

Modern Alternative Popes*

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The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is arguably the most important event in modern Catholicism, and a major act on the twentieth-century religious scene at large. On several points, the conciliar fathers made changes in how the Catholic Church perceived the modern world. The language in the decrees was different from earlier councils', and the bishops opened up for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, seeing at least "seeds of truth" in other religious traditions. The conciliar fathers also voted in favour of liberty of religion, as meaning something more than the right to practise Catholic faith. A very concrete effect of the Council was the introduction of the New Mass Order (Novus Ordo Missae) in 1969 that replaced the traditional Roman rite, decreed by Pius V in 1570. Apart from changes in content, under normal circumstances, the new mass should be read in the vernacular, not in Latin as before.

Though many Catholics welcomed the reforms of Vatican II, many did not. In the period just after the end of the Council, large numbers of priests and nuns were laicized, few new priest candidates entered the seminaries, and many laypeople did not recognize the church and the liturgy, which they had grown up with. In the post-conciliar era, there developed several traditionalist groups that criticized the reforms and in particular the introduction of the Novus Ordo. Their criticism could be more or less radical, and more or less activist. Many stayed in their parishes and attended mass there, but remained faithful to traditional forms of devotions and paid much attention to modern Marian apparitions. The apocalyptic contents of many

* This article was published on-line at <http://uu.diva-portal.org/> in 2015.

apparitions helped them understand the crisis they saw in church and society. They can be called Catholic Conservatives. Others joined traditionalist groups that were very critical of the developments and thought that the Tridentine mass was the only legitimate, but still accepted the Roman popes and episcopacy. However, a much smaller group maintained that a true pope would never accept the radical changes of Vatican II, and therefore argued that the Holy See was vacant, as the pope and the curia had become heretics. A manifest heretic could not be pontiff. Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards some individuals claimed that they had been elected true popes, either by direct divine intervention or through alternative conclaves.

In this article, I will concentrate on people (males), who have claimed or still claim that they, and not the vastly more recognized popes in Rome, are the true pontiffs. I will refer to these men as papal claimants or alternative popes. From Rome's perspective they are antipopes, while the papal claimants denounce the popes in Rome (and other alternative popes) as antipopes, who they think have nothing to do with the Catholic Church founded by Christ.

Before entering the theme of alternative popes, it might be useful to give a somewhat more detailed overview of different types of post-conciliar traditionalist groups. A central person in this movement was French Archbishop Marcel Lefèbvre, who opened a traditionalist seminary at Ecône, Switzerland in 1970 and founded the Priestly Society of St. Pius X (SSPX). Lefèbvre was very critical of the decisions of Vatican II and stopped reading mass according to the *Novus Ordo*. He ordained priests for the SSPX, who did only read the traditional mass, and from the 1970s onwards, the Society opened up seminaries and churches in several parts of the world. Though they were critical of Pope Paul VI and his successors, the official position of the SSPX was that they were true popes and included prayers for them in mass. For some adherents, this was not enough. They thought that the council had founded an entirely new religion, and taken into the account the dogma of papal infallibility, a pope who approved of such decisions could not be the Holy Father, but an apostate.

This minority group within the traditionalist movement became known as sedevacantists, as they claimed that the Holy See was vacant, due to the popes'

heresies. One of the early promoters of the view was Mexican Jesuit Joaquín Sáenz y Arriaga, who wrote several works about the matter before his death in 1976. Another early sedevacantist was Francis Schuckardt from the United States. The first sedevacantist communities appeared just a couple of years after the end of the Council, not least in the United States and Mexico, but also in Western Europe. The most common position among the sedevacantists is that Pius XII, who died in 1958, was the latest true pope, and that none of his successors have been true pontiffs, as they, and the cardinals who elected them, were heretics and accepted Vatican II and the Novus Ordo. Some, however, claim that the sedevacancy only began with the death of John XXIII in 1963, or indeed in 1962 when Pope John promulgated a revised version of the Roman rite. Sedevacantist priests could either belong to established communities or work more independently. Among such groups one could mention: the *Instauratio Catholica*, the Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen (CMRI), *Fundación San Vicente Ferrer*, *Sociedad Sacerdotal Trento*, the Priestly Society of St. Pius V and the Japanese *Seibo no Mikuni*. To distinguish themselves from the post-Vatican II-church, sedevacantists, but also other traditionalist, often refer to it as the Novus Ordo-church or the Conciliar Church. This emic expression will be used in this article, too.

The post-Vatican II Catholic traditionalists needed to secure apostolic succession in order to have bishops of their own. Many thought that Archbishop Lefebvre would consecrate bishops already in the 1970s, but it would take until 1988, when he finally consecrated four men assisted by retired Brazilian bishop Antonio de Castro Mayer. Traditionally minded bishops with an apostolic succession, who could consecrate and ordain had to be found elsewhere. Moreover, many thought that Lefebvre was too close to Rome, that he had been too involved in Vatican II and was consecrated by a freemason.

One of the men who helped the traditionalist groups in the 1970s and early 1980s, was the Vietnamese archbishop Pierre Martin Ngo-Dinh Thuc (1897-1984) who lived in European exile since the mid-1960s. He consecrated a dozen bishops for various traditionalist groups, and today there is a large number of bishops who claim their apostolic succession from the Thuc lineage. Still another group, the Priestly Society of Pius V and their bishop Clarence Kelley claim apostolic succession from

Alfredo Méndez González, retired Roman Catholic bishop of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and assert that the Thuc consecrations are invalid. Still other traditionalist clerics sought consecration from Old Catholic lineages. Some of them are in the lineage of Carlos Duarte Costa, who was a Roman Catholic bishop until 1945, but left to found the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church. Other traditionalists claim their apostolic succession through the lineages of René Vilatte and Arnold Mathew Harris.

A variant of sedevacantism is the so-called sedeprivationist position, which was developed by French Dominican Michel-Louis Guérard de Laurier, a Thuc-bishop. He argued that the popes after Pius XII are “materially but no formally popes” (*materialiter sed non formaliter*). That means that they are indeed lawfully elected, but that they, due to their heretic views could not formally accept the papacy or rule the church. One of the few groups, who defend this position is the Mater Boni Consilii, present in France, Belgium and Italy. Individual bishops who are or were sededeprivationists include Robert F. McKenna and Donald Sanborn.

From the 1980s, there were sedevacantists who did not regard the traditionalist priests and bishops as legitimate. They had no jurisdiction as the Holy See was vacant, and thus administered the sacraments without official license. These people, who did not have any place to take communion and receive other sacraments, were popularly called home-alone Catholics. Today some call themselves Catacomb Catholic. They are Catholics, not only without a pope, but presently without legitimate bishops and priests.

From the 1960s, there have been a large number of papal claimants, while one claimed that he was elected as early as 1950. The twentieth and twenty-first century alternative popes can be divided into two main groups: the mystically elect and the conclavist. Most of these alternative popes maintain that Pius XII was the last pope in Rome. Some, however, claim that John XXIII and even Paul VI were legitimate pontiffs, even if they could not act freely, or in the case of Paul VI, was drugged by the curia or publically replaced by a modernist imposter.

There are also a very minor group who defend the so-called Siri thesis, which implies that John XXIII was not the one elected in the 1958 conclave. Instead, Guiseppe Cardinal Siri, the Archbishop of Genua became pope, accepted the office

and took the name Gregory XVII. Still, due to modernist opposition in the curia he was hindered from acting as the pope and was, in fact, kept under surveillance until his death in 1989.

Another very small group are the “Catholic survivantists”, who believe that Pope Paul VI (born 1897) is still alive. They claim that he is jailed, but that he will return to the Holy See and restore the Church. They also maintain that Paul VI was replaced by an actor, and the man who died in 1978 was the imposter, not the real pope.

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Mystically Elect Popes

The mystically elect popes maintain that God had chosen them to become pontiff in the end times. In this era, a conclave is not necessary anymore. In fact, there are no orthodox cardinals left who can take part in such a reunion. Quite a few of the mystically elect popes were Roman Catholic priests before election. They claimed to have succeeded the Roman pope, but in many cases they announced that the Holy See had moved from Rome to a new place. In the majority of the cases, the church

was re-named, but the institution was not seen as anything else than the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church in a time of almost universal heresy. Furthermore, they argued that their election was foretold in prophecies, in particular in the Marian messages to the seers at La Salette (1846) and Fatima (1917). Many also referred to the Prophecy of the Pope, attributed to Irish bishop Malachi, and to testimonies by mystics such as Anne Catherine Emmerich and Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort.

Though the mystically elect popes maintained that they were leaders of the one, true Catholic Church, claiming to fight for its traditional teachings, due to frequent private apparitions, the doctrinal development of their churches was often rapid. In some cases, the creed has become very different from a traditional Roman Catholic belief system, though the groups themselves would say that they have developed a deepened, unveiled understanding of the same faith, made possible through continued divine revelation.

It is possible to know quite a lot about many of these mystically elect popes, but sometimes only a few sources are available. In the latter cases, the elections were not widely publicized, and in a few cases there is even scant evidence that they claimed the papacy. Other cases are possibly hoaxes or misunderstandings.

The Apostles of Infinite Love

The relations between the popes related to the Apostles of Infinite Love is a complicated matter. The first pope, Clement XV, asserted that he from 1950 onwards assisted Pius XII, and that he continued to support John XXII under his pontificate. To him, both Pius and John were true popes, though enemies in the curia hindered them from acting freely. In short, they needed help from Pope Clement. First with the election of Paul VI, in 1963, Clement claimed that he was the only true pope, moving the Holy See to Clémery, the small French town where he lived. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Apostles were divided into several groups, and a Canadian cardinal declared that he had been divinely chosen to replace the founder and took the name (John) Gregory XVII. Several other splinter

groups appeared, and after Clement's death in 1974, at least two other men have claimed to be his papal successor.

Michel Collin (Clement XV, 1950 (1963)-1974) was born in 1905 in Béchy, French Lorraine. He studied at the priest seminary in Metz and at the Faculty of Theology in Lille. From an early age, Collin claimed to receive frequent private apparitions from Christ and the Virgin. Their messages foretold an extraordinary ecclesiastical career: from priest via bishop to pope. He also asserted to have been born with the stigmata.

Before ordination to priesthood, Collin became a member of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Jesus (Sacré Coeur de Saint-Quentin). He was ordained a priest in 1933 by the archbishop of Lille, Achille Cardinal Liénart, and served in the parish of Loubilé in the 1930s, but soon left to work in a chain of other parishes in France. Collin had no stable position and many colleagues regarded him as a difficult person, not least as he maintained to have continuous encounters with celestial beings. On 28 April 1935, Collin experienced that Christ consecrated him a bishop, but did not make the news public at the time. On the same day, he founded the Apôtres de l'Amour Infini—the Apostles of Infinite Love. It was a kind of religious order or brotherhood, but did not receive any ecclesiastical authorization.

During the Second World War, Collin continued to serve as a priest in several parishes. In 1943, the diocesan bishop forbade the work of the Apostles and Collin therefore established the Crusade for the Rosary—"La Croisade des Disciples du Rosaire et du Magnificat", whose mission was nothing less than to work for the conversion of humanity. In fact it was very similar to the Apostles. The members formed Foyers-Cenacles, small house communities. During the last years of the war, Collin and other members were persecuted by the Nazi occupiers. They managed to hide on various occasions, but in September 1944, Collin was arrested and brought to a concentration camp. He faced execution, but managed to flee at the last moment.

After the war, most of his followers had either left the group or died. According to Collin, Pope XII blessed the work Apostles of Infinite Love at a private audience in 1946, thus removing the bishop's ban. In the next couple of years, Collin

provided the Holy See with documentation that he hoped would lead to a formal ecclesiastical authorization. He also travelled around in France and neighbouring countries, trying to convince bishops of his mission. Nevertheless, Collin's life would soon enter a new phase, which meant that it became utterly impossible to get any recognition from the Roman Catholic Church.

On 7 October 1950, Collin claimed that the Trinity had crowned him pope, and he took Clement XV as his papal name. Still, the French pope did not think that he had replaced Pius XII, but merely assisted him. The news about the mysterious coronation leaked out and Collin was interrogated by Vatican authorities. Following an investigation, in 1951 the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office issued a decree that reduced him to layman status. In the same document, the Congregation banned the Apostles of Infinite Love. The condemnation was reiterated five years later, as the Institute still existed and Collin's activities had not diminished.

Nevertheless, Collin was convinced that he had continued support from Pius XII, but that the Roman pontiff was hindered to make it public, due to powerful modernist forces in the curia. Collin also accepted Pius's successor, John XXIII (1958-1963), as true pope, but just as in the case of his predecessor, he thought that Pope John could not work freely as he was opposed by communists and freemasons.

However, since Pope John did not make the third secret of Fatima public, which was Collin's greatest wish, in 1961 he went public with his papal claims and established the Eglise Catholique Renovée, the Renewed Church of Christ, sometimes also called the Church of Glory or the Church of Miracle. Still, to him, this church was nothing else than the only true Catholic Church. After the announcement, Collin was formally excommunicated by the bishop of Nancy. It was a severe form of interdict—Collin should be avoided by all Catholics. Nevertheless, he continued to claim that he only assisted the Roman pope, and maintained that he was in secret contact with him, both through letters and tape recordings. By this this time, his group of followers was still small.

At the death of Pope John XXIII, in 1963, Collin asserted that he now was the sole pope. Somewhat later, he was crowned at a ceremony held in his community in Clémery, Lorraine. The French pontiff claimed that Paul VI was a usurper and that

the Holy See therefore had moved from Rome to Clémery, where he had built his Little Vatican. According to Clement XV, he was the pope of the end-times, who according to several apocalyptic prophecies would not be elected at a conclave, as Rome had fallen into the hands of heretics. He openly attacked Paul VI as an antipope and at least a forerunner of Antichrist, if not Antichrist himself. In the mid-1960s, members of the Renewed Church were present in the St. Peter's Square in Rome, handing out leaflets with messages such as: "Opponents of Our Lady of Fatima and Clement XV will be punished by God". In his new journal *Verité*, the pope of Clémery declared war against the Roman antipope, whom he excommunicated, and he denounced the Roman Catholic Church, in particular due to the changes during and after Vatican II.

The Renewed Church held a General Council in Lyon in September 1963. According to the final documents, its main mission was to re-establish the Early Church, directly led by Christ, in the person of Clement XV. The pope was seen as almost identical with Christ. Despite its harsh criticism against Rome, a peculiar aspect of the Renewed Church was the followers' double religious participation. It meant that they went to mass in the Roman Catholic parish church, but also attended rituals celebrated by the Renewed Church.

Despite claiming to be the pope, Clement XV did not become bishop until 23 October 1966, when he was consecrated by Cyprien Damgé de Lannoy, a well-known figure in the world of independent churches, who had been ordained a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church and consecrated a bishop by Henri Engel-Plantagenet of the Old Catholic Vilatte lineage. By then, Damgé had become one of Clément's followers and was consequently made a cardinal. After this, apart from being divinely elected pope, Collin could claim valid apostolic succession, which, at least theoretically, gave him more credibility as a church leader. In practise, however, few would acknowledge him as a Catholic bishop, let alone the pope.

Apart from the pope, the Renewed Church was constituted by cardinals, bishops, male and female religious and laypeople. Claiming to defend traditional Roman Catholic teachings, it is surprising that the Renewed Church ordained women as priests and that the obligatory clerical celibate was abolished. The reason for

ordaining women was the pope's view that Christ ordained the Virgin Mary a priest. Though sources are not entirely clear, it is possible that Clement XV was assisted by a "papess" or "high priestess". She was a woman in her forties who asserted to have mystically married Christ; she was literally the Bride of Christ.

The growth of the Renewed Church was fastest between 1965 and 1968, the years following the end of the Second Vatican council. By 1969, about thirty people lived in the Clémery community on a more permanent basis, but most members did not live there, but in other places in France and beyond. Their homes were house communities, where a consecrated host was perpetually on display. The church also had some chapels in France and neighbouring countries.

By 1969, the Renewed Church claimed to have "thousands of members", some sources even say 25.000, though it is very difficult to assess these claims. Most of them lived in France, Canada and the United States, but quite a number were spread out in other countries. As for Germany, the group reported no less than 300 house communities. There were groups of faithful in Italy and Austria, too, and quite a strong presence in Switzerland, where the church asserted to have founded 120 house communities in little over a year. Most of them were situated in the canton of Luzern. A number of the new church members were ardent followers of the Garabandal and Heroldsbach movements, and influenced by the apocalyptically centred Marian apparitions at those places, which were denounced by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

The Renewed Church held that there are seven sacraments, but their understanding of them differed much from the Roman Catholic teachings. Their masses, for example, were reduced to consecration and the taking of communion, and turns of masses were read. At Clémery alone, there could be hundreds of masses a day. There was also a special "love mass" which just included the words "This is my love", repeated many times. The pope abolished auricular confession: sins were confessed directly to God and the individual decided his or her penance. The sacrament of confirmation could be repeated various times as a way to get strength from the Holy Spirit. Central devotions in Clémery were the statues of Jesus

Pontifex and Our Lady of the Rapture. The latter, small in size, was often carried around by the pope and brought along on journeys.

Clement XV defined the dogmas of the Renewed Church “under the dictation of Heaven”. The eschatological parts of Bible remained important, but they were complemented with continuous private revelations. Other Marian apparition traditions and apocalyptic writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth century were significant, too. Among the new doctrines, he taught that the Virgin and St. Joseph were co-redeemers of humanity.

Towards the end of his life, Pope Clément’s teachings became even more original and included frequent references to extra-terrestrials and UFOs. He predicted an imminent nuclear war, which would destroy the entire world. At first, he stated that the war would come in 1965. Later, the date was moved forward to 1969. The explanation for the postponement was that the global war was hindered by “Planetarians”, inhabitants of other planets. Clement XV claimed that 5.000 of them lived on earth. They appeared in human guise, but the pope could see their true reality. Given the extra-terrestrial connections, in the late 1960s the Renewed Church attracted UFO-believers, including a few members a Danish Doomsday sect that also predicted that the world would come to its end in 1969. According to the Renewed Church, however, the true believers would be raptured to the Planet of Mary before the destruction of the earth. This planet was a place where no evil existed, a paradise.

The Renewed Church survived its founder’s death in 1974. However, even before the death of the pope, the group had split into various branches. The most numerous dissenter group were the Canadian Apostles of Infinite Love, led by Gaston Tremblay, in religion called Jean-Gregoire de la Trinité, who broke with Clement in 1968. At that time, the Canadian cardinal declared that he had replaced Clement and was made pope under the name John-Gregory XVII.

Nevertheless, in October 1969, Clement XV nominated Cardinal Cyprien Damgé de Lannoy as his papal successor, and the decision gave rise to new splinter groups, including a French group who followed the stigmatized Robert Fontaine and an independent community in Cicero, Illinois, led by Bishop John Higgins. Today, a

small community remains at the Little Vatican in Clémery, though nobody there claims to be the pope. At his death, followers thought that Clement would return from heaven before the end of 1982. Therefore, no new pope was elected, as the end of the world was near. Still, there are sources that indicate that a bishop of the Renewed Church, who resided in Angouleme, France, claimed the papacy after Clement's death in 1974. He used the papal name **Leo XIV**.

A number of Italian followers remained basically loyal to the spiritual heritage of Clement XV, but there seems to be no formal connection to the French group. They are concentrated to the province of Brescia, and since 1974, they have been led by a local farmer, Guiseppe Zani, sometimes referred to as Pope **Rabbi or Rabi**, who is surrounded by male and female priests, as well as laypeople.

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Gaston Tremblay (Gregory XVII, 1968-2011) was born in Rimouski, Quebec 1928 into a rather poor family. His father died when he was young, and his mother became a nun. At age sixteen, Tremblay moved to Montreal to join the Brothers of St. John, the Hospitalers. There he was renamed Brother Jean and worked with terminally ill patients. Around 1947, he began to receive apparitions, and in 1949, he claimed to have seen the face of a future pope in a vision. A little later, he had yet another vision indicating that he was going to found a new religious order, whose members would live a very simple life in the style of the Early Church. He also asserted that Christ told him: “you will become a priest, but one like me, when I walked the Calvary” and “you will become a bishop, but your mitre will be a crown of thorns”. On his twenty-fourth birthday, in 1952, Tremblay left the Hospitalers to form a community of his own.

After a meeting with Archbishop Léger of Montreal, Tremblay was permitted to found the Community of Jesus and Mary. The archbishop believed in the veracity of his visions and somewhat later, when he was made cardinal, he managed to secure a blessing of the community from Pope Paul XII. Together with a few other men, Tremblay settled in Rivière de les Praires, where the group lived in radical poverty, claiming to preach the gospel like the apostles. He took a new religious name: Jean-Gregoire de la Trinité. After a couple of years, he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Rome and continued to receive visions of Christ and the Virgin. In 1958, the community decided to leave its original site and acquired a farm near St. Jovite, where they began to build a monastery.

In 1961, Tremblay met Michel Collin, Pope Clement XV, at the airport in Montreal. They saw the resemblance between their beliefs and agreed to merge their communities, Tremblay accepting Collin as the true pope. In fact, he claimed that Collin was the man he had seen in his papal vision, twelve years before. In 1962, Tremblay travelled to France to be ordained a priest and consecrated a bishop by Collin. Later, he was made a cardinal, and the pope ceded the title of superior of the order to him. In the following years, an increasing group of people joined the Canadian branch, and Tremblay ordained a number of men and women to priesthood. At this time, the activities at St. Jovite were denounced by the local Roman Catholic ordinary, but the community continued to grow rapidly and drew

people from Canada and the United States. In 1964, the Canadian branch had ninety full-time members.

The relation between the Canadian and the European branches of the church became increasingly restrained. On 10 September 1968, Tremblay asserted that he had been elevated to the papacy by means of a mystical coronation, taking the name Gregory XVII (or John Gregory XVII). Nevertheless, even in the future he would most often be referred to as Father Jean-(Gregoire) de la Trinité. He thus claimed to have replaced Pope Clement. As a diplomatic gesture, and realizing the hard facts, Clement XV agreed that the keys of St. Peter had been passed onwards to Brother Jean. At least partially, Clement concurred with the claims of the new pope, but at the same time did not announce that he had stepped down. In fact, he designated another successor. As had been the case during the reigns of Pius XII and John XXIII, there were two popes at the same time between 1968 and 1974, but in this period, both belonged to the Apostles of Infinite Love.

The religious order that Tremblay led was called the Order of Magnificat of the Mother of God. It forms part of the Apostles of Infinite Love, also known as The Catholic Church of the Apostles of the Last Times. The order consists of male and female religious, lay celibate or married people living at the monastery - and tertiaries. Some of the priests were consecrated bishops and during the pontificate of Gregory XVII there was a twelve-member College of Cardinals. All members of the order follow a common rule, which the movement believe to have been dictated by the Mother of God at La Salette in 1846. Just as the Renewed Church in Europe, the Canadian church ordains women to priesthood, though there are differences between male and female priests. Women only celebrate mass at all-female religious services, and unlike males, they have to kneel when reading the mass. Moreover, only older and experienced nuns are ordained priests, while young men, just having entered the community can become priests.

In the 1970s, the Apostles opened up missions in different parts of Canada: Ontario, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, and not least at several places in the Quebec province. But they also established themselves in the United States, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Dominican Republic and Ecuador. There

were also small groups of members in South Africa, France and Italy. According to Michael Cuneo, in the mid-1990s, when he studied the church, there were 300 members living in the mother house in St. Jovite.

The church and the order were founded to preserve the traditional Catholic faith, which they thought was seriously threatened by the Vatican II and the post-conciliar developments. They were against the liberty of religion and wanted to form a theocratic society beginning at St. Jovite. Prophecies foretold the appearance of a Great Monarch in the last times and Pope Gregory appointed a member of the St. Jovite community, Louis Douziech king of France.

The pope at St. Jovite was very critical of Paul VI and asserted that one of the U.S. cardinals bribed members of the conclave to elect such a modernist. Pope Gregory was critical of the new mass order, too, but on the other hand, he was in favour of a simplified liturgy. The Apostles of Infinite Love celebrate mass according to a simplified Tridentine rite, but in the vernacular. The St. Jovite pontiff was much more positive of John Paul II, than of Paul VI, but still believed the Pole was an antipope, as the vast majority of the members of the conclave were heretics. He thought that though John Paul II was a man of good will, there was no chance reforming the Roman Church.

The teachings of the Apostles are explained in a number of texts. In 1975, seven years after becoming pope, Gregory XVII published a long encyclical called *Pierre parle au monde* which includes his comments on the recurrent sins of humanity and the modern age, and a very harsh criticism of the post-Vatican II church developments. In an almost thousand-page long book called *Tu es Pierre*, printed in the early 1990s, Catherine St-Pierre explains the papal claims of Gregory with references to a wide array of prophecies and other texts. Through its editorial house, Éditions Magnificat, the Apostles have also published a large number of other texts by the pope, a Catechism, a long series of pious books in the apocalyptic vein, as well as a journal called *Magnificat*.

The Apostles of Infinite Love is a closed community and a number of ex-members give testimonies of abuse. Many of them were born or grew up at St. Jovite and left as young adults. In the community, children were separated from their parents, often

not meeting them more than a couple times a year, and then only for short periods of time. The girls were raised by nuns and the boys by male religious. The children were also divided according to age groups and did not meet their siblings very often. Some ex-members testify that children often were beaten, otherwise mishandled and humiliated by male and female religious. Not much time was given to education and instead, they had to perform hard physical work from an early age.

Throughout the years, the Apostles of Infinite Love has been involved in a series of legal processes, and on no less than four occasions the police has raided the community at St. Jovite. In the mid-1960s, the Canadian authorities judged that the community was an unsuitable context for children to live in, and therefore took custody of all minors they could find there, forty in all. Still, at least fifty other children were hidden from the police. After further investigation, however, the authorities came to a different conclusion, and the children were handed over to the community again. Criticism against the leaders of the group continued through the years, and in 1978 Pope Gregory was arrested, accused of having hidden three children, whose mother belonged to the community. Their father, who did not belong to the Apostles, had been given custody of them, but was not allowed to meet the children. In 1980, Gregory was sentenced to two years in prison for kidnapping, but was released already in March 1981, after only five months behind bars.

Much later, in 1999, there was a huge police raid at St. Jovite, when authorities brought away twenty children to be questioned about abuses. The pope was arrested, accused of sexual abuse of minors from the late 1960s until 1985. In the last couple of years, at least sixteen former members had filed complaints, and throughout the years the authorities had gathered a lot of evidence. Still, after having studied the evidence, the persecutor decided that the case would not hold in court, particularly as most of the crimes should have been committed many decades ago. Moreover, older evidence material related to the Apostles had disappeared from the archives. Thus in 2001, the charges against the pope were dropped, but now there is a law that hinders children from living in a cloistral community.

Finally, in 2003, an ex-member sued various leaders of the community for destroying his life. The accuser lived in the community from his birth in 1970 until

he turned sixteen. The charges included physical and psychical abuse and lack of proper education. He claimed that it had been impossible for him to adjust to the world outside the closed community, and this had meant that he ended up in drug addiction and criminality. Citing a number of circumstances, the judge dismissed the case as he did not find the claimant credible.

Gregory XVII died at the hospital in Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts on 31 December 2011. The group is currently led by Father Mathurin de la Mère de Dieu, originally named Michel Lavallée, who does not claim to be the pope.

There is, however, a man who belonged to the Apostles of Infinite Love between 2003 and 2006, who asserts that he was divinely elected pope and king in 2005. After making his claims public, he was expelled from St. Jovite. According to his testimony, in a vision to him, God took the papal tiara from Pope Gregory and the crown from King Louis, to give them to the young man. The claimant took the papal name **Leo XIV** and does not reveal his birth name or the name taken when joining the Apostles. He was born in 1975, lives in Montreal and calls his group L'Église Catholique de la Nouvelle France, the Catholic Church of New France. He seems to be active only through his web site and refers to himself as a kind of hermit.

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The Legio Maria of African Mission Church

Without any doubt, the Legio Maria, founded in Kenya in the early 1960s, is the largest of the churches in this overview. Although it is very difficult to estimate the numbers of followers, some researchers state around one million followers, while some give even higher estimates. During its existence it has had at least three popes. The founder, Simeo Ondeto could be included, too, but he was also considered the Messiah, and today they are two claimants to the Legio Maria papacy.

Timothy Joseph Blasio Atila (1964–1998).

Maria Pius Lawrence Jairo Chiaji Adera (1998–2004).

Raphael Titus Otieno (2004–)

Papacy disputed by Romanus On'gombe (2010-)

The Legio Maria became an organized religious movement in 1962. It was founded among the Luo in Western Kenya, beginning in the Nyanza Province. The founder was a man called Simeo Ondeto, who was born in 1926 and baptized a Catholic in

1952. Soon, however, he came to the conclusion that the African laypeople had a too marginalized role in the church.

In the late 1950s, Ondeto had become a well-known healer and prophet. He gathered many followers and was increasingly criticized by the Roman Catholic Church authorities, who did not accept his active and quite unorthodox ministry. In the beginning of the 1960s, Ondeto became upset by the fact that Pope John XXIII did not make the Third Secret of Fatima public, as many had hoped. Ondeto claimed that as a reaction to the pope's silence, Virgin Mary became angry and walked away from Rome coming to Africa, where she hoped that she would meet more faithful people.

Ondeto's movement later took the name Legio Maria, which also was the name of a Roman Catholic lay organization, normally known by its English version, Legion of Mary, which was established in the Luo area in the 1930s. According to early testimonies by Ondeto, in the beginning he had no intention to found another church, but as Legio Maria was counteracted by the Catholic Church and the newly independent Kenyan state, he looked upon the Legio as an African Catholic church, which had nothing to do with the Vatican that the Virgin had left. According to Ondeto, the third secret of Fatima had, in fact, to do with African independence and the establishment of Legio Maria.

It is a Legio belief that on 9 March 1962 in Suna, Migori, the Holy Spirit revealed that Christ had returned to earth as Simeo Ondeto, now known as Baba Simeo Melkio Messias. According to testimonies by followers, there was a general outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the 1150 people present, and many started speaking in tongues and have visions. Ondeto established his headquarters on the mountain of Got Kwer, which he and his followers referred to as the New Jerusalem and the Holy City. One noteworthy Legio Maria doctrine is the three visitations of God. This teaching implies that God has appeared in human form on three occasions: first he came to India in the person of Melchizedek, then to Palestine in the person of Jesus Christ and finally to Africa in the person of Simeo Ondeto. The

latter was believed to have descended to earth on Mount Ararat and wandered down to Kenya, and his appearance meant the Second Coming of Christ.

Apart from Ondeto the most important figure in the early years of Legio Maria was Mama Maria (Regina Owitch), who was believed to be an African incarnation of Bikira Maria (the Virgin Mary) and the “spiritual mother” of Ondeto, the Messiah. In 1966, at age 90 the Kenyan Mama Maria returned to heaven. One of the other important members of the Legio was Gaudencia Aoko, born 1943, who was known for her prophetic gifts. She and Ondeto would only collaborate until 1966, when Aoko would leave as the Church Council decided that women should not be able to serve as priests. She founded a church of her own and today, Aoko is hardly mentioned in the official history. In the first years of its existence, the Legios were persecuted by the Kenyan authorities and groups of faithful, including Ondeto, were arrested. However, in 1966 the Legio Maria was officially registered a church.

Legio Maria has retained much Roman Catholic Church’s traditional structures and worship practices, including the liturgical acts, the use of Latin in the Mass and a hierarchy including bishops, cardinals and a pope. Still, there are many differences. Mass is, for example, celebrated with wafers and Coca-Cola, and clerics could be married. But Legio Maria also share many characteristics with African independent churches of a charismatic kind. Healing rituals, exorcism, deliverance from witchcraft, prophecies, glossolalia, dream interpretation and visions have a central place. Moreover, the group has much focus on purity rules, and prohibit the eating of pork, and the use of tobacco and alcohol.

The Legio Maria is a clearly hierarchical organization. As long as Ondeto lived, he, as the Messiah, was the unquestionable leader, seconded by Mama Maria, who was believed to be the incarnation of the Virgin. In 1964 the two elected Timotheo Blasio Atila (1941–1998) pope of the Legio Maria. He became the highest leader at Ondeto’s death in 1991. In the 1960s, it was also decreed that Atila’s successor should be elected by the Holy Spirit, but at the same time a Cardinal Dean was chosen. He had the right of succession and worked closely with the pope. There are

also a number of other cardinals in Legio Mary and below them are archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons, nuns, brothers and sisters.

At Pope Atila's death in 1998, Maria Pius Lawrence Jairo Chiaji Adera (1944–2004) became the pope. He had converted from Roman Catholicism in 1971, and later became the Cardinal Dean. The present (2015) pope is Raphael Titus Otieno Adika (2004–). He was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in 1954 and joined the Legio Maria in the 1970s. In 2010, his papacy was disputed by Cardinal Romanus Alphonsus On'gombe, and from that time, the church has two popes and there are clashes between the fractions. The Jerusalem church sided with Adika while the Kalafare Church, God Kwer Hill, sided with On'gombe

Though the Legio Maria is a church founded in Africa, it has a more universal scope. It is stated that the Legio is “of Africa, but not just for Africa”. Still, the vast majority of the faithful live there, not only in Kenya, but also in Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire, Zambia, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

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Palmarian Catholic Church

The Palmarian church evolved from a series of purported apparitions at Palmar de Troya in Spanish Andalusia from 1968 onwards. One of the seers, Clemente Domínguez Gómez and his brother in arms, Manuel Alonso Corral soon began to dominate the cult. The movement led by them became institutionalized. A religious order was founded, priests were ordained and bishops consecrated. At the death of Paul VI, in 1978, Clemente Domínguez testified that Christ had crowned him pope under the name Gregory XVII. The Holy See was moved to Palmar de Troya and the Holy Catholic Apostolic Palmarian Church was founded. The first pope was thus mystically elected, but he elected his successor Manuel Alonso (Peter II), who in his turn appointed Ginés Jesús Hernández Martínez (Gregory XVIII) his successor.

Clemente Domínguez Gómez (Gregory XVII, 1978-2005).

Manuel Alonso Corral (Peter II, 2005-2011).

Ginés Jesús Hernández Martínez (Gregory XVIII (2011-)).

Palmar de Troya, located about 40 kilometres south of Seville was settled in the 1930s. By the late 1960s, the town had about 2,000 inhabitants. It had electricity but still lacked a medical doctor and running water. It was ecclesiastically marginal as well, having neither resident priest nor permanent church building. When the curate from a neighbouring town did arrive, religious services were held in a private home or at an industrial compound. Few townspeople went to mass regularly, and Palmar de Troya was considered something of a mission field.

On March 30, 1968, four school girls (Ana, Josefa, Rafaela and Ana) between the ages of eleven and thirteen reported seeing a "very beautiful lady" when picking flowers by a mastic tree (lentisco) on the Alcaparrosa field, less than a kilometre

from the town centre. The woman was identified as the Virgin Mary. From April 1968 onwards, other people asserted to have mystical experiences close to the mastic tree. Several women and men fell into trances, claiming that the Virgin Mary appeared and spoke to them. Most of the ecstatic were not natives of Palmar de Troya, but rather came from other locations in the nearby area. The heavenly messages received at Palmar de Troya at this early stage were often very brief and general. The Virgin told the seers that all people should frequently pray Our Father and the rosary and convert to traditional Catholic faith. These were the only ways to placate divine ire and save humanity. The stories about the apparitions rapidly spread to other parts of the country, and even abroad. Growing crowds of people visited the place. On certain days, particularly on the fifteenth of each month when the Virgin usually made important statements, they numbered in the thousands.

By the end of 1969, Clemente Domínguez y Gómez (1946-2005) had become one of the most influential seers at Palmar de Troya. Later, many would look upon him as the seer par excellence, while others would consider him a fake or something in between. After failing to enter priest seminary, he became an office clerk. He worked for a Catholic company in Seville for a time but subsequently was fired. Clemente was not one of the pioneer seers, but beginning in the summer of 1969, and on an almost daily basis, he went to Palmar de Troya together with his friend, the lawyer Manuel Alonso Corral (1934-2011).

According to official Palmarian hagiography, Clemente had an ecstatic experience at the Alcaparrosa field on August 15, 1969, and one and a half months later, on September 30, he received his first vision, of Christ and the recently deceased Italian Capuchin Padre Pio. On December 8, he began receiving visions of Virgin Mary. Even if Clemente was the recipient of the heavenly communications, it was his friend Manuel Alonso, who recorded them on tape, transcribed them, and distributed them to pilgrims. It is clear that Clemente was the charismatic figure and the recipient of the heavenly messages, while Manuel was the organizer.

In various apparitions, the Virgin and Christ let him know that there was only one true mass, the Tridentine Latin rite. The novus ordo mass promulgated in 1969 was nothing less than blasphemy. The Tridentine Latin rite must therefore be reinstated.

Other salient themes were that freemasons and communists had infiltrated the Roman Catholic Church at all levels. Nevertheless, according to Clemente, Pope Paul VI was free of guilt as he was drugged and held hostage.

During the early 1970s, Clemente Dominguez continued to receive new heavenly messages. They were recorded by Manuel Alonso, written down, copied and distributed. Some of them were translated into English, French and German as part of the diffusion of the news beyond Spain's borders. To be able to make mission journeys and institutionalize the movement, funding was needed. According to testimonies, Manuel Alonso was a very good fund-raiser who convinced some very wealthy people to contribute large sums. The capital influx meant that Clemente and Manuel could travel widely on both sides of the Atlantic. Beginning in 1971, they went through Western Europe, to the United States and to various countries in Latin America to win people for the Palmarian cause.

Palmar de Troya belonged to the archdiocese of Seville and it soon became clear that the Palmarians could not count on any support from the archbishop, Cardinal José María Bueno Monreal, who wholeheartedly embraced the reforms of Vatican II and systematically implemented them. Thus, he was certainly no ideal partner for a group of traditionalists, who saw the Council as the main root of evil. For two years, however, Archbishop Bueno made no official statements about the events, but a steady stream of pilgrims kept coming to Palmar de Troya. It was reported that as many as 40,000 people were present on May 15, 1970. Three days after this all-time-high, Bueno published a document, where he briefly commented on the events. He did not mince matters when stating that they were signs of “collective and superstitious hysteria.” The gist of the archbishop Bueno's statement on Palmar de Troya was reiterated in 1972. In a decree, he explicitly forbade all kinds of public worship at the Alcaparrosa field, ordering Roman Catholic priests not to be present, let alone celebrate any religious services there.

There is, however, clear evidence that individual Catholic priests were present at Palmar de Troya, both before and after the archbishop's denunciations, and that Tridentine masses were celebrated regularly at the site from 1969 onwards. The clerical support group included both Spaniards and foreigners, who were critical of

the post-conciliar developments. Still, the seers and leaders of the growing movement were laypeople in the early 1970s. Being successful in their fund raising endeavours, in 1974, Clemente and Manuel could acquire the apparition site and thus control the movement. After the purchase, they built a somewhat more elaborate shrine, initially a hangar-like construction.

In a vision to Clemente on November 30, 1975, the Virgin Mary and Christ announced the forthcoming foundation of a new religious order that would replace all the existing ones. The new Palmarian order, the Carmelites of the Holy Face, was indeed founded on December 22, 1975. It included four classes of members: priests, brothers, sisters and tertiaries. The Palmarians still lacked priests of their own, of course, and Archbishop Bueno of Seville would not ordain any for them. Nonetheless, it was imperative for the group to be able to claim apostolic succession.

The solution to the ordination problem came with Vietnamese Archbishop Pierre-Martin Ngô-dinh-Thuc (1897-1984). After one of the Vatican II sessions, he had been unable to return to his home country and therefore lived in Italy. Thuc was consecrated bishop in 1938 and became archbishop of Hue in 1960. While living in Europe, he was replaced in Hue and instead made titular archbishop of Bulla Regia. However, he actually served as an assistant pastor in a small Italian town, upset and bewildered by the changes in the post-conciliar church. Archbishop Thuc came to Palmar de Troya through the mediation of Maurice Revaz, who taught canon law at the traditionalist Society of Pius X's seminary in Ecône. Revaz convinced Thuc that he was elected by the Virgin to save the Catholic Church from perdition. With short notice, the Vietnamese prelate therefore travelled to Seville and Palmar de Troya. On New Year's night in 1976, he ordained Clemente Dominguez, Manuel Alonso, and two other men to the priesthood. The priestly ordinations, however, were just the prelude. Less than two weeks later, on January 11, 1976, Thuc consecrated five of the Palmarians, once again including Clemente and Manuel. With the episcopal consecrations, the Palmarians had secured their much sought-after apostolic succession and could start making bishops of their own.

While the local hierarchy had been slow to comment on the apparitions, their reaction to the ordinations and consecrations was immediate. Following the episcopal consecrations, Archbishop Bueno declared them irregular and all those involved to be suspended a divinis and thus barred from performing any clerical acts, while again denouncing the purported apparitions at Palmar de Troya. On January 15, the papal nuncio, Luigi Dadaglio, went to Seville where he declared the Palmarian bishops and Archbishop Thuc excommunicated from the time of the consecrations (ipso facto) in the absence of necessary licenses from the Holy See and the ordinary. In September 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome declared the clerics suspended ipso iure (according to Canon Law), but made no clear statement about whether the consecrations were invalid or substantially valid though illicit.

By 1976, the Palmarians had already developed a quickly growing ecclesiastical hierarchy, and in less than two years they consecrated ninety-one bishops. Most of them were from Ireland and Spain, while others came from a number of countries in the Americas and Europe. The normal procedure in this period was that Clemente claimed to have received a private apparition from the Virgin or Christ, asking him to consecrate more bishops. In the messages, it was also clearly pointed out who should be made bishops. An effect of this modus operandi was that males who entered as friars in the Carmelites of the Holy Face could become bishops within months, weeks, or even days. A small minority of the consecrated Palmarian bishops were or had been Roman Catholic priests, others had attended seminary, while most were young laymen. At this time, the Palmarians did not consider themselves a separate church but as among the few true adherents of the Roman Catholic Church.

By the beginning of the 1970s, Clemente Domínguez already claimed that Pope Paul VI would be succeeded by both a true pope and an antipope. In 1976, the messages became even more concrete, and it was implied that there would be a time when the Catholic Church would not be Roman anymore. As for the status of Pope Paul VI, the Palmarian stories changed over time. Some claimed that he was drugged or held a prisoner and was replaced by an actor. At the same time, it was

claimed that Paul VI would soon arrive there in person to lead his faithful episcopal college, thus escaping the curia of Rome.

Pope Paul VI died on August 6, 1978. At that time, Clemente was in Bogotá together with a group of bishops. Just hours after the demise of Paul VI, Clemente claimed to have become pope by direct divine intervention, taking the name **Gregory XVII**. Having returned to Seville, on August 9, he proclaimed that the Holy See had moved from Rome to Palmar de Troya. The Roman era of the church was over and the Holy Catholic Apostolic Palmarian Church was established.

Palmarian church activities were in no way restricted to Spain. In the early 1980s, there were missionary bishops in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Great Britain, Nigeria but also in the United States, Canada and in various countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, particularly Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru, Chile and Colombia. In Oceania, there were communities in Australia and New Zealand. Some of these places had separate chapels and resident clergy. In most locations, however, Palmarians formed so-called cenacles in private homes, and were visited by clergy on an infrequent basis. It is hard to estimate the membership in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it must have amounted to a few thousand.

No official documents show the overall member changes in the Palmarian Church. Still, for bishops, there are internal data that give a clear indication. Overall, 192 men were consecrated Palmarian bishops between 1976 and the death of Gregory XVII in 2005. During these three decades, no less than 133 have either left the order or been expelled, twenty-seven died in office, and only thirty-two bishops remained as of 2005. The female branch of the order, which at its height included more than a hundred nuns, was probably down to thirty or forty by 2005, and the decline has continued. During the Palmarian church's existence, many bishops, priests, nuns and lay people have left the church voluntarily or been excommunicated, while new people have entered. Still, except for at the very beginning, most new members were children of Palmarian couples and not people coming from outside.

The late 1990s and early 2000s was a very turbulent time in the church, filled with secessions and expulsions. The crisis had to do not only with the new teachings of

the church, but also with the behaviour of the pope and other leaders. The pope's morals became an apple of discord. In 1997, Gregory XVII apparently made a public statement, confessing that he had had sinned against the vow of chastity during his time as the leader of the order. On the same occasion, he also confessed to immoderate drinking and eating habits. In a sermon three years later, the pope made clear reference to his earlier aberrant behaviour, but claimed that he had mended his ways.

The five-volume Sacred History or the Palmarian Bible, printed in 2001, became another very serious point of discord. It was a thorough and very detailed reworking of the biblical books based on the continuous private revelations to Gregory XVII. The goal of the revision was to establish the true meaning of the texts, exactly as the divine author had conceived them. When the new Bible was made public, the faithful were ordered to destroy their traditional Bibles and only read the Palmarian version. Criticism against this development led to further secessions and excommunications.

Interestingly enough, at the time of the secessions and expulsions, by the turn of the millennium there was one feature of papal religious behaviour that changed. Not since the Palmarian Council was inaugurated in 1980, when teaching had become more formalized and institutionalized, had Gregory XVII fallen into public ecstasy, receiving heavenly messages before the eyes of the faithful. Still, it happened again after 2000.

These public ecstasies were certainly a way to present evidence for that Christ and the Virgin was on Gregory's side, thus defending his papal authority. According to the pope, the faithful members of the visible church under his absolute rule were about to enter the Ark of salvation, whose doors soon would be closed. In his view, the church militant is minuscule, but it consists of the only people that obey the divine (and papal) will.

Holy Week in 2005 was a crucial time in the history of the Palmarian Church, as Gregory XVII died on March 21. At his death, there was no conclave as he had already named Father Isidoro María (Manuel Alonso) his successor. The latter was crowned on March 24, taking **Peter II** as his papal name. In his first apostolic

letters, the new pope defended his position as the true successor of Gregory XVII the Very Great, who was immediately canonized. Peter II never claimed to receive any private apparitions and mainly looked upon himself as the defender of the Palmarian teachings.

Under Peter II, the Palmarian church became more closed and exclusive than ever before, even if it was a matter of degree and not of kind. Messages about the necessity to break with the surrounding world and live according to strict Palmarian norms have been present in every apostolic letter. On a number of occasions, Peter II reiterated the idea that the Palmarian Church is the only hope in a world totally dominated by Satan. Not only the “apostates,” but also lukewarm members were accused of destroying the church from within. During the papacy of Peter II, the number of detailed regulations increased considerably, and many of the older ones have become even stricter. Many have to do with clothing.

There are many other rules that distinguish Palmarians from what they see as the total moral depravity of the surrounding world. Church members are not allowed to vote in general elections or enter the church buildings of other denominations. They are also forbidden to attend baptisms, weddings or funerals of non-Palmarians, including close relatives. Even more far-reaching is the general ban against talking to people not dressed in the Palmarian way, or non-Palmarians at large. Members must destroy their television sets, videos, mobile telephones and computers in order not to be infected by the “repugnant moral leprosy rampant in the world,” as the pope phrased it.

It has always been difficult to know exactly how the Palmarians have been able to assemble such substantial funds despite being a rather small organization. During the 1970s, 1980s and to some extent into the 1990s, the Palmarian church was very wealthy due to substantial, more or less voluntary, donations from members and benefactors. People paid part of their salary to the church, and it became the beneficiary in last wills and testaments. With the money, the leaders acquired about ten buildings in the city-centre of Seville, which served as headquarters and convents. They also were able to build the enormous church at the apparition site, the Cathedral-Basilica of Our Crowned Virgin of El Palmar, which is one of the

largest temples constructed in twentieth-century Spain. Together the sumptuous religious paraphernalia kept within the Basilica, its cost is at least 100,000,000 Euros, and probably much more. Due to decreasing incomes in the late 1990s, the Palmarians sold their remaining buildings in Seville in 2003. At that time, the clergy left for Palmar de Troya, where the order had bought some twenty houses in the 1970s. New buildings were constructed on the cathedral compound. Palmar de Troya thus became the residential centre of the church, not only the spiritual.

After six years in office, Peter II died on July 15, 2011. His successor was Bishop Sergio María, the former military officer Ginés Jesús Hernández Martínez (b. 1959). He was publically named Peter II's successor on March 3, 2011. The new Palmarian pope was crowned on July 17, taking the name **Gregory XVIII**. Shortly after the coronation, the new pope convened a new Palmarian Council to begin in January 2012. During the pontificate of Gregory XVIII, the Palmarian economy seems to have improved considerably. After a decade-long long standstill, the work on the cathedral speeded up, and by 2014, the construction work that began in 1978 was finished.

Though there seems to be new money at Palmar, the number of members remains very low, probably not exceeding a thousand. They are concentrated in Spain (Palmar de Troya) and Ireland (Dublin), but there are Palmarian communities in many other places too, including the United States, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. At one of their big religious feasts, on January 1, 2015, journalists were allowed to enter to Cathedral compound. One of them mentioned that only twenty nuns were present, less than a fifth of the number that they used to have when the church was at its strongest. It is a clear indication of a continuing membership crisis. Still, due to the great secrecy, it is very difficult to get a clear reading on the state of things.

Just as the Roman Catholic Church, the Palmarians hold that Christ instituted seven sacraments. Nevertheless, they also teach that in this end-time the election to the papacy is an eighth, invisible sacrament, directly conferred by Christ. One original aspect of that Palmarian sacramental theology is that the Virgin “enthrones” a drop of her blood into the faithful at baptism or conversion. This drop can be

strengthened, diminished or disappear altogether according to the moral status of the individual. The sacraments also “enthone” and strengthen a piece of Christ's heart in the faithful.

Baptism is the door to the church and the other sacraments, and children should preferably be baptized within eight days of their birth. Through baptism, the child (or adult) receives Mary's blood drop, which takes away original sin. The Palmarian baptism has an undeletable character, but the strength of the blood drop can be weakened. The sacrament of confirmation should ideally be administered very shortly after baptism. It strengthens the blood drop and makes the individual stronger in his or her fight against Satan. If a person commits a cardinal sin, the blood drop of Mary disappears. Confession is the way to re-enter the state of grace.

The eucharist is arguably the most important sacrament for the Palmarians. In his first papal decrees in 1978, Pope Gregory XVII declared that the only rite that should be used was the Tridentine mass of Pius V, promulgated in 1570. Shortly thereafter, however, he introduced several new elements, and on October 9, 1983, the pope instituted a new, much briefer Palmarian mass order, which is concentrated to offertory, consecration and sacrificial communion taken by the priest. Briefly, every cleric should read several masses a day; in fact, they read turns of masses and not individual masses. According to Palmarian doctrine, the body, soul and blood of Christ and Mary are present in the consecrated bread and wine. Communion should only be taken on the tongue and the recipient must be kneeling when receiving the sacrament.

The fifth sacrament of the church, the last unction, strengthens the faithful's relationship with Christ and Mary, and increases the Virgin's blood drop. In the Palmarian church, there are three degrees of clerical ordination: deacon, priest and bishop. At ordination, the priest becomes inhabited by the soul of Christ, seen in the form of a radiant cross. The seventh Palmarian sacrament is marriage. Its main reason is to give children, new members, to the church. Still, virginity is the preferred state.

Through the years, the Palmarian church has canonized a very large number of people. Just in the period between 1978 and 1980, some 1,400 named individuals

were declared saints by Gregory XVII. The saints are of many kinds. They came from many different parts of the world and died between the eleventh century and the mid-1970s. Still, the large majority were Spanish. One important category of Palmarian saints is bishops, priests and nuns killed during the Spanish Civil War. Among the saints canonized in 1978 was also the recently deceased Spanish leader Francisco Franco, but other twentieth-century right-wing politicians such as the Fascist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera also were elevated to the altars. English martyrs, killed during the sixteenth and seventeenth-century persecutions of Catholics, constitutes another sizeable group, as do missionaries who died as martyrs in China and Indochina. Gregory XVII also canonized an “innumerable” group of Irish martyrs, killed because of their Catholic faith.

At its foundation in 1978, the Palmarian church, officially known as Santa Iglesia Católica Apostólica y Palmariana and Orden Religiosa de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz en Compañía de Jesús y María, already had a developed, top-heavy organizational structure, headed by the pope. The pope has absolute power in the church. He is the High Priest, the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter. He is infallible when proclaiming doctrine and has the supreme spiritual and temporal authority in the universe. Still, it is evident that the first Palmarian pope, Gregory XVII and Manuel Alonso (Father Isidoro María) were close collaborators. Clemente/Gregory was the “voice-box” of heaven and charismatic leader, while Manuel/Isidoro María was the eminent grise through whom all messages passed.

From 1976 onwards, the Palmarians consecrated a large number of bishops. Palmarian priests existed, but they were clearly outnumbered by bishops. At the foundation of the church in 1978, most of the bishops were made cardinals, who were members of a curia, led by Secretary of State, Father Isidoro María. Number three in the hierarchy was the Vice-secretary of State Father Elias María, who would remain so until his death in 1997. A fourth influential leader was Father Leandro, Camilo Estévez Puga, who died in 1999. In 1987, Pope Gregory announced that since 1978 he had elevated ninety-eight bishops to the cardinalate. Of the bishop-cardinals, some were vicars generally in charge of liturgy, cult, vocations, missions, propagation of faith and the Inquisition, and some were elected archbishops, patriarchs or archpatriarchs. Nevertheless, in 1995, Gregory XVII suppressed the

cardinalate, and in the year 2000 he appointed Father Isidoro María as his successor. After Gregory's death in 2005, he became pope, taking the name Peter II. During Peter II's pontificate, Father Sergio María was the Secretary of State and was chosen as his successor. At Peter's death in 2011, he succeeded him as pope.

In the early years, there were about a hundred nuns in the Carmelite Order of the Holy Face, who lived a life in strict enclosure. They were led by a mother superior, seen as the co-General of the Order. The available sources say little about their role.

Despite its general condemnation of the outside world, the Palmarian church wanted to become an officially recognized religious group. Following the promulgation of the 1980 Spanish law on religious freedom, in 1981 and several times later, the Palmarians applied for inscription into the official Spanish register of religious associations. However, they were repeatedly denied inscription by the Ministry of Justice, among other reasons because the term “Catholic” was controlled by the Roman Catholic Church. In later applications, they therefore introduced a new official name, Iglesia Cristiana Palmariana de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz. In the official context, then, the church did not use the label “Catholic” but rather “Christian”.

In 1985, the Palmarians appealed against the Ministry's decisions to the Spanish Supreme Court. At first, the Court ruled against them. However, on November 2, 1987, the Court decided that the Palmarian church could indeed be included in the register, as they met all the formal requirements for a religious association. This decision was followed by much criticism in the Spanish media and from some researchers, who looked upon the Palmarians as a dangerous sect and a suspect business organization, most of all interested in the collecting riches.

Though Clemente Domínguez and the group around him physically took over the apparition site in 1974 and dominated the rapid development from a movement into a church of its own, most other seers clearly distanced themselves from them, not wanting another pope and a new church. Today, one can see a white cross with a picture of Pope Francis just outside the high walls of the Palmarian church compound. It is the Cruz Blanca: the gathering site for the seers who do not belong to the Palmarian church and their supporters. According to the group's own data,

about a dozen people meet there every weekday to pray the rosary. On weekends, there can be forty persons present. At Easter, however, as many as a couple of hundred gather at the site, including pilgrims from abroad.

According to the group's website, the number of apparitions at the Cruz Blanca and in their chapel, Santuario del Corazón de María, through the decades are estimated at about 10,000 to date. At the beginning, several of the old seers claimed to receive heavenly communications by the Cruz Blanca, including Pepe Cayetano and Manuel Fernández, but in later years, only Rosario Arenillas claims to receive messages. Until his death in 2005, the group was led by Félix Arana, a former Roman Catholic priest, who in 1976 was consecrated a Palmarian bishop. However, he only maintained membership for a few months and then opposed the movement as it had developed. Arana served as the Cruz Blanca's spiritual leader. He recorded the messages of the seers, and transcribed, published and interpreted them. He also celebrated the Tridentine mass in the chapel on a daily basis.

Christ and the Virgin are those who most frequently have appeared to the seers by the Cruz Blanca, followed by St. Joseph and Padre Pio. The messages often have a clear apocalyptic component. They are very critical of the modern Roman Catholic Church, claiming that it has been almost destroyed after Vatican II and that most priests and bishops are heretics. However, the pope is not to be blamed, as his messages are falsified by the curia. The Cruz Blanca thus claims that Pope John Paul II and his successors are true popes, but that they suffer immensely because of their fidelity. They assert that the Holy See will be overtaken by Antichrist, and that great wars and catastrophes will precede the Second Coming of Christ. In this situation, the faithful's role is to pray for the pontiff and the church, so that the end of the world is averted. The Cruz Blanca group's only relation to the Palmarian church, referred to by them, as "the sect of Clemente" is that they pray for their return to the Roman Catholic Church. Still, as can be seen, the contents of the messages at the Cruz Blanca are similar to the ones that Clemente received during the first half of the 1970s.

An important step in the history of the Palmarian church was taken on November 7, 2000, when Gregory XVII expelled no fewer than eighteen bishops and seven

nuns, accusing them of heresy and of planning to overthrow the pope. Some of the excommunicated started an independent Palmarian community in Archidona, Andalusia, and others would follow them later. Although, they still regarded early apparitions to Clemente as verified and believed that Gregory XVII indeed had been the true pope, with the publication of the Palmarian Bible, or even from the mid-1990s, they had come to regard him as an insane heretic who had lost his papal authority. The dissenter group was very critical of the fact that Pope Gregory had suppressed the cardinalate in 1995. Further dissenters opposed his decision in 2000 to choose Father Isidoro María as his successor, taking away the possibility of a conclave. As Gregory (and Isidoro María) were regarded as manifest heretics, the group in Archidona believed the Holy See to be vacant.

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For a much more detailed study on the Palmarians with full references, see my article “Palmar de Troya – Holy Catholic Apostolic Palmarian Church”, which is part of the World Religion and Spirituality Project, led by Professor David G. Bromley at Virginia Commonwealth University at Richmond:

<http://www.wrs.vcu.edu/ARTICLES/PALMARIAN%20CATHOLIC%20CHURCH/PalmarianCatholicChurch.htm>

The New Universal Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Gino Frediani (Immanuel I, 1974-1984) was born in 1913 and served as a parish priest in Gavinana in Italian Pistoia from the 1940s onwards. Beginning in 1973, he claimed to receive apparitions from Old Testament prophets. On 5 September 1973, he asserted that the prophet Habakkuk had placed a hand on his head saying that the Italian parish priest was chosen to fulfil a great universal mission: to “build a Holy Church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. This was the beginning of what the seer referred to as the “Great Revelations on the last times of sin and sorrow”. Later, other prophets would appear to Frediani, including Naum, Nehemiah and Baruch. They revealed secrets that were hidden in the prophetic books of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse of St. John.

In 1974, Frediani proclaimed himself Pope Immanuel I and officially founded the Chiesa Novella Universale del Sacro Cuore di Gesù, the New Universal Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At first, he stayed in his parish, but when removed by the bishop, the community resided at a former inn in Gavinana. Apart from laypeople, at least three other Italian parish priests joined the New Church and were consecrated bishops. The doctrines of the church were transmitted by the “heavenly voices”, heard by Frediani. Later messages were not only received from Old Testament prophets, but from angels, the Virgin Mary, John the Evangelist and even the Trinity. Frediani thought that Jesus’s words that “all would be revealed in the last times” applied to him and the current era. He asserted that the whole truth had not been made available to humanity until now, because the Catholic Church “had closed the mouth of God”, by stating that divine revelation had come to an end with the Apocalypse of St. John. The New Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus therefore published “A scriptural appendix to the prophets of the Old and New Testament”—which included new revelations with commentaries by the pope.

In the end times, God would guide the New Church by means of his “chosen instruments”. The most prominent of them was Pope Immanuel, but there were others, who were chosen by God to receive hidden knowledge, too. The messages preached in the New Church were mainly apocalyptic. Pope Immanuel announced forthcoming divine punishments and indicated precise dates for future events. As it had never listened to the voice of Christ, in the end time God would severely castigate the Roman Catholic Church and its leaders. According to Immanuel I, the Holy See had become “the shameful see of Satan: the enemy of God”. For this reason, God would destroy the Vatican, and had already decided to move the Holy See to Gavinana. From there God would establish a universal theocracy with the help of his new Vicar.

According to Pope Immanuel’s predictions, the followers of the New Church would have to go through great tribulations. There would be several phases of the end times. The first was a ten-year era of natural disasters that would kill most people in the world. During the second period that also would last for a decade, the people of Israel would be decimated to a small remnant. During the third phase, a Holy

kingdom would be gradually built, and finally God the Father will establish the “Eternal Kingdom of his Son” in its fullness and for all eternity.

At the death of Immanuel I in 1984, Cardinal Sergio Melani was divinely elected the “greatest of the Lord” or the “notary of notaries of the universe”. He was not the pope, as he only administered the New Church temporarily until Pope Immanuel would return from Heaven. In the meantime, Melani should interpret and censure the messages received by the “heavenly instruments” and transmit the commands of Heaven to the church members. Some years after the death of Pope Immanuel, “heavenly voices” revealed that there would soon appear a very important “instrument”: a woman who represented all humankind. Her body, which in some way was linked to the Trinity, would be like a tabernacle that, once purified, would house Virgin Mary’s body. Thus, just as Christ was incarnated “this woman would accomplish a salvific mission on earth”. In the 1980s, one of the followers of the New Church was regarded as that woman, whose body the Virgin would inhabit or already did inhabit. The sources are not clear on this distinction.

The New Church’s ultimate goal was to collectively be transformed into the “perfect son of God”, through complete obedience to the Law of God. The faithful would gradually reach greater perfection; among humans only the Virgin would be a more perfect person. According to the “heavenly voices”, a “great crucifixion” would then take place. Then all true believers would be sacrificed together with Christ, the head of the mystical body. At that time, all sacraments but the eucharist would become obsolete, and the words of consecration words will be: “This is our body, this is our blood”. By then, earth itself will be transformed into a “Great Altar, where the sacrifice of Christ is completed”.

In 1989, the Roman Catholic bishop of Pistoia and Fiesole, Simone Scatizza issued an interdict, stating that the New Universal Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had nothing to do with the Catholic Church. He declared that it was separated from ecclesial communion, as it refused to accept the authority of the pope and the local bishops. The group’s main transgressions were that it had changed sacred texts according to their own whims, created a liturgy of their own, and developed an eschatological belief system, based on false revelations. For these reasons, the

bishop proclaimed that Roman Catholics were not permitted to take part in the rituals and meetings of the New Church, as it might constitute a danger to their Catholic faith and ultimately, their salvation. The only surprising thing with this message is that the ecclesiastical hierarchy waited for so long.

Today, the New Church has a much reduced membership. According to news reports, by 2000, about fifteen people, most of them very old, lived permanently in the Gavinana community, and a couple of dozen of others outside to attend the Sunday services.

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Chester Olszewski (Chriszekal Elias/Peter II, 1977-1980?) was a cradle Catholic, who tried to enter seminary on a number of occasions, but was not accepted as a priest candidate. Later, he converted to the Episcopal Church and was ordained in Albany, New York state, in 1974. After ordination, Olszewski served as a parish priest in Eddystone, Pennsylvania, where problems started already in the following year. At that time, he became convinced that a statue of Christ, owned by one of the parishioners, Anna Poore, bled and bore the stigmata. Olszewski brought the statue to church, where he made it the central devotion. Later, Poore claimed that she, too, had received the stigmata as well as visions of the Holy Family.

These events estranged a major part of the parishioners, but a small group became convinced of the purported miracles. Shortly thereafter, Olszewski and Poore

claimed to be divinely chosen to restore the traditional Catholic faith; God had converted them to Catholicism. In order to re-establish the true Catholic Church, Olszewski needed to become a bishop and he soon found a person who was willing to provide him with apostolic succession. In 1977, he was consecrated by Edward Michael Stehlik, a bishop of the American National Catholic Church, the church to which the Marian shrine of Necedah was connected since 1975, when the Roman Catholic Church issued an interdict against it. Shortly thereafter, however, Stehlik regretted the consecration, for reasons that soon would become obvious.

On 31 May 1977, Olszewski proclaimed himself Pope Chriszekiel Elias at a ceremony in St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Eddystone, alleging that God himself had elected him and provided him with his new name. He also claimed that a bloody cross appeared on the consecrated host when he celebrated his first papal mass. Not surprisingly, Olszewski was first warned and then defrocked by the Episcopal Church, through the bishop of Albany. Still, he managed to physically stay in the Eddystone church until 1980. By that time, he had begun to use the name Peter II, probably believing that he was the last pope in history. Eventually leaving the parish church—and the papacy—for sixteen years Olszewski ran a shop and kept a very low profile. In 1997, however, he reappeared as Fr. Christian Elias, the Catholic Archbishop of Bradford, Pennsylvania. By then, he had assumed a sedevacantist position, but not much is known about his later ministry.

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Francis Konrad Maria Schuckardt (Hadrian VII 1978?/1984?-) was born in Seattle in 1937. He graduated from a Jesuit University in 1959 and briefly entered the priest seminary in Carthage, Missouri, which he had to leave due to illness. Thereafter, he worked as a high school teacher and was very active in the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, eventually becoming a member of its International Council. In the mid-1960s, however, Schuckardt was dismissed from the Blue

Army for publically condemning Vatican II, and he became one of the first public sedevacantists in the United States.

In 1967, he started the Fatima Crusade in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The Fatima crusaders were dedicated to the spreading of the Portuguese apparition messages and traditional Catholic faith, in opposition to the post-conciliar developments and Paul VI. In the same year, Schuckardt founded the Congregation of Mary, Immaculate Queen of the Universe (CMRI), with nuns, brothers and priests. Strangely enough, it was initially approved by the Roman Catholic ordinary of Boise, Idaho. The group also established a community in Rathdrum, Idaho, which they called the City of Mary.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Schuckardt was very important for the spread of sedevacantist views in the United States. He went around the country, giving lectures about the heresies of the Vatican II-church and the antipope Paul VI. His active mission led hundreds of people to leave their hometowns for the communities in Idaho. Schuckardt maintained that the official Church of Rome was an empire of evil, and that one of the few places where it was possible to live a true Catholic life was in the Idaho communities that he had founded. Already at this time, critical voices accused Schuckardt of promoting a personality cult around himself.

In 1971, Schuckardt was ordained a priest and consecrated a bishop by Daniel Quilter Brown, a bishop of the North American Old Catholic Church, who had apostolic succession through Arnold Harris Matthew, but also via the African Orthodox Church and René Vilatte. Evidently, Bishop Brown had converted to sedevacantist Catholicism before the consecration act, and the two bishops cooperated for a couple of years before they split.

The Idaho communities grew fast and the facilities there soon became too small and in 1978, they Mount Saint Michael in Spokane, Washington, where they lived in a former Jesuit seminary. In the same year, Schuckardt changed the name of the movement to the Tridentine Latin Rite Catholic Church, of which CMRI was a part. In the first years in Spokane, the church continued to attract more members. After ten years as a bishop, in 1981, Schuckardt had only ordained six priests, but there were no less than 120 sisters and 60 brothers in the order. The Church established

missions, not only in the United States, but also in Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand, and bought at least some twenty properties at different places. At the same time, there were reports of severe physical abuse of children living at the community, with draconic punishments meted out by the religious.

In 1984, Schuckardt's position changed dramatically as he was accused of having sexually abused several seminarians. He and some twenty loyal followers abruptly left Mount Saint Michael and later settled in Greenville in northern California. The leadership of the Spokane community was assumed by one of his priests, David Chicone, whom was excommunicated by the bishop, and several legal processes over properties followed.

In 1987, the police raided Schuckardt's community in California, and together with a group of followers, the bishop was arrested for possessing large quantities of drugs, mostly prescribed, as well as some illegal weapons. The defence presented by the accused was that Schuckardt had many severe medical issues that caused him great pain and that he consumed large doses of pain killers. After a brief investigation, the charges against them were dropped. After this incident, the group had a low-key presence in Oregon and Washington, using the name Oblates of Mary Immaculate. By that time, Schuckardt had about a hundred followers.

The sources that claim that Schuckardt believed that he was the pope are difficult to assess. He did think that he was the last true bishop and there is some evidence that he used the papal name Hadrian VII, even as early as in the late 1970s or in the early 1980s, both before and after he left, but that he probably did not claim the papacy in public, though he at times wore a white cassock. According to some sources, one of the nuns of Mount Saint Michael had received a vision that Schuckardt was divinely elect pope and convinced him. Still, there are so many different views on him that it is virtually impossible to reach a well-founded conclusion. His faithful describe him as a saint, while some former members see him as Satan in human disguise. Schuckardt died on 5 November 2006, after decades of severe illness.

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A very critical discussion group: <http://bishopfrancis.blogspot.se/>

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<http://www.bishopjosephmarie.org/doctrine/Godasmywitness.html>

Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Aimé Baudet (Peter II or Peter Athanasius II, 1984?) is a Belgian man, who lived in Brussels. According to some reports this man enthroned pope before St. Peter's grave in 1984. Allegedly, he was a Palmarian ex-bishop. Still, this seems to be something of an urban legend.

Pierre Henri Dubois (Peter II 1985?). His name is on some lists of modern alternative popes (often erroneously called Pierre Henri Buboïs). Still, it is a misunderstanding that he was ever a papal claimant. Dubois is a Belgian, born in 1947. He has an impressive record in the world of independent churches. He was ordained a priest in 1970 in L'Eglise Catholique Gallicane and consecrated bishop for the first time in 1981 by Pascal Colin and Pascal Robert Deliens, and thereafter in 1982 by Maurice Devent of the Eglise Catholique Apostolique de Belgique. Finally, in 1992, he was consecrated *sub conditione* by Louis Canivet (Aloysius Basilus III), Patriarch of the Eglises Orthodoxe Héraclitienne.

Dubois is now bishop in the Église Catholique Apostolique Gallicane Traditionelle de Belgique. According to some sources, he declared himself pope in 1985 under the name Peter II, but that is apparently not true. What happened was that the Eglise Catholique Apostolique Gallicane traditionnelle de Belgique and the Eglise

Catholique Oecuménique Gallicane Belge on 19 May 1985 jointly elected him Patriarch of Belgium under the name Peter IV.

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www.gallican.be

The Missionary Order for the Salvation of Souls

Valeriano Vestini (Valerian I, 1990-1995) was born Olinto Vestini, taking the name Valeriano when he joined the Capuchin order. He later became superior of the Mater Domini monastery in Chieti. In 1983, a local woman called Rita claimed having dreams which featured Vestini as a representative of Padre Pio. The dreams included a divine command: that the group around her should work for the salvation of souls, joining forces with the seers of Lourdes, Fatima and Mediugorje. Rita left the group in 1989, and the role as the voice-box of heaven was taken over by Nicola Di Carlo and Alessandro Di Donato. In 1990, the movement became known as the Missionary Order for the Salvation of Souls. At the same time, the two seers revealed that Fr. Valeriano was elected pope by divine intervention. His papal name became Valerian I.

In 1991, Pope Valerian created 24 cardinals, and by virtue of his papal power, he excommunicated, canonized and proclaimed dogmas. Still, there are very few sources that give any detailed information about the development. In the same period, he began to ordain women to priesthood and through the Order's journal, *Presenza Divina* he initiated a campaign against the Roman Catholic Church and anti-pope John Paul II. In 1993, Vestini was suspended *a divinis* by the Provincial Superior of the Capuchins. However, by September 1995, he clearly distanced himself from his earlier papal claims, left the Missionary Order for the Salvation of the Souls and returned to the Capuchins in Avezzano, where he was welcomed back.

After their pope had left, his old followers changed the group's name to Opera Divina Provvidenza and turned to the sedeprivationist Istituto Mater Boni Consilii to get spiritual succour, but it did not work out well. Later the community approached the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, but, not surprisingly, found them to be modernists. Around the turn of the millennium, the Opera Divina Provvidenza had some 40 members.

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The Real Hidden Church

Maurice Archieri (Peter II, 1995-?), born 1923 was a former car mechanical, who lived in Le Perreux-sur-Marne, France. After an “intellectual vision” at Pentecost 1995, he claimed to be Vicar of Christ in the end times. He took the name Peter II, but did not claim to be the pope. The reason given by Archieri was that, there could be no pope in the current era, as the Roman Church had “eclipsed” and no orthodox Roman hierarchy was left. According to Archieri the true church in the end time is L’Eglise Réelle Occultée, the Real Hidden Church, and not the Roman Catholic Church. Archieri was consecrated a bishop in 1997 and claims apostolic succession through the Old Catholic Antiochan line of the Eglise Gallicane via Joseph-René Vilatte, Ernest Houssay Louis-Marie-Francois Giraud and Bernard Isidore Jalbert-Ville. Still, the claims are difficult to assess.

Peter II maintained that the entire hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church were apostates and that there had been no real pope since the death of Pius XII in 1958. He denounced Vatican II and the post-conciliar liturgy. The only mass that should be celebrated was according to the Tridentine rite. Consequently, the “una cum” masses of the SSPX were unacceptable, as that would imply that the Holy See was not vacant and the Roman pope was not an anti-pope. The letters of Peter II were

mostly apocalyptic in content and a major part were drawn from nineteenth and twentieth-century Catholic apocalyptic texts, which were abundantly cited. Just as in many other cases of Catholic apocalypticism, the secret message at La Salette had a central place in the teaching. According to Peter II, the era of Antichrist had begun and only a small remnant of true believers was left. As the Vicar of Christ, his role was to safeguard the Catholic faith until Christ's return.

According to the French Vicar of Christ, he was chosen by the Holy Spirit and invested by its power. This meant that he would be able to re-establish sanctifying grace and supernatural charity in the souls that had been lost since the death of Pius XII. Peter II claimed several gifts of the spirit, including that of discernment. He maintained that he could distinguish a consecrated from a non-consecrated host, but also feel the difference between an object that had been blessed and one that had not. He was also supernaturally equipped to be able to distinguish between validly and invalidly ordained clerics, thus knowing whether they could administer sacraments legitimately. In 2002, Peter II consecrated his son Jean-Marie Archieri a bishop and named him his successor, but I have not been able to find any notes about either about them after 2007.

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Julius Tischler (Peter II, 1998-?). Almost nothing is known by this claimant, apart from that he was German and aged ninety when he proclaimed himself pope in 1998, taking Peter II as his papal name.

Reinaldus Michael Benjamins (Gregory XIX, 2001-?). Very little is known about this person. In religion he was allegedly known as Brother Raymond of the Trinity and was from Malone, New York, He went public as Pope Gregory XIX in October, 2001 and was on Robert Hess' list of papal claimants in the early 2000s, but that

page has unfortunately been discontinued. Of his teachings, I have only been able to find “an invitation” to the true church, written in 2005.

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Mathias Vigan (Christopher XVIII, 2012-) was a Roman Catholic priest, ordained in 2000 in the diocese of Abomey, Benin. He served as a parish priest in Banamè, when he, in 2008, met Vicentia Tadagbé Tchranvoukinni. She was born in 1992 and according to later followers she had no parents, but was found left alone. She was brought to Mathias Vigan, who should perform an exorcism on her, as she was regarded as possessed and he was obviously impressed by her spiritual powers. In 2009, she asserted that she was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and should be referred to as Parfaite, the Perfect One, or Daagbo, God the Holy Spirit. At that time and through her, the Holy Spirit took residence in a special manner in Banamè. Matthias Vigan became a believer and promotor of the cult. The Roman Catholic Church reacted as soon as they heard about the development. In 2009, Vigan was condemned by the bishop of Abomey and in 2011 he was suspended *a divinis*.

The teachings of Daagbo about the group’s mission were summarized in three points: to destroy the Devil and all sorcery; to unite all people in the True Catholic church and destroy all other religious movements; and to cleanse the Catholic church from masons and sorcerers that were found everywhere among the Roman Catholic clerics. The church needed to be re-founded and the hierarchy replaced. According to Daagbo’s teachings, Rome was the city of death, while Banamè and especially a hill there, the Sante Colline Sovidji was the centre of the True Church, the City of the Heavenly Court. At first, the church was called l’Eglise catholique au Benin (The Catholic Church in Benin). Later, it was renamed L’Eglise de Banamè or L’Eglise catholique de Jésus Christ (The Church of Banamè or The Catholic Church of Jesus Christ).

In November 2012, Mathias Vigan was chosen pope by the Holy Spirit (i.e. Daagbo) and given the name Christopher XVIII. Daagbo and Vigan asserted that the event was predicted by the Italian mystic Anna Maria Taigi in 1818. According to hagiographies, Taigi saw future events in a sun-glove and stated that that there would come a day when wars and other calamities killed a large portion of humanity. At that time the pope would not live in Rome and a new church should be founded. She prophesized that many would convert to the true church and that new pope would be a simple priest from a faraway country.

After his election, Christopher XVII elevated twelve men to cardinals, called apostles of the Holy Spirit and consecrated eight bishops together with a number of priests. He also instituted female religious orders. Following the election, on 25 January 2013, both Mathias Vigan and Daagbo were excommunicated *latae sententiae* by the local bishop. Apart from them, all other followers of the church were excommunicated. The Bishops Conference of Benin backed up the local bishop. Christopher XVII was formally crowned pope 17 February 2013, a couple of hours after Benedict XVI stepped down from the Roman See.

According to its own report The Catholic Church of Jesus Christ has been active in different fields. They claim to annihilate sorcery and evil spirits, heal all sorts of diseases and resurrect dead people. They claim that pilgrimages to Sainte Colline de Banamè Sovidji give immunity against sorcery and evil spirits. They also think that the church will reduce poverty and lower the number of road accidents and provide education. In later years, several hundred thousand people have made the pilgrimage to Banamè and there have been conflicts, including violent clashes between Roman Catholics and the followers of Daagbo and Pope Christopher. Apart from Benin, the church has some presence in Gabon and France.

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William Kamm (the future Peter II) was born in 1950 in Cologne, Germany, but as a little child he moved to Australia together with the rest of the family. Aged eighteen, he said that he had begun receiving heavenly messages and gathered a small group of followers, who believed that he was a voice-box of God. In 1970 he founded the Marian Work of Atonement, his first religious organization. During these years, he was a bank employee for some time.

In 1979, Kamm went to Bayside, New York for the first time, convinced of the truth of the apparitions to the controversial seer Veronica Leuken, but still claimed to have apparitions of his own and wanted to form a similar apparition movement in Australia. In 1982, the Virgin announced that henceforth he should be called Little Pebble, and from that time onwards he claimed to receive continuous apparitions, particularly from Our Lady, but also from God the Father, Christ, St. Joseph and the Archangel Michael. The Virgin, most often referred to as Our Lady of the Ark, Mary Our Mother, Help of Christians, allegedly spoke to him on the 13th each month at 3 PM. Until 2015, Kamm claims to have received more than 700 such messages, most of which have been published in either printed form or digitally.

Currently, the group around him plan to publish the whole series of messages on the web page of Little Pebble. Most of the apparitions have a clearly apocalyptic content, including forthcoming catastrophes: a third world war, attacks from Communists, atomic bombs, natural disasters and comets that will destroy the earth.

Kamm claims that he had a special charism of uniting seers all around the world, and discern whether their messages are true or. Thus, he did in no way regard himself as the only true voice-box of God, though he was the leader of a whole army of seers in the end-times. The goal is to return to traditional forms of Catholic devotion.

In 1983, Kamm and a group of his followers settled in Cambewarra, outside Nowra in New South Wales, Australia, a place which remains the group's centre. It is also known as Holy Grounds. The community is located at an old trailer park and most of the members live in mobile homes or caravans. There is also a chapel, where most locutions take place. In 1985, Kamm founded the Order of Saint Charbel, named after the Lebanese nineteenth-century hermit Charbel Makhlouf, known as an efficient miracle-worker. A couple of hundred members of the order lived at the Holy Grounds in Cambewarra in the 1980s and 1990s. Later, the number decreased. Apart from the main centre, there were several other much smaller communities in Victoria (Tyaak, Seymour, Lethbridge and Meredith), South Australia (Mallalla and Mount Gambier) and Queensland (Ormeau). Outside Australia, there are or have been small groups of followers in the United States, Canada, Japan, the Philippines, Uganda, Tanzania, Zaire, Kenya, Reunion, Ireland, France, Poland and New Zealand.

Not surprisingly the Roman Catholic hierarchy has been very critical of Kamm's movement. The first critical reactions came in the mid-1980s, but it was only at the turn of the millennium that the statements have become much more explicit and harsh. In 1999, Bishop Philip Wilson of Wollongong stated that Kamm's movement had nothing to do with the Catholic faith. Three years later, and following a closer examination, the new bishop of Wollongong, Peter William Ingham issued a decree in which he stated that Kamm's visions has no supernatural origin, and that he spread teachings which are in no way coherent with Catholic faith and morals. Kamm was ordered to cease his mission and return to the Catholic Church. The bishop was backed up by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and in 2003, William Kamm was excommunicated.

Still, the members of the Order of St. Charbel claim that they are Catholics. In fact, they believe that they are the ones who are chosen to save the church in the end-time. The Order is basically a lay organization. In the 1980s and 1990s, Kamm travelled around the world trying to convince Roman Catholic clerics of his mission, but the results were meagre and he mainly got some backing from small groups of priests in Uganda, Kenya and southern India.

There is no doubt that Kamm was and is the charismatic leader of the Order of St. Charbel, being the main voice-box of heaven, but he has not a high clerical position. For a long time, he remained a layman. In 2004, however, he was ordained deacon by his advisor Malchold L. Broussard, who was a Roman Catholic priest in Texas until he was suspended in 1989. In 2003, he was consecrated bishop by Bartholomäus Schneider, a German who in his turn had been consecrated by Athanasius Mary Seiwert-Fleige. The latter was a bishop of the Palmarian Church and later consecrated *sub conditione* by Jean-Gerard de la Passion Antoine Laurent Charles Roux. Following his consecratio, Broussard was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church and remains the bishop of the Order of St. Charbel.

William Kamm have not claimed that he is the pope, but at least from 1987 onwards, he maintains that he will become pontiff. In fact, he claims that he will be Petrus Romanus, the last pope in history under the name Peter II. For many years, he declared that he would succeed John Paul II, but after the pope's death in 2005, Kamm asserted that John Paul II "is not dead, but sleeping in God" and that he "will be resurrected in a new body at the right time." Therefore, Kamm also regarded Benedict XVI as true pope, but thought that that he would be succeeded by an antipope. At that time Little Pebble will become the true pope. After Benedict's retirement from the papacy, Kamm seems to claim, at least indirectly, that the Francis is an antipope. Still, there are no sources that indicate that Kamm thinks that he now is the pope.

Shortly after the turn of the millennium, the Order of St. Charbel was in deep crisis. In 2002, William Kamm was arrested, and in the following years, he was tried twice. First in 2005 and then in 2007. Both cases included accusations of sexual assault on underage girls. He was found guilty in both cases and sentenced to ten

years in prison. Kamm stated that he had done nothing wrong and that Our Lady had appeared to him saying that he should elect twelve “queens” among the young female members of the community, “mystically marrying” them and have children with them to create a “new race”. He is said to have fathered some twenty children in the community. Kamm appealed on various occasions to the High court, but the appeals were dismissed and he remained in prison until November 2014. After the prison sentences, many members left the order, not believing in Kamm anymore. When Little Pebble was in jail, his brother-in-arms, Bishop Broussard led the reduced community in Cambewarra, which was strengthened by a group of Maori followers from New Zealand. Little Pebble is now out of prison and active again, now under the name William John Costellia. Nevertheless, in November 2015 he stated that he would not publish any messages on his webpage in the near future as he was constantly watched over by “the authorities”.

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Conclavists

There are much fewer conclavist popes than there are mystically elected. The first of the conclaves took place in 1990, and two more were held in the 1990s, while a few others have followed in the 2000s. Moreover, there are indications that some groups currently plan conclaves in order to elect a pontiff. All these groups have a background as sedevacantists, and generally argue that the Holy See in Rome has been vacant since 1958. Since there are no true cardinals left, others, including laypeople, have the duty to elect a pope. According to conclavists, it does not matter if the number of voters is small, as long as they all profess what the groups regard as true Catholic faith.

There is also a very different case, which includes a conclave, but that cannot really be called “conclavist”. It is the so-called Siri Thesis, which assert that someone else than John XXIII was elected at the conclave in 1958.

The Siri Thesis (Gregory XVII 1958-1989?)

On 26 October 1958, white smoke coming out from the famous Vatican chimney for five minutes, indicated that a new pope had been elected after the demise of Pius XII. Somewhat later, however, this was reported a mistake; the conclave went on. The advocates of the so-called Siri Thesis mean that Guiseppe Cardinal Siri, the archbishop of Genoa, was legally elected at the conclave, and not the Patriarch of Venice, Angelo Roncalli (John XXIII). The opposition to Siri is generally explained by “Jewish-Masonic powers” influence on the curia. According to the thesis, Siri was elected in the fourth ballot of the first day and accepted the office, announcing that his papal name would be Gregory XVII. Then, there is supposed to have been a secret meeting, where it was planned that Cardinal Roncalli should be made pope at all costs. Roncalli was also the man who appeared to the world as the newly elected pope, but according to the Siri believers he was not the real one. After this

chain of events, the advocates think that Siri was kept hostage during the remainder of his life.

The thesis seems to have become more known by the end of the 1980s, when Siri was still living. According to his own testimonies, the traditionalist Vietnamese priest Peter Khoat Van Tran, met Siri on various occasions in 1988 and 1989. Still, not even in the interviews published by the advocates of the Siri thesis, the cardinal stated that he was elected in 1958 and thereafter was kept a prisoner. This omission was explained with the vow of secrecy taken before the conclave. Fr. Khoat, however, was convinced that Siri was the real pope and offered to take him the United States, but according to the Vietnamese priest's testimony, Siri was convinced that if he went, "they" would kill him, meaning the Vatican clerics ("masonic agents"), whom Khoat saw as the true pope's prison guards.

According to Khoat, he also had contact with Archbishop Arrigo Pintorello, whom he claimed assisted him in his contacts with the cardinal. Cardinal Siri died on 2 May 1989. Khoat claimed that he was killed by masons, but he also maintained that Siri shortly before his death had appointed a number of cardinals, a hidden curia that should be able convene a lawful conclave after his death. There are also a few sources that indicate that Father Khoat Tran thought that he was made "a secret pope" by Siri, and that he had a right of succession. Still, at least today, Khoat Tran does not claim that he is, or have ever been, the pope.

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David Bawden (Michael I, 1990-) was born in 1959 in Oklahoma City, Kansas. Aged eighteen, in September 1977, he entered the Society of Saint Pius X's seminary at Ecône Switzerland, but soon left for their seminary in Armada, Michigan. Bawden was dismissed from the seminary in December 1978. Later, he appealed against the dismissal to Marcel Lefebvre and his appeal was accepted in the following year. In January 1980, Bawden took a position at the SSPX College

in Saint Marys, Kansas, but encountering many “un-Catholic things” there, on March 5, 1981 he resigned. At the same time, he also left SSPX for good.

Realizing that it would be difficult to become a Catholic priest under current circumstances, Bawden approached various traditionalist priests, searching advice and assistance, but according to him, none of them was willing to help. Instead, he pursued theological studies on his own, gathering a very large collection of traditional Catholic books. Through his studies, Bawden came to the conclusion that there was something fundamentally wrong in the whole traditionalist movement. During the prolonged sede vacancy that had begun in 1958, traditionalist bishops and priests administered the sacraments without proper jurisdiction and necessary licenses. In 1985 he presented a paper on the matter: *Jurisdiction during the Great Apostasy*, which was distributed in traditionalist circles.

He saw the situation as very problematic. On the one hand he thought it impossible to ever have another true pope through a conclave made up by cardinals, but according to the (First) Vatican Council, St. Peter would have perpetual successors at the Holy See. By 1987, Bawden became convinced that it would be possible, and even necessary, to convene a conclave which even included laypeople. At the time, he met Fr. Khoat to investigate the Siri Thesis, but was not convinced about the matter, and on May 2, 1989, Siri died.

Bawden and Teresa Benns compiled a series of texts which were printed in book form as: *Will the Catholic Church Survive the Twentieth Century?* In 1990, they sent copies to sede vacantist groups worldwide, including all Thuc-line bishops, in order to convene a conclave. The event took place in Belvue, Kansas on 16 July, 1990. While others had announced their presence, in the end, the conclave was only made up by six laypeople, including Bawden himself, his parents, and Teresa Benns. At the conclave, David Bawden was elected pope and took Michael I as his papal name.

Pope Michael moved from St. Marys in 1993 and lived for twenty years in Delia, Kansas, where the Vatican-in-Exile was located. In 2013 he moved to Topeka, Kansas. As Pope Michael was not ordained a priest, he could not read mass. In 2011, however, he was both ordained and consecrated by Robert Biarnesen, a

bishop with apostolic succession through the Duarte Costa lineage. Before the consecration, Bishop Biarnesen converted to the Catholic Church, rendering obedience to Pope Michael.

The group that accepts Pope Michael as pope is not big. In 2009, he stated that he had “thirty solid followers”. He is very active on the internet, including several websites, Facebook and Youtube

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Victor Von Prentz (Linus II, 1994-2007?) is a South African, born in 1952 by parents of Irish and German background. He studied at the seminary of the Priestly Society of St. Pius X in Winona, Minnesota in the late 1980s, but soon left SSPX. Thereafter, he became an independent traditionalist priest, allegedly ordained by an Ukraine bishop of the Byzantine rite and later ordained *sub conditione* by South African bishop Richard Bedingfeld of the Tridentine Latin-Rite church.

As regards Von Pentz' papal claims there are a few quite detailed sources about the election, but almost nothing about his pontificate. The official story is that at meeting in Spokane, Washington, a group of sedevacantists took the decision to convene a conclave in order to elect a pope. On 25 June 1994, this conclave was in fact held in Assisi, where Von Pentz was chosen pope. He accepted the office, took the name Linus II and was crowned on 29 June 1994. Shortly thereafter, the group tried to enter the Lateran basilica in Rome, but was hindered by the police.

One of the participants in the conclave, Brazilian Homero Johas provides some details about the event. He writes that Roberto Gorostiaga from Argentina took the initiative and financed most of the event, and that sedevacantist Bishop José López Gastón invited electors and led the conclave. The participants were Bishop Thomas C. Fouhy from New Zealand, Bishop Emmanuel Korab from the Czech Republic, Bishop José Franklin Urbina Aznar from Mexico, Bishop José López Gastón from the United States, Father Víctor Von Pentz from South Africa, José E. Cháves and Osvaldo Ancona, both from Mexico, Rudolf Gerstner from Germany, Elisabeth Gerstner from Great Britain, Homero and Ruth Johas from Brazil and Roberto Gorostiaga from Argentina. In his article, Johas claims that Von Pentz was very reluctant to accept the papacy, and afterwards held a very low profile.

Of the participants of the conclave, it could be interesting to look at the bishops' apostolic succession. Thomas C. Fouhy was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1943. He worked in Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States, but briefly left the priesthood after Vatican II. Later, he became a traditionalist priest who travelled around to various parts of the world, teaching and administering sacraments. He was consecrated a bishop in 1993 by Jean Gérard de la Passion Antoine Laurent Charles Roux, who in his turn claimed to be made a bishop by Archbishop Thuc, though this is a much questioned assertion. José López-Gastón was a Thuc-bishop through the Christian Marie Datesson line, consecrated in 1992 by Guy Jean Tau Johannes de Mamistra Oliveres. In 1993, he was consecrated *sub conditione* by Jean Gérard de la Passion Antoine Laurent Charles Roux. Emmanuel Korab was first ordained and consecrated by a bishop in the Czech Old Catholic Church. In 1994, he was conditionally consecrated in 1994 by José Ramon Lopez-Gaston, and in 1999, he asserted to have been consecrated

sub conditione by Pavel Maria Hnilica, a Slovak Roman Catholic bishop who ministered clandestinely in Czechoslovakia, but later lived in Italian exile. According to Korab, the consecration took place in the bishop's home in the Vatican. The fourth of the bishops, who took part in the conclave in Assis, was José Franklin Urbina Aznar. He was consecrated in 1994 by José Ramón López Gastón.

In 1998, Pope Linus II moved to Hertfordshire in England, where his Byzantine Catholic Community was established. His contact person was a famous German traditionalist, Elisabeth Gerstner, who had been a conclavist at least since the mid-1970s and participated in his election. She died in 2005 and there are signs that by that time, she had distanced herself from Pope Linus.

Some sources state that Linus II was consecrated bishop by José Ramon Lopez-Gaston. Others claim that he, in fact, was consecrated by Arrigo Pintonello (1908-2001), the only Roman Catholic bishop who had voted against every single document of Vatican II and resigned from his office in 1971. Nevertheless, these claims were consistently denied by Pintorello. The group around Linus II, however, did not want to officially reveal the consecrator's name as he was a Roman Catholic bishop, and they thought that his life would be threatened if the name was made public.

According to some sources, Linus II had groups of followers in England, Germany and Italian, but held a very low profile throughout the years, and even former followers were unsure whether he has resigned, and took the lack of response from him as a "yes". As he did not answer the letters from Bishop Emmanuel Korab, from July 2007, Korab declared the Holy See vacant, and began to prepare a conclave.

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Lucian Pulvermacher (Pius XIII, 1998-2009) was born in 1918 in Bakeville, Wisconsin as Earl Pulvermacher. He joined the Capuchin order, as did his three brothers. Pulvermacher studied at different monasteries in Indiana, New York state and Wisconsin, before being ordained a priest in 1946. Two years later, he became a missionary to Japan, where he served on the Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa, until 1970. Thereafter, the order sent him to Australia to work in Queensland. He stayed there until 1976, when he left the Capuchins without any prior notice, and returned to the United States, stating that he was unwilling to accept the post-Vatican II changes.

In the United States, Pulvermacher first went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. For a brief period he was close to the Society of St. Pius X, but having developed a sedevacantist position, he was unhappy with their official view on the papacy. Later, being criticized for staying so long in the Novus Ordo church, Pulvermacher claimed that “I was in the Novus Ordo shell, but I never was an organic part of the worm inside the shell.”

From August 1976 onwards, Pulvermacher was on his own, not being part of any bigger traditionalist group. He lived with his parents in Pittsville, Wisconsin, and in the following two decades, he travelled around reading the traditional mass in private chapels. Not being subject to any traditionalist bishop, Pulvermacher claimed that he still administered the sacraments with the permit of the bishop of Okinawa. As that bishop accepted the Novus Ordo, some traditionalists questioned the Pulvermacher’s authority. In 1992, he moved from Pittsville to Arpigo, Wisconsin, where he continued his ministry for six years until he relocated to Kalispell, Montana, where he was invited to read mass in a private chapel.

By 1995, Pulvermacher had turned conclavist after meeting a German priest who had a vision to call a conclave, as there was no hope that there would ever be an orthodox pontiff in Rome. Fellow traditionalists Robert Lyons from Texas and Gordon Bateman from Australia also thought that a conclave was necessary to safeguard the Catholic tradition. In this exceptional situation, when the Holy See

had been vacant for four decades, non-cardinals and even laypeople could elect a pope, they argued. Therefore, they tried to convince other traditionalists to attend.

The conclave was held in Kalispell, and Lucian Pulvermacher was elected pope on 24 October 1998, taking Pius XIII as his papal name. After becoming the pope, in 1999, he was consecrated bishop by Gordon Cardinal Bateman. Bateman was a layman, but one of seven cardinals appointed by Pius XIII in 1998. He was later ordained a priest and consecrated bishop by the pope, and Robert Lyons was ordained a priest in 2000. Another priest was Charles Bateman, who died already in 1999. The church was called the true Catholic Church (tCC) and its Holy See was located to Springdale, Washington. Still, there is no doubt that Pulvermacher claimed to be the legal successor of the latest Roman pope, Pius XII. It is not known how many people recognized Pulvermacher's papal claim. One of his faithful, however, was his mother, Cecelia Pulvermacher, who died at 104 in 1999.

During his pontificate, Pius XIII issued a number of encyclicals and papal letters, closely following pre-conciliar teachings. During the last years of his life, the pope suffered from dementia and did not make any public statements after 2005. Around that time, his old brother-in-arms, Gordon Bateman, was excommunicated as was Robert Lyons. The reason was that they criticised the pope for practising divination by help of a pendulum. Pius XIII died in 2009. According to his followers, there is currently a sede vacancy and the group is planning for a new conclave in 2017 or 2018.

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The Catholic and Mercedarian Church

Joaquín Llorens Grau (Alexander IX, 2005-). According to the group's own information, a traditionalist missionary in Guatemala, Antonio Velasco founded the Congregación Mercedaria Sagrada Tradición Nuestra Señora de la Merced, Generala de los Ejércitos Celestiales, Corredentora. They claim that Velasco was consecrated by Bishop Moises Carmona of the Unión Católica Trento, who was in his turn was consecrated by Archbishop Thuc. There is, however, no independent support for this assertion. Together with six priests and nine novices, Velasco transferred to Elche (Elx) in Spanish Alicante.

The community there was founded in 2004 by him and Father Esteban de Paula, who became prior general. Before his death, Velasco consecrated six bishops: Antonio de la Merced, Esteban de Paula, Francisco de Paula, Carlos María, Jose Antonio del Socorro and Pablo de María.

In 2005, a conclave was held and Joaquín Llorens Grau was elected Pope Alexander IX. At this time, the Iglesia Católica Apostólica Española Tradicionalista y Mercedaria was founded. More concisely, it is known as the Iglesia Católica y Mercedaria. Alexander IX sees himself as the legal successor of the Holy See, which has been moved from Rome to the Finca Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Elche, which is looked upon as the first part of the New Papal State.

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The Catholic Apostolic Remnant Church

This church with its center in Argentina is a complicated matter. Some claim that it does not exist in reality, and is a hoax and/or only exists on the Internet. Still, the Remnant Church has very active webpages, and the alleged pope publishes many documents. Since 2006, three men have been pontiffs.

Oscar Michaelli (Leo XIV 2006-2008) was born in 1983 in the province of Buenos Aires. Having had a vision that he should become a priest, he joined the Sociedad de Nuestra Señora de la Compasión in Moreno, where he became known as Oscar de la Compasión. After a brief period, Adolphe George Cantor and Mario Cornejo of the Santa María Church ordained him a priest and consecrated him a bishop, both in 2005. A new religious order, the Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Compasión was initiated on 1 April 2005, when he, as the superior general, issued a “Declaration on the Sede Vacante”, subscribing to a sedevacantist position.

On 24 March 2006, a conclave of the Catholic Apostolic Remnant Church elected Oscar de la Compasión pope and he took the name Leo XIV. Just thereafter, he and the other bishops of the order were consecrated *sub conditione* by John William Blackhill, Raphaël Cloquell and Raúl Francisco Tejada.

From Blackhill, Leo XIV claimed apostolic succession through a number Armenian and later British-Armenian prelates, including Charles Leslie Saul, who in 1945 was given the title and position of Archbishop of Suthronia in the Eparchy of All the Britons. Saul consecrated Herman Philippus Abbinga as Missionary Bishop for Holland and Indonesia, who consecrated Perry Nikolaus Cedarholm, Bishop of Scandinavia for The Apostolic Episcopal Church. Cedarholm in his turn consecrated Nils Bertil Alexander Persson who later was enthroned as Primate of The Apostolic Episcopal Church, and it was Persson who was the consecrating bishop of John William Blackhill, who later turned sedevacantist.

The apostolic succession of Bishop Cloquell of the Église Catholique Latine Traditionelle is through the Thuc lineage via Michel Louis Guérard des Lauriers, Robert Fidelis McKenna and Oliver Oravec. Bishop Tejada’s apostolic succession

is from The Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch through the rich lineage of Joseph Rene Vilatte of The American Catholic Church. Vilatte consecrated John Barwell Walker, who consecrated Emile Federico Rodriguez y Fairfield of the Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox Church of the Americas, who became the consecrator of Raúl Francisco Tejada.

According to the church's own data, on 16 March 2007, Pope Leo was shot, but survived the attack. Later in the year, however, he became severely ill and died of cancer 2 February 2008.

Juan Bautista Bonetti (Innocent XIV, 7 March–24 May 2008) is an Argentinean, born in 1957. He was ordained a priest 5 July 2006 by Emilio Javier de la Compasión and consecrated a bishop 12 August 2007 by Aristoteles Cardinal Papaloupos. On 7 March 2008, he was elected pope at a conclave, but was much criticized for modernism, and a majority of the members of the order left Moreno for Villa María, Cathedral Nuestra Señora de la Compasión. Innocent XIV was forced to leave the papacy on 24 May 2008.

Alejandro Greico (Alexander IX, 24 May 2008-) was born in 1983, in Buenos Aires, Alejandro de la Compasión ordained in 2005 by Oscar de la Compasión consecrated in 2007 by the same. On 24 May 2008 he was elected pope of the Remnant Church. It now claims to have bishops in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, United States, Canada, France, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands.

References

The Church's official website: <http://icaremanente.webcindario.com/>

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The Hasidean Catholic Church

Bryan Richard Clayton (Athanasius I, 2011-?) was born in 1975 in Chicago. He briefly attended CMRI's seminary in Omaha Nebraska. According to some sources,

he thereafter received training from a traditionalist Franciscan in Mexico. Clayton was ordained a priest around 2005, and in 2007, he was consecrated a bishop by Bishop Patrick Taylor of the Society of the Virgin Mary, who resides in Buckley, West Virginia.

Taylor's apostolic succession is related to a vast array of apostolic lineages. He was consecrated by three bishops Michael Boucher, Denis Michel Garrison and Paul Dolan. Their apostolic succession include the Arnold Harris Matthew Old Catholic lineage, as well as Russian, Ukrainian, Ethiopian and Greek Orthodox and the Duarte Costa Brazilian Catholic lineages. Taylor was later conditionally consecrated by sedevacantist prelate, Bishop Merrill Adamson in 2001 of the Thuc lineage through Christian Datesson.

In 2009 and 2010, Bryan Richard Clayton signed a number of extensive pastoral letters as the Commissary Apostolic of Saints Peter and Paul and leader of the Order of Friars Minor of the Original Observance. He travelled around the United States, specializing in exorcisms. At around that time, he also appears as the leader of the Crusaders of the Most Holy Face. As bishop, he was attached to a chapel in Boston, but left or was forced to leave from there, and relocated to Spokane, Washington.

In November 2010, Clayton announced a forthcoming conclave to elect a new pope. He had a different position to sedevacantism than the vast majority of the advocates of the thesis. According to him, Pius X was the first in the series of antipopes. According to Clayton, he was a mason or at least an agent of masons. In his view, masons got a hold of the curia from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and successively destroyed the Roman Catholic Church from within. To him, Leo XIII, who died in 1903, was the last true pope and there had been a sedevacancy at least since 1911, when Pius X reformed the Roman Breviary. Popes Pius X through John XXIII lost their offices, but from Paul VI onwards, the Roman popes are antipopes as they headed a religious group that is not the church that was founded by Christ, but another religion.

Therefore Clayton and a few followers concluded that a conclave was necessary. They argued according to the principle of epikeia: if there were no true cardinals, then bishops should take part, together with priests and male laity. The conclave

was held in December 2011. Fifteen men were invited and nine of them posted their ballots after taking an oath of true Catholic faith, as Clayton saw it, and abjured earlier false beliefs. On Christmas Eve 2011, the ballots were opened, and Clayton received all votes and accepted the papacy. He now claimed to be Pope Athanasius I of The Holy, Apostolic, Universal, and Catholic Church.

By 2013, the name of the church was changed to the Hasidean Catholic Church. According to Athanasius I, the decision was taken so that this true church could be easily distinguished from the Novus Ordo church. For the same reason, he wore an Eastern Orthodox habit and not the papal white. Still, the new church seems to have had a special mission to convert Jews, and the Old Testament has an unusually strong position. By now (2015) the webpage of the Hasidean church is discontinued and no post-2013 data about it or Athanasius I can be found.

References

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There are two 2013 speeches by Athanasius I, available on Youtube, see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30ThveQSncQ>

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