so rich a feast
began to swell until it broke its bounds,
and what became of it, it does not know.

"Open your eyes, look straight into my face!
Such things have you been witness to that now
you have the power to endure my smile."

He has been looking into Beatrice's eyes, and now he can take her smile. He is now strong enough.

As one just shaken from a dreamy sleep
who having dreamed has now forgotten all
and strives in vain to bring it back to mind,

so I was hearing her self-offering,
an invitation that can never be
erased within the book of my past life.

If at this moment all the tongues of verse,
which Polyhymnia and her sisters nourished
with their sweet milk, sang to assist my art,

their singing would not come to one one-thousandth
part of the truth about her sacred smile
nor how it set her holy face aglow...

All this focus and contemplation of Beatrice is necessary to get us toward that which is about to occur.

So I find that my consecrated poem
describing Paradise will have to make
a leap, like one who finds his road is blocked.

Now bear in mind the weight of my poem's theme,

think of the mortal shoulders it rests on,
and do not blame me if I stagger here:

this stretch of sea my vessel's prow now dares
to cut is no place for a little boat
nor for a captain who would spare himself.

Again, we see the sense of inadequacy.

"Why are you so enamored of my face
that you do not turn to the lovely garden
flowering in the radiance of Christ?"

There is the Rose in which the Word of God
took on the flesh, and there the lilies are
whose fragrance led mankind down the good path."

Beatrice tells Dante not to look at her, but rather
at the Rose.

Thus Beatrice. And I, eager to serve
her every wish, surrendered once again
my frail eyes to the battle of the light.

Here we have another poetic image. He's
trying to give us images so that we have some
understanding of what he saw.

Sometimes on cloudy days my eyes have seen
a ray of pure sunlight come streaming through
the broken clouds and light a field of flowers,

just so I saw there hosts of countless splendors
struck from above by ardent rays of love,
but could not see the source of such a blaze.

O Mighty Force that seals them with such light,
You raised yourself on high so that my eyes,
powerless in your presence, might perceive.

The sound of that sweet flower's name, the one
I pray to night and day, drew all my soul
into the vision of that flame of flames;

and when both of my eyes revealed to me
how rich and glorious was that living star
that reigns in Heaven, as it had reigned on Earth,

down from Heaven's height there came a flaming
torch
shaped in a ring, as if it were a crown,
that spun around the glory of her light.

An angel is coming to him to help him.

The sweetest sounding notes enrapturing
a man's soul here below would sound just like
a clap of thunder crashing from a cloud

compared to the melodious tones that poured
from the sweet lyre crowning the lovely sapphire

whose grace ensapphires the heaven's brightest
sphere:

"I am angelic love encompassing
the joy supreme who breathed from out the womb
which was the place where our Desire dwelt,

and I shall circle you, Heavenly Lady
while you follow your Son, to highest heaven
and with your presence make it more divine."

Now, understand: the angel has fallen down and
is circling and singing. Now he says he will follow
upward. He descended in order to lead Dante back
up. The pattern continues: the light comes down,
re-glow, goes back up. It continues throughout the
poem.

With this the circling melody was sealed,
and all the other lights within that sphere
sang out the Blessed Virgin Mary's name.

Suddenly, the multitude of lights we saw are
singing. Our senses should be confused. That which
we are seeing we now hear. This is not confusion but
unity and wholeness. Things are not separated any
longer.

The regal mantle folding itself round
the turning spheres, and nearest to the breath
and ways of God it burns and quickens most,

was curving round us with its inner shore
at such a distance that from where I stood
as yet there was no sign that it was there;

He is being encompassed by the mantle. The
mantle is going around him.

And so my mortal eyes did not have strength
enough to see the crowned flame as it rose,
higher and higher, following her son.

And as an infant after it has suckled
will raise its arms up searching for its mother,
expressing all the love with which it glows...

The image is fascinating: he is as a baby in the
presence of the Divine Mother.

So I saw all those radiances stretch,
their flame on high, thus making clear to me
how deep their love, how much they cherished Mary.

There they remained suspended in my sight
singing "*Regina coeli*" in tones so sweet,
the joy of it will never leave my mind.

O what abundant grace is stored up here
inside those richest coffers who below

in our world sowed the land with their good seed!

Herein they truly live and they enjoy
the wealth their tears had won for them while they
in Babylonian exile scorned all gold.

And here, victorious, beneath the Son
of God and Mary and amid the good
souls of the Old and the New Covenant

triumphs the one who holds the keys to glory.

The images are piled so thickly atop one another
that we are not entirely sure what we are seeing or
where we are. We are just moving upward. It is not
confusion; it is glory. The mind can barely describe
because the eye can barely see. The sense is that we
are just flying upward.

A brief schema of cantos 24-26: I encourage you
to read these closely because they are particularly
magnificent. We are about to approach the Godhead
Itself here. We are going up to the *Primum Mobile*.
While we are there, before we can finally enter
the Empyrean and see the vision of God, there is
a quiz. It's essentially a pop quiz. Please note: the
Pilgrim has been in ecstasy, being overwhelmed by
love. But once again we are told the intellect must
precede love. Wisdom has to come first. We have to
first know what we want before we can desire it. It
demands that there is a balance between mind and
heart.

So immediately following this glorious rapture,
this hint of the vision of the Blessed Mother herself,
the Poet, soaring upward, suddenly has a test to take
before going further. He has to prove that he knows
where he is and understands enough to be allowed
to glimpse the vision that is coming. The test is in
three parts. In Canto 24, he is given a test on faith.
St. Peter himself gives the Pilgrim the test on faith. It
is rather intimidating. You need to read it, but let us
say the Pilgrim passes the test.

Having made it through that, Canto 25 brings
us a test on hope, given by St. James. Of course, the
pattern completes itself: in Canto 26, he is given a
test on the nature of charity by St. John. They are
wonderful Cantos; they are the stuff of the intellect.

Let us look at Canto 27. At this point, he has
passed the tests. All the souls of the blessed are
singing the *Gloria*. The Pilgrim has made it this far.
Suddenly, the brilliant light of St. Peter turns red.
The souls stop singing. St. Peter begins a discussion
about the corruption of the Church. He begins
railing against his successors. It is important to
realize that there are certain perpetual problems;
the history of the Church is not a bed of roses. It
is rather daring of Dante to put these words in the
mouth of St. Peter, this invective against the state of
the Church. Part of this is criticism of a particular

moment in history. On another level, it is part of the
design of the poem: the falling of from perfection in
the beginning, the need for perfection as one draws
near the end, and the disorder of history as opposed
to the perfection of the cosmos:

and I heard: "Do not marvel at my change
of color, for you are about to see
all of these souls change color as I speak.

Here we have St. Peter speaking, and all the
souls turn red.

"He who on earth usurps that place of mine,
that place of mine, that place of mine which now
stands vacant in the eyes of Christ, God's Son,

St. Peter looks down and says the seat is vacant!

"Has turned my sepulchre into a sewer
of blood and filth, at which the Evil One
who fell from here takes great delight down there."

The color which paints clouds at break of day,
or in the evening when they face the sun—
that same tint I saw spread throughout that Heaven.

So it is a tint, not a dark red.

And as a modest lady, self-secure
in her own virtue, will at the mere mention
of someone else's failings blush with shame,

so did the face of Beatrice change—
the heavens saw the same eclipse, I think,
when the Almighty suffered for our sins.

Beatrice is embarrassed for what she hears
happening on earth.

Then he continued speaking, but the tone
his voice now had was no more different
than was the difference in the way he looked:

"The bride of Christ was not nourished on blood
that came from me, from Linus and from Cletus,
only that she be wooed for love of gold;

it was for love of this delightful life
that Sixtus, Pius, Calixtus, and Urban,
after the tears of torment, spilled their blood.

Never did we intend for Christendom
to be divided, some to take their stand
on this side or on that of our successors,

not that the keys which were consigned to me
become the emblem for a battleflag
warring against the baptized of the land,

nor that my head become the seal to stamp
those lying privileges bought and sold.
I burn with rage and shame to think of it!

This corruption will keep bubbling up and will
be used to create a greater crisis some centuries on.

“From here we see down there in all your fields
rapacious wolves who dress in shepherd’s clothes.
O power of God, why do You still hold back?”

It is a common cry of those faced with
corruption. The point is made. We are seeing again
what Charles Martel spoke of earlier: the misuse of
proper nature. Things are set up in a certain way,
but we misuse them. Man does not understand.

Let us look at two moments at the end of the
poem. The first is a particularly moving moment
that very few are aware of; I think it is because
so few readers continue to the poem’s end. Most
people think Dante’s guides are only Virgil and
Beatrice. But, in fact, he has three guides. The third
one doesn’t come until the last few cantos of the
Paradiso. Beatrice steps aside in Canto 31 after we
have entered the Empyrean. We have transcended
the nine spheres. He’s getting very close to the final
vision of the Godhead:

By now, my eyes had quickly taken in
a general plan of all of Paradise
but had not fixed themselves on any part...

So he has a general sense of what he is seeing
but cannot have knowledge of the full impact of the
particulars until he returns to write the poem. The
desire for wisdom increases as he goes higher.

And with new-kindled eagerness to know,
I turned around to ask my lady things
that to my mind were still not clear enough.

What I expected was not what I saw!
I thought to see Beatrice there but saw
an elder in the robes of Heaven’s saints.

He is expecting the beautiful Beatrice but sees
instead an old man. It turns out to be St. Bernard
of Clairvaux. He is Dante’s third guide; he takes
Dante the rest of the way. Why this change? If Virgil
represented reason, and reason can tell you about
sin and punishment, reason can teach us about
Hell and take us to the *Purgatorio*. But we need
Beatrice, divine wisdom that comes from grace, to
enter Paradise. Please notice: we need the beauty of
Beatrice, but this beauty is not earthly beauty; it is
divine wisdom. It is the beauty of God’s grace that
comes to the Pilgrim.

But divine wisdom will not get us all the all the
way because we are about to come to the ultimate

mystery. In front of the ultimate mystery, even the
intellect fails. Even wisdom fails. Beatrice steps
aside; what we need is a guide to the mystical vision.
We’re about to penetrate the heart of the mystery.
Therefore we get a new guide, St. Bernard the
mystic.

But before we go to that final vision, we have to
say goodbye to Beatrice. Dante leaves her and says
goodbye:

I thought to see Beatrice there but saw
an elder in the robes of Heaven’s saints.

His eyes, his cheeks, were filled with the divine
joy of the blest, his attitude with love
that every tender-hearted father knows.

Notice: we go from the guide as mother, which
is what Beatrice was, to a father who must take us
into the mystery.

And “She, where is she?” instantly I asked.
He answered: “I was urged by Beatrice
to leave my place and end all your desire;

you will behold her, if you raise your eyes,
to the third circle from the highest tier,
enthroned where her own merit destined her.”

This is the Rose. There are seats all around the
petals of the Rose. She is in the third circle from the
highest tier. It was destined that she be there.

I did not say a word but raised my eyes
to the third circle from the highest tier,
enthroned where her own merit destined her.
Not from that place where highest thunder roars
down to the very bottom of the sea,
is any mortal’s sight so far away

as my eyes were from Beatrice there;
but distance made no difference, for her image
came down to me unblurred by anything.

Dante feels as if she is beyond him once again.
But here is his farewell, his last words to her:

“O lady in whom all my hope takes strength,
and who for my salvation did endure
to leave her footprints on the floor of Hell,

Remember she went down and got Virgil. She
deigned to go down there to Hell itself to help this
lost soul.

Through your own power, through your own
excellence
I recognize the grace and the effect
of all those things I have seen with my eyes.

From bondage into freedom you led me
by all those paths, by using all those means
which were within the limits of your power.

Preserve in me your great munificence
so that my soul which you have healed may be
pleasing to you when it slips from the flesh.”

Such was my prayer. And she, so far away,
or so it seemed, looked down at me and smiled;
then to Eternal Light she turned once more.

In the last, Beatrice becomes a woman again.
If she has been a symbol for much of the poem, in
the end she is the woman whom Dante glimpsed on
earth some years before. Now it is just the individual
soul seated there, connecting with him; she smiles
at him, then looks toward the eternal light. It is a
vision of the communion of saints. She is the one
who gave him that first glimpse, who set him on the
journey. In the same way, God, in His mystery, has
people who will touch us and give us a push down
that road. There is a place for us reserved there if we
get there, if we cooperate with God’s grace. Thus we
leave Beatrice, the woman, the soul filled with grace,
in the presence of God, staring at that eternal light.

Then, St. Bernard speaks:

“That you may reach
your journey’s perfect consummation now
I have been sent by sacred love and prayer...

St. Bernard will lead him to the end. Let us go
to the very end where the Pilgrim is granted that
glimpse. He looks and sees the three interconnected
circles of light at the end. He is absolutely and
totally stunned by it. In the final Canto, let us give
Dante the last word:

Within Its depthless clarity of substance
I saw the Great Light shine into three circles
in three clear colors bound in one same space;

the first seemed to reflect the next like rainbow
on rainbow, and the third was like a flame
equally breathed forth by the other two.

How my weak words fall short of my conception,
which is itself so far from what I saw
that “weak” is much too weak a word to use!

So human language is here clearly insufficient.

O Light Eternal fixed in Self alone,
known only to Yourself, and knowing Self,
You love and glow, knowing and being known!

That circling which, as I conceived it, shone

in You and Your own first reflected light
when I had looked deep into It a while,

seemed in Itself and in Its own Self-color
to be depicted with man’s very image.
My eyes were totally absorbed in It.

He looks at the central section. And, suddenly,
in the center circle, he sees an image of man: God
the Son, God Incarnate. He is overwhelmed by it,
trying to figure out what it is he has seen.

As the geometer who tries so hard
to square the circle, but cannot discover,
think as he may, the principle involved,

so did I strive with this new mystery:
I yearned to know how could our image fit
into that circle, how could it conform;

How could God become man? How could there
be an image of man in the Godhead itself? How is it
possible that God could become incarnate?


But my own wings could not take me so high—
then a great flash of understanding struck
my mind, and suddenly its wish was granted.

Dante is trying to figure it all out, but he cannot.
But suddenly he understands and knows all.

At this point power failed high fantasy
but, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,
I felt my will and my desire impelled

by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

He has a glimpse of it. He understands it all—and
then his power of imagination to tell us what it was
fails him. He wants to tell us because he is filled with
the love that moves the universe. What is unspoken
in the end is what he cannot tell us.

We end *The Divine Comedy* with the Poet telling
us to make our own journey. Through God’s grace,
and by taking the right path, with good guides,
prayer, and love, we can get there. But the poem is
at an end. 

Dr. David Allen White taught World Literature at the Naval Academy in
Annapolis, Maryland, for the better part of three decades. He gave many
seminars at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Winona, Minnesota, including
one on which this article is based. He is the author of *The Mouth of the Lion*
and *The Horn of the Unicorn*. All quotes from *The Divine Comedy* are taken
from Mark Musa’s translation, published by Penguin Books. Illustrations by
Gustave Doré.



“THE LORD’S PRAYER”

The seventh petition, strictly speaking, is a corollary to the sixth petition. Because the early Christian exegetes were fond of the number seven, it was declared to be a separate petition, although the version of the Our Father in Luke ends with the petition: “Lead us not into temptation.” In Matthew this petition continues with the elaboration, “but deliver us from evil.”

Part 9 of 9

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Our Father
who art in heaven,
- 3) hallowed be
Thy name;
- 4) Thy kingdom come;
- 5) Thy will be done,
on earth as it is
in heaven!
- 6) Give us this day
our daily bread
- 7) and forgive us our
trespasses, as we
forgive those who
trespass against us,
- 8) and lead us not
into temptation,
- 9) **but deliver us
from evil. Amen.**

1. Deliverance from what? From evil or from the personified adversary?

On the basis of the original Greek text it cannot be determined whether “evil” is meant in this petition, *i.e.* the sum total of all powers and events that are opposed to God, or “the evil one”, the person of Satan himself. Either one could be meant, both are possible. The great commentators, from the Church Fathers to the present day, either decide on one of the two variant readings or else advocate openness in principle to both interpretations. However the reader or the Christian at prayer may decide, in any case the reality referred to here is a threat to mankind which the weak sinner can hardly overcome alone without God’s help.

2. Augustine: Deliverance from all evils

One plausible reading goes back to St. Augustine, who argues on the basis of the preceding petitions of the Our Father. Against the background of the continuing theme of temptations, the concluding petition formulates the request that God might assist us in all attacks of the evil one (of whatever sort), so that we are not overpowered by the evil one. It is obvious that we are supposed to pray here to be preserved from **all evils**. By “evil” St. Augustine understands sins as well as sicknesses, sufferings and afflictions.

3. Thomas Aquinas: Four ways and means of “deliverance from evil”

St. Thomas Aquinas argues more strictly than Augustine in a process of elimination, in which he, unlike Augustine, deliberately

“I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world,
but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil” (Jn. 17:15).

excludes sin and temptation. Thomas understands “evil” to mean simply all the sufferings and adversities of this world, which God can alleviate for the suffering person in four ways:

- by sparing the person suffering;
- through a sympathetic person or some other consolation in suffering;
- through the gift of blessings which cause the suffering to be forgotten;
- through a miraculous transformation of sufferings into joy.

4. The concluding petition as the seal and summary of all the petitions

The conclusion of the Our Father represents the crowning, indeed the quintessence of all the petitions, if we read this final petition in light of the *High Priestly Prayer* of Jesus in the Gospel of John, where our Lord Jesus Christ, about to depart from this world, implores God the Father for the well-being and salvation of mankind: “I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil” (Jn. 17:15). Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that the importance, character and substance of the other petitions is once again summarized and intensified here in the last petition. Likewise it is not presumptuous, with St. Jerome (in his Homily on Matthew) to describe this petition as the **seal** of the Lord’s Prayer.

5. A Christian sense of reality!

The last petition once again shows so marvelously and impressively the fundamental weakness of man who is faced with overwhelming evil. The realistic person who prays does not presumptuously rely on his own might and strength, but instead humbly places his trust in God’s power and faith in God’s Providence. The weakness of the person who prays, if it is humbly admitted, ceases to be an oppressive burden, inasmuch as he knows that he is continually being held in God’s hand.

6. Deliverance from the ultimate evil: the loss of salvation

If we disregard for the moment all temporary, earthly evils, then ultimately only one decisive evil remains for every human being, namely the loss of eternal salvation, the loss of eternal happiness with God—the total absence of hope of ever being able to

see and possess God. That is the only really major evil that can befall a human being. The Second Epistle to Timothy, for example, points in this direction, in one passage where it borrows language from the concluding petition: “The Lord hath delivered me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18).

Thus evil is understood as “sin.” The great evil of sin breaks the bond between the soul and God; only God is capable of overcoming the chasm brought about by sin. Do not fool yourselves: the concluding petition is not simply about having a little less sin, but rather about the total defeat of all sin and disorder. This demands therefore from the person who prays an unsparingly objective view of the reality of the sin in his life, free from any illusions. The person who prays the Our Father honestly has to take up the fight against sin as the all-important task of his life.

Whereas the human being in the midst of suffering understandably is fixated on the oppressive sensation of his suffering, God cares about the only thing that contributes to man’s salvation. The decisive thing is reaching the goal, and there is no second chance. The believing Christian, despite the adversities and afflictions in his life, should never lose hope in a good outcome, if he believes that the concluding petition will be granted and fulfilled. God is always more powerful than all evil and any misfortune! Satan seeks our life (the salvation of our souls), but God is always stronger!

7. Evil and “consequent evil”

Only in the rarest cases does sin remain inconsequential; often it causes repercussions in one’s immediate circle, in society and in the Mystical Body of Christ. We can assume, therefore, that the concluding petition of the Our Father prays also inclusively for deliverance from all the (secondary) consequences and complications of sin.

8. “*Sed libera nos a malo*” (from Holy Mass in the Traditional Rite)

In the Missal according to the Traditional Rite there is a continuation of the Pater Noster in the words, “*libera nos Domine ab omnibus malis, praeteritis, praesentibus et futuris*—deliver us, O Lord, from all evils: past, present and future.” A request merely for deliverance from past sufferings, pains, *etc.*, makes little sense here. The Missal understands “*malum*” here as “sin,” which results in separation from God. Along the same lines, one of the three Communion prayers of the priest after the *Agnus*



Over the grotto on the Mount of Olives in which, according to tradition, the Lord taught His disciples the Our Father, a large basilica was built by St. Helena. It was destroyed after the Persian invasion of Jerusalem and could not be replaced until the time of the Crusades. In the 19th century a Carmel was founded here by French nuns. The walls of the cloister and of the church are decorated with ceramic plaques on which the Lord's Prayer is translated into the major languages of the world.

Dei says: “*et ne umquam a te separari permittas*—never permit me to be separated from Thee.”

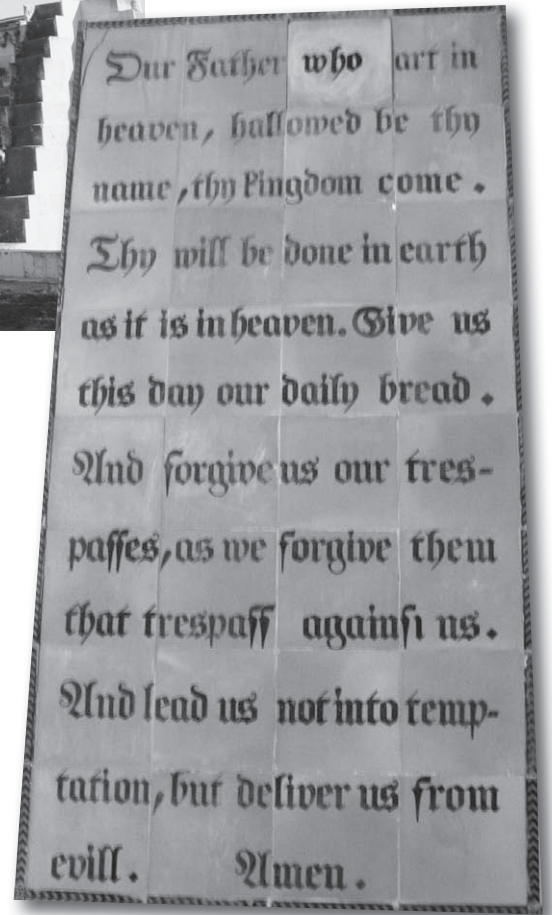
Conclusion: The Our Father as light and illumination from Tradition

May the preceding reflections on the individual petitions of the Our Father help us learn to pray the Our Father with a fresh attentiveness. Let us allow ourselves to be instructed and formed by the words of the Lord's Prayer, so that we can become more and more like God. May we pray the Our Father daily and increasingly profit from it.

At first the Lord's Prayer can be for us an important aid as we learn the **right attitude toward God**. The words of the Our Father taken all together describe the essence of a right relationship to God. On the basis of the Our Father we can determine very easily whether we have already acquired this right attitude toward God or how far removed we still are from it.

The Our Father is a true school of genuine **Christian spiritual formation**. Let us allow our hearts to be conformed to the Heart of Jesus. The Our Father is a real spiritual treasure that orients and directs the heart to God.

One method of delving more deeply into the spirit of the Our Father would be to repeat each individual meaning unit and to explore it meditatively until one has made progress in understanding it more profoundly.



True conversion to God always means a progressive adaptation of purely secular (that is, worldly) ways of thinking and acting to those of a genuine Christian. The Our Father, if taken seriously, will train and increase our **alertness** and **power of resistance**.

Those so-called Christians who neglect the prayers of Tradition and instead prefer newly fabricated, supposedly creative texts, have no idea what profound and wonderful treasures of Tradition remain closed to them. The use of traditional prayers is an offer and a gift from heaven to us, to smooth the way to heaven for us with powerful signposts and bridges. It is sheer incomprehensible presumption to despise traditional ways of prayer, especially since our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us to pray this way. Let us be humble, open to God's promptings, and may we persevere in prayer! **Ω**



O . H E N R Y

The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry was the pseudonym for William Sydney Porter, an American author of the late 19th and early 20th century. Most of his works were short stories like this. Of his hundreds of stories, this is one of the most famous.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she

could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I

couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy.

Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a

Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm.


The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

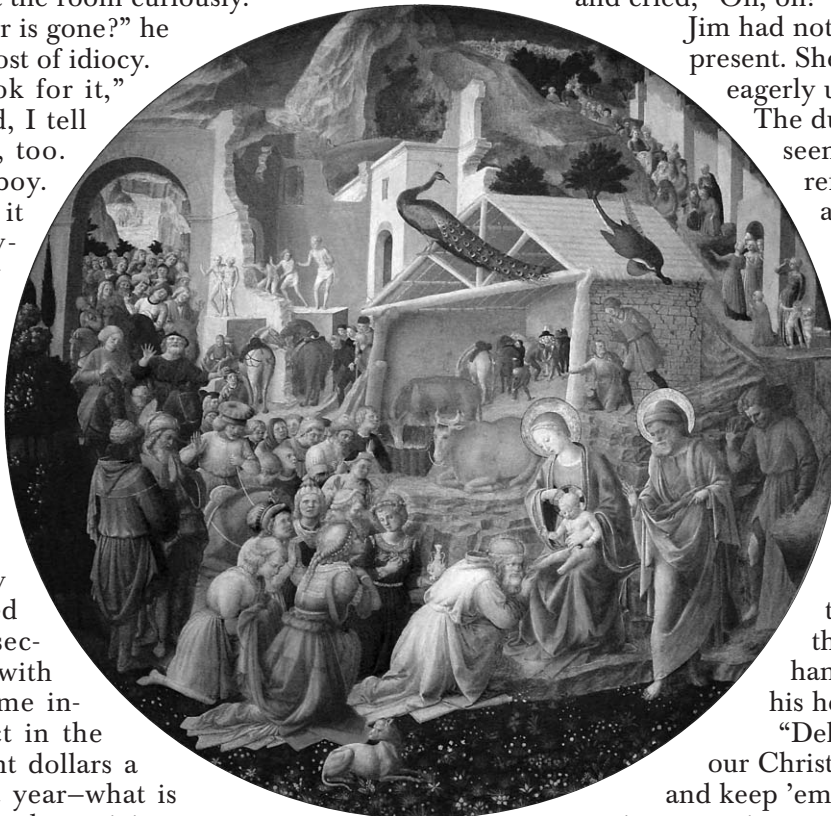
"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs.

And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi. 





Latin Mass Gets Press in Italy

There are things that preoccupy you for a good quarter of an hour. One of them is finding an article dedicated to the Mass in Latin (the real one!) on the first page of *L'Avvenire*, the daily newspaper of the Italian Bishops' Conference. And reading in it nothing but words of praise in lyrically suggestive prose, which is only what one would expect from the author of the piece: the author Antonia Arslan, one of the finest minds in contemporary literature and, like any Catholic who loves Beauty, a devotee of the immemorial rite.

Unlikely, yet it is in fact *L'Avvenire*, as the logo on the left testifies, not to mention an advertisement on the right for an essay by Cardinal Martini (written, as the blurb says, "in order to find the path and to look with confidence to the future"—thanks, very kind of you, but we prefer Arslan's recipe).

But here is the text of the article:

Masses in Latin

I happen to go to Mass in Latin often, the extremely well-attended 11:00 Mass at St. Agnes Church in New York.

It is best to arrive early.

There is a crowd of people of all nationalities in festive garb: the white women often in suit and hat, the black ladies in sumptuous draped tunics, the Puerto Rican usher with his broad smile, the Mexican woman dressed in violet, with a large satin scarf over her shoulders, kneeling in front of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The ceremony is lively and festive, with music by great composers and a polished choir.

Here in Italy, in Venice, at the Chiesa di San Simon Picolo, I found instead an austere, simple rite, less striking but maybe, just maybe more authentic.

It did not seem to be an exception that Sunday but rather the perpetuation of ancient words and gestures fraught with centuries of significance, which the celebrant ran through again with us, although he was turned around facing the altar and pronouncing the words in a lost language.

Those in attendance were recollected, reading the booklets with the prayers in Latin and Italian.

The music and the chant were stimulating without being imposing, and the presence of the sacred seemed to me more and more intense, as though other very ancient voices joined in with ours, voices of the dead and of the living, together until the Resurrection.

(Source: "Messa in Latino," *L'Avvenire*)

Christians Mourn the Attacks against Them

The situation for Christians in Iraq is becoming bleaker. The violence directed against them is no longer limited to the capital city Baghdad, but has been spreading throughout the country.

Two Christian men were killed Nov. 15 in the northern city of Mosul, about 250 miles northwest of Baghdad. The men were shot as they sat in the living room of their home.

The latest wave of violence began October 31 when Muslim extremists massacred more than 50 worshipers in Baghdad's Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation. Bombings of Christian

homes around the city quickly followed as part of what some Church officials and other analysts describe as a concerted effort to erase the ancient Christian footprint from the nation.

Fr. Firas Benoka, a Syrian priest in Mosul, said November 16 that at least five Christians have been killed in Mosul and Baghdad in recent days. Some were murdered in their homes while others were victims of car bombs.

A report from Italy's Catholic *Avvenire* newspaper placed the death toll of Iraqi Christians in recent days at seven.

"There is a climate of terror that fills the Christian homes not only in Mosul and Baghdad, but also those on the plain of Nineveh," Fr. Benoka told CNA of the mood in the country.

The plain of Nineveh, where Mosul is located, is one of the ancient cradles of Catholicism. The towns and villages that dot the plain are home to some of the world's original Christian communities, dating back nearly 2,000 years to the dawn of Christianity.

These communities have been the target of numerous attacks in recent years. In February, five family members of a priest were killed in their Mosul home. Separate bombings of buses carrying Christian students to the University of Mosul took place in both May and August, with many casualties.

Kidnappings and killings of Christians have become almost routine in the city.

Experience has proven that all Christians are vulnerable. In February 2008, Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul's Chaldean Catholic rite was kidnapped and killed. In 2005, the current Syrian Catholic Archbishop Basile



Georges Casmooussa of Mosul was kidnapped, but released after one day in captivity.

Archbishop Casmooussa told CNA in an e-mail interview that the situation on the ground in Iraq today is “tense.”

Christians, he said, feel like “hostages of fear,” he said.

But there are glimmers of hope and reconciliation.

Muslim and Christian leaders in the city of Irbil issued a joint statement November 12 condemning the anti-Christian violence. Mullahs, or spiritual leaders, representing both main Muslim factions, the Sunni and the Shiite, have promised to use their pulpits to invite people “to be

instruments of peace and fraternity rather than violence.”

Islamic extremists such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq, which claimed responsibility for the attacks on the Our Lady of Salvation, are directly responsible for attacks. But Archbishop Casmooussa said these groups are able to operate with impunity because Iraq’s government has been in discord.

Archbishop Casmooussa asked for assistance from the international community to ensure the safety of Iraqis and stop the mass emigration. He specifically urged international companies doing business in Iraq to push for greater human rights protections

and to use their economic clout to put pressure on the Iraqi and U.S. governments.

He is also calling on the Iraqi government to investigate and bring the terrorists to justice.

If they do not, he said, the United Nations must step in.

Until the perpetrators of this religious violence are brought to justice, Archbishop Casmooussa said, “Christians will not feel safe. The hemorrhage of emigration and violence will continue to undermine the Christian presence in Iraq and it will be disaster for Christians.”

(Source: *Catholic News Agency*)

The Story of St. Camilla Battista da Varano

On Sunday, October 17, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI canonized several new saints. One of these newly canonized saints put forward for our imitation was St. Camilla Battista da Varano, an Italian princess who left her life of luxury to become a Poor Clare. Although only canonized recently, she lived in the late 15th and early 16th century.

Born to a wealthy family, her father was the Prince of Camerino in central Italy. Her father initially resisted her attraction to the religious life, going so far as to imprison her for two and a half years until relenting to her vocation. He would later do penance by building a new monastery for the Poor Clares.

Strangely, we know almost nothing about the beginning or end of her life. What we do know about her we know primarily from her own writings, which she began at the age

of 10 and continued until she was 33 years old. She wrote at the request of her confessor, Blessed Peter of Mogliano, a Franciscan.

Among her books are numbered *Remembrances of Jesus* (1483), *Praise of the Vision of Christ* (1479–1481), *Treatise on the Mental Sufferings of Jesus Christ our Lord* (1488), and *The Spiritual Life* (1491), an autobiography that took 25 years to write.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says: “As a whole the writings of Baptista are remarkable for originality of thought, striking spirituality, and vividly pictorial language. Both St. Philip Neri and St. Alphonsus have recorded their admiration for this



Beata
Camilla Battista Da Varano

gifted woman who wrote with equal facility in Latin and Italian, and who was accounted one of the most brilliant and accomplished scholars of her day. Baptista died on the Feast of Corpus Christi, and was buried in the choir of her monastery.

Thirty years later her body was exhumed and was found in a state of perfect preservation. It was reburied to be again exhumed in 1593. The flesh was then reduced to dust but the tongue still remained quite fresh and red. The immemorial cultus of Baptista was approved by Gregory XVI in 1843, and her feast is kept in the Franciscan Order on June 2.”

(Source: *Angelus Press*)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is the Catholic Church opposed to the use of condoms?

In a book-length interview entitled *Light of the World*, which was released in German, Italian and English on November 23, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI admits, for the first time, the use of condoms “in certain cases” “to reduce the risks of infection” by the AIDS virus. These erroneous remarks require clarification and correction, for their disastrous effects—which a media campaign has not failed to exploit—cause scandal and disarray among the faithful.

1. What Pope Benedict XVI said

To the question, “Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?” the pope answered, according to the authorized English translation of the original German version:

She of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.

To illustrate his statement, the pope gives only one example, that of a “male prostitute.” He considers that, in this particular case, it

can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants.

The case in question, therefore, concerns someone who, while already committing an act contrary to nature, for mercenary reasons, would take care not to infect his client fatally in addition.

2. What Benedict XVI intended to say, according to his spokesman

These remarks by the pope have been perceived by the media and by militant movements in favor of contraception, as a “revolution,” a “turning point,” or at the very least a “break” in the constant moral teaching of the Church on the use of contraceptives. That is why the spokesman for the Vatican, Fr. Federico Lombardi, issued an explanatory note on November 21 in which we read:

The Pope considers an exceptional circumstance in which the exercise of sexuality represents a real threat for the life of another. In that case, the Pope does not morally justify the disordered exercise of sexuality but maintains that the use of a condom to reduce the danger of infection may be “a first act of responsibility,” “a first

step on the road toward a more human sexuality,” rather than not using it and exposing the other to risking his life.

It is appropriate to note here, to be exact, that the pope speaks not only about “a first act of responsibility” but also about “a first step in the direction of a moralization.” Along these same lines, Cardinal Georges Cottier, who was the theologian of the papal residence under John Paul II and at the beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI, had declared during an interview with the news agency Apcom on January 31, 2005:

In some particular situations—and I am thinking about environments where drugs are circulated or where great human promiscuity and great poverty prevail, as in certain regions of Africa and Asia—in those cases, the use of condoms can be considered legitimate.

Legitimacy of condom use, regarded as a step toward moralization, in certain cases: that is the problem posed by the pope’s remarks in *Light of the World*.

3. What Benedict XVI did not say and what his predecessors have always said

“No ‘indication’ or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act” (Pius XII, Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives, October 29, 1951).

*“No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good” (Pius XI, Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, 54).*



Now the use of condoms is contrary to nature inasmuch as it deflects a human act from its natural end. Their use therefore remains immoral always.

To the journalist's clear question, "Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?" the pope answers by citing an exceptional situation, and he does not recall that the Church is always fundamentally opposed to condom use.

Now the fact that condom use is an intrinsically immoral action, and matter for mortal sin, is a constant point in the traditional teaching of the Church, for example in the writings of Pius XI and Pius XII, and even in the thought of Benedict XVI when he says to the journalist who is questioning him, "[The Church] of course does not regard [the condom] as a real or moral solution," but nevertheless the pope allows it "in certain cases." But that is inadmissible from the perspective of the faith. "No reason," Pius XI teaches in *Casti Connubii*, §54, "however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good." Pius XII recalls this in his Address to Midwives (October 29, 1951): "No 'indication' or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act." Saint Paul condemned the opinion that evil may be done so that good may come of it (see Rom. 3:8).

Benedict XVI seems to consider the case of the male prostitute according to the principles of "gradual morality" which claims to allow certain less serious crimes so as to lead delinquents progressively from extremely serious crimes to harmless behavior. These lesser crimes would not be moral, no doubt, but the fact that they are part of a path toward virtue would render them licit. Now ***this idea is a serious error because a lesser evil remains an evil, whatever improvement it may indicate.*** As Paul VI teaches in *Humanae Vitae* (§14):

Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Romans 3:8)—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general.

Tolerating a lesser evil is not the same as making that evil "legitimate," nor including it in a process of "moralization." *Humanae Vitae* (§14) recalls that


"it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong," just as one must say that it is an error to propose the idea that a condom, which in itself is wrong, could be made right by the hoped-for path toward virtue of a male prostitute who uses it.

As opposed to a weaning process that would lead from a sin that is "more mortal" to one that is "less mortal," evangelical teaching clearly affirms: "Go and now sin no more" (Jn. 8:11) and not "go and sin less."

4. What Catholics need to hear from the pope's lips

Certainly, a book-length interview cannot be considered an act of the Magisterium [*i.e.*, of the Church's official teaching authority], *a fortiori* when it departs from what has been taught in a definitive, unchangeable way. Nonetheless the fact remains that the doctors and pharmacists who courageously refuse to prescribe and deliver condoms and contraceptives out of fidelity to their Catholic faith and morality, and in general all the many families devoted to Tradition, have an urgent and overriding need to hear that the perennial teaching of the Church could not change over time. They all await the firm reminder that the natural law, like human nature upon which it is engraved, is universal.

Now in *Light of the World* we find a statement that relativizes the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* by describing those who follow it faithfully as "deeply convinced minorities" who offer the others "a fascinating model to follow." As if the encyclical by Paul VI set an ideal almost out of reach, which is what the great majority of bishops had already persuaded themselves of, so as to slip that teaching more readily under the bushel basket—precisely where Christ forbids us to place "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14).

Should the demands of the Gospel become, unfortunately, the exception destined to confirm the general rule of the hedonistic world in which we live? The Christian must not be conformed to this world (see Rom. 12:2), but rather must transform it as "the leaven in the dough" (see Mt. 13:33) and give it the taste of Divine Wisdom as "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). 

From the General House of the Society of St. Pius X. Menzingen. Published on November 26, 2010.

The Death of Catholic Nations Leads to the Disappearance of Christian Minorities

On Sunday, October 31, 2010, while we were celebrating the Feast of Christ the King, our brothers in the Middle East were suffering bloody persecution. While the Syrian Catholic Cathedral of Baghdad was packed for Sunday Mass, soldiers burst into the sanctuary and in the name of Allah cut down two priests, Fathers Athir and Wassim, and some fifty of the faithful who had been taken hostage. Profaned altars, exploding grenades, gun-fire bursts, blood shed, bodies mangled, families scattered, should not strike us as the commonplaces of distant news.

Historians relate that the disciples of St. Thomas had evangelized Mesopotamia in the first centuries of our era. The bell towers of Christian churches in the Orient were lifted up to heaven long before the advent of minarets, and these communities which are today condemned by the silence of our contemporaries to suffer exile or abject submission in face of the advance of Islam, were implanted in these lands long before the birth of Mohammed. Today, they are destined to imminent disappearance in a great number of countries while people explain that this deplorable development is only the work of a fanatic minority, when it is first and foremost that of a cowardly desistance.

If, despite the spread of Islam, Christian communities were able to survive in these countries and preserve the first hearths of Christianity for centuries, it was essentially due to the protection afforded

them by the Catholic States of the West, which never ceased to support them. Their programmed disappearance, in favor of the theme of religious liberty which surfaced in the 20th century, has left these Christendoms in prey to persecution, while the new practice of dialogue proves to constitute scant protection for this Christian presence, daily shrinking away to nothing in the Middle East. In parallel, it is the same equalization of religions that makes it that, far from being contained, the spread of Islamic thought is making enormous inroads in once Catholic, now apostate countries, rendering the Muslim communities less and less of a minority.

Eighty-five years ago, Pius XI, in the encyclical *Quas Primas*, recalled the Catholic doctrine on the subject that he had received from his predecessors and which has strangely disappeared in the last 40 years. The pope prophesied about the disastrous consequences of the disappearance of Catholic nations in social, cultural, or geopolitical matters on a planetary scale. On the contrary, he explained, “When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great bless-



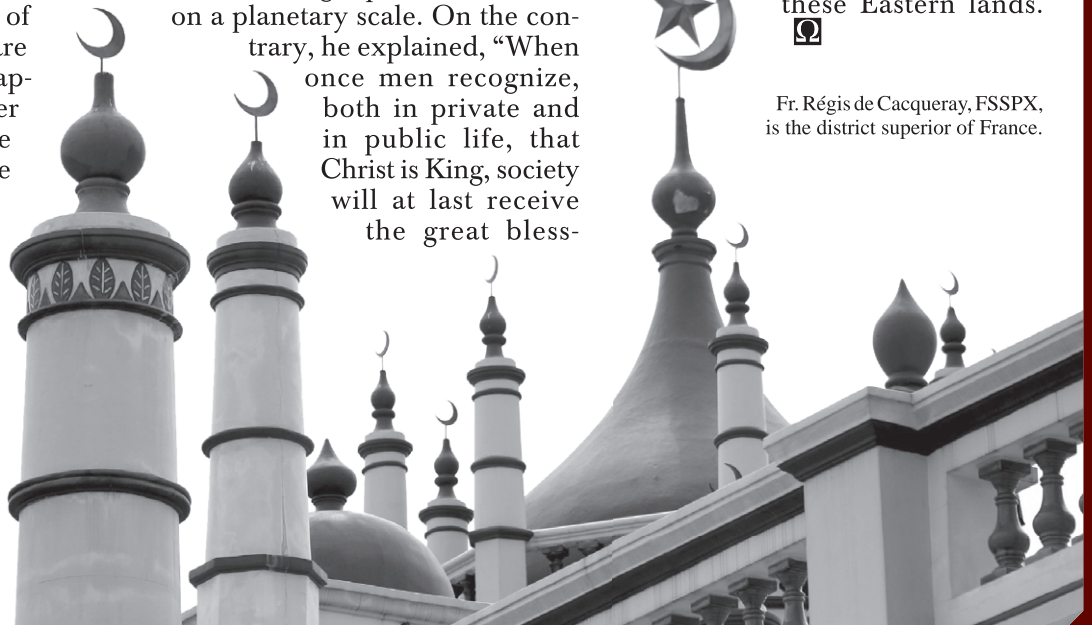
ings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony” (§19).

Thus, it is indeed on the profession of faith by heads of State that depends the fate of Catholics throughout the world. No international authority secular or interreligious, no universalist diplomatic conferences can establish a peace that does not rest upon Jesus Christ.

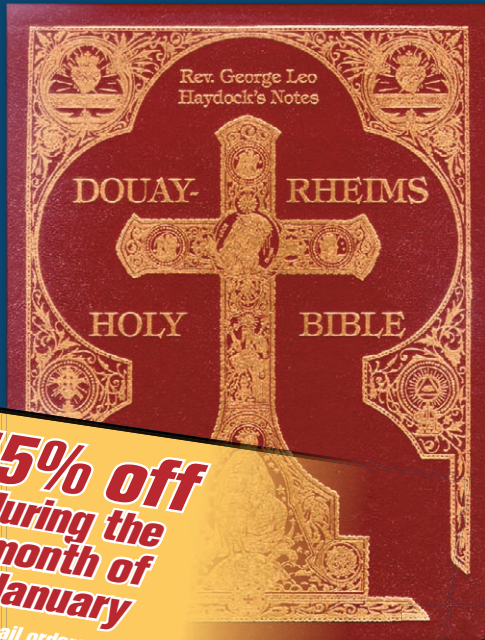
Let us pray and let us not neglect any sacrifice for these Christian brethren suffering martyrdom, whose blood, by the grace of God, will make the Church bound back in these Eastern lands.



Fr. Régis de Cacqueray, FSSPX, is the district superior of France.



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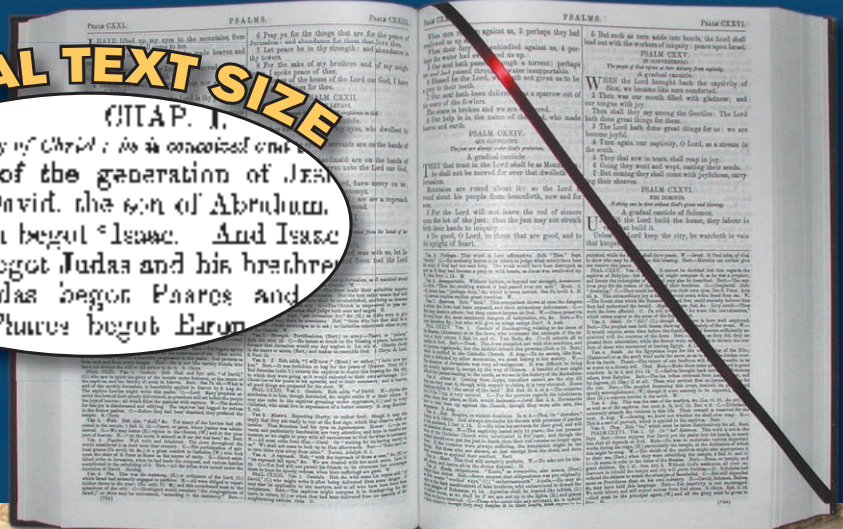
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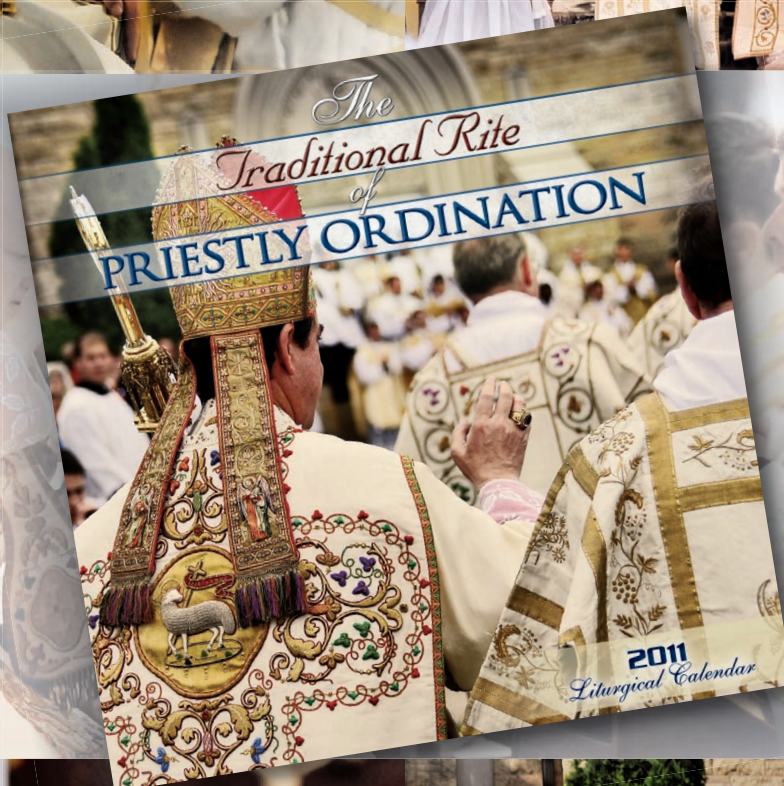
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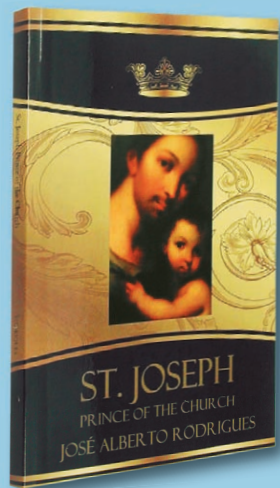
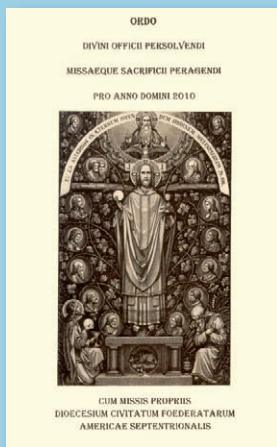




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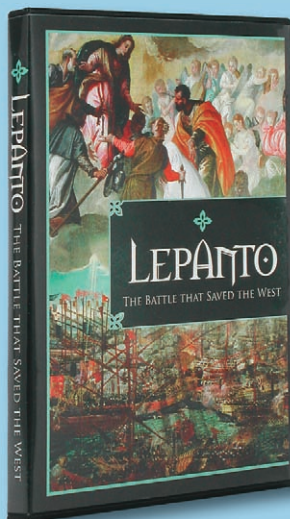
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