

35. The Triple Weakness

The overall deterioration of the Roman Catholic institutional structure has now gone so far, indeed with each passing year proceeds at such a sustained pace; and Pope John Paul II and his papal bureaucracy have been pushed or have retreated into such ineffectual isolation from the day-to-day governance of the Church Universal, that now three dreadful outcomes are possible. Any of them could—probably would—entail the final disintegration of this Roman Catholic institutional organization as we have known it, and as men and women have known it for over five hundred years.

The day that a sizable body of Roman Catholics, clergy and laity, become convinced—rightly or wrongly—that the then occupant of the apostolic throne of Peter is not, perhaps never was, a validly elected pope, that day the presently continuous piece-by-piece deterioration of the organizational structure will be quickened into a muffled collapse of the entire organization. The already schism-split and heresy-ridden Roman Catholic body will then be a headless thing, a complicated machine exploding in all directions into fragments, because its secure casing and capstone cover were shattered.

For the only tangible guarantee Roman Catholics have that a man has truly become Pope is the legal guarantee of valid election in a legal Conclave of legal cardinals. Their faith then assures them that through this man and his predecessors they are in historical relationship with Jesus Christ, who founded the Church, and in supernatural relationship with Christ as he now is in the Heaven of God's glory. The legality—or validity, to use the ecclesiastical term—of a papal election depends on the exact observance, in the presence of witnesses, of the various visible and controllable procedures laid down in the rules for papal elections.

The final outcome of the election—a validly elected pope—is attained only with the freely pronounced *Accepto* of the Pope-elect. This is why Cardinal Laurenti, who became Pope-elect at the Conclave of February 1921, could never be regarded as Pope: He did freely decline to accept the pontificate, having been validly elected by the due majority. No one has to accept the Petrine Office. A pope-elect who refuses to accept is not obliged to explain why he has refused it, just as a pope who resigns the office is not obliged to explain why he has resigned.

What does the term “freely” mean when we say that the Pope-elect must freely accept or reject his election to the pontificate?

Take, for example, the Conclave of 1903, which produced as Pope Pius X Giuseppe Melchiorre Cardinal Sarto. But Sarto was not the prime choice of those sixty-two Cardinal Electors. After one voting session and scrutiny of the votes, on August 1, the first day of the Conclave, it was clear that the required majority (twenty-nine in this instance; Sarto got only five votes in that session) went to Italian-born Mariano Cardinal Rampolla Del Tindaro. Rampolla, if allowed, would have pronounced the required *Accepto*, would therefore have become Pope automatically.

But he was not allowed to accept the pontificate. At that time, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria had the privilege from the Vatican of vetoing any pope-elect he did not fancy. Rampolla he did not fancy—but the majority of Cardinal Electors never found out in their lifetime why it was so. The ostensible reason given for the Emperor’s veto was Rampolla’s record of political opposition to Austria and his support of France. So, on August 2, the Polish-born Jan Cardinal Puzyna of Austria-Hungary stood up in the Conclave and announced the Emperor’s veto on Rampolla.

Rampolla and the other Cardinal Electors bowed to the Austrian veto, because he and all the cardinals knew exactly what damage the persnickety Franz Joseph could cause the Churchmen in Central Europe, where the domains of the Austro-Hungarian empire stretched. In that sense, Rampolla’s *Non accepto* was free. He and the other cardinals freely accepted the existence of that veto. But insofar as the Emperor’s veto impeded the cardinals’ having the pope they freely chose, and impeded Rampolla from acceding to their overwhelming wish, neither they nor he was free. Yet no one then or since would hold that Rampolla was the real Pope, that Sarto—the Pope-elect produced by a later session of voting and scrutiny—was not validly Pope.

It was only in subsequent years that the true motive for Franz Joseph’s veto was revealed. The Emperor was privy to a very closely held secret: Cardinal Rampolla had joined the Lodge of Freemasons. Without any

doubt, the Emperor had the right to veto a papal candidate he did not fancy. Rampolla and the Electors bowed to the exercise of that privilege. But an entirely different situation would arise if a pope-elect were prevented from accepting the papacy by someone who had no right to do so, someone who threatened ruin and death to a pope-elect's reputation and family and person if he accepted his election as pope. Such a threat would be unjust, would be an undue limitation on the freedom of the Cardinal Electors. In that instance, the Pope-Elect would be in no way free. Unjust force and pressure would rob him of his freedom and would rob the Church of its validly elected Pope.

But very tortuous questions can thus arise. Nowadays, for instance, there is no state power or individual to whom the Holy See has granted a formal veto power on popes-elect. There is, however, a different category of persons outside the Conclave that the Holy See recognizes as having a legitimate interest in the actual identity of the new Pope. The Cardinal Electors entering a Conclave today are aware of which papal candidate is *persona non grata* to which interested outside party. Veto it is not, in the old formal sense; yet the likes and dislikes of such outside parties are certainly taken into account. And, therefore, at least theoretically, the situation can arise in which a duly elected candidate for the pontificate is vetoed.

In such a case—and it is not as theoretical as it would sound—very puzzling questions would emerge concerning the election of a second pope-elect in the same Conclave. Those questionings could blossom into a persuasion that the second election was invalid, that indeed the freedom of the Electors had been unduly manacled, and that the Church had been hoodwinked, and that the valid Pope-Elect had been sidetracked.

If such a persuasion was shared by a sizable body of Roman Catholics, the consequences could be dire for Church unity.

The same catastrophe of disintegration would desolate the Roman Catholic institutional organization—this is the second dreadful possibility—if a sizable body of Roman Catholic clergy and laity became convinced, rightly or wrongly, that the then occupant of the Throne of Peter was elected quite validly but over time had become heretical, and was actually collaborating, actively or passively, in the piece-by-piece dismemberment of the sacred Petrine Office and its ministerial organization. For a pope who became a heretic would cease to be pope.

In such a situation, the principal cause of disintegration would be the

lack of any authoritative voice in the Church structure by which Catholics would be assured authoritatively that their Pope had or had not fallen into heresy. For there is no official mechanism within the structure of the Church that is authorized to pass judgment on pope and papacy. Indeed, the Church's official code of ecclesiastical law, canon law, expressly denies to anyone the right or duty of passing official judgment on pope or papacy.

Only once so far in this century did a situation arise when a pope, Paul VI, did contemplate and take the first steps along a course of action that some of his closest advisers thought would have entailed certain heresy. This arose because of the way in which Paul VI originally proposed to change the age-old and all-important ceremony of the Roman Mass. His first version of a new Mass ceremony, those advisers argued, if ever it had been imposed and enforced throughout the Church Universal, would effectively have done away with those elements of the ceremony that were and still today are dogmatically essential to the successful confection of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of his death. At least two cardinals, Ottaviani and Bacci, made it clear privately to Pope Paul VI and publicly to third parties that if he went ahead with his plans for the new Mass ceremony, they would not hesitate to denounce him publicly to the whole Church as a heretic and as deposed from the Throne of Peter. They were prepared to denounce his new Mass ceremony as reeking of heresy. The faithful would thereby have been released from all allegiance and obedience to Pope Paul VI. He would have ceased to be pope.

In the event, Pope Paul, under such a dire threat from two prestigious cardinals, retreated from his original proposal; and the Church was spared a harrowing experience. But it is to be noted that neither Ottaviani nor Bacci nor any of the other Churchmen involved had any juridical right to make the threat or to carry it out. The mere threat frightened Paul VI into retreat; by modifying his first version of the new Mass in order to eliminate the most glaringly offensive elements of his original text, and by counterthreatening Cardinal Ottaviani with deprivation of the Sacraments, he escaped official censure at the hands of his Vatican colleagues. That 1967 crisis was kept under Vatican wraps.

Thus a great searing and divisive rift could split Church members, some siding with the Pope, others declaring him invalidated by his alleged heresy. Inevitably, at least two Church bodies would emerge, each contesting the other, each claiming to be orthodox. Whether an attempt to elect a new (and supposedly orthodox) pope would be made by those who believed the original Pope to be heretical, or whether solid segments

of the Catholic body would detach themselves from obedience to the accused Pope, the effect—disintegration—would be a wholesale loss of faith in the papacy, resulting in abandonment of Catholic religious practice and observance of Catholic moral precepts, which would be followed by the adoption of the “cafeteria” religion John Paul II has derided, the “pick-and-choose” Catholicism of many millions of Catholics today in North America and throughout the Western world.

There is one other possible development within the Roman Catholic body that, if unchecked, could shatter its unity of structure. Briefly, this is the Conclave election of a papal candidate whose policy would be to dissolve the unity and change the structure of the Roman Catholic Church by simply abandoning the exercise of the Petrine Office and privilege on which the structural unity of the Church is built as a visible body and by disassociating the approximately four thousand bishops of the Church from their collegial submission to the papacy—the principle on which they have been, up to now, structured. All this would mean a new function for the Bishop of Rome, and not the traditional one; it would also entail a new relationship of all bishops, including the Bishop of Rome, to each other. If anyone doubts seriously that such an eventuality could come about, let him remember that no one would have seriously speculated during the forties and fifties that a pope in the sixties would attempt to do away effectively with the elements that guaranteed the central happening of the Roman Mass; namely, the reenactment or re-presentation of Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary. Yet that, according to reliable sources, is precisely what happened.

There is a second reason why no one should consider farfetched the third possibility outlined above. A serious consideration of the present situation with dispassionate eyes very quickly reveals the grim fact of Roman Catholic life today: On the universal level of parish and diocese, and on the superior level of papacy and papal ministry, we will find present all the dispositive elements required and sufficient to bring this dire development to fruition. Indeed, we will find these elements have already been working intensively and extensively.

On the level of parish and diocese, and rife among bishops, priests, nuns and lay people, we will find an unshakable persuasion that before the Second Vatican Council there was one Roman Catholic Church—the “pre-Conciliar Church”; but that since that Council, the pre-Conciliar Church has ceased to exist, and its place has been taken by the “Conciliar Church,” animated by the “spirit of Vatican II” and no longer

called the "Roman Catholic Church" but instead called either, in the biblical words, the "people of God" or simply, vaguely, the "Church."

We will find that the two "Churches" are radically different in the minds of bishop, priest, nun and lay person. Different on four capital points. The "Conciliar Church" lays no claim to exclusive possession of the means of eternal salvation. Non-Catholics as such and non-Christians as such can make equal claims to have the means of salvation within their own religion—or "way of life," if they happen to be religionless. For all of us—Catholics, non-Catholics and non-Christians—are just pilgrims to the same goal, although approaching it by different roads. Second, in the Conciliar Church, the source of religious enlightenment, guidance and authority is the local "community of faith." Correct beliefs and correct moral practice no longer come from a hierarchic body of bishops submissive to the central teaching authority of one man, the Bishop of Rome. Third, the worldwide clusters of "communities of faith" have as their prime function to cooperate with "mankind" in building and assuring the success of world peace and world reform in the use of earth's resources so as to eliminate economic oppression and political imperialism. Fourth, the former Roman Catholic Church rules of moral behavior about life issues—conception, marriage, death, sexuality—must be brought into fraternal alignment with the outlook, desires and practices of the world at large. Otherwise, how can members of the Church claim to have opened up to their human brothers and sisters?

Now, these radical differences between the two "Churches" are seen as the prime fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which is endlessly quoted in order to justify them. The horrible fact is that the documents of that Council can be quoted to support these differences. For those documents are pockmarked with ambiguities in matters of faith, and in at least two of them, there are statements that, *prima facie*, seem irreconcilable with the constant teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and its popes up to the reign of Pope John XXIII and the opening of his Council.

On the level of papacy and papal ministerial organization, we find elements that foment, protect and give free rein to the aberrant "spirit of Vatican II" rife on the parish and diocese levels. We find that two popes, Paul VI and John Paul II, did not exercise their supreme teaching privilege and authority in order to prevent the birth of the "spirit of Vatican II"; or, once it started to flourish, refused to take the bull by the horns in the one way they and only they could do. For quite a long time now, Roman Catholics have needed a statement issuing from the personal power and privilege of the Pope, from his *ex cathedra* infallibility, once

and for all and without ambiguity telling all Catholics and all Christians and, for that matter, the entire world which of the two "Churches" is the orthodox one, which represents the Roman Catholic Church, the one and true Church vindicated by so many popes and so many martyrs and so many saints. Needed, in other words, is the authoritative interpretation of the Second Vatican Council's official documents.

But a papal statement cannot be mere words. The Church has been responding with words, and its atmosphere has been thick with documents and programs and reports, every year since the end of the Second Vatican Council. There must be reenforcement of Catholic laws by means of the traditional sanctions known to all of us: excommunication, expulsion from official positions, name-by-name condemnation of the people—prelates, priests, theologians, nuns, lay people—who refuse to accept the papal statements.

Both popes have refused to do this. Their neglect to do so has been excused or explained away by an attempt to maintain that they are preoccupied with more immediate or more important issues. But in the growing and spreading "spirit of Vatican II," there blossom the baneful flowers of destruction for the Roman Catholic institutional organization. Its protection is the vital element in the Petrine Office both these pontiffs swore to defend as personal representatives of Christ.

This is why the accusation of malfeasance in high office has been hurled against both pontiffs. They were judged as collaborating in the lethal endgame of those who intend to encompass the liquidation of the papacy and of the Roman Catholic institutional organization.

Unchecked and unhindered, the development will go as follows: With the slow leavening of the bishops everywhere by the "spirit of Vatican II," with no countervailing stance adopted by papal Rome, it is inevitable that what we now can see clearly in a restricted number of cardinals will permeate a greater and greater number. There is very little doubt in anybody's mind that cardinals such as Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, Basil Hume of Westminster, Godfried Danneels of Belgium, Paolo Evaristo Arns of São Paulo, Roger Etchegey of France, are partisans of "the spirit of Vatican II."

There are, to be sure, cardinals alive today who, together with more cardinals yet to be created by Pope John Paul II, will elect the pope who succeeds him. All will come into the next Conclave from a Church structure in which they have functioned for at least twenty-five years and where they not only did not curb or combat or even correct the aberrancies of the "spirit of Vatican II," but fomented it passively (by doing nothing) or actively (because they shared that same "spirit"). They will

come from dioceses where the vast majority of bishops will know nothing and will want to know nothing that doesn't cohere with the "spirit of Vatican II." The parishes and dioceses behind them are already thoroughly leavened by that same "spirit."

Barring a last-minute miracle, their choice of papal candidate will be one of their number, whose papal policy will be to crown and confirm the official existence of the "spirit of Vatican II."

Such a cardinal validly elected as pope will have as a principle of action what Popes Paul VI and John Paul II apparently adopted as a temporary expedient: not to exercise the now outmoded Petrine privilege of office. Paul VI promulgated the documents of the Second Vatican Council and sat back while the Church was devastated by the impact of the bastardization employed both by his Vatican officials and by his bishops throughout the Church. John Paul II has again and again sanctified the Council documents with papal assurances that they now hold the norm for Catholic belief and behavior.

Between those two pontiffs, Paul VI and John Paul II, on the one hand, and the next pope, elected after John Paul II dies, there will be this difference. That new pope's deficiency in his high office will be the result of a conviction that the original papal and Petrine Office as practiced by the Roman popes up to the last third of the twentieth century was really nothing more than a time-conditioned result of cultural modes extending way back hundreds of years; and that now is the time to downgrade its importance in order to free the "spirit of Vatican II" to mold the Church in an image that will suit the progressive mind of a new and far different age.

Roman Catholics will then have the spectacle of a pope validly elected who cuts the entire visible body of the Church loose from the traditional unity and the papacy-oriented apostolic structure that the Church has hitherto always believed and taught was divinely established.

The shudder that will shake the Roman Catholic body in that day will be the shudder of its death agony. For its pains will be from within itself, orchestrated by its leaders and its members. No outside enemy will have brought this about. Many will accept the new regime. Many will resist. All will be fragmented. There will be no one on earth to hold the fractionating members of the visible Roman Catholic body together as a living compact organization. Men will then be able to ask for the first time in the history of the Church: Where is the visible body of the Church Christ founded? But there will be none visible. The Church Christ founded will be in the same condition as on the day that the Apostle Philip encountered the Ethiopian official on the road from Je-

rusalem to Gaza and, finding that this man had received the grace to believe in Jesus, baptized him at a wayside well. After that Philip disappeared, and the official continued on his way. But now he was a living member of the Church of Christ, a participant in the Mystical Body of Christ, as surely as any Christian of a thousand years later who was baptized in one of Europe's cathedral baptisteries and had his name registered as an official member of the visible Church structure to be found everywhere around the cathedral.

But for that Ethiopian official there was no visible Church structure. Actually, by that simple ceremony of entering the wayside stream with the Apostle Philip and accepting baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that official had joined an underground, the nascent Christian underground, against which already the first pogroms had been launched by the resident Jewish authorities headed by a fiery rabbinical zealot named Saul of Tarsus, who, in the words of the same chapter of the Acts of the Apostles that tells of the Ethiopian's baptism, "wreaked havoc on the Church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women out and throwing them into prison."

For however or wherever the Church founded by Christ survives and lives on, it is sure that it will live on; the whole brute strength of Hell will not prevail against it. And the successor of Peter, whoever he is during those dire days, will finally be converted and will, as Jesus foretold after his resurrection, restore and bring back to spiritual strength the faith of his bishops and people in the Church of Christ.

36. Scenario: *The Consistory*

It was the first time and, although no one there quite realized it, the last time these particular 153 men would assemble together in the second-floor auditorium of the Nervi Hall of Audiences in Rome and sit down together facing Papa Valeska: a small sea of cardinalial blood purple