

The Papacy and the Passion of the Church

by Mario Derksen

"If I did not believe God, I would be convinced that the Catholic Church was about to end."¹

These are the words of Mgr. Joseph Clifford Fenton, written in his personal diary on November 23, 1962, approximately six weeks after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in which he was participating as a theological expert.

What has happened to the Catholic Church?

This is a question that not a few people have asked themselves since the death of Pope Pius XII on October 9, 1958. In fact, any objective observer would have to agree that nothing has been the same since. At this point, after 58 full years, the only resemblance to the Church of Pius XII and his predecessors that the institution in Vatican City bears, is the buildings and some externals that are few and far between. Only the outer shell of Catholicism has been retained, and the inside has been replaced with a toxic mix of heresy, blasphemy, and impiety.

But how could this be? Did our Blessed Lord not promise to St. Peter that he would be the rock on which the Church was to be built, and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it? Furthermore, a common theological maxim says, "Where Peter is, there is the Church"²; and the Church is infallible and indefectible, the Ark of Salvation which everyone must join if he wishes to be saved.

To solve this conundrum, let us first take a look at what the Catholic Church teaches about the nature and the purpose of the Papacy, and what consequences result from it.

The Nature and Purpose of the Papacy

In an allocution given on March 7, 1873, Pope Pius IX explained the intrinsic connection between the Catholic Faith and the office of the Papacy:

Such was Peter's faith; such must be our own. Faith was the strongest characteristic of the Prince of the Apostles. This it was which made him answer Christ: *Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi*, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God"; this it was which won for him the title of *blessed: Beatus es, Simon Bar-Jona, quia caro et sanguis non revelavit tibi*: Blessed art thou, because neither flesh nor blood has put on your lips the confession of my divinity, but because it is my eternal Father who has revealed it to you from heaven: *quia caro et sanguis non revelavit tibi, sed Pater meus qui in coelis est* [Mt 16:16-17]. From this comes

¹ Joseph Clifford Fenton, "Journal of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth trips to Rome, March 1962-February 1963", entry dated Nov. 23, 1962; online at Digital Collection of *Catholic University of America*, <http://hdl.handle.net/1961/2041-112136> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

² "*Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*" -- This maxim was first enunciated by St. Ambrose in his *Commentary on Twelve Psalms of David*, 389 AD.

the order establishing Peter as the foundation of the Church.³

The Faith of St. Peter was guaranteed by Christ Himself never to fail: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren."⁴ But this gift of unfailing Faith did not die with St. Peter. Just as with the Petrine primacy itself, the gift of never-failing Faith endures in all of his valid successors. This was taught by the First Vatican Council, promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1870:

So, this gift of truth and a never failing faith was divinely conferred upon Peter and his successors in this chair, that they might administer their high duty for the salvation of all; that the entire flock of Christ, turned away by them from the poisonous food of error, might be nourished on the sustenance of heavenly doctrine, that with the occasion of schism removed the whole Church might be saved as one, and relying on her foundation might stay firm against the gates of hell.⁵

In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV had summarized Catholic teaching about the nature of the Roman Pontificate as follows:

The Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff have primacy in the entire world. The Roman Pontiff is the Successor of Blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, true Vicar of Christ, Head of the whole Church, Father and Teacher of all Christians.⁶

In 1853, Pope Pius IX taught the following, in his encyclical letter *Inter Multiplices*:

This chair [of Peter] is the center of Catholic truth and unity, that is, the head, mother, and teacher of all the Churches to which all honor and obedience must be offered. Every church must agree with it because of its greater preeminence.... Now you know well that the most deadly foes of the Catholic religion have always waged a fierce war, but without success, against this Chair; they are by no means ignorant of the fact that religion itself can never totter and fall while this Chair remains intact, the Chair which rests on the rock which the proud gates of hell cannot overthrow and in which there is the whole and perfect solidity of the Christian religion.⁷

Moreover, the First Vatican Council proclaimed this dogmatic canon:

If anyone thus speaks, that the Roman Pontiff has only the office of inspection or direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal Church, not only

³ Pope Pius IX, Allocution to an international Catholic deputation, March 7, 1873; excerpted in Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, eds., *Papal Teachings: The Church* (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1962), p. 238, n. 420; italics given.

⁴ Luke 22:31-32

⁵ Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, Chapter 4; Denz. 1837. The full English text of the 30th edition of *Denzinger* is available online at <http://patristica.net/denzinger/> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

⁶ Pope Benedict XIV, Apostolic Constitution *Etsi Pastoralis*; excerpted in *Papal Teachings: The Church*, p. 32, n. 3.

⁷ Pope Pius IX, Encyclical *Inter Multiplices*, nn. 1, 7; online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9interm.htm> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

in things which pertain to faith and morals, but also in those which pertain to the discipline and government of the Church spread over the whole world; or, that he possesses only the more important parts, but not the whole plenitude of this supreme power; or that this power of his is not ordinary and immediate, or over the churches altogether and individually, and over the pastors and the faithful altogether and individually: let him be anathema.⁸

Thus we see expounded the nature of the Papacy: The Pope is the Universal Teacher of Christendom; he is the Supreme Judge of all the faithful; he is the Vicar of Christ who governs all and to whom everyone must submit; he is the principle of unity; he is the divinely-instituted guarantee of the true Faith in the true Church.

Understanding the nature of the Papacy, we can easily see its purpose: to ensure that sound doctrine will always be taught in the Universal Church and especially the See of Rome; to maintain the unity of all the members of the Church; to rule the Church with the authority of Christ by binding and loosing. In short, the purpose of the Papacy is to keep the gates of hell from prevailing against the Church -- and it is clear that Christ endowed the office of the Papacy He Himself had founded with all the guarantees and heavenly aid necessary to attain its purpose.

Christ Jesus Himself, then, guarantees the Papacy, and He does this regardless of who the occupant of the papal office is at any given point in time. As Popes Leo XII and Pius IX taught, the Papacy "does not fail even in an unworthy heir."⁹ Pope Leo XIII elaborated on this point as follows:

...[T]he Church has received from on high a promise which guarantees her against every human weakness. What does it matter that the helm of the symbolic barque has been entrusted to feeble hands, when the Divine Pilot stands on the bridge, where, though invisible, He is watching and ruling?¹⁰

It would be absurd, indeed, if the office of the Papacy could either fail or succeed depending on who currently happens to be Pope, as though it were based on the personal qualifications, charisma, or merits of the occupant rather than on the institution by, and promises of, Jesus Christ. This would defeat the purpose of the Church and make her indistinguishable from any merely *human* institution. It would make the Pope indistinguishable from any other human leader.

The Papacy has Consequences

But if all this is so, then a number of things follow, both in theory and in practice.

The first consequence that follows from this is that we have an obligation to submit, with our intellect

⁸ Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, Chapter 3; Denz. 1831.

⁹ Pope Leo XII, Encyclical *Ubi Primum*, n. 22; online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo12/112ubipr.htm>; Pope Pius IX, Encyclical *Nostis et Nobiscum*, n. 16; online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9nostis.htm> (both accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

¹⁰ Pope Leo XIII, Allocution to Cardinals, March 20, 1900; excerpted in *Papal Teachings: The Church*, p. 349, n. 645.

and will, to the Roman Pontiff, and this as a matter of our eternal salvation. This indeed is Catholic dogma, defined by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302, in his bull *Unam Sanctam*: "...we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff."¹¹

Secondly, it also follows from this that we have a divine guarantee that we will never stray from sound doctrine as long as we are united with the Holy See under the Pope. Pope Leo XIII put it quite succinctly in his encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, where he taught: "Union with the Roman See of Peter is ... always the public criterion of a Catholic.... [quoting St. Augustine:] 'You are not to be looked upon as holding the true Catholic faith if you do not teach that the faith of Rome is to be held.'"¹²

Likewise, Pope Pius IX said:

Indeed one simple way to keep men professing Catholic truth is to maintain their communion with and obedience to the Roman Pontiff. For it is impossible for a man ever to reject any portion of the Catholic faith without abandoning the authority of the Roman Church. In this authority, the unalterable teaching office of this faith lives on. It was set up by the divine Redeemer and, consequently, the tradition from the Apostles has always been preserved.¹³

Notice how Pius IX mentions here that the preservation of Apostolic Tradition is a *consequence* of the Papacy having been established by Christ. Once again we see that the Papacy *guarantees orthodoxy*, and this by divine institution. It cannot fail, regardless of who currently happens to be Pope, and regardless of any other circumstances.

From all the foregoing, we can see how important the "Pope question" is. Many who call themselves traditional Catholics think that the issue of whether the papal claimants after Pius XII are true Popes or not, is peripheral, perhaps even unimportant, or, in any case, just a matter of opinion, *as though nothing followed* from accepting or rejecting someone's claim to the Papacy. However, looking at what the Church teaches about the nature, purpose, and consequences of the Papacy, we can see how mistaken and dangerous such an attitude is.

Indeed, all the Church teaching quoted so far is inherently incompatible with the idea that a true Pope could be a public heretic. If such a thing were possible, Catholic teaching on the Papacy would be reduced to absurdity. The Vicar of Christ would become the Vicar of Satan, and the Church, which is the Ark of Salvation, would turn into a vehicle for damnation.

"Vehicle for damnation," we might say, is actually a pretty apt description of the Vatican II Church and its current captain, Jorge Bergoglio ("Pope Francis"). This consideration alone would suffice to prove

¹¹ Pope Boniface VIII, Bull *Unam Sanctam*; online at <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/B7UNAM.HTM> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

¹² Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, n. 13; online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113satis.htm> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

¹³ Pope Pius IX, Encyclical *Nostis et Nobiscum*, n. 17.

that the Novus Ordo Establishment is not the Catholic Church and its head is not the true Catholic Pope. For, if it is true that where Peter is, there is the Church, then it is likewise true, by the necessity of logical inference, that where the Church is not, there Peter is not, either.

The Church's Mystical Passion: The Mystery of Iniquity

Describing the Catholic Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, Pope Pius XII explained:

It is the will of Jesus Christ that the whole body of the Church, no less than the individual members, should resemble Him. And we see this realized when, following in the footsteps of her Founder, the Church teaches, governs, and offers the divine Sacrifice. When she embraces the evangelical counsels she reflects the Redeemer's poverty, obedience, and virginal purity. Adorned with institutes of many different kinds as with so many precious jewels, she represents Christ deep in prayer on the mountain, or preaching to the people, or healing the sick and wounded and bringing sinners back to the path of virtue -- in a word, doing good to all. What wonder then, if, while on this earth she, like Christ, suffer persecutions, insults and sorrows.¹⁴

As we all know, our Blessed Lord suffered the ultimate persecution, frightful insults, and countless sorrows in His Sacred Passion on Holy Thursday and Good Friday; and indeed, Sacred Tradition tells us that Holy Mother Church too, will undergo her very own Mystical Passion before Christ returns in glory. Like her Divine Spouse, the Catholic Church will undergo every kind of persecution and humiliation -- and like Him she will seem, for a time, to have failed.

Yet, this will not take place until the appointed time! We recall that no one was able to harm our Lord until the precise moment in time *when He willed it*.¹⁵ So also the persecution of the Church could not begin until the precise moment predetermined by God from all eternity.

It is very important for us to understand that the Passion of the Church was prophesied ahead of time, just as our Lord's Passion was prophesied, both by the writers of the Old Testament¹⁶ as well as by Christ Himself when He spoke to His disciples: "At present I tell you, before it come to pass: that when it shall come to pass, you may believe that I am he."¹⁷

Just as the Passion of our Lord was the ultimate consequence of people rejecting Him and His teachings, so the Passion of the Church will likewise be the final consequence of people revolting against her authority, her mission, and her teaching. One of the central texts in Sacred Scripture dealing with this is 2 Thessalonians 2:3-11:

Let no man deceive you by any means, for unless there come a revolt first, and the man of

¹⁴ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, n. 47; online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12MYSTI.HTM> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

¹⁵ For example, see John 7:30, John 8:20, and Mark 14:41.

¹⁶ For example, see Wisdom 2:12-22 and Isaias 53.

¹⁷ John 13:19.

sin be revealed, the son of perdition who opposeth, and is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself as if he were God. Remember you not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now you know what withholdeth, that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity already worketh; only that he who now holdeth, do hold, until he be taken out of the way. And then that wicked one shall be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of his mouth; and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, him, whose coming is according to the working of Satan, in all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and in all seduction of iniquity to them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Therefore God shall send them the operation of error, to believe lying; that all may be judged who have not believed the truth, but have consented to iniquity.

This passage reveals a number of important things that pertain to the Passion of the Church. St. Paul explains that already in his time there was underway what he calls the "Mystery of Iniquity," which is the cause of this revolt against the Church: They are the forces of Antichrist which seek to draw away as many souls from Christ as possible. One way they will do this is through what St. Paul calls the "operation of error," a great deception that God will allow to be inflicted on all who do not love the truth but instead prefer to remain in sin.

This revolt of the Mystery of Iniquity will culminate in the revelation of the Man of Sin, the Antichrist, who will seduce and deceive almost everyone by means of false doctrines¹⁸ and false miracles.¹⁹ But -- and this is a really significant point -- even though this Mystery of Iniquity was already at work in the first century, St. Paul says there is a restraining force in place that holds it back from succeeding against the Church -- at least for a predetermined time, until this restraining force is "taken out of the way."

The question that presents itself then is, what or who is this restraining power? According to the Church Fathers and other notable Catholic theologians, that which holds back the Mystery of Iniquity from prevailing against the Church is precisely *the Papacy*. The Pope -- not any particular Pope but the Pope as such -- is what keeps the Antichrist forces from conquering the Church. Yet, this will be only for a time, "until he be taken out of the way." What will happen then? Again Holy Scripture gives us the answer: "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,"²⁰ the prophet Zacharias foretold. And our Lord used this very verse to warn His disciples on the night of His Passion that they would be scandalized in Him because He, the Shepherd, would be struck.²¹

The Church's Mystical Passion: The Striking of the Shepherd

How might this striking of the shepherd actually take place? Here it will be helpful to turn to the book

¹⁸ False doctrines will be welcomed by all who do not care for the truth or do not wish to endure it: "For there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: and will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

¹⁹ See Matthew 24:24.

²⁰ Zacharias 13:7

²¹ See Matthew 26:31.

of the Apocalypse. There we read the following:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars: And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads, and ten horns: and on his head seven diadems: And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered; that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her son. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with an iron rod: and her son was taken up to God, and to his throne.²²

At first sight, this passage may not seem to have anything to do with the issue under discussion, but actually it does. By 1955, Fr. Herman Bernard Kramer, a diocesan priest from Iowa, had studied the Apocalypse for 30 years and published the fruits of his labor under the title *The Book of Destiny*. In it, he explains that this passage talks about the church "passing at that time through the greatest crisis of her whole life."

He continues:

In that travail, she gives birth to some definite "person" who is to RULE the Church with a rod of iron (verse 5). It then points to a conflict waged within the Church to elect one who was to "*rule all nations*" in the manner clearly stated. In accord with the text this is unmistakably a PAPAL ELECTION, for only Christ and His Vicar have the divine right to rule ALL NATIONS. Furthermore, the Church does not travail in anguish at EVERY papal election which can be held without trouble or danger. But at this time the great powers may take a menacing attitude to hinder the election of the logical and expected candidate by threats of a general apostasy, assassination or imprisonment of this candidate if elected. This would suppose an extremely hostile mind in the governments of Europe towards the Church and would cause intense anguish to the Church, because an extended interregnum in the papacy is always disastrous and more so in a time of universal persecution. If Satan would contrive to hinder a papal election, the Church would suffer great travail.

...As a dragon, Satan through the evil world-powers of that time will enter the Church, interfere with her liberty and perhaps by stealthy suggestions having long before directed the choosing of candidates for the episcopate will now endeavor by threats of force to hinder the election of the worthiest candidate for the papacy.²³

This intriguing interpretation of Apocalypse 12:1-5 becomes even more fascinating when we reflect on the fact that Fr. Kramer wrote this in 1955, when Pius XII was still reigning as Pope. Obviously, Fr.

²² Apocalypse 12:1-5

²³ Herman Bernard Kramer, *The Book of Destiny* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books & Publishers, 1975), pp. 278-279; italics and capitalizations in original. This book was first published in 1955 and bears the *imprimatur* of Bp. Joseph M. Mueller of Sioux City, Iowa.

Kramer did not have knowledge of future events. He simply interpreted the Apocalypse in accordance with Catholic Tradition and in light of world events up until that time. However, the main point here is not so much *how* Fr. Kramer thought a papal election might be hindered or a Pope kept from exercising his office, but the very fact that he brings up an *extended interregnum* -- a time without a Pope -- at all, as well as the possibility of a general apostasy in connection with it.

Interestingly enough, Fr. Kramer was by no means the only one to interpret the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse in this manner. Fr. E. Sylvester Berry, for example, had essentially said the same thing as far back as 1921:

In this passage there is an evident allusion to some particular son of the Church whose power and influence shall be such that Satan will seek his destruction at any cost. This person can be none other than the Pope to be elected in those days. The Papacy will be attacked by all the powers of hell. In consequence the Church will suffer great trials and afflictions in securing a successor upon the throne of Peter.²⁴

There is the scenario of the struck shepherd and the scattered sheep, applied as recently as the 20th century.

The Church's Mystical Passion: The Operation of Error

Although a struck shepherd and scattered sheep are one thing, they alone do not yet constitute that "operation of error" that will make people "believe lying." In the Gospel, our Blessed Lord warns that "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and [they] shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect."²⁵ In other words, Scripture has it that the deceptions worked by this Mystery of Iniquity will be so powerfully seductive that almost everyone will fall for them -- *especially* Catholics.

Why Catholics in particular? Because if Catholics were largely immune from this deception, it would lose most of its seductive power. It is Catholics, after all, that are to be deceived by it, more than anyone else. But how could virtually everyone, even *almost* the elect, be deceived if this deception proved to be no great challenge to the members of the Church?

Given this, what better way would there be for the Mystery of Iniquity to try to overcome the Papacy than by taking the Pope "out of the way" and substituting a false one in his stead? We must recall that the *only* way for the forces of Antichrist to succeed for a short time is for the Pope to be taken out of the way and for a new one to be prevented from being elected -- and the best way to guarantee that is to make everyone believe that a true Pope *is actually reigning* when this is not at all the case.

This is not mere idle speculation -- in fact, it is exactly what the aforementioned Fr. Berry said is foretold in Apocalypse 12. He wrote about this both in his 1921 book *The Apocalypse of St. John*, already quoted earlier, as well as in his book *The Church of Christ*, published in 1927:

²⁴ E. Sylvester Berry, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (Columbus, OH: John W. Winterich, 1921), p. 121.

²⁵ Matthew 24:24

It is a matter of history that the most disastrous periods for the Church were times when the Papal throne was vacant, or when anti-popes contended with the legitimate head of the Church. Thus also shall it be in those evil days to come.²⁶

The prophecies of the Apocalypse show that Satan will imitate the Church of Christ to deceive mankind; he will set up a church of Satan in opposition to the Church of Christ. Antichrist will assume the role of Messiah; his prophet will act the part of Pope; and there will be imitations of the Sacraments of the Church. There will also be *lying wonders* in imitation of the miracles wrought in the Church.²⁷

So there we have it prophesied: the true Church without a Pope, opposed by a false church with a false pope, false miracles, and false sacraments. In the end, this false church will also endorse the false messias, the Antichrist. This is the operation of error that God will send so that the people who have not loved the truth would instead believe lying; and this operation of error is an integral part of the suffering inflicted upon the Church during her Mystical Passion.

Cardinal Manning on the Characteristics of the Church's Passion

In 1861, the celebrated convert from Anglicanism Cardinal Henry Edward Manning published a booklet with a series of lectures entitled *The Present Crisis of the Holy See Tested by Prophecy*, which has been reprinted recently under the more intriguing title *The Pope & the Antichrist*. In this little book, Cardinal Manning describes in some detail the Mystical Passion the Church will undergo in the last age of the world, based on the testimony of the Church Fathers and the best Catholic theological authorities up until that time.

The first sign or characteristic of this Passion, Cardinal Manning says, will be an indifference to religious truth. This prediction alone is remarkable because His Eminence was writing in 1861, a time when the large-scale Indifferentism we've lived through in our own day was virtually inconceivable. But he was right -- a widespread indifference to truth would be necessary to allow the Great Apostasy to begin; and as we now know, this was accomplished by means of the Ecumenism of Vatican II. Ecumenism is the great promoter of Indifferentism, if not in theory, most certainly in practice. Its evil fruits are all too visible today.

After people have grown indifferent to truth, Cardinal Manning says, the next mark of the Church's Passion will be a *persecution* of truth, and the Vatican II Church has been doing exactly that from the beginning: It has persecuted Catholic truth. As a result, secular society has begun to do likewise, and we can see this even in our very own country, where beyond religious truth even truths of the natural order are now being questioned and persecuted, such as the obvious and empirically-verifiable truth that God created man male and female.²⁸

²⁶ Berry, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 124.

²⁷ E. Sylvester Berry, *The Church of Christ: An Apologetic and Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1927), p. 119; italics in original.

²⁸ This scientific truth is also revealed, of course, and therefore also a matter of divine Faith; see Genesis 1:27.

Further characteristics of the Church's Mystical Passion, says Cardinal Manning, will be the taking away of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the sanctuary, the temporary overthrow of the Papacy, and the apparent "death" of the Church.

On April 3, 1969, the false pope Paul VI suppressed the True Catholic Mass and instituted the *Novus Ordo Missae*, the Modernist worship service, in its stead. And if you look at the Vatican II Church today and how it carries out its highest act of worship, there are only two words that fittingly describe it: "abomination" and "desolation."

During this time when the Holy Sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation set up, Cardinal Manning says:

Then, the Church shall be scattered, driven into the wilderness, and shall be for a time, as it was in the beginning, invisible, hidden in catacombs, in dens, in mountains, in lurking-places; for a time it shall be swept, as it were, from the face of the earth. Such is the universal testimony of the Fathers of the early centuries.²⁹

Does this not sound familiar?

Next, Cardinal Manning mentions the overthrow of the Roman Pontificate:

...the casting down of "the Prince of Strength"; that is, the Divine authority of the Church, and especially of him in whose person it is embodied, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. God has invested him with sovereignty, and given to him a home and a patrimony on earth. The world is in arms to depose him, and to leave him no place to lay his head. Rome and the Roman States are the inheritance of the Incarnation. The world is resolved to drive the Incarnation off the earth. It will not suffer it to possess so much as to set the sole of its foot upon... The dethronement of the Vicar of Christ is the dethronement of the hierarchy of the universal Church, and the public rejection of the Presence and Reign of Jesus.³⁰

Thus we can see that the great apostasy, the great deception, the operation of error, the suppression of the Holy Mass, the overthrow of the Vicar of Christ -- it was all foretold in prophecy, and we've been privileged to witness it.

We may be tempted to ask, why is it that so many people succumb to these workings of the Mystery of Iniquity? The four factors Cardinal Manning mentions as enabling or accelerating the Great Apostasy are fear, deception, cowardice, and human respect.

The last stage in the Church's Passion is the final persecution, culminating in the apparent "death" of the Church. On this point, Cardinal Manning does not go into detail, but he does say this:

²⁹ Henry Edward Manning, *The Pope & the Antichrist* (Sainte-Croix du Mont: Tradibooks, 2007), p. 74. This new edition of Cardinal Manning's *The Present Crisis of the Holy See Tested by Prophecy* can be purchased from tradibooks.com.

³⁰ Manning, *The Pope & the Antichrist*, p. 76.

The Word of God tells us that towards the end of time the power of this world will become so irresistible and so triumphant that the Church of God will sink underneath its hand.... It will be deprived of protection. It will be weakened, baffled, and prostrate, and will lie bleeding at the feet of the powers of this world....

[The Church] will seem, for a while, to be defeated, and the power of the enemies of the faith for a time to prevail.³¹

This describes the Church being mystically entombed, and no doubt that is what we are witnessing today.

After her Passion and "Death", the Church will Rise Again

Although we weep at the Church's sufferings, no less do we hope for her future Resurrection, of which we are absolutely certain. We have to remember always that the Church's Passion resembles that of her Divine Spouse. In the words of Cardinal Manning:

As the wicked did not prevail against [Christ] even when they bound Him with cords, dragged Him to the judgment, blindfolded His eyes, mocked Him as a false King, smote Him on the head as a false Prophet, led Him away, crucified Him, and in the mastery of their power seemed to have absolute dominion over Him, so that He lay ground down and almost annihilated under their feet; and as, at that very time when He was dead and buried out of their sight, He was conqueror over all, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven, and was crowned, glorified, and invested with His royalty, and reigns supreme, King of kings and Lord of lords — even so shall it be with His Church: though for a time persecuted, and, to the eyes of man, overthrown and trampled on, dethroned, despoiled, mocked, and crushed, yet in that high time of triumph the gates of hell shall not prevail. There is in store for the Church of God a resurrection and an ascension, a royalty and a dominion, a recompense of glory for all it has endured. Like Jesus, it needs must suffer on the way to its crown; yet crowned it shall be with Him eternally. Let no one, then, be scandalised if the prophecy speak of sufferings to come. We are fond of imagining triumphs and glories for the Church on earth — that the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, and the world to be converted, and all enemies subdued, and I know not what — until some ears are impatient of hearing that there is in store for the Church a time of terrible trial: and so we do as the Jews of old, who looked for a conqueror, a king, and for prosperity; and when their Messiah came in humility and in passion, they did not know Him. So, I am afraid, many among us intoxicate their minds with the visions of success and victory, and cannot endure the thought that there is a time of persecution yet to come for the Church of God.³²

These are sobering words. They are words of warning but also words of comfort.

³¹ Manning, *The Pope & the Antichrist*, pp. 78, 75.

³² Manning, *The Pope & the Antichrist*, pp. 63-64.

Beware the *False* "Passion of the Church"

Having looked at some length at the Mystical Passion that Catholic Tradition tells us the Church will suffer before Christ returns, we note that although there are plenty of references to the Church being persecuted and apparently defeated, the sanctuary overthrown, the Holy Mass suppressed, and a Pope being kept from being elected or from exercising his office -- *at no point* is there any mention of the true Church teaching error, legislating harmful disciplines, promulgating evil sacramental rites, or of the Pope himself becoming an enemy of Christ through public heresy or apostasy. In fact, the Pope is always mentioned as the *victim* of the persecution, not as its protagonist -- and, recalling to mind the Church's teachings about the Papacy expounded at the beginning of this essay, this is not at all surprising.

Theologically, the Pope is always the solution, never the problem. According to prophecy, the Great Apostasy is an apostasy *from* the Church and the Vicar of Christ, not *of* the Church or the Vicar of Christ. As the representative of our Lord, in the Church's Mystical Passion the Pope is *being* persecuted, not *doing* the persecuting! The shepherd *is* struck; he is not *doing* the striking!

Again, this should come as no surprise. For example, if we look at the teaching of Pope Pius IX, we see that he describes the apostasy as consisting precisely in a *failure* to adhere to the Supreme Pontiff and his Magisterium; and so he proposes as the remedy, or as a preventative measure, *ever greater fidelity* to the Holy See, not *resistance* against it:

...We exhort you to direct your constant efforts so that the faithful people of France may avoid the crafty deceptions and errors of these [anti-Catholic] plotters and develop a more filial affection and obedience to this Apostolic See. Be vigilant in act and word, so that the faithful may grow in love for this Holy See, venerate it, and accept it with complete obedience; they should execute whatever the See itself teaches, determines, and decrees.³³

That is how we prevent or escape the Great Apostasy: by ensuring we *adhere ever more firmly* to the Holy See, not by resisting it.

This deserves to be emphasized because there are those who take a "recognize-but-resist" position with regard to the Vatican II Church and its "popes" and who try to argue that the Passion of the Church consists in the *faithful* being persecuted *by the Pope and the bishops!* Such a claim is outrageous and certainly not reconcilable with the testimony of Catholic prophecy or with traditional Catholic doctrine.

In particular, anti-sedevacantist authors John Salza and Robert Siscoe believe in what amounts to a *self-inflicted* "passion," one in which the Church basically wounds herself, since she obviously consists of both the hierarchy and the laity. Salza and Siscoe have tried to argue³⁴ that just as in our Lord's Passion,

³³ Pope Pius IX, Encyclical *Inter Multiplices*, n. 7.

³⁴ This argumentation is found in their anti-sedevacantist book *True or False Pope? Refuting Sedevacantism and Other Modern Errors* (Winona, MN: STAS Editions, 2015), *passim*, and on their web site. Both Salza and Siscoe essentially subscribe to the theological position of the Lefebvrist Society of Saint Pius X.

the legitimate leaders of the Old Covenant persecuted Christ, so in the Church's Mystical Passion, it is the legitimate authorities of the New Covenant who persecute the Body of Christ. However, this argument fails upon closer examination.

For one thing, the Body of Christ is the Catholic Church *as a whole*, including the very leaders Salza and Siscoe claim are doing the persecuting (i.e. the Pope and bishops) -- it is not merely the laity. Secondly, and more importantly, when our Lord was condemned by Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, and delivered up to Pontius Pilate, the Jewish authorities had *already ceased* to be the legitimate leaders of the true religion of the Old Covenant. We can verify this simply by reviewing the pertinent Gospel text and its authentic traditional Catholic interpretation.

First, the applicable passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

And the high priest said to him: I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ the Son of God. Jesus saith to him: Thou hast said it. Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his garments, saying: He hath blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy: What think you? But they answering, said: He is guilty of death.³⁵

The Church's greatest Scriptural exegete is St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church and patron saint of biblical scholars. His commentary on the passage just quoted is as follows:

And by this rending [of] his garments, [Caiaphas] shews that the Jews have lost the priestly glory, and that their High Priest's throne was vacant. For by rending his garment he rent the veil of the Law which covered him.³⁶

In other words, St. Jerome tells us that when he rent his garments and rejected Christ as the true Messiah, the high priest Caiaphas lost his authority and his office, automatically and without a declaration, by publicly defecting from the true religion. Does this not sound familiar?

The idea that the Passion of the Church should consist of the Catholic hierarchy misleading the faithful and turning the Church from the Ark of Salvation into the Ark of Damnation -- with each individual believer being obliged to figure out for himself just when the Church is faithful to Christ and must be submitted to, and when she is apostate leading souls to hell and must be resisted, both under pain of damnation -- is absurd. It's not found in Catholic Tradition, it doesn't jibe with Catholic prophecy, and it certainly contradicts Church teaching on the Papacy and the Magisterium.

Conclusion: Faith, Hope, and Charity

Understanding all these things about the Mystical Passion of the Church and how it was prophesied,

³⁵ Matthew 26:63-66

³⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, ed., *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels collected out of the Works of the Fathers I:III* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842), p. 926.

strengthens us in Faith and hope. Too often we are focused only on the Church's sufferings, but we must not forget that we have cause for hope; that after the Passion, there will be a marvelous Resurrection.

We recall that everything seemed hopeless when Christ lay in the tomb -- most of His disciples had abandoned Him, fearful, distraught, and perplexed. But then came our Lord's glorious Resurrection, which proved that what had appeared to be His great defeat was in fact His ultimate Victory.

As it was with Christ's physical Body, so it shall be with His Mystical Body; and we may suppose that He repeats even to us today the words He spoke to His disciples on the road to Emmaus: "...O foolish, and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory?"³⁷

Reflecting on this should inspire us with ever greater love for God, who does not abandon His children but loves them with a perfect love. We have cause, therefore, not for fear but for charity: "Fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth, is not perfected in charity. Let us therefore love God, because God first hath loved us."³⁸

In a way, then, we may say that everything is "going according to plan," as it were: What the Church has suffered in the last six decades has been but the fulfillment of prophecy, and to be allowed to witness it is in fact a great privilege, able to merit for us many graces. Let us keep in mind that this Mystical Passion of His Church, just like His very own, is willed by Christ for His glory and for the sake of the salvation of His elect -- it is not a negation of His Providence: "...I lay down my life, that I may take it [up] again. *No man taketh it away from me*: but I lay it down of myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again...."³⁹

As we mourn at the mystical tomb of Holy Mother Church and, full of hope, await her Resurrection, let us implore God day and night to hasten the day when we will once again have a true Pope; and let us seek refuge in the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, secure in the knowledge that in the end, this Immaculate Heart will triumph.

"If I did not believe God, I would be convinced that the Catholic Church was about to end."⁴⁰

Blessed are those who believe God.

³⁷ Luke 24:25-26

³⁸ 1 John 4:18-29

³⁹ John 10:17-18; italics added.

⁴⁰ Fenton, "Journal", entry dated Nov. 23, 1962.