Notes and Comments

FORGED PROPHECY
AND MILLENNARY SPECIATIONS

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"The Prophecy of St. Malachy" is the topic of two articles first published in 1899 by Herbert Thurston, S.J.¹ Although this so-called "prophecy" has been largely discredited, it has recently been giving rise to speculations (1) about papal succession, (2) about Wojtyla as the last pope, and (3) especially about the millennial future of the Roman Catholic Church.

PAPAL SUCCESSION

The prophecy about the 111 papal successors of Pope Celestine II (d. 1144) was first published, not by St. Malachy (d. 1148), but by the Benedictine monk Dom Arnold Wion in 1595. Its credibility was supported by later commentators including Henry Engelgrave, S.J.² and Arthur Devine contributing to the (old) Catholic Encyclopedia.³ Others were more skeptical, especially Thurston who points out the "striking contrast between the success and uniformity of the earlier interpretations and the failure and wide diversity of the later ones."⁴ In other words, details known in 1595 were clear and accurate but details not

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1. Herbert Thurston, S.J., The War & the Prophets (New York: Kenedy & Sons, 1915), chap. VI, 120-61. This chapter is substantially identical with his articles in the June and July issues of The Month for 1899, as mentioned on p. vii.
yet known in 1595 were vague and impossible to verify or falsify accurately. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* ends its article on Malachy with the statement: “This prophecy is a 16th-century forgery.”

**WOJTYLA: LAST POPE?**

Thurston’s skepticism is largely directed against the mottoes and coat-of-arms of the 111 popes but has nothing to say about “111” as the number of popes after Celestine II. If it can be assumed that the number is not part of the 16th-century forgery, what are some possible deductions? One is that the *1993 Catholic Directory of the Philippines* lists the present Pope John Paul II as the 99th successor to Celestine II, thus indicating that 12 more popes are needed to complete the list of 111 in the prophecy. However, the *Annuario Pontificio* of 1987, besides listing these 99 legitimate popes, also lists the antipopes during that period, and their number is exactly 12! There may not be much point in discussing the validity of including the antipopes in a numbered list that is supposedly invalid anyway. But it may be of interest to give these 12 names: Anacletus II, Victor IV, Victor IV (yes, two of them), Paschal II, Callistus III, Innocent III, Nicholas V, Clement VII, Benedict XIII, Alexander V, John XXIII (1410-1415) and Felix V. Canonical flaws not necessarily implying bad faith, whether in the preparatory stage of a papal election or during or after the actual conclave, have historically led to lists of antipopes, although all such lists are subject to reservation.

The officials investigating the Garabandal phenomena of 1961-65 will do well to inquire if rumors about these 99 plus 12 papal names have somehow influenced the popular interpretations being given to Conchita’s reports.

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Independently of any prophecy, whether true or false, is it possible that Pope John Paul II is the last or close to the last pope? An affirmative answer would be somewhat inconsistent with the lively conversations about the Cardinals who will be voting for Wojtyła’s successor(s). And yet this affirmative supposition seems to provide the subconscious basis for what might snidely be dubbed as Speculative Vaticanology appearing below on fuller and fuller display in early 1994.

VATICINATION: MILLENNIAL FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

Thurston mentions Abbot Joachim da Fiore (d. 1202) as a papalarius seer similar to St. Malachy. Is psychic relationship implied? At any rate, Joachim is now the subject of articles by two emerging vaticanologists Gianni Valente and Massimo Borghesi.

Valente’s reading of Joachim’s writings proclaims that the Church, having passed through two ages emphasizing the Father and then the Son, is now about to enter into a third age that will emphasize the Holy Spirit. It will be transfigured into a spiritual Church. The papacy, far from disappearing, will be “sublimated” into a historical center of gravity, a universal guide to truth. The transformation is towards ecumenism and universalism and will even provide a mystico-esoteric dimension that will smooth out the gnostic differences between Catholics and Masons. Pope John Paul II’s various utterances are seen as directed to a world more than ever united in the praxis of peace, justice, brotherhood and devotion to the young.

Borghesi is even more esoteric. Joachim’s three ages are subdivided thus: the Father’s age embracing five subdivisions, the sixth age shaped by the Son, and the seventh age the final age of the Spirit. In this age, Petrine and sacramental Christianity will be “superseded” by a more transcendent form. Among

10. Lucio Brunelli, “Cardinals To Be or Not To Be,” in 30 Days, No. 3 (1994) 18-23. Brunelli speaks of a “Wojtylian majority” of 80% or 102 voting Cardinals of the total 141, of whom 94 had been elevated by John Paul II.
Joachim's intellectual descendants, Borghesi names Lessing, Schelling, Hegel, Voegelin, Ratzinger and Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard's "cosmic panchristism" and "pleroma" are traced to Joachim's "trans-Catholic" (not "anti-Catholic") Christianity.

The styles of Valente and Borghesi reveal scholarly detachment. But the plethora of books they advertise gives the impression of a massive survey of excited blurbs. This seems to hint in the first quarter of 1994 that bookshop owners are bullish about readers' interest in problems regarding the papacy and the Church in the third millennium. Perhaps in reaction to the armed savagery and political hatreds that shock global televiewers everyday, this bullishness is a welcome sign, a subtle signal: the reading public is showing interest in 12th-century hopes for the spiritualization of world history and the immanentization of eschaton.