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Magnus Lundberg

A Pope of their Own

El Palmar de Troya and the Palmarian Church



Second Edition

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About the author

Magnus Lundberg is Professor of Church and Mission History at Uppsala University. He specialises in early modern and modern Latin American, European and North American church and mission history, and new religious movements. Among his monographs are *Giuseppe Maria Abbate: The Italian-American Celestial Messenger* (co-authored with James W. Craig) (2018), *Tomás Ruiz: Utbildning, karriär och konflikter i den sena kolonialtidens Centralamerika* (2017), *Mission and Ecstasy: Contemplative Women and Salvation in Colonial Spanish America and the Philippines* (2015), and *Church Life between the Metropolitan and the Local: Parishes, Parishioners and Parish Priests in Seventeenth-Century Mexico* (2011).
Personal web site: www.magnuslundberg.net

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Editor's address: Uppsala University, Department of Theology, Church History,
Box 511, SE-751 20 UPPSALA, Sweden.
E-mail: magnus.lundberg@teol.uu.se.

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Preface to the First Edition (2017)

In 2018, fifty years will have passed since the first reports of Marian apparitions in El Palmar de Troya in Spanish Andalusia. It will also be the fortieth anniversary of the coronation of the seer Clemente Domínguez Gómez as Pope Gregory XVII, and the consequent foundation of the Palmarian Catholic Church. Still, placing the papal tiara on his head was only seen as a human act of confirmation. He asserted that Christ himself had crowned him just after the death of Pope Paul VI.

This book provides a broad overview of the history of the apparitions at El Palmar de Troya and the church that became its main result. It also includes a more systematic analysis of the church's increasingly unusual doctrines and rituals. Through the study, I try to answer two underlying questions: First, which factors contributed to the foundation of the Palmarian Church? Second, how has the church survived and developed through its four decades of existence?

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For me, the book has an almost two-decade-long prehistory. In the late 1990s, I spent much time in Seville, doing research for my doctoral dissertation on colonial Mexican church history. Sometimes, I stayed at the Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, close to the Plaza del Museo. There, somebody told me about a group who lived a couple of blocks away that had a pope of their own. In El Palmar de Troya, some 40 kilometres south of the city, amid the arid fields, they had constructed an enormous Cathedral-Basilica. Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, the pope, the friars—almost all of them bishops—and the nuns still lived in several buildings in the central parts of Seville. When strolling around in the afternoons, I sometimes spotted white vans leaving the convent garages, bringing

bishops and nuns to their cathedral. On other occasions, I saw bishops, dressed in black cassocks walking rapidly in line.

The Palmarian church was certainly closed and secretive, and there were many rumours about them. Some locals described them as hard-line fascists, involved in shady business activities. Other looked upon the clerics as mere clowns. Many were ashamed of this group, who had canonised Francisco Franco, and regarded them as a bizarre anachronism in the rapidly modernising Spanish society. People talked about friars and nuns living in very frugal circumstances, while the church leaders seemed to have unlimited economic means. I heard much about the blind pope and his closest men's lavish dining and heavy drinking at the city's best restaurants. The combination of seemingly strict traditionalism and this flamboyant papal character, frequenting bars and bullfights, was strange to me.

Still, most of the stories that I was told related to the 1970s and 1980s, and they often focused on dramatic accounts that made it to the local news. Nobody could tell me much about the Palmarian teachings and their relation to Roman Catholic doctrine. What had happened in the church since the 1980s? How traditionally and recognisably Catholic were they, really? What new teachings had they developed? I knew that they did not say Mass according to the traditional, so-called Tridentine rite anymore, something that made them stand out from other groups in a similar vein.

Moreover, it is well known that religious leaders who claim to receive visions and heavenly messages continuously often introduce new, extra-canonical, doctrines at a rapid pace. That was probably the case with Gregory XVII, too, I thought. The few people who had written about the Palmarians at the time, often presented their doctrines as nonsensical or outlandish, without referring to them in more detail. In short, there was much to investigate.

As the years passed, my initial fascination transformed into a more serious interest. Wanting to learn more, I started collecting whatever I could find about the Palmarian church, but I realised that it was

challenging to find up-to-date sources and literature; most were concerned with the 1970s. Still, that fact that the more recent source material was challenging to acquire only contributed to the attraction. When reading Palmarian doctrinal works that I managed to find, I realised that they had an elaborate, and at least to me, fascinating theological system, with evident roots in Catholic traditionalism, popular piety and apocalyptically centred movements in other places. They provided a kind of all-inclusive variety.

Still, it had become very different from the other traditionalist groups I knew of. In 2001, Pope Gregory promulgated a Palmarian Bible, banning the use of traditional Bibles. To destroy Bibles, which among Christians are often regarded as containing divine revelation par excellence, was undoubtedly a drastic measure for a group that self-define as Christian. In fact, the Palmarians see themselves as the only real Christians in this End time.

In 2005, Pope Gregory XVII died, and around that time, an increasing number of testimonies by former Palmarians appeared on different web forums. Many of those who wrote were young people. They had grown up in the church but had recently left or been expelled. They reported a veritable exodus of members, increasingly strict rules and members' growing isolation from the outside world. Leaving was difficult, as it meant cutting the ties with family and friends who remained Palmarians. The shunning of 'apostates' was complete.

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Shortly after Pope Gregory's death—which almost coincided with Pope John Paul II's—, I wrote an essay about the Palmarian church for the most significant Swedish morning paper, *Dagens Nyheter*. Some years later, in 2009, I published another article in *Signum*, a Swedish Catholic journal. While I planned to write a more detailed study in either English or Spanish, other work took all my time. Eventually, I managed to summarise some of my findings about the Palmarians in an article, 'Fighting the Modern with the Virgin Mary: The Palmarian Church,' which was published in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* in 2013.

Two years later, I was asked to write a group profile for the World Religion and Spirituality Project at Virginia Commonwealth University. While preparing the brief profile, I also authored a much more extensive research report on the church's history and theology, *Palmar de Troya—Holy Catholic Apostolic Church* (2015), which was published on the Project's web site (www.wrldrels.org). It should be clearly stated that this book includes portions of both the article and the research report, though the texts have been thoroughly revised and reworked.

This volume is only one part of an ongoing project on different varieties of modern Catholic traditionalism and apocalypticism. The Palmarian church is not the only religious group that claims that the true pope is not the man in Rome, but their leader. To them, the Roman pontiff is not Catholic anymore. I refer to them as '(modern) alternative popes,' and do not use the official Roman Catholic Church's designation 'antipope.'

An unexpected and dramatic chain of events, beginning in April 2016 suddenly made my knowledge of the Palmarian church sought-after, not least by Spanish and Irish media. The third pope, Gregory XVIII, left the papacy and the church. He had a girlfriend and publicly announced that the Palmarian church was based on lies—that it was a fraud from beginning to end—though he claimed to have been unaware of it until recently. In the year that followed, I wrote several texts about the development and the historical background, which I published on my website. In this context, it should be mentioned that the chapter on Gregory XVIII included in this book is based on a research report published on-line called *Papal Management by Fear: The Palmarian Pontificate of Gregory XVIII (2011–2016)* (2016). Nevertheless, the text has been thoroughly revised, and I have been able to include many other sources.

—

The potential source material for a study of the Palmarian church is abundant; I would say overwhelming. There are many official texts, including apparition messages, papal documents, decrees, encyclicals, apostolic letters and sermons, as well as catechisms and prayer books. Most

importantly, there are two very extensive doctrinal works: *The Treatise of the Mass* (1992) and *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible* (2001). Only a fraction of the material is found in research libraries, and apart from brief documents, the church does not provide outsiders with doctrinal texts. Still, in various ways, I have acquired copies of all the most important works as well as many other official documents. As for the last two decades, the least known period of the church, I have been able to gather an almost complete source collection, divided between editions in English, Spanish and German. Whenever possible, in this book, I refer to and quote the English versions. Otherwise, I indicate that the translations are mine.

Apart from the written sources, from 2005 onwards, I have been in contact with many ex-Palmarians, including former bishops and nuns. With very few exceptions, they have established contact with me, knowing about my interest from reading my comments, articles and reports. My correspondents left the church at different times, ranging from the 1980s until very recently. They told me stories about their life: how they became members or what it was like growing up a Palmarian, how they experienced the changes in the church, and how they left. Some ex-clerics provided me with detailed information about the ecclesiastical structure and the inner workings of the church. It is essential to underline that I have not pressured anybody to disclose data; most often, I have only asked for clarifications of what they have told me.

Many of my informants have asked to remain anonymous. Of course, I have respected their wishes, and in cases where we have not dealt with the issue of anonymity explicitly, I have not disclosed their names, nor have I included data that would make it possible to identify them. To refer to anonymous sources might be problematic, but generally, I only use their statements as testimonies about personal experiences in the church. With few exceptions, which are noted, when using the testimonies of informants as sources for a particular assertion, I have relied on several statements. Apart from the anonymisation of my informants, I am very restrictive of disclosing names of individual nuns and friars. The exception is the foremost leaders of the Palmarian church. Due to the closed nature of the

Palmarian Church, it is impossible to establish contact with the current leadership, and for the ordinary faithful, to have contact with ‘anti-Palmarians’ leads to ex-communication. Of course, I have not actively tried to expose any member to such a risk.

Newspaper articles from the late 1960s onwards have served as an essential complement to church publications and testimonies by ex-members. In this context, the Seville edition of the daily paper *ABC* is especially important, but I have used contributions from over 20 other Spanish and foreign news media, including TV, Radio and websites. This material includes news reports, background articles and documentaries.

In 1976, just after the first episcopal consecrations, there appeared no less than seven journalistic books about El Palmar de Troya. Above all, they provide good source material, as they reproduce both written documents and interviews from the time. After the 1970s, the press published much less on the church. In 2006, however, Manuel M. Molina, a Spanish journalist who has covered the Palmarians for several decades, published a book about them. Though mainly focusing on the earlier years, he also included recent interviews with ex-clerics as well as notes on the development from the 1980s onwards.

Apart from these journalistic accounts, there are several brief and up-dated overviews on the Palmarian church, written in the 2000s by, for example, Moisés Garrido Vázquez, Jean-François Mayer, Massimo Introvigne, PierLuigi Zoccatelli and Marcin Karas. A few older specialised studies focus on legal issues. Carlos Seco Caro (1988) wrote about the Palmarian church and the Spain legislation on religious freedom, and José Carlos Beltrán y Bachero (1989) devoted an article to the canonical status of the episcopal consecrations at El Palmar de Troya in 1976. The only more detailed studies about Palmarian theology are authored by Eric W. Steinhauer (2014) and me (e.g. 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

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To write about a group such as the Palmarian Church certainly has its challenges. My goal has been to be as objective and multi-faceted as possible, using sources of many different kinds critically. From a religious

studies perspective, there should be no difference in the way you study a big, established, religious organisation and a relatively small and new one. Religions and religious beliefs should be investigated as human constructions, even if adherents believe that supernatural powers are involved. What interests me, in this case, is the Palmarian organisational structure, self-understanding, actors, conflicts, doctrines, spirituality, rituals and rules, as well as former members' experiences.

Though there certainly are uncommon features in the Palmarian doctrine, it is important not to overstate its uniqueness, which has been done too often. The church was certainly not developed in an ideological vacuum, and many of the ideas are found elsewhere in traditionalist and apocalyptic milieus, where modern apparitions of Christ and Mary have a vital status. Thus, when studying the Palmarians, I have a comparative outlook, searching for parallels and sources of inspiration, though most of the book deals with the inner workings of the church and its own tumultuous history.

Nevertheless, this study is not only a detached analysis of organisation and doctrine. It is a fact that many people have suffered and suffer from their life in the church, and from being shunned by family and friends because of leaving. Trying to present as full a depiction of the church as possible, such testimonies must be included, too.

While I do not want to enter too much into the heated debate on whether to use terms such as 'sect' and 'cult' or 'new religious movement' and 'emergent religion' to describe a group such as the Palmarians, a brief comment might be necessary. To label a religious group, a 'sect' or 'cult' does not lead to a greater understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, I think it creates the image that on the one hand, there is such a thing as 'religion', which is good, or at least better, and, on the other hand, something called a 'sect', which is evil and harmful. In fact, the boundaries are always very hazy.

To me, this is certainly not a way of reducing the testimonies by people affected by a group. Instead, it is a way of underlining that 'religion' or 'church' is not anything intrinsically good, or better. Similar destructive

processes that people have experienced in El Palmar de Troya appear in much bigger and much more established religious groups, too. Moreover, religious groups can change rapidly in character. Still, there is no doubt that the Palmarian church is a relatively small, and very closed religious group, which holds universal truth claims, and has a leader claiming total authority over the members, and all aspects of their lives.

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A Pope of their Own: El Palmar de Troya and the Palmarian Church divides into twelve chapters, following an approximate chronological outline. In *chapters 1 through 4*, I trace the development from the reports of the first apparitions at El Palmar de Troya in 1968, through the increasing institutionalisation of the movement, the foundation of a separate religious order, the consecration of the first Palmarian bishops in 1976, and finally, the election of Clemente Domínguez Gómez as Pope Gregory XVII in 1978. Throughout, I place the apparitions at El Palmar de Troya and the development of the Palmarian movement into a broader historical and religious context, looking for parallels, sources of inspiration and interactions with persons related to other traditionalist and apocalyptic groups.

In *chapters 5 through 9*, I follow the history of the Palmarian church through the successive pontificates of Gregory XVII (1978–2005), Peter II (2005–2011), Gregory XVIII (2011–2016) and Peter III (2016–). In this second part, the emphasis is put on church organisation, ministry, economy, internal conflicts, secessions and expulsions, as well as on testimonies by ex-members about the increasing isolation. Thus, in this part, the comparative perspective fades away, and it becomes more of an internal narrative of an increasingly closed group.

The third part of the study, which is made up of *chapters 10 and 11* has a different structure. They include a more systematic thematic analysis of Palmarian doctrines and rituals, comparing and contrasting them to Roman Catholic and Catholic traditionalist and apocalypticist teachings and practices. *Chapter 12* is a brief epilogue, where I present some concluding observations about the five decades of Palmarian history.

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This book would have been impossible to write without the help of many, including people who have personal experiences of the Palmarian church, and colleagues in the scholarly world. To conclude this preface, I first want to thank the former Palmarians, in all some thirty persons, with whom I have been in contact during the extended research process. I am very grateful to them for sharing their experiences and answering questions and helping me access written sources. Collectively, I extend my sincere appreciation to them. As a group, I also acknowledge the scholars around the globe, with whom I have been in contact through the years, discussing the Palmarian church and Catholic traditionalism at large.

A final word of acknowledgement is due to Annika Berg and Towe Wandegren, who in different periods have endured my increasingly obsessive interest in matters Palmarian.

Uppsala, Sweden, May 2017.

Preface to the Second Edition

I published the first edition of this book in mid-2017. By then, Palmarian Pope Gregory XVIII–Ginés Hernández–had left the papacy and the church and married a former nun. These events made El Palmar de Troya known again. It had been four decades since the Spanish press devoted this much interest to the Palmarian Church.

Since then, the Palmarians have attracted even more attention. They became front-page news in Spain as the ex-pope and his wife were tried for the armed robbery of the Basilica in Palmar de Troya. The interest in the Palmarian Church was also sparked by best-seller writer Dan Brown’s *Origin* (2017) that included it in the plot. That made the existence of the church known to many outside of Spain, too. As my book was the only recent monograph on the Palmarians, it has been downloaded tens of thousands of times. To reach such a vast readership was undoubtedly an unusual experience for me.

Due to the dramatic chain of events, newspapers in both Spain and other countries published many articles on the Palmarians, news articles, very ambitious feature articles as well as more sensationalist pieces. In 2019, the prolific Spanish author Oscár Carrera published the book *El Palmar de Troya: Historia del cisma español*. His work is of a popular kind but solidly based on primary sources, and the writer has a critical eye. It was the first book-length study in Spanish in the last two decades. In early 2020, Movistar+ broadcasted *El Palmar de Troya*, a very ambitious and well-received four-episode documentary, which attracted a broad audience. I’m grateful to the production team for inviting me to be a part of the series.

In late 2018, the Palmarian Church, which had no internet presence for the last twenty years, unexpectedly launched a website, and soon after that, they established an Instagram account, a YouTube channel and a Facebook group. This on-line apostolate has made the church much more known.

Taken into account the rapid development during the last three years, I decided to write an enlarged version of *A Pope of their Own*, which follows the Palmarian Church until today. The updated parts are mainly found in chapter 9 (pp. 189–200), covering the current papacy of Peter III. However, I have also included some new sections about earlier history and about rituals (see pp. 20–22, 99–102, 112–113, 118–119, and 226–229). I would like to thank my friend John Plummer for proof-reading these parts.

Finally, I would like to thank the many people all over the world who have provided me with feedback and helped me in various ways during the last three years. I'm especially happy to have received messages from ex-Palmarians, who have found my book helpful in their struggles with experiences from the years they belonged to the church. These interactions have made my time consuming and sometimes exhausting work on the Palmarians worthwhile.

Uppsala, Sweden, June 2020.

1. Introduction

El Palmar de Troya, located about 40 kilometres south of Seville, close to Utrera, was settled in the 1930s. By the late 1960s, the town, which was surrounded by fields and olive groves, had about 2,000 inhabitants, most having relocated from other parts of Spain. The majority of them were day labourers on big agricultural estates, *latifundios*. Anne Cadoret-Abeles, who conducted anthropological fieldwork there in the late 1960s and early 1970s, noted the lack of communitarian spirit resulting from virtually all inhabitants being newcomers. The town had electricity but still lacked a medical doctor and running water, and its school remained undeveloped. Poverty was widespread, but towards the end of the 1960s, the economic conditions for day labourers improved somewhat.

El Palmar de Troya was ecclesiastically marginal as well, having neither resident priest nor permanent church building. When the curate from the neighbouring town of Gudalema de los Quintero did arrive, which he did from 1958 onwards, religious services were held in a private home or at an industrial compound. Few townspeople went to Mass regularly. Not much indicated that beginning in 1968, this town would be the centre of a significant religious movement when apparitions of the Virgin Mary and Christ were reported. However some of Cadoret-Abeles's informants stated that a few local people had claimed to receive apparitions in the early 1960s, but those stories were not believed by many.¹

Although the religious situation in El Palmar de Troya was fragile, it was not extreme. In many rural parts of southern Spain, the share of

¹ Cadoret-Abeles 1981; cf. Cadoret-Abeles 1974 for a detailed study of the town in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Catholics who went to church regularly was very low. Only a small minority fulfilled the church's precepts: confessing and taking communion at least once a year. Priests were rare guests and, due to their working conditions, day labourers had few possibilities to attend religious services, even if they had wished to do so.²

From the 1940s onwards, there were attempts to catechise rural inhabitants in Andalusia and other regions through popular missions, as the clergy claimed that most inhabitants were only nominal Catholics with insufficient knowledge of the church's teachings. The vast majority's religious practice was almost reduced to the rites of passage: baptism, marriage and burial. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, sociologists made studies of religious beliefs and activities in Spain. They found that in Andalusia, about one-fifth of the Catholics attended Mass regularly, but among the rural workers, only about seven per cent were active churchgoers.³

The Religio-Political Context

Francisco Franco's (1892–1975; r. 1939–1975) Spain is often looked upon as a very religious society, where the so-called National Catholicism was a dominant ideology, implying that church and state were closely intertwined, and that to be Spanish was to be Catholic. The Generalissimo was the country's leader for almost four decades. He successfully assumed power during the Civil War (1936–1939), which nationalists described as a crusade against the Second Republic (1931–1939), international communism and freemasonry. Many clerics were killed during the war, and in several areas dominated by the Second Republic, the church had to go underground, and priests went into hiding. The Catholic hierarchy,

² Cadoret-Abeles 1981.

³ For a general history of the Catholic Church in Spain 1875–1998, see Callahan 2000; here pp. 462–489. For a study on popular religion in Andalusia, see Gómez García 2000.

including the Vatican, drew parallels between the situation in Spain and the religious persecution in Mexico and the Soviet Union.⁴

After their final victory in 1939, the new regime wanted to strengthen Catholicism's role in society. They wished to 're-Christianize' Spain, continuing the crusade against the enemies of state and religion. Not surprisingly, the official church celebrated the end of the Second Republic. From this time on, Franco defined Spain as a totalitarian state, based on what he called autocratic dictatorship. After the end of the war, numerous groups of political opponents were executed, put to forced labour, or imprisoned in concentration camps; others were forced into exile. Franco consistently opposed any kind of regional independence by strengthening the central power, and by making Castilian the only acceptable language, counteracting other languages such as Catalan, Galician and Basque. Though influenced by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, Spain officially remained neutral in the Second World War.⁵

In the 'Organic Laws' of the Franco era, Spain was declared a confessional Catholic state, and following lengthy discussions, a concordat with the Holy See was signed in 1953. In Franco's Spain, religious minorities such as Protestant communities were actively, and during some periods violently, repressed. In the nationalist discourse, to be non-Catholic was to be non-Spanish or anti-Spanish. The Franco regime regarded freemasons as a particularly severe threat to society and religion, and a special Tribunal for the Suppression of Freemasonry was founded. Freemasonry was seen as the foremost exponent of Liberal (and Protestant) internationalism. In the nationalist rhetoric, Spain was a providential nation, being a faithful Catholic bulwark against liberalism, Freemasonry, Protestantism and communism, under the strong leadership of its great Caudillo. Francisco Franco's longevity as a leader had much to

⁴ The literature on the Spanish Civil War is enormous. A good synthesis is Beevor 2006. For the church, the republic and the civil war, see Callahan 2000: 306–380.

⁵ For a biography on Franco, see Preston 1994.

do with his ability to balance different rightist groups: conservatives, authoritarian monarchists, Carlists and members of the Fascist Falange.⁶

During the Franco-era, the Catholic Church had many privileges and much influence. Its hierarchy took part in official ceremonies, and the state contributed to the salaries of the clergy and other ecclesiastical expenses. Catholicism had significant control over the school system, and priests were given a prominent role in the state censorship. Many clerics were pleased with the situation. Nevertheless, the marriage between state and church was not always a harmonious one. The church hierarchy's support of the Caudillo was not unanimous or consistently enthusiastic, and there was a definite element of power struggle. Many higher ecclesiastics thought that the state had too great power in the religious field and threatened the church's liberty. In the 1940s, for example, the Vatican opposed the idea that all bishops should swear an oath of loyalty to the Caudillo, and many Spanish bishops were cautious about the fascist Falange, whose corporatist ideology they thought would diminish the church's influence.⁷

Particularly after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), a growing number of Spanish bishops became more critical of the regime. Not that all bishops wanted a political democracy, but they thought that Franco was unsuitable to lead a modern state. They wanted someone more competent, who could deal with the major societal problems, but not necessarily a radical change of the political system.⁸

The episcopal opposition against Franco in the 1960s was led by the president of the Bishops Conference, Vicente Cardinal Enrique y Tarancón, while some bishops continued to laud Franco until the end, or at least remained loyal to him. Many younger ecclesiastics increasingly criticised the regime for abuses against civil rights and supported greater independence for regions, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country. A particular prison for 'rebellious priests' was even opened towards the end

⁶ Preston 1994.

⁷ Callahan 2000: 381–439.

⁸ Callahan 2000: 500–526. On Vatican II generally, see O'Malley 2010 and for the Spanish bishops' role there, cf. Laboa 2005.

of the 1960s, while many other priests clearly sided with the Generalissimo until his death, including the 6,000 members of the *Hermandad Sacerdotal del Clero*.⁹ Following the end of the Second Vatican Council, in 1967, Spain issued a new Organic Law that guaranteed some fundamental rights for minority religions. It is, however, safe to say that this development was not welcomed by the Caudillo.¹⁰ Until his death in 1975, the ideal he defended was the unity between One Leader, One State and One Religion.

Early Apparitions at El Palmar de Troya

Such was the national religio-political context when the apparitions at El Palmar de Troya entered the religious scene. Given its marginal status, the press hardly ever reported anything from the town, but that would change in the spring of 1968. On March 30, four schoolgirls, Ana, Josefa, Rafaela and Ana, aged between eleven and thirteen reported seeing a ‘very beautiful lady’ when picking flowers by a lentisk tree (*lentisco*) on the Alcaparrosa field, less than a kilometre from the town centre. The woman was identified as the Virgin Mary. In a testimony, one of the girls described the event:

We saw the face of a very beautiful lady, with dark brown, beautiful eyes. In the beginning, we thought that it was a hangman or a bull with green horns, but later we saw that it was the face of a lady. It was very round and rosy, with a green thing around her [head] and she was dressed in a brown mantle. She smiled at us. It was the Virgin.¹¹

⁹ Callahan 2000: 527–548.

¹⁰ On the concordat of 1953, see Callahan 2000: 408–411; cf. pp. 509–515 for the law changes. For a study on Spanish Protestants during the early Franco era, see Vincent 2015.

¹¹ Cited in Garrido Vázquez 2004; my translation.

Still, it should be emphasized that this is only one of the many versions of how the first apparitions took place and how the stories developed.¹²

The first reported apparition was a vision; the ‘very beautiful lady,’ remained silent. In modern apparition cases, an initial pure vision, without any verbal message, is the standard.¹³ The accounts about the events at the Alcaparrosa field became the starting signal for a religious phenomenon that soon would attract large crowds, who came there as pilgrims to pray the rosary and meditate on the Stations of the Cross, waiting for more miracles to occur. In the very beginning, a simple cross was made by pieces of the *Lentisco* (now with a capital L), thus indicating the holy place.¹⁴

Modern Marian apparitions often take place in a context of social and economic crisis. The location is generally poor and marginalised, and the seers are laypeople and frequently young girls, who at the time of the first apparition are involved in every-day activities.¹⁵ In this sense, El Palmar de Troya was very typical. In the Palmarian case, however, the girls were soon out of the picture. They did only claim to have a few very similar visions, and their parents and other relatives wanted to keep them away from the commotion. The testimonies about their continued presence at the site are contradictory, at least since the early 1970s, none of the girls seems to have talked about the matter with outsiders.¹⁶

Nevertheless, from April 1968 onwards, other people asserted to have mystical experiences at El Palmar de Troya close to the *Lentisco*, which almost disappeared as pilgrims took leaves and pieces of wood as relics. Most of the encounters took place in the late afternoon or in the evening. Several women and men fell into trances, claiming that the Virgin Mary

¹² For a good overview of some of the many different versions, see Carrera 2019: 17–24.

¹³ Bromley & Bobbitt 2011: 11–14.

¹⁴ *ABC*, April 14, 23, 27 and May 14, 1968; cf. Gómez Burón & Martín Alonso 1976:35–37 and Garrido Vázquez 2004.

¹⁵ Bromley & Bobbitt 2011: 8–11.

¹⁶ Garrido Vázquez 2004; cf. Ulúa 1976: 181–190.

appeared and spoke to them, particularly on a low hill, later known as Mount Christ the King.¹⁷

While the first reported apparition at the Alcaparrosa field was a vision without any words involved, soon other people reported locutions, that is, oral heavenly messages, which sometimes developed into dialogues between the individual and the celestial being. In the 1960s, the influential Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner provided a useful definition. He saw an apparition as a ‘the psychic experience in which objects (or persons) not perceptible by our visual and auditory faculties supernaturally enter the sphere of the senses, despite being inaccessible to normal human experience.’¹⁸ The recipients of apparitions are usually known as visionaries or seers (*videntes* in Spanish), even if the messages they claim to receive are oral. Sometimes, however, seers also self-define as ‘voice-boxes of Heaven.’

From the official Roman Catholic perspective, an authentic apparition is a type of private revelation. It is considered different from the divine revelation—Scripture and Tradition—not only in degree but in kind. Divine revelation is already complete, perfected in Christ. Thus, there is nothing substantial to add, though the Church’s Magisterium continues to interpret this so-called Deposit of Faith. One of the differences between the divine and private revelation is that the latter is not considered a necessary matter of faith; Catholics are not requested to believe in private apparitions, even if they are authorised by the church.¹⁹

Most of the new seers at the Alcaparrosa field were not natives of Palmar de Troya but came from other locations in the nearby area. Among the most important visionaries at this early stage were Rosario Arenillas from Dos Hermanas, María Marín from Utrera and María Luisa Vila from Seville. The first two came from impoverished circumstances, while the third was an affluent woman. Several adult males also had visions, including natives from Palmar de Troya, such as Antonio Anillos, José Navarro, Antonio Romero, Pepe Cayetano and Manuel Fernández.

¹⁷ See, e.g. Vidal 1976.

¹⁸ Rahner’s definition in Bastero 2011: 352; my translation.

¹⁹ Bastero 2011: 351–354.

Nevertheless, during the first years, the three women remained central actors.²⁰

The heavenly messages received at El Palmar de Troya at this early stage were often very brief and general. The Virgin told the seers that she was their mother and that all people should frequently pray Our Father and the rosary, as acts of reparation for the sins of humanity. The Virgin told them that both she and her son were crying because of the increasing wickedness of humankind and the destruction of the traditional faith. Prayers and conversion to the traditional Catholic faith were understood the only ways to calm divine ire and save humanity in that time of darkness and damnation. The recently deceased Capuchin stigmatic, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887–1968) appeared to them, too. He was a real hero for many traditionalists worldwide, and his confirmation of the importance of the site was crucial.²¹

Just in other apparition cases, some seers at El Palmar claimed to receive communions from Christ himself—a communion wafer miraculously appeared in their mouths, and pilgrims reported that they had observed strange solar phenomena at the field; the sun seemed to be dancing. As at many other sites at the time, photographs were taken to document prodigies, and messages were continuously recorded and transcribed.²² As time passed a wide variety of miracles were reported from El Palmar de Troya. To name but a few: communion wafers were seen flying around, at least seven people received the stigmata, mysterious fragrances emanated from objects and places, and pillars of smoke suddenly appeared at the site. Seers and pilgrims testified to charismatic gifts including xenolalia (speaking languages they did not know) and agility (moving around at an extraordinary speed).²³

²⁰ LBM; Alfaro 1975; Gómez Burón & Martín Alonso 1976: 38–41; Vidal 1976: 37–43; Cardoret-Abeles 1981 and Carrera 2019: 24–28 and 40–53.

²¹ LBM. On Padre Pio, see Luzzatto 2010.

²² LBM; cf. Alfaro 1975 and Cadoret-Abeles 1981.

²³ Cf. Carrera 2019: 40–49.

Initially a local and regional attraction, within a few weeks the stories about El Palmar de Troya rapidly spread to other parts of the country, and even abroad. Consequently, pilgrims began to arrive in higher numbers. The owner of the Alcaparroza field, a man from Seville, tried put up fences to keep people from entering the grounds, but to no avail. Due to the popularity of the site, the grains could not be harvested. In 1968–1969, newspapers reported the growing hordes of people who visited the place; on certain days, particularly on the 15th of each month, a symbolic date, when the Virgin usually made especially essential statements, they numbered in the thousands.²⁴

Clemente Domínguez and Manuel Alonso

By the end of 1969, Clemente Domínguez y Gómez (1946–2005) had made a rapid career at El Palmar de Troya and gradually became one of the most influential seers. Somewhat later many would look upon him as the seer par excellence, while others would consider him a fake, or something in between. Clemente grew up in Seville. His father was regularly absent from the home, his mother died early, and he had a very conflict-filled relationship with his stepmother.

According to many testimonies, Clemente was not well-liked in school and the neighbourhood, and he was bullied, people shouting abuses at him. Many regarded him as ‘effeminate’ and ‘queer.’ At least once during his teens, he tried to commit suicide. Clemente was a homosexual, well known in the Sevillian gay community, which due to the legislation had to be underground. Though he felt a strong vocation for religious life he was neither admitted to the seminary, nor into the Dominican order. Despite a desire to join the military, he was not allowed to enrol, as an army doctor diagnosed him with epilepsy. His career was not successful either. After having had a large number of short-term jobs, at the age of 22 he became

²⁴ *ABC*, April 14, 23 and 27; May 14, 1968; cf. Molina 1996: 21–26 and Vidal 1976.

an office clerk.²⁵ When Clemente started to spend more time at the apparition site than at work, he was fired. In short, he had lived through a long series of disappointments during the first decades of his life.

Clemente Domínguez was not one of the pioneer seers at El Palmar de Troya but had visited the site already by October 1968, still not convinced about the veracity of the apparitions. However, reading about the themes and listening to lectures by a couple of priests, from the summer of 1969, and on an almost daily basis, he was at El Palmar. Most often he went there together with his new friend, Manuel Alonso Corral (1934–2011), who was the manager of a Catholic insurance company, but both he and Clemente were fired, being absent from work as they visited the apparition site too often.²⁶

According to Palmarian hagiography and the collections of visions and messages, Clemente had his first ecstatic experience at the Alcaparrosa field on August 15, 1969, and one and a half month later, on September 30, he received his first vision; of Christ and Padre Pio. On December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he began receiving messages from the Virgin Mary under different advocations.²⁷ Thus, the visions and messages to Clemente were not only from the Virgin but also, and above all, from Christ, often in the form of the Holy Face (as in the Shroud of Turin), that for long had been a favourite devotion of his. He also reported visions of the ‘Eternal Father’ as well a growing number of saints. In 1975, one author computed that Clemente had reported messages from some sixty saints and other celestial beings. In 1970, the group around Clemente placed an image of the Holy Face at the apparition site. Later images of the Virgin as the Divine Shepherdess and as Our Lady of Palmar were put there, too.²⁸

²⁵ For the Church’s official biography, see e.g., HD, HRP and PR. For much less edifying stories about his background, see e.g., Molina 1996: 31–40 and Carrera 2019: 32–35.

²⁶ Molina 1996: 31–40 and Carrera 2019: 32–35.

²⁷ DH and PR; cf. Vidal 1976: 45–54.

²⁸ There are several collections of visions and messages to Clemente Domínguez; the most complete is HVM (1969–1975) and HVM2 (1976–2002), revised by

According to the heavenly messages to Clemente, one of his main missions was to disseminate the devotion the Holy Face of Christ (*La Santa Faz*) throughout the world. This particular devotion has a background in private revelations to French Carmelite nun Marie de Saint-Pierre in the 1840s. In visions, Christ and the Virgin urged the nun to propagate the devotion to the Holy Face as a way for the faithful to make acts of reparation for sins against the first three commandments of the Decalogue, such as blasphemy, profanation and unbelief. The devotion was officially approved by Pope Leo XIII in 1885, and special confraternities were founded internationally. It was essential to the very popular Carmelite Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, whose complete religious name was Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. The devotion was further strengthened after reports in the 1930s, of visions to an Italian nun, in which Christ urged her to create a medal with the Holy Face, which would provide help for those who carried it.²⁹

Even if Clemente was the recipient of the heavenly communications, it was his friend Manuel Alonso (colloquially known as Manolo). The latter recorded and typed them, distributing copies to pilgrims and others. He would continue to do so during their entire life together.³⁰ The two assumed different roles: Clemente was the charismatic figure and the recipient of the heavenly messages, while Manuel, who had a solid academic education, including a degree in management, was the more formal organiser and distributor.

Modern Marian seers are often laypeople troubled by personal problems. Most of the original seers at El Palmar de Troya were poor, some were illiterate, and Clemente and Manuel became unemployed. Marian apparitions usually take place in an underprivileged and devoted

Manuel Alonso (Pope Peter II) and printed in 2011. See also other more limited collections: LBM (which also includes messages to other seers), MC and MT. I have also had access to copies of individual messages.

²⁹ On the general history of the Holy Face devotion, see Chinnici 2001.

³⁰ Gómez Burón & Martín Alonso 1976.

environment.³¹ Palmar de Troya was indeed a marginalised town, but, as has been shown, it was not a profoundly Catholic setting.

Yet most of the seers were devout Catholics even before the supernatural events, and the majority of them, especially those who claimed to receive messages after 1969, were not locals. By 1970, some of the seers who were residents had moved away from town, others did not want to talk about their visions at all, and many townspeople became increasingly irritated by all the commotion at the Alcaparrosa field. The seers from outside had taken over, and Clemente Domínguez was about to be regarded to as the chief seer at the site, and a divinely elect charismatic authority.³²

The heavenly messages Clemente claimed to receive were often long and detailed, though they were interspersed with very brief locutions. They were frequent and came in clusters. Often one celestial figure appeared after another. Thus, Christ, the Virgin, St. Dominic and the Prophet Elijah could appear to him in the same evening. In several visions experienced by Clemente from 1970 onwards, the Virgin blessed Spain and all those who believed in the messages from El Palmar de Troya. She had a universal mission to save humanity that would begin in Andalusia. In this mission, she was seconded by Christ and the Eternal Father. At first, the messages to Clemente concurred with the other seers' testimonies. Soon, however, the communications received by him began to include a more outspoken and detailed criticism of the post-Vatican II church.³³

A constant theme in the apparitions was that the faithful's most important mission in the End time was to pray. With prayers, they could give thanks to the Virgin and Christ, who were offended by the sins of humankind. The faithful should make acts of reparation for the sins committed by humanity: a central subject in many reported nineteenth and twentieth-century apparitions. In that way, the divine punishments

³¹ For general patterns, see Bromley & Bobbitt 2011; cf. Bromley 1997.

³² Cadoret-Abeles 1981.

³³ HVM, messages 1969–1970.

on humanity could be postponed, and more people would have the chance to repent.³⁴

In one vision to Clemente, St. Dominic explained that the most important and useful form of prayer was the penitential rosary, where one Our Father, one Hail Mary, one Glory Be, and one Hail Mary Most Pure were prayed on each bead.³⁵ At El Palmar, there seems to have been conflicts between the seers and their supporters over whether to pray the ordinary rosary or the penitential rosary. In this conflict, Clemente conveyed continuous heavenly messages that stressed the importance of the penitential rosary, as it was the more demanding prayer of the End time.³⁶

Christ and the Virgin also urged the faithful to wear a big scapular featuring the images of the Holy Face and Our Lady of Palmar, later together with a picture of the Sacred Hearts of Christ and Mary and another of St. Joseph. The scapular should be worn externally, over the clothes. Then it would provide the faithful remnant with protection, and even postpone the cataclysmic catastrophes of the End time.³⁷

In various apparitions, the Virgin and Christ let Clemente know that there was only one true Mass: the Tridentine Latin rite must be reinstated, and the so-called *Novus Ordo* Mass promulgated in 1969 was nothing less than blasphemy, as was hand communion, and the taking of communion standing. Other salient themes were that freemasons and communists infiltrated the church at all levels, including the Vatican, and that a general schism was nigh. Nevertheless, according to Clemente, Pope Paul VI (1897–1978; r. 1963–1978) was free of guilt, as he was drugged and held hostage by the masonic and communist curia. They forced him into making modernist statements, for example, by establishing ecumenical contacts

³⁴ HVM, messages 1969–1970.

³⁵ HVM, message December 12, 1969.

³⁶ HVM, message February 3, 1970.

³⁷ HVM, message February 15, 1971.

with ‘heretics’ and speaking before the United Nations, understood as the masonic world organisation par excellence.³⁸

In a few messages, even as early as 1971 and 1972, Clemente claimed that an antipope would succeed Paul VI. At that same time, a true pope would appear to govern the remnant: the small group that held fast to the traditional teachings of the magisterium and wholeheartedly practised traditional forms of piety.³⁹ In a 1971 message from the Virgin to Clemente, it is stated:

The Vatican is in the hands of Freemasons and Marxists. Freemasons and Pharisees have infiltrated the curia. They are the ones who obstruct the way of the Vicar of Christ. It is necessary to realize what will happen: there will be floods of blood on St. Peter’s Square. In this very moment, Communism and Freemasonry are preparing to make a decisive thrust and Marxism will usurp the church and sit on the throne.⁴⁰

Still, the apparitions were only part of the miraculous events that were associated with El Palmar de Troya. In 1970, Clemente claimed to have received the stigmata, the crucifixion wounds. On his forehead, a bleeding cross could be seen, his hands and feet were wounded, and on his side appeared another wound from which blood poured out. Allegedly, Clemente would experience the stigmata on several other occasions until 1974, and he offered his pain for the good of the church and the pope. On one time, witnesses testified that he had bled no less than sixteen litres.⁴¹ On a later occasion, in February 1975, Christ appeared before Clemente

³⁸ MC, messages March 15, September 5 and November 23, 1970; February 8 and 24, April 25, July 30 and September 27, 1971; January 26, March 9, April 2 and May 9, 1972.

³⁹ MT, messages March 23, April 25 and September 15, 1971; and August 16, 1972.

⁴⁰ MT, message September 27, 1971.

⁴¹ LBM; cf. HVM, messages April 13, 1970; April 2, 1971; March 3 and 20, 1972; March 14, 1973; March 12, 1974 .

bleeding, and blood from his wounds dripped down on a blanket, which later was cut into pieces that were distributed as relics.⁴²

The claims about a large number of detailed messages and testimonies about his stigmata strengthened Clemente's authority, though several other seers experienced the stigmata, too. He convinced larger groups that he was the main mouthpiece of Christ and the Virgin. Still, other seers, too, reported to have received the stigmata and continued to receive heavenly communications.⁴³ At the site, the seers, including Clemente, also had an extraordinary role blessing religious objects, and at a given time, they could carry several kilos of rosaries in their hands, asserting that the Virgin loaded them with heavenly power.⁴⁴ Moreover, reports published by the Palmarians detailed a large number of curing miracles, most of which were associated with drinking water from a well on the site that had been blessed by the Virgin. The well, however, was closed down by the health authorities in 1976.⁴⁵

There was a struggle between many of the seers, and many of the others did not join the apparition movement, which was increasingly dominated by Clemente and Manuel, and which was eventually transformed into a church. Some claimed to receive messages for many years. In the case of Rosario Arenillas, there are reports of heavenly messages as late as in the 2010s. The part of the movement that did not accept Clemente Domínguez's dominant role, the formation of the Palmarian Church and his papal claims, is known as La Cruz Blanca. The name comes from a white cross, which now is found just outside the Palmarian church compound.⁴⁶

⁴² LBM, message February 13, 1975.

⁴³ LBM; cf. HVM.

⁴⁴ LBM; cf. HVM and HVM2.

⁴⁵ HVM, message May 15, 1970.

⁴⁶ See the group's website: <http://www.cruzblanca.es>. On La Cruz Blanca, see also chapter 6 of this book.

2. Apparitions and Traditionalisms

This chapter is not a general background but an essential and integrated part of the study of the Palmarian case. It provides several theological threads that offer a greater understanding of the type of Marian Apocalyptic movements, which the Palmarian represents. The ideological threads are used for the comparative analysis in chapters 3 and 4, which focus on the development of the Palmarian movement until the foundation of the Church in 1978. They also supply the systematic study of Palmarian theology and rituals (chapters 10 and 11) with comparative material.

The first thread follows the series of apocalyptically centred nineteenth and twentieth-century apparition cases of which El Palmar is an example. Apart from the well-known case of Fatima in 1917, only a handful of the Marian *apparitions* reported in the last century have been formally officially approved by the official church authorities, though bishops, in some cases, authorised devotion or the construction of the shrine at the site, while making no final evaluation of the related apparitions. Other reported apparitions have been clearly denounced by the local ecclesiastical hierarchy, sometimes with the explicit backing by Rome. However, in most cases, no formal decision has been taken.

Nevertheless, several contested or denounced apparition sites continued to attract many pilgrims, and the devotion led to the establishment of organised supporter groups. Mainly based on earlier research, I search for organisational patterns, doctrinal elements, concepts and descriptions of the End time event in Western European apparition reports, which can be compared with El Palmar, the Palmarian movement and the later teachings of the Palmarian Catholic Church.

The second thread follows the more clerically dominated Traditionalist movements that developed in the decade following the end of the Second Vatican Council, i.e. 1965–1975. These groups were highly critical of the conciliar reforms and not least the new Mass order. The Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) and its leader Archbishop Marcel Lefèbvre played a central role on the traditionalist scene, though there were many other groups, too. Beginning as an officially recognised entity, by the mid-1970s SSPX lost its canonical status, and Lefèbvre was suspended. At that time, there were direct and indirect relations between Palmarians and SSPX representatives. Still, there were traditionalist groups criticised Lefèbvre for being too lenient towards Rome. Some of them claimed that Paul VI was a usurper and antipope, and claimed that the Holy See was vacant.

The third and final thread I will follow is the role and teachings of French alternative pope Clément XV, originally called Michel Collin, who was crowned the sole pope in 1963 (he had been a ‘co-pope’ for many years) and died in 1974. He declared that Heaven had elected him, just as Clemente Domínguez would do in 1978, and claimed to receive numerous private revelations, which contributed to the development of the dogma of his Renewed Church. Many of the more unusual traits of later Palmarian theology have a background in the French pope’s teachings, though there are some very significant differences, too. This French-Spanish connection has hardly been investigated at all, and I argue that it is indispensable for the understanding of the Palmarian development. Moreover, I will show that there were personal contacts between the Palmarian movement and former adherents of the French pope in the 1970s.

Apocalyptic Marianism

A leitmotif in the heavenly messages given to Clemente Domínguez was that the end of the world was near. Prophecies about the End time is an essential theme for many Catholic traditionalist groups that have evolved from Marian apparitions. According to sociologist Michael W. Cuneo, such

groups can be identified as Catholic Marianists, Mystical Marianists and Mystical Apocalypticists.⁴⁷

Apocalypticism is a form of eschatology that involves the belief that the End is imminent, and that End time events will follow a specific, predetermined order, characterised by a struggle between Good and Evil/God and Satan in concrete historical circumstances. In Christian traditions, such views are of course nurtured by the Old Testament prophecies, the last book in the New Testament, the Book of Revelations, but also a wide range of later prophecies. Apocalypticists often have a radically dualist worldview, with apparent deterministic or fatalistic features. The term Apocalypticism is equivalent to what scholars today often refer to as Catastrophic Millennialism—in broader circles commonly known as Premillennialism. These ideas, found both among Catholics and Evangelicals, imply that in the end, God will prevail, and the faithful remnant will be saved. Before that, however, humanity will become increasingly sinful, following a downward spiral, catastrophes will abound, and the Antichrist will appear to fight the remnant.⁴⁸

Scholars sometimes make a useful distinction between two varieties of Catastrophic Millennialism: Avertive and non-Avertive. The latter denotes that the End time events follow an irreversible divine plan. Those who believe in some kind of avertive or conditional variety hold that there is a determined divine plan, but concede the process can be forestalled. In the context of modern Apocalyptic Marianism, this could happen if people convert, pray intensively or make acts of reparation following heavenly messages given to divinely elected seers.⁴⁹ Such avertive elements were clearly present in the messages to Clemente Domínguez and other seers at El Palmar de Troya. To understand the development of the Palmarian movement, it is vital to put it in a context of other apocalyptically centred modern apparition movements. Then it becomes clear that messages at El

⁴⁷ Cuneo 1997a.

⁴⁸ Robbins & Palmer 1997, Wessinger 1997 and Wessinger 2011.

⁴⁹ Wojcik 2011.

Palmar focus on themes similar to other apparition stories, while there are some unique Palmarian characteristics, too.

Through an interview study, published in the year 2000, Amy Luebbers identified several characteristics in the world-view of Catholic apocalyptic believers in the United States, when describing the End time: Traditional society is in crisis with a decline in morals, particularly with regards to sexuality. The Catholic Church is profound in crisis after Vatican II, and only a small remnant keeps true to the faith. Personal conversion is necessary in this time of crisis. There is an apparent duality of good and evil, and the forces of evil are everywhere to be seen. The Devil works through different means, such as modern technology, trying to control society and lead people astray, but authentic apparitions and prophets is a crucial antidote. In this context, the faithful remnant's response should be constant prayer.⁵⁰

In his monograph on varieties of North American Catholic traditionalism, *The Smoke of Satan*, Michael W. Cuneo identifies a more detailed three-stage scenario of the events in the End time, which is common in traditionalist discourse. It is a model in which the messages at El Palmar de Troya fit well. The opening act is 'the first chastisement,' when most Christians will apostatise and live a life far from traditional faith and morals. Then horrendous natural disasters and wars will fall upon humanity. At that time, the true believers will be reduced to a small number and maltreated for their fidelity, communism will gain a stronghold over humankind, and a false pope will be installed in the Vatican, while a true pontiff will lead the church militant in confronting its enemies. After the victory of the faithful will come a 'period of peace and virtue,' when vast hordes of people will convert and submit themselves to the true pope. The third and last phase will be another chastisement when many people revert to unfaithfulness and sinful behaviour. After that, a final world war will bring the world to its end.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Luebbers 2001.

⁵¹ Cuneo 1997a: 5, 121, 130, 180; cf. Cuneo 1997b and Cadone 2007.

La Salette and Fatima

Many modern Marian apparitions thus contain similar apocalyptic messages.⁵² The Palmarians regard some of them as essential steps towards the final and most important apparitions at El Palmar. Much more than Lourdes, for Marian Apocalypticists, a most influential precursor was the apparitions at La Salette near French Grenoble in 1846. When looking after cattle, a girl and a boy—Mélanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud—reported having seen a young woman, whom they interpreted as the Virgin Mary. She was crying for the sins of humanity. Some of the reported heavenly messages were made public at an early stage, and the apparitions were rapidly embraced by the church authorities.⁵³

In many respects, the contents of the apparition at La Salette were similar to one earlier nineteenth-century apparition case: the messages from Virgin Mary received by French nun Catherine Labouré at Rue du Bac in Paris in 1830, and the following veneration of the Miraculous Medal. The context of the apparition was a period of increasing anticlericalism and anti-Catholicism in France and prophesied the coming of even worse persecution. They also stressed the importance of prayer, conversion and deepened religious commitment, to make reparation for the sins committed in France and beyond.⁵⁴

In this context, one should not underestimate the influence of the French priest-theologian Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673–1719), who was an influential writer on matters Marian, and whose works experienced a revival by the mid-nineteenth-century. His *Traité de la Vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge* (True Devotion to Mary) was finished in 1712 but was not widely known or published until 1842. Montfort emphasised the Virgin's active role in the redemption, as a mediator. For a person, to

⁵² For Marian apparitions in general, see Hierzenberger & Nedomansky 1996 and Laurentin & Sbalchiero 2007. For Western European cases, cf. Maunder 1991 and Maunder 2016.

⁵³ Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 27–42.

⁵⁴ Perry & Echeverría 1988: 91–101.

consecrate oneself entirely to Mary was the eminent way to reach Christ. In fact, in the End times, the Virgin would have the most central role as mediator between humankind and Christ; it was the Age of Mary. In this period, the true Christians would be persecuted by the Church's enemies, led by Antichrist, but at last, Christ will reign, through Mary.⁵⁵

At La Salette, there were some messages to the children that were referred to as 'secrets' that were only made public decades later, and then in revised and much more elaborate versions. It is these versions of the secrets, published in 1879 and clearly influenced by Montfort that have remained popular in traditionalist circles. According to Mélanie Calvat, the Virgin had declared the imminent end of the world, and that the End would be preceded by general apostasy. In this era, many clerics would lead laypeople into heresy, and even the Roman Curia would be dominated by apostates.⁵⁶ Among other things, the secret included a long passage about the coming general apostasy, the birth of Antichrist and the End time catastrophes that were imminent.

A certain precursor of Antichrist, together with his followers from many nations, will oppose the real Christ, the only Saviour of the world. He will endeavour to eliminate the adoration of God in order to be considered as God Himself . . . Rome will lose the Faith and become the seat of Antichrist . . . [S]ee, here is the Beast with its subjects that claims to be the Saviour of the world. Proudly it rises in the air to go straight to Heaven, but it will be strangled by the Archangel Michael and cast down. And the earth, which for three days has been in continuous convulsions, will open her fiery jaws and swallow him with all his cohorts forever into its hellish abyss. Eventually water and fire will cleanse the earth and the works of human pride will be destroyed and all will be renewed. Then will all serve God and glorify Him.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ On Montfort's Mariology, see Séguy 1982.

⁵⁶ Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 27–42 and Introvigne 2011: 554–555.

⁵⁷ English translation at www.catholictradition.org/Mary/salette3.htm.

In many ways, the apparitions at Portuguese Fatima in 1917 followed in the tradition from La Salette, but the disastrous First World War and the upcoming Russian Revolution provided another social context. The reported messages from Virgin Mary to the three children seers at Fatima had a clear apocalyptic emphasis, underlining the necessity of conversion and the practice of traditional acts of piety to placate divine ire. There was also a need to consecrate Russia to the Sacred Heart of Mary, which would counteract Communism and hasten the country's conversion. Apart from apparitions, at Fatima, there were reports of solar miracles and mystical communions, where communion wafers suddenly appeared in the mouths of seers. On an international level, the popularity of Fatima would increase after World War II, copies of the image–pilgrim statues–travelled the Catholic world, and during the Cold War, Our Lady of Fatima became an essential symbol for Catholic resistance to communism.⁵⁸

According to one of the children seers at Fatima, Lúcia Santos–later a Carmelite nun–the Virgin had entrusted them with three ‘secrets’. Two of them were disclosed in 1941, while the third was placed in a sealed envelope, which was eventually sent to the pope. Still, Lúcia advised the pope not to make it public until 1960 ‘when it will become clearer’. In 1960, however, the Holy See declared that the Third secret ‘would probably remain, forever, under absolute seal.’ Not surprisingly, this was a great disappointment for many ardent followers of Fatima. Some saw the decision as a sign of growing modernism in the curia, and a more lenient attitude to the Communist states; a more diplomatic *Ostpolitik*. In fact, the Third secret was not made public until the year 2000, but some traditionalists still assert that the Holy See had omitted parts.⁵⁹

The apparitions at La Salette and Fatima were thus officially recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, though some versions of the apocalyptically centred ‘secrets’ were not. Nevertheless, the vast majority of modern apparition reports have not been authorised by the Catholic

⁵⁸ Perry and Echeverría 1988, Zimdars Swartz 1991, and Bennett 2012.

⁵⁹ Maunder 2016: 29–39. A Traditionalist perspective on the publication on the Third Secret is found in Kramer 2010.

hierarchy. Most often, local bishops took no clear decision, and in other cases, they were more or less actively counteracted.

Contested Visions

In twentieth-century Western Europe, reports of Marian apparition tended to turn up in clusters. Apparitions that attracted large numbers of pilgrims to a particular site would be followed by other apparition reports in the same country or region. In the first years of the 1930s, there was a series of cases in northern Spain. In the three years following a reported apparition at Beauraing, Belgium in 1932, apparitions were reported at more than thirty other sites in the country. During World War II and in the first half of the 1950s, there was an outburst of apparition cases in Germany and France and an even higher number in post-war Italy.⁶⁰ The culmination of these ‘apparition epidemics’ came around 1954, and there were much fewer reports of new apparitions in the 1960s. Still, a few of the apparitions in the 1960s and 1970s would become very popular, e.g. Garabandal, Ladeira do Pinheiro, San Damiano and El Palmar de Troya, but they were all denounced by the church hierarchy.

The Palmarians regarded the apparitions in the Basque village of Ezkioga (1931–1933) as a significant precursor. In fact, the messages to some of the seers included ideas that had a bearing on their understanding of their own role in the End time. The first reports of communications from the Virgin and different saints at Ezkioga came in June 1931, two months after the proclamation of the Second Republic, the exile of the Spanish king and the increasing anticlericalism. As in many other places, the first seers were children, but soon hundreds of adults, both men and women, would

⁶⁰ On Belgium, see Van Osselaer 2010 and Maunder 2016: 84–98. On Germany, see Zumholz 1995 and Scheer 2010. On France, see Boufflet 2002: 260–293 and Badone 2007.

claim to receive visions, and fell in a trance. In a matter of weeks, crowds of up to 50,000 people gathered at the site on some days.⁶¹

Some of the apparitions at Ezkioga had a clearly apocalyptic content: there was an imminent threat of divine chastisement through famine, natural disasters, wars and epidemics. One of the seers was able to tell that Antichrist had already been born. She also asserted that after the first chastisement, there would be only one religious order, the Cross bearers (*crucíferos*), whose early members would come from Seville. At that time, a great monarch would appear and lead the faithful in the final battles against Satan; ideas that became very central to the Palmarians as time passed. Though there was clerical support of the Basque apparition case, the local church hierarchy was decidedly negative, and in 1933, the bishop of Vitoria formally denounced the purported apparitions and the cult at Ezkioga.⁶²

The post-World War II era, which was marked with the rise of communism in Eastern Europe and threats of a full-scale atomic war, probably contributed to a rapid increase in reported Marian apparitions. According to William Christian, in Western Europe alone there were at least 112 cases between 1947 and 1954, attracting local, regional and even international pilgrims.⁶³ In 1949, the local bishops approved the Marian apparitions at Beauraing and Banneux in Belgium, which took place in 1932 and 1933 respectively, stating that they had a supernatural origin. In fact, these were the last Western European apparition cases that were formally acknowledged before the end of the century. The Roman Catholic reluctance towards approving alleged apparitions increased.⁶⁴

At the same time, Marian piety was much encouraged by the Catholic hierarchy. In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared a much-awaited fourth Marian dogma in 1950—the Assumption of the Virgin, and he declared 1954, the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the

⁶¹ For a monograph study on Ezkioga, see Christian 1996.

⁶² Christian 1996.

⁶³ Christian 1999: 62.

⁶⁴ Maunder 2016: 84–98.

Immaculate Conception, a Marian year when special Marian congresses and other events were organised throughout the Catholic world. Still, the constant reports on new apparitions worried the church authorities, both on a diocesan and universal level. In 1951, Alfredo Ottaviani published an article on apparitions and other miracles in the Vatican's official newspaper, *Ossevatore Romano*, which included stern warnings. At that time, Ottaviani was an advisor to the Holy Office, the defender of Catholic orthodoxy. Later, he became its secretary as well as a cardinal well known for his traditionalist stance during the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁵

Though it did not have the character of an official statement, Ottaviani's article would have great importance for local bishops' increasingly negative attitude towards reported apparitions and other prodigies. It was translated and reprinted around the Catholic world and set the tone for the Church's policy into the 1980s. On the other hand, the article was a direct effect of the increasing number of reports that the Holy Office received from bishops, asking for advice. Ottaviani regarded publications on unauthorised apparition messages, the proliferation of reports on questionable miracles, and the faithful's credulousness as a severe threat to the Catholic Church and the episcopal and papal authority.

For the past ten years, while the religious authorities have shown restraint, the people have hastily busied themselves with wonders which, to say the least, have not been verified. To be honest, we must admit that such events may be simply the expression of natural religious enthusiasm. They are not Christian events, and they give a dangerous pretext to those who are ready to discover at all costs the mingling and survival of paganism and superstition in Christian belief and life, and especially in Catholicism. Just as wrongdoing may find its way into our daily lives, so we may error. We must know

⁶⁵ Ottaviani 1951, cf. Maunder 2016: 124.

it for what it is. Just as the Church has the power to forgive sins, so has it also been commended by God to keep us from error.⁶⁶

A series of apparitions that the Palmarians held high—and which Ottaviani explicitly mentioned as one of the worst examples—were those at Heroldsbach, near Nuremberg in West Germany (1949–1952). In these messages, there was a clear focus on the threat of Communism, a coming great war, an escalating moral decline and general apostasy. The growing group of seers, both children and adults, claimed to have received thousands of apparitions. Heroldsbach was just one of many cases in Western Europe at the time, but for a short period, it became unusually popular. In three years, some 1.5 million people arrived in the small Bavarian village. The apparitions and the cult were unequivocally denounced and counteracted by the local church hierarchy, and a large number of people involved were excommunicated. Still, even after the denunciation many people frequented the site and believed in the heavenly messages. There was a substantial Heroldsbach movement in the German-speaking countries, in which both Palmarians and other similar groups would find adherents later on.⁶⁷

Apart from many clearly apocalyptically centred apparitions, two contemporary cases focused more on doctrinal development: Kirizenen and Amsterdam. Jeanne-Louise Ramonet was the seer of Kirizenen in French Brittany. Though she claimed to receive visions and messages between 1938 and 1965, the most significant were reported in the mid-1950s. A central theme in them was the union between the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which were held together by the Holy Spirit. The apparitions and the devotions at the site were denounced by the local bishop on four consecutive occasions.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ottaviani 1951; English translation on www.rosarychurch.net/mary/ottaviani.html. On Roman Catholic ecclesiastical skepticism during the twentieth century, cf. Zumholz 1995 and Louis 2007.

⁶⁷ O’Sullivan 2009; cf. Scheer 2012 and Maunder 2016: 132–134.

⁶⁸ Badone 2007.

Ida Peerdeman, the seer of Amsterdam, claimed to receive apparitions of Our Lady of the Nations between 1945 and 1959. Following the pope's declaration of a fourth Marian dogma in 1950, Peerdeman stated that the Virgin appeared urging the papal proclamation of a fifth dogma: 'Mary as Coredeмпtrix, Mediatrix and Advocate.' These titles were known before, but the reported apparition to Peerdeman was the first occasion they were brought together in one dogma. Just as the French case, the Amsterdam apparitions were denounced for a long time, but by the late 1990s, the local hierarchy approved of the devotion.⁶⁹ The contents of both apparitions clearly influenced later Palmarian teachings.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of publicised apparition cases was much lower than before, and mostly confined to Italy and Spain.⁷⁰ It is important to note that the first reported apparitions came in the years just after 1960 when the Holy See chose not to make the Third Secret of Fatima public and continued during Vatican II Council. In the 1960s and 1970s, the focus on divine chastisement and the End-time events was even greater than before. They also included clear criticism of contemporary priests and the church hierarchy

One of the most popular new apparition sites of the 1960s was Garabandal, in Spanish Cantabria (1961–1965) that was very central to the Palmarians. In messages to the four children seers, celestial beings—Mary, Christ and Michael the Archangel—admonished people to convert and return to traditional Catholic devotion, in order so that that divine chastisement would be averted. Virgin Mary wanted to warn and assist humanity in this End-time if they only would listen. She pointed out that the church was moving in a disastrous direction, and a general apostasy was on the way. Still, there was a real chance to repent and avert divine punishment. There would be a great miracle at the site, and though the weekday, Thursday, and hour, 8:30 PM, was stated, the date or year was not announced; only that it would be made public in advance when the

⁶⁹ Margry 2009 and Margry 2012. For a comparison between Kerizenen and Amsterdam, see Maunder 2016: 109–121.

⁷⁰ Maunder 2016: 136–152.

date approached. Then people would be able to see their sins in a clear way, as with God's eyes, enabling them to convert to escape eternal damnation.⁷¹

At Garabandal, as in other similar cases, there were numerous testimonies of other prodigies; including miraculous agility—people were seen moving unusually rapidly—levitations, as well as miraculous communions as well as solar miracles and ecstasies. The stories attracted many Spanish and foreign pilgrims but were repeatedly denounced by the local bishops. For many followers, Garabandal was a 'new Fatima', where the Virgin intervened as people had not listened to her and converted. The messages at Garabandal continued, and continue, to be popular in international traditionalist-apocalyptic milieus, not least in the United States.⁷²

In the 1960s, the small Italian village of San Damiano became yet another international pilgrim destination. The seer was a local woman called Rosa Quattrini—colloquially known as Mama Rosa. In 1961, she claimed to have been visited by a 'young woman,' not surprisingly identified as the Virgin, who miraculously healed her from a severe illness. She admonished Rosa to talk to Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, who instructed her to take care of hospitalised people and wait for a new assignment from heaven. Three years later, Rosa reported that the Virgin had appeared again asking her to dig a well nearby. The water had curative effects, attracting pilgrims, including many from abroad. As in other cases, groups of pilgrims reported sun miracles and saw crosses in the sky. The Virgin was called the Rose Madonna, a name given at Heroldsbach, too. She was sad and angry over the sins of humanity and wanted prayer and penance. The local bishop was decidedly negative and prohibited priests and

⁷¹ On Garabandal, see Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 124–165; cf. Sjöström 2010 and Maunder 2016: 138–147.

⁷² See Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 124–165; cf. Sjöström 2010 and Maunder 2016: 138–147. On the use of photography to document miracles, see Wojcik 1996 and Pagliaroli 2004.

laypeople to attend the site. He also forbade her to make the messages public, and later, on several occasions, placed a personal interdict on her.⁷³

At about the same time as San Damiano, Ladeira do Pinheiro in Portugal became part of the southern European apparition geography. It presents interesting parallels with El Palmar de Troya, and should, therefore, be studied in more detail. From 1960 onwards, a local woman called Maria da Conceição claimed apparitions of Christ, the Virgin, the Trinity, the Archangel Michael and Joan of Arc, warning humanity that the End was near, and that reparation and sincere conversion was needed. Maria da Conceição prophesied the birth of Antichrist would be in 1970 and the end of the world would be February 2, 2000. As in many other messages of this kind, she claimed preceded by wars, natural catastrophes and epidemics. Still, the heavenly messages were only one part of the cultus at Ladeira. From the late 1960s onwards, there were reports of a wide array of prodigies: mystical communions, bleeding crucifixes and sun miracles, but also levitations and bilocations. Maria da Conceição reported to have received the stigmata, and a bloody cross appeared on the seer's forehead. Not least, numerous miraculous cures were related to the apparition site.⁷⁴

The site of Ladeira do Pinheiro and the messages connected to it were regarded as a continuation of Fatima. The messages can be characterised as traditionalist and apocalyptically focused, and the criticism of the official Roman Catholic Church was prevalent. The cultus at the site became increasingly organised, and the seer founded a religious order, O Exército Branco, the White Army, which had an international membership, including both European and North American nuns. In the mid-1970s Maria da Conceição began to claim that she was not only an elect seer but in fact, 'Virgin Mary on earth.' Consequently, she was referred to as Mãe Maria, Mother Mary. After 1976, it seems that she did not claim to receive any more private revelations. At least, there are no printed collections that include later heavenly messages.⁷⁵

⁷³ Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 92–123; cf. Maunder 2016: 147–152.

⁷⁴ Lopes 2012: 126–172.

⁷⁵ Lopez 2012.

The majority of the pilgrims who went to Ladeira do Pinheiro were Portuguese, but groups also arrived from Spain, France and other countries, often combining visits to Fatima and Ladeira. Not only laypeople made the pilgrimage; on special occasions, many clerics were present at the site. Due to the censure of the local church, few Portuguese priests were present. The majority of the clerics who attended the site to say Mass and give spiritual guidance were Spanish and French. Though most often ordained Roman Catholic priests, many had a questionable canonical status; in some cases, they were excommunicated and put under personal interdict. A special feature of Ladeira was the celebration of a new ‘alliances’ with Heaven. That meant that groups of priests, sometimes more than twenty, say Masses which should re-establish the bond between God and his faithful remnant.⁷⁶

Both the ecclesiastical and secular authorities regarded Maria da Conceição as a fraudster, which caused many problems through the great crowds who attended the site. She was harshly treated by the state authorities. On several occasions, she was hospitalised against her will and was brought to court. She was severely mishandled by people who broke into her home, and people also threatened and threw stones at pilgrims. On several occasions, the police raided the location, and the authorities closed the access to the site between 1972 and 1974.⁷⁷

The Portuguese democratisation in the mid-1970s ended the state persecution, and the new laws on religious freedom opened up new possibilities. In 1977, the patriarch of the Igreja Católica Ortodoxa do Portugal—the Portuguese Catholic Orthodox Church of Portugal—approved the apparitions and established a church building at the site. At the same time, the church began constructing a cathedral which was inaugurated two decades later. In the early 2000s, the site was dominated by an Old Catholic Church, Igreja Apostólica Episcopal Vétéro-Católica, while an

⁷⁶ Lopes 2012: 173–196.

⁷⁷ Lopes 2012: 107–125, 198–215.

independent Bulgarian Orthodox church was also present at the site for a short period.⁷⁸

As this detailed overview of modern apparitions shows, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the heavenly messages to the seers at El Palmar de Troya closely followed in the wake of a long series of modern apocalyptic traditions. Still, the private revelations reported by Clemente Domínguez included an ever-harsher criticism of the modern Catholic Church. An obvious reason was the reforms following Vatican II. Urges for conversion and reparatory prayers as ways to avert divine chastisement were present in most cases as was the idea that only a small remnant would be faithful until the very end.

Post-Vatican II Traditionalist Groups

Though the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar developments were welcomed by many Catholics around the world, they also gave rise to traditionalist opposition from both clerics and laypeople, and to a veritable exodus of priests and women religious, who were laicised, and the number of seminarians dropped rapidly. In general, the clerically dominated traditionalist groups opposed the Council's teachings about freedom of religion, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and not least the introduction of the new Mass order in 1969–1970. They doubted that a true Catholic hierarchy would make such changes, and saw modernist, masonic and communist conspiracies. Many more or less organised groups of this kind existed in Europe, the Americas and in other parts of the world.⁷⁹

In Western Europe, one influential early critic of the Council and the reforms was Georges de Nantes (1924–2010), the Abbé de Nantes, a priest in the diocese of Grenoble, who founded a congregation based on the ideas of Charles de Foucauld. Due to his very outspoken criticism of the conciliar reforms and Pope Paul VI, the Abbé was suspended from his benefice, and

⁷⁸ Lopes 2012: 126–143, 216–260.

⁷⁹ Cuneo 1997a. For a traditionalist inside perspective, see Ruby 2002.

eventually from the priesthood. He later founded La Ligue de la Contre-réforme Catholique—the League for Catholic Counter-Reformation. In particular, the Abbé disapproved of the decrees on religious liberty and ecumenism, as well as the new Mass order. He also denounced the church's endorsement of political democracy, human rights and de-colonialization. Consequently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (earlier known as the Holy Office) issued a notification against him in 1969. In 1973, Georges de Nantes published the *Liber accusationis*, in which he openly accused Paul VI of heresy, schism and scandal. While the Roman Catholic Church considered him a schismatic, Georges de Nantes had many adherents, and his journal and other writings found many readers in broader religio-political traditionalist circles; in French often referred to as 'integrists.'⁸⁰

The most influential of the post-conciliar Catholic traditionalist groups, however, is the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), founded in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefèbvre (1905–1991). Their base is in Ecône, Switzerland. Being a bishop, Lefèbvre had a much more powerful position in the Roman Catholic Church than Georges de Nantes, but his fundamental criticism of against Vatican II was similar if more diplomatic. SSPX had a very critical stance against the new directions of the Council, not least the introduction of the new Mass order. In fact, Lefèbvre was one of the theologians behind the so-called Ottaviani intervention, signed by the cardinal, and sent to Pope Paul VI in 1969. The text argued that the *Novus Ordo Missae* meant a clear break with the traditional Catholic Mass offer rite and that it resembled a Protestant form of worship.⁸¹

At Ecône, Lefèbvre gathered a growing number of traditionalist-minded seminarians, and the Society provisionally received status as a religious institute within the diocese. At first, when ordained, some of the SSPX seminarians were incardinated—they were given pastoral tasks within a particular diocese. In 1974, however, the French bishops decided

⁸⁰ There are few studies on the Abbé de Nantes, see, however, Perrin 2008 and Perrin 2013.

⁸¹ Cuneo 1997a and González Sáenz 2016.

not to incardinate SSPX seminarians anymore, and in the following year, the local bishop withdrew their provisional authorisation. Consequently, SSPX was no longer a recognised organisation within the Roman Catholic Church.⁸² At that time, Lefèbvre made a statement, later known as the *Declaration*, in which he distinguished between the ‘Eternal Rome’ and the modern ‘Vatican institution’:

We cleave, with all our heart and with all our soul, to Catholic Rome, the guardian of the Catholic Faith and of the traditions necessary for the maintenance of that Faith and to Eternal Rome, mistress of wisdom and Truth. On the other hand we refuse and have always refused to follow the Rome of the neo-Protestant trend clearly manifested throughout Vatican Council II and, later, in all the reforms born of it.⁸³

From this time onwards, Lefèbvre started to ordain priests directly for the Society and opened up special Mass centres and churches on both sides of the Atlantic. At that time, the Society also founded new seminaries and other schools in the United States, France and Germany, but despite ambitious attempts, they had a remarkably limited influence in Spain. In 1976, Marcel Lefèbvre was suspended after ordaining priests against the explicit instructions of the Holy See. Many expected him to consecrate bishops, too. Still, that would not happen until 1988, and then both he and the new bishops were excommunicated.⁸⁴

Though very critical of Paul VI, Lefèbvre and the SSPX officially considered him a true pope. Nevertheless, the pope question would give rise to many internal debates in the SSPX and other similar groups, and from the 1970s, a growing number of groups took a more radical stance. They claimed that the modern Church had deviated so much from its traditional teachings that Paul VI had become a manifest heretic and not a true

⁸² Ruby 2002, cf. González Sáenz 2016.

⁸³ Quoted from Ruby 2002.

⁸⁴ Ruby 2002, cf. González Sáenz 2016.

pontiff. The adherents to this position were generally referred to as sedevacantists.

Somewhat later, many of these groups claimed that John XXII (1881–1963; r. 1958–1963) had not been a true pope either. To them, the Holy See had thus been vacant since the death of Pius XII (1876–1958; r. 1939–1958). This latter, more far-reaching position is the standard for current-day sedevacantists. Most of the sedevacantist groups were, and are, small, and though there are groups active in many parts of the world, the United States is a kind of centre with the Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen as the most significant individual group.⁸⁵ A variant of sedevacantism is known as sedeprivationism, a very complex scholastic theory that was developed by French Dominican Michel-Louis Guérard des Lauries. The thesis implies that the popes from John XXIII onwards ‘materially, but not formally’ were popes. The position is defended by small groups in various countries. From the 1980s, both sedevacantist and sedeprivationist groups consecrated bishops of their own.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, in the early 1970s, there was only one sedevacantist bishop, Francis Konrad Schuckardt, from the United States, who claimed apostolic succession through an Old Catholic bishop.⁸⁷ From the 1980s, some sedevacantists who turned conclavists, i.e. they contended that in this case of ecclesiastical emergency, they were able to call conclaves to elect a pope, despite not being cardinals. A few popes of this kind have been chosen from 1990 onwards.⁸⁸

A French Pope and His Circles

Already in the 1960s and early 1970s, there existed traditionalist groups who established a complex hierarchical structure, including a pope of their

⁸⁵ Ruby 2002; Introvigne 2004 and Introvigne & Zoccatelli 2015a.

⁸⁶ Introvigne 2009 and Introvigne & Zoccatelli 2015b.

⁸⁷ Cuneo 1997a, cf. Lundberg (forthcoming).

⁸⁸ See Lundberg (forthcoming).

own. These pontiffs were not elected in a conclave. Instead, the true pope in the End time—as Clemente Domínguez later would claim—was divinely elect. One of the few modern alternative popes who preceded the Palmarian pontiff was French Clément XV. During a brief period, he gathered thousands of adherents in several countries. The primary source on Clément’s early life is a hagiography called *Flos Florum*, which was written in the late 1960s.

The future pope was born as Michel Collin 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. The messages foretold an extraordinary ecclesiastical career of his: from priest via bishop to pope. Collin was ordained a priest in 1933 and served in several parishes. He 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.⁸⁹

In 1935, Collin experienced that Christ consecrated him a bishop, but did not make the news public at the time. At the same time, he founded the Apôtres de l’Amour Infini—the Apostles of Infinite Love, a kind of religious order, which did not receive any ecclesiastical authorisation. In 1943, Collin established the Crusade for the Rosary and the Magnificat—La Croisade des Disciples du Rosaire et du Magnificat—whose mission was to convert humanity. The Crusade was very similar to the Apostles, and members formed Foyers-Cenacles, small house chapels, where the sacrament was on display. After World War II, most of his followers had either left or died, and Collin seems to have travelled around France and neighbouring countries, attending apparition sites and searching for episcopal support for his mission.

Nevertheless, Collin’s life would soon enter a new phase, which made it utterly impossible to get any recognition from Roman Catholic

⁸⁹ The most detailed works on Clément XV are Heim 1970, Kriss 1972 and Delestre 1985. See also Boufflet 2002: 269–278 and the chapter on Clément XV in Lundberg (forthcoming).

authorities. On October 7, 1950, while in Sorrento, Italy, he claimed that the Trinity had crowned him pope, taking Clément XV as his papal name. Still, he did not think that he had replaced Pius XII but merely assisted him. As a result, the Holy Office reduced Collin to lay status and denounced his teachings, though not mentioning his papal claims. Yet, he was convinced that he had the continued support from Pius XII, though the pontiff was hindered from making it public, due to powerful modernist forces in the curia.⁹⁰

Clément accepted the pontificate of Pius's successor, John XXIII (r. 1958–1963), too. However, just as in the case of his predecessor, he claimed that Pope John could not work freely. When the Vatican decided not to publish the Third Secret of Fatima, Clément went public with his papal claims and in 1961, he established L'Église Catholique Renovée—the Renewed Catholic Church—sometimes also referred to as the Church of Glory or the Church of Miracle. To him, however, this church was nothing other than the only true Catholic Church. According to him, the Third Secret of Fatima, which Rome did not reveal, had been made known to him. The message was that in the End-time a pope, named Clément XV, should be elected without a conclave.

After the announcement, Collin was formally excommunicated and placed under personal interdict—he was a *vetandus*, who should be avoided by all Catholics. Three of his collaborators, all Roman Catholic priests, were excommunicated too. Nevertheless, Clément continued to claim that he was in secret contact with John XXIII, both through letters and tape recordings, assisting his Roman colleague.

At the death of Pope John XXIII in 1963, Collin asserted that he now was the only true pontiff, being crowned at a ceremony held in his community in Clémery, a village in Lorraine of some 150 inhabitants. The centre of the church was the Domain of Mary Co-redemptrix, which included a church building, a separate chapel, the papal residence, a convent and a garden with a Lourdes grotto. The French pontiff claimed

⁹⁰ Heim 1970: 40–45 and Delestre 1985: 9–22.

that Paul VI was a usurper and that the Holy See had moved to Clémery: the Little Vatican, as he called it. He openly attacked Paul VI as an antipope and a forerunner of Antichrist. The Renewed Church held a General Council in Lyon in 1963: a kind of anti-Vatican II. According to the final decrees, the Church of the Apostles should be re-established. It was directly led by Christ, in the person of the pope. While claiming that he had been mystically consecrated in 1935, in the mid-1960s Clément XV was also consecrated by an independent bishop, of Old Catholic and Liberal Catholic lineages. Apart from the pope, the Renewed Church was constituted by cardinals, bishops, male and female religious and laypeople. A large portion of the members became priests; in the Little Vatican, there was at least one ordination per week.⁹¹

The church proliferated between 1965 and 1968. Clerics and other members were very active as missionaries and publications were disseminated in large editions, not least the monthly journal *La Vérité*. By the late 1960s, the Church claimed to have ‘thousands of members.’ An internal source stated that the membership even amounted to 25.000. Most of the adherents lived in France, Canada and the United States, but there were large groups in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, too. Lay members’ homes became communities, cenacles, where the Sacrament was on permanent display, but the church also established separate chapels.⁹² The publications of the church attacked Paul VI in an increasingly aggressive way. Though Clément XV was prohibited from entering Italy, on several occasions from 1968 onwards, groups of adherents went on ‘marches to Rome’, appearing at papal audiences and at St. Peter’s Square, shouting insults.⁹³

Explaining the relatively fast growth of the Renewed Church in the late 1960s, Joachim Boufflet points out that Clément XV ‘travelled a lot, visiting places of Marian apparitions recognised or not, and hoping to

⁹¹ Delestre 1985; cf. Heim 1970: 44–45 and Kriss 1972.

⁹² Heim 1970: 74–85 with a focus on Switzerland, and Delestre 1985 with a focus on France.

⁹³ Heim 1970: 45–46 and Delestre 1985: 78-90.

obtain the endorsement of certain visionaries. He hoped to catch new adepts in the teeming pool of the apparitionist clientele.⁹⁴ In the heavenly messages, he claimed to receive, Christ and the Virgin taught that the apparitions of Heroldsbach were true, but that they had been condemned by freemasons in the episcopate and the curia. As an alternative pope, however, he was not welcome at many apparition sites. Most seers did not want to be associated with him or even meet him, including those of Garabandal, and he was even chased away from a few locations.⁹⁵

Still, he found supporters among pilgrims, and he established contact with less known visionaries. For example, he went to Swiss Miécourt where Maria Finkel-Benigna—a seer earlier related to Heroldsbach had found support from the parish priest who wanted to transform the village into the New Jerusalem. There he met other priests who had had an active role in promoting Heroldsbach, and they joined forces with Clément, at least for a time. The French pope also frequented San Damiano, and Ladeira do Pinheiro in the second half of the 1960s, and promoted many alleged cases of bleeding and weeping holy images.⁹⁶

In the early 1960s, many of Pope Clément's teachings followed traditional Roman Catholic doctrine, though maximalist in its Mariology, but he also proclaimed a whole series of new dogmas 'under the dictation of Heaven,' and the church published thousands of pages of heavenly messages. While he still related to apocalyptic texts in the Bible, the messages he received, referred to as the Third Testament was seen as more important in the current era. Other modern Marian apparition traditions were included in Clément's teachings, too. Among the new dogmas, he decreed that the Virgin and St. Joseph were co-redeemers of humanity, and the resurrection and assumption of St. Joseph. Later, he took a dramatic step, dogmatically defining the Virgin as pre-existent and present in the Eucharist. All these dogmas would be included in the Palmarian belief

⁹⁴ Boufflet 2002: 281.

⁹⁵ Boufflet 2002: 269–275 and Delestre 1985: 37.

⁹⁶ Boufflet 2002: 269–275; cf. Heim 1970: 55–62.

system. Still, the Renewed Church taught that St. Joseph, too, was present in the sacrament, which the Palmarians do not.⁹⁷

At first, the Renewed Church used the Roman Rite of the Mass, but later Clément XV reduced it to the offertory, consecration and the taking of communion, and turns of Masses were read. At the Little Vatican alone, there could be hundreds of Masses a day. Many of these features would be included in the later Palmarian teachings. There were several different brief Mass liturgies in the Renewed Church, including the very brief Love Mass, which only included the words of consecration. While Latin (and Greek) were the official languages of the church, the vernacular could be used in the rituals. The Renewed Church had another unusual feature: double religious participation. Adherents could and should attend Mass in their Roman Catholic parishes, too. Another important difference was that the Renewed Church ordained women as priests, the main reason being that the pope held that Christ ordained the Virgin Mary.⁹⁸

Towards the end of the 1960s, Pope Clément's teachings became more original and included frequent references to extraterrestrials and UFOs. He predicted an imminent nuclear war, which would destroy the entire world. At first, he stated that it 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,' aliens in human guise, whom only Clément could recognise. He also stated that the Renewed Church was the 'Intergalactic church' of the End times, where 'Planetarians' were priests and bishops on other planets. Before the last apocalyptic fight, a huge luminous cross would appear in the sky. This prophecy was found in the messages at Garabandal, and later at Palmar. Still, Clément XV also taught that true believers would be transported by space ships to the Planet of Mary before the destruction of the earth. It was another belief that would later be integrated into Palmarian doctrine, while they exchanged the space ships with angels.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Heim 1970 and Kriss 1972: 356–360.

⁹⁸ Heim 1970 and Kriss 1972: 358–361.

⁹⁹ Heim 1970: 60–65 and Kriss 1972: 353–355.

The Renewed Church was severely weakened by its founder's death in 1974, and no successor was elected at Clémery. The official position was that the true pope would be resurrected and return from heaven in the early 1980s. Today, only a tiny community remains in Clémery.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, already before the death of Clément, the Renewed Church had split several times, and several other groups were formed. The only community that remains significant is the Apostles of Infinite Love, based in Canadian St. Jovite. It was led by Gaston Tremblay (1928–2011), a former cardinal in Clémery who broke with Clément. He claimed to have succeeded the French pope, and in 1971 he was crowned Pope Gregory XVII. To distinguish him from his Spanish contender, he later often referred to himself as John-Gregory XVII or just by his old religious name, John of the Trinity.¹⁰¹

There were other splinter groups with roots in the Renewed Church, some with hundreds of adherents. On an individual level, there were many direct and indirect connections between former clerics of the Renewed Church and the movement at El Palmar de Troya. The groups that originated in the Renewed Church and the Palmarian movement existed in similar apocalyptic Marianist milieus in Europe, in which seers and their support groups tried to establish themselves on the same increasingly crowded religious market.¹⁰²

In the first half of the 1970s, there was an abundance of reports about stigmata, bleeding and weeping statues and Eucharistic miracles, as well as apparition reports, in which both ex-members of the Renewed Church and the growing Palmarian movement were involved. They went to the same apparition sites, and some of the former bishops and cardinals of Pope Clément have wholeheartedly supported the cause of El Palmar de Troya, as will be indicated in the following chapter. Besides, many doctrines that were established by the French pope were later integrated into the Palmarian Creed. Though Clemente Domínguez never mentioned the case

¹⁰⁰ Delestre 1985 and Bouflet 2002: 276–278.

¹⁰¹ Rigal-Cellard 2005.

¹⁰² Bouflet 2002: 277–294.

of Clément XV in the official Palmarian documents, it is clear that part of his teachings and his methods served as a source of inspiration when building up his own papal claims.

3. El Palmar de Troya and the Official Church

Palmar de Troya was thus part of a long sequence of apocalyptically centred apparition traditions, where laypeople played a crucial role as seers and ‘voice-boxes of Heaven.’ While the number of reported apparitions in Western Europe slowed down towards the end of the 1950s, in Italy and Spain, they continued to thrive, both before and after the Second Vatican Council. This chapter is on the development of El Palmar de Troya during the first half of the 1970s, with a clear focus on the group around Clemente Domínguez and Manuel Alonso, and the relation to the official Roman Catholic Church.

In the early 1970s, Clemente Dominguez, who had become the Palmarian seer par excellence, claimed to receive heavenly messages continuously. By 1975, the transcriptions, made by Manuel Alonso, contained no less than 700 closely written folios. Still, it is important to stress once more that Clemente was not the only significant seer at El Palmar de Troya. The three pioneers Rosario Arenillas, María Marín and María Luisa Vila, were still on the scene together with a few of the others, while Clemente claimed to receive heavenly messages prohibiting women from assuming leading positions at the site. Like most other cases of reported apparitions, El Palmar de Troya would not be approved of by the local church authorities. Still, the Palmarians could attract potential adherents in apocalyptically minded circles through other means.

Diffusing the Messages from El Palmar

In 1966, Pope Paul VI removed the canon that stated that Catholic publications required prior ecclesiastical censorship: the *imprimatur*. At

the same time, the Index of Forbidden Books was abolished. These changes lead to a veritable explosion of books, booklets, journals and leaflets about apparitions and heavenly messages. Thus, ironically enough, a post-Vatican II decision made it much easier for traditionalist critics to disseminate messages that supported their own cause.¹⁰³

Newspapers and other media could sometimes play an essential role in the diffusion of apparition messages. In the case of El Palmar de Troya, regional and national dailies wrote about the events, but their interest waned rapidly. There were some media reporting in other countries, too. In the early 1970s, Spanish, French and Irish television crews filmed at the location. From the very beginning, however, mimeographed transcriptions and printed booklets were much more important means to disseminate the series of heavenly news. They were distributed to pilgrims, who in their turn could spread the news to others.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, there were other means of communication on a national and international level. William A. Christian, the author of several studies on modern Spanish apparitions, makes an important observation when writing that the seers and their support groups often managed to ‘reach another network—on permanent alert—of vision *aficionados* eager for the very latest word from the divine.’ He underlines that such ‘dedicated “marvelists” with disaffection for modern times and an eye on the apocalypse have long existed in Spain.’¹⁰⁵

In the early 1970s, the Palmarians could count on the support of some of these apparition *aficionados*, who were influential writers on matters Marian. The most prominent of them was probably Francisco Sánchez-Ventura y Pascual, the wealthy founder of the *Círculo* publishers in Zaragoza and editor of the *María Mensajera* magazine, who owned the apparition site at Garabandal. He printed the book *Las apariciones en el Palmar de Troya* in 1970, which had a positive, though somewhat hesitant evaluation of the new apparitions. Still, he claimed that Palmar de Troya

¹⁰³ Christian 2009: 158–162.

¹⁰⁴ HVM; cf. Vidal 1976.

¹⁰⁵ Christian 2009: 158.

was in continuation with Garabandal, but soon he clearly distanced himself from Clemente and Manuel.¹⁰⁶

Another of the ‘marvelists’ was José Luis Luna, an Aragonese priest, often just referred to as Padre Luna. He was an ardent supporter of Garabandal and a spiritual advisor of some of the seers there. He was also well connected with Spanish royalty and aristocracy and wrote several books about Padre Pio and apparitions. From 1969 onwards, Luna continuously travelled to El Palmar de Troya and served as a spiritual advisor of several of the visionaries there, too. Clemente, however, was not interested in any advice from Luna, and there was a growing rupture between them.

In 1972, Luna published a book on the apparitions—*La Madre de Dios me ha sonreído*—which became something of a best-seller, appearing in several Spanish, French, Dutch and German editions. Still, like Sánchez-Ventura y Pascual, Padre Luna criticised the direction the apparition movement took under the leadership of Clemente and Manuel. In his 1972 book, he included criticism of Clemente’s role, and in 1976 published another book, trying to distinguish ‘the true from the false El Palmar,’ where he denounced Clemente.¹⁰⁷

Yet another person who offered much support on a more local level to El Palmar de Troya, was the octogenarian Hermano Nectario María, a La Salle-priest of French origin but a naturalised Venezuelan, who lived in Seville and had been one of the priests who encouraged Clemente and Manuel to go to El Palmar in the first place. Nectario María would have an essential role as a facilitator of contacts with potential donors and became responsible for the group’s finances for some time. But later he, too, opposed the actions of Clemente and Manuel, considering them greedy fraudsters.¹⁰⁸

Among other people who without any doubt, could be counted into the group of ‘marvelists’ were several foreign priests, many of them

¹⁰⁶ Sánchez-Ventura y Pascual 1970.

¹⁰⁷ Luna 1973; cf. Luna 1976.

¹⁰⁸ Molina 2006: 52–56.

recently suspended. André Althoffer, a former cardinal of Clément XV, had earlier been a leading figure at Heroldsbach. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he lived incognito in San Damiano, editing and translating heavenly messages to Mama Rosa. Yet another of these clerics was René Durand, a Frenchman who was a principal organiser at San Damiano, but who also travelled to Garabandal on a steady basis.

Both Althoffer and Durand became active promoters of El Palmar de Troya from around 1970. However, when they realised that Padre Luna already had assumed the role of spiritual advisor there, not least for the woman seers, they kept some distance from the site, but still spread the messages from El Palmar through their networks.¹⁰⁹ Another priest associated with San Damiano and Palmar de Troya was the Swiss Josef Leutenegger, another former adherent of Pope Clément's, who claimed to have experienced miracles in his church in Maria Rain, including bleeding hosts and wine that turned into real blood.¹¹⁰ Thus, there was a growing, and increasingly international network in Europe of apparition *aficionados* around Clemente, many of whom have had been, at least for some time, adherents of French Pope Clément.

Apart from the help from outside supporters, the group around Clemente Domínguez continued to issue booklets of their own and some quite extensive collections of messages. Many of them were translated into English, French and German as part of the diffusion of the news beyond Spain's borders. As time passed a significant portion of the pilgrims to Palmar were foreigners, not least Irish. A collection called *Selected Messages of our Lord and Our Blessed Lady Given to Clemente Dominquez Gomez (Stigmatist) Seer of Palmar de Troya*, first printed in Spain, and later re-published in Ireland on several occasions.¹¹¹

From 1973, a group of supporters, the Protectors of Palmar in Barcelona, led by José María Andreu Magri, who also was a significant

¹⁰⁹ Boufflet 2002: 279–283. On San Damiano, see Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 92–123.

¹¹⁰ Boufflet 2002: 279, cf. Leutenegger 1970.

¹¹¹ McKeown 1970.

donor, issued a journal called *Ecos del Palmar*.¹¹² Besides, in 1975–1976, the Infusora Mariana editorial in Buenos Aires printed quite complete message collections in two volumes. Earlier, at least, the editorial was related to the Society of St. Pius X.¹¹³

The individual books and booklets produced by the Palmarians were often printed in several thousand copies to spread the news from Heaven to as many people as possible, regarding them as a final word of warning from heaven that should be a compass for life in the End time. The group around Clemente saw the lion's share of the contemporary Catholic bishops as apostates, who, together with the vast majority of nominally Catholic priests, female religious and laypeople, needed to convert and join the Palmarians in their struggle against the modern.¹¹⁴

Donations and Journeys

News about the apparitions was thus disseminated in printed form, but the new leader duo at El Palmar, Clemente Domínguez and Manuel Alonso, also thought it necessary to make longer 'apostolic journeys' and to further institutionalise the cult. They needed money and devoted much time and effort to securing sufficient funding. Donations at the site and the selling of collections of printed messages and objects of piety were a source of income, but the Palmarian movement could also count on much more substantial gifts.

In 1972, Clemente and Manuel managed to establish contact with a very wealthy woman who was an ardent supporter of the Garabandal movement: the Second Baroness of Castillo de Chirel, who was 90 years old at the time. This was the real opening for the duo, as she provided them with no less than 16 million pesos—the equivalent of over 200,000 Euros today. Somewhat later, however, she regretted her decision and came to

¹¹² Burón & Alonso 1976: 77.

¹¹³ *Palmar de Troya* 1975–1979.

¹¹⁴ Alonso & Canales 1976: 145–158.

consider the two Palmarian apostles as fraudsters.¹¹⁵ Still, it is safe to say that the baroness's donation became the cornerstone for the institutionalisation of their Palmarian movement. Not least, in 1974, they could buy the apparition site—the 15,000 square meter *Finca* of Alcaparrosa—having to pay a price well over the market price. This acquisition enabled the group around Clemente to control the site more physically.¹¹⁶

Moreover, the capital influx meant that Clemente, Manuel and some of their closest supporters could travel widely on both sides of the Atlantic. The journeys were often arranged in a hurry and itineraries regularly changed. According to Clemente, he always followed the exact orders of heaven. Clemente sometimes made the journeys together with Manuel Alonso. On other occasions, he was accompanied by Carmelo Pacheco Sánchez (1948–1997), a former waiter who had become one of their closest companions.¹¹⁷

On numerous times between 1970 and 1975, the Palmarian leaders went around most of Spain and part of the neighbouring countries to win bishops, priests and laypeople to their cause. They visited Rome several times, trying to meet and convince members of the curia and through them, the pope.¹¹⁸ On at least three occasions, they travelled to Madrid trying to hand over the messages to General Franco but were never granted an audience.¹¹⁹

In 1974, they went on a long journey through France, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy, handing over compilations of apparition messages to local bishops, before returning to Spain. In 1975,

¹¹⁵ *Odiel*, October 6, 1976; cf. *Diario de Sevilla*, May 1, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Gómez & Burón 1976: 103.

¹¹⁷ See the interview with Pacheco in *Ulia* 1976: 176–180; cf. his hagiography in *PLS*, vol. 2: 498–499.

¹¹⁸ *HVM*, cf. Alonso & Canales 1976:145–158.

¹¹⁹ Carrera 2019: 29.

they made a similar tour, now trying to convince the bishops to consecrate their dioceses to the Holy Face.¹²⁰

In the same period, in company with others, Clemente also made at least seven journeys to the Americas. They went to the United States, Canada and Mexico, but also to Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. In some places, they could present the messages at meetings in parish churches. At other locations, audiences gathered in private homes or town halls to listen to Clemente. Everywhere, they disseminated transcriptions of messages, which were printed in significant numbers, and spread pictures of the Holy Face and Our Lady of Palmar. Throughout, Clemente also defended the authority of Pope Paul VI, though claiming that he was kept a prisoner in the Vatican, not being able to speak freely. In groups where Paul VI often was looked upon as a person of at least questionable orthodoxy, he asserted that the pope, in fact, was the greatest martyr in the world.¹²¹

During the journeys, Clemente received continuous visions, not least at famous apparition sites. The messages to Clemente were thus no longer limited to the location of Palmar de Troya; the Virgin, Christ and other celestial beings obviously followed him around. In this way, the leaders of the Palmarian movement were able to connect El Palmar de Troya to older, well-known apparition sites such as Lourdes and La Salette as well as newer ones like Spanish Garabandal, Italian San Damiano and Portuguese Ladeira. Such stories could also serve as arguments for traditionalists who were upset by the post-conciliar changes, and for the devotees of other apparition movements; they should form a union of faithful defending traditional Catholicism.¹²²

It seems that the number of pilgrims to El Palmar de Troya decreased after a couple of years, and throughout 1973, Clemente continuously forwarded heavenly messages urging people to return there. From that time onwards references to other apparition sites disappeared or

¹²⁰ HVM, messages 1974–1975.

¹²¹ HVM, messages 1972–1975, cf. Alonso & Canales 1976: 150–158.

¹²² HVM, messages 1973–1975.

were actively opposed. In the case of Ladeira, for example, Clemente claimed that Soviet agents had infiltrated and God had left the site; the main reason being that the seer was in favour of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in 1974.¹²³ El Palmar de Troya successively became *the* apparition site of the Last Times. It was the only beacon of light in a sinful and dark world, where the entire celestial court gathered.

Reactions and Denunciations

The very first apparitions, in 1968 and 1969, received no apparent support from the local parish priests who visited Palmar de Troya regularly, though one of the nearby curates admitted that that ‘something strange was going on in Palmar de Troya,’ and did not know what to believe. However, another younger parish priest was more critical.¹²⁴ One authority figure on the local scene gave the apparitions a kind of official support was the school headmaster in Palmar de Troya, who also was the depute-mayor of the town.¹²⁵

However, the seers needed supporters in higher ranks. Having heard about the reported apparition to the four girls, one week after the events, the Archdiocese of Seville made a brief statement, which was referred to in local newspapers. The message was that, at present, the Archdiocese would not make any comments on the matter.

The cabinet secretary of the Archbishopric of Seville, Don Andrés Galindo has stated that there are still no official or unofficial news about the event. The *arcipreste* in Utrera, Reverend Hernández Fuentes has made the same statement. The parish priest of Guadalema de los Quinteros [sic!], near the town of El Palmar de Troya, who attends to these parishioners spiritually, has been in Madrid for a couple of days. Nevertheless, the Archbishop’s

¹²³ HVM, message November 17, 1974.

¹²⁴ ABC, April 27, 1968.

¹²⁵ Cadoret-Abeles 1981: 382.

Secretariat warns against this type of alleged apparitions, as it is known that many of them are the result of autosuggestion.¹²⁶

The decision whether the reports merited any formal investigation fell on the archbishop of Seville, José María Cardinal Bueno Monreal (1904–1987; r. 1957–1982). By the 1960s, Bueno had become increasingly critical of the Franco regime and together with a group of other bishops, he denounced the state's politics as a source of injustice, in apparent contradiction of the Catholic Social Doctrine. At Vatican II, Bueno was one of the few Spanish bishops who stood out from an elderly and conservative episcopacy. He was no theological radical but embraced the conciliar reforms, and systematically implemented them in his diocese.¹²⁷ Thus, Bueno was certainly no ideal partner for a group of traditionalists, who saw the Vatican II as the main root of evil, and Franco as the God-sent Caudillo.

For two years, between April 1968 and May 1970, the cardinal-archbishop made no official statements about El Palmar de Troya. Of course, he received information about the miracles and the growing cult, but it seems that there was no formal investigation into the matter. It was the bishop's choice to consider if accounts of apparitions and other miracles were worthy of such an enquiry, which he evidently did not. At this time, a steady stream of pilgrims kept coming to Palmar de Troya. The press, and the Palmarians, reported that no less than 40,000 people were present on May 15, 1970. This large group included many sick and handicapped persons in search of a miracle.¹²⁸

Three days after this all-time-high, Bueno published a document, where he briefly commented on the purported apparitions and miracles. His verdict was decidedly negative. According to the archbishop, the reported events did not have a supernatural origin, and he denounced them as signs of 'collective and superstitious hysteria.'

¹²⁶ *El Pueblo*, April 6, 1968, quoted in Garrido Vázquez 2004; my translation.

¹²⁷ Callahan 2000: 501–520.

¹²⁸ HVM, description of the events, May 15, 1970.

Consequently, we prohibit the celebration of any religious rite at the site. We ask priests, as well as male and female religious, both from the diocese and from outside the diocese, not to be present in any of these demonstrations unless they are specially authorized. We also urge all the faithful to assert themselves in their faith and in the Word of God, in accordance with the authentic magisterium of the Church, trying to live a sincere, committed Christian life in communion with the Holy Mother Church, constituted by charity, simplicity and sacrifice, and by external exhibitions that are not approved by the Church, and which neither honour God, nor contribute to the health of souls.¹²⁹

The Palmarians were naturally not pleased with the decision. And shortly after, Clemente allegedly received several messages from Christ and the Virgin, stating that the Bueno and the Spanish episcopacy at large were modernists and freemasons.¹³⁰ After the archbishop's negative conclusion, they wanted to approach the Holy See to get the support they needed. In early July 1970, Clemente was at a papal audience in Rome. There, he ran forward and fell on his knees before the pope handing over a note about the apparitions to a prelate that was present and asked him to forward it to the Holy Father.¹³¹

By 1970, there were no officially established criteria for the Holy See's handling of reports about private revelations and apparitions, though the eighteenth-century criteria for canonisations were generally used. It was a matter for the diocesan bishop to investigate the possible supernatural nature of such events, even if he could consult the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. A 'qualified group of faithful' could also approach the Holy See in this matter. However, in exceptional circumstances, the Holy See could intervene on its own initiative.

¹²⁹ Archbishop Bueno's letter, dated May 18, 1970, in Vidal 1976: 62–63; my translation.

¹³⁰ HVM, messages May and June, 1970.

¹³¹ *El País*, May 9, 1976 and Vidal 1976: 65.

Having discussed the matter for many years, in 1978 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued their *De modo procedendi in diudicandis praesumptis apparitionibus ac revelationibus*. It was approved for internal use alone and not made public until 2012, even if parts of the content had been known for a long time.¹³²

The document includes many of the traditional criteria used by twentieth-century Catholic bishops to judge the veracity of private revelations. There were two main types of criteria in assessing such claims: positive and negative. The positive criteria have to do with the ‘moral certitude’ or ‘probability’ of the events, as well as the personal qualities of the seers (e.g. psychological status, and morality). They also include the requirement of coherence with church doctrine and that the events should have given rise to ‘healthy devotion and constant spiritual fruit’ in the form of conversions, increased prayer activity and acts of charity. The negative criteria include manifest error concerning the facts and doctrine, but also evidence of a search for personal profit or psychological disorders, as well as tendencies of what was called collective hysteria.¹³³

According to this model, a diocesan assessment could result in three possible verdicts: 1. *Constat de supernaturalitate* (the supernatural nature of the events has been established); 2. *Non constat de supernaturalitate* (the supernatural nature has not been verified); and 3. *Constat de non supernaturalitate* (the non-supernatural nature of the events has been determined).¹³⁴ Through Archbishop Bueno’s declaration in 1970, it becomes entirely clear that, for him, the case of El Palmar de Troya fell into the third category, though the document was not the result of a formal investigation. Nevertheless, such an episcopal verdict did not have a permanent nature. It could be changed if there were new, more convincing evidence.

Nevertheless, the gist of the archbishop’s statement on El Palmar de Troya was reiterated in 1972. In a decree, printed in several newspapers he

¹³² Sacred Congregation 1978, cf. Maunder 2016: 39–49.

¹³³ Sacred Congregation 1978.

¹³⁴ See Maunder 2016: 45–46.

forbade all kind of public worship at the Alcaparrosa field, ordering Catholic priests not to be present, let alone celebrate any religious services there. In short, his conviction was that the activities in El Palmar de Troya had nothing to do with the Catholic faith. The archbishop's words could hardly be more explicit, and the site was put under interdict:

We do not give any authority to those allegedly supernatural phenomena ... and we disapprove of all publications and manifestations of revelations that are said to have taken place there ... The priests and the male and female religious who assist the site will be punished with the corresponding canonical penalties ... The celebration of religious acts there is definitely forbidden ... and faithful should stay far away from such expressions, which are disapproved by the Church.¹³⁵

As an answer to the Bueno's second declaration, Manuel Alonso drew up a lengthy letter, which was signed by more than 300 'pilgrims.' It included a summary of the apparitions to several seers with particular focus on Clemente's role. The author claimed that the archbishop's decision had been made without prior investigation and that some of his assistants were part of a conspiracy hostile towards them.¹³⁶

In the years to come, this report was disseminated to Pope Paul VI, as well as many bishops, priests and laypeople. However, the diocesan hierarchy did not change its views: the purported apparitions and other supernatural events should not be supported by any Catholic as they led people astray from the true faith. For the Palmarians it became increasingly clear that the vast majority of the Spanish and international episcopate was heretical, as they did not listen to the messages given at El Palmar; they were Marxists and masons.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that individual Roman Catholic priests were present at El Palmar de Troya, both before and after

¹³⁵ Cadoret-Abeles 1981: 381; my translation.

¹³⁶ LBM.

¹³⁷ HVM.

the archbishop's indictment, and that Mass, according to the Tridentine rite, was read regularly. On special occasions, there could be between ten and twenty priests present, saying Mass day and night. The clerical support group included priests from different parts of the world: Spain, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, Argentina, Guatemala, the Dutch Antilles and the Philippines. All these clerics were critical of the post-conciliar developments and attracted by the anti-modernist and apocalyptic messages. Some would later become Palmarian bishops. Still, the seers and leaders of the growing Palmarian movement were laypeople.¹³⁸

Though El Palmar de Troya attracted many Spanish pilgrims, on important feasts, international pilgrim groups arrived from countries like Ireland, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Venezuela, the United States and Canada.¹³⁹ From the early 1970s, Clemente's supporters formed more organised prayer groups, also known as cenacles. Such groups existed both in Spain and abroad, including both North and Latin America.¹⁴⁰

Having bought the Alcaparrosa field in 1974, Clemente and Manuel could physically control the apparition site and develop the cult as they wished. After the purchase, they built a somewhat more elaborate shrine. It was a hangar-like structure, where images of Our Lady, The Holy Face, St. Joseph, Padre Pio and Saint Ferdinand were kept, and where the statue of Our Lady of Palmar was enshrined. Through donations, the Palmarians could acquire a house, where foreign pilgrims could be lodged, and other properties were bought or built nearby.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ HVM.

¹³⁹ HVM.

¹⁴⁰ HVM.

¹⁴¹ HVM, cf. Molina 2006.

4. From Religious Order to Papacy

In the first years of the 1970s, the Palmarians' steps towards greater institutionalisation followed a rather normal procedure for modern Marian apparition movements. In their analysis of thirteen European and North American cases, David G. Bromley and Rachel S. Bobbitt observe that this process involved 'mobilizing the key resources necessary for organizational viability: a stable location and financial base, organization and leadership, a network of supporters, and a means of systematising the revelatory process and ritual observances.'¹⁴²

Donations were secured by the group around Clemente and Manuel, the apparition site was acquired, publications spread the messages and more formalised prayer groups were established, and despite the archbishop's condemnations, significant numbers of pilgrims continued to visit El Palmar de Troya, where traditionalist priests said Mass on an increasingly regular basis. By the mid-1970s, there were even a few resident priests at the site. Nevertheless, due to ample financial resources and the successful national and international propagation, from the mid-1970s onwards the degree of institutionalisation of the Palmarian movement would become unusual, finally including the election of a pope of their own in 1978.

Apostles of the Last Times

From around 1973, the leading members of the Palmarian movement began to refer to themselves as Marian apostles or Apostles of the Cross and

¹⁴² Bromley & Bobbitt 2011.

started wearing brown habits, Carmelite style.¹⁴³ By that time, Clemente claimed that the Virgin had appeared to him, giving indications about the ministry in the End time, and El Palmar de Troya's role during the coming era.

O, my children, one day pilgrims will come to this site from all nations. You already see this as they come from France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, Canada, Mexico and Venezuela, and you could mention many others, too. And from here, from this Sacred Place, the Eternal Father wants that the apostles will go out to prepare humanity for the Second Coming of Jesus.¹⁴⁴

1975 and 1976 were very eventful years at El Palmar. The Palmarian movement would take dramatic steps towards much greater institutionalisation. In a vision to Clemente on November 30, 1975, ten days after the death of General Franco, the Virgin Mary and Christ announced the forthcoming foundation of a new religious order at El Palmar de Troya that would replace all the existing ones, providing a synthesis. The idea of founding a new order had been present in the heavenly messages, at least since the year before, but the death of the Generalissimo, who was so much praised by the Palmarians, must have been a catalyst.¹⁴⁵ The members of the new order would be the Apostles of the Last Times, an expression used in the eighteenth-century Mariological works of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort.¹⁴⁶ The group at El Palmar also referred to themselves as the Cross Bearers, a name used in prophesies at Ezkioga in the 1930s.¹⁴⁷

The new religious order, called the Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face (Orden de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz), later the Carmelites

¹⁴³ MC, messages January 29 and September 24, 1974.

¹⁴⁴ Message 1973, quoted in Vidal 1976: 94.

¹⁴⁵ MC, message November 30, 1975; cf. Alfaro 1975 and Vidal 1976: 130–132.

¹⁴⁶ Introvigne 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Christian 1996.

of the Holy Face in Company with Jesus and Mary (Orden de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz en Compañía de Jesús y María) was indeed founded on December 22, 1975—or December 23 according to some text editions. It included four classes of members: priests, brothers, sisters and tertiaries, all wearing a brown habit and the large scapular featuring images of the Holy Face of Christ and Our Lady of Palmar. Not surprisingly, Clemente Domínguez became the General of the Order.¹⁴⁸

At its foundation, the group of female religious numbered ten; a month later, they were fifteen. Initially, the community was led by an Asturian former nun, though she was soon expelled from El Palmar. As the growing group of friars, the community of female religious was international, including women from Spain, Ireland, Canada, Great Britain, Germany and the United States.¹⁴⁹

Ordinations and Consecrations

The Palmarians, however, had relatively few ordained priests among them, and Archbishop Bueno of Seville would of course not ordain any. In any case, they would probably not have accepted the post-Vatican II ritual of ordination. They also wanted bishops of their own, who would be faithful to traditional teachings in the End time. To be able to claim apostolic succession was necessary for a group like theirs: Palmarian bishops must be consecrated by a Roman Catholic bishop. Therefore, a traditionalist willing to make consecrations had to be found.

The solution to the problems came with Vietnamese Archbishop Pierre-Martin Ngô-dinh-Thuc (1897–1984), by then living in Italian exile. After one of the Vatican II sessions, he had been unable to return to his home country, where his brother, South Vietnamese president Ngô-dinh-Diem, had been killed, as was another brother, an influential provincial leader. The whole family, including the prelate, had significant economic

¹⁴⁸ MC, message December 22, 1975.

¹⁴⁹ Alonso & Canales 1976: 139–140.

interests in the country. After a solid education in Europe, including triple doctorates, Thuc was consecrated in 1938. In 1960, he became archbishop of Hue. While in exile, he was replaced and instead made titular archbishop of Bulla Regia. Still, he served as an assistant pastor both in and outside Rome, obviously bewildered by the changes in the post-conciliar church.¹⁵⁰

While Thuc was very reluctant towards the new Mass order, like Lefèbvre, he had used it. Apart from that, if there was one thing that characterised Thuc's actions during Vatican II, it was undoubtedly not general traditionalism. In one of his few interventions, he asked for the invitation of more non-Christian observers to the Council. In another statement, he pledged for the ordination of women, speaking against the discrimination of women in the Catholic Church. This must have been regarded as highly revolutionary to the conciliar fathers. Overall, Thuc opposed many of the changes made at the Council.¹⁵¹

Though the Palmarian leaders at the time claimed that the Vietnamese prelate's arrival in El Palmar was 'unexpected, mysterious and providential', he certainly did not come there by chance, and the Carmelites of the Holy Face was not founded until he was on his way.¹⁵² In fact, he came there through the mediation of Maurice Revaz, a canon of the Swiss Abbey of Grand-Saint-Bernard, who was teaching at the SSPX seminary in Ecône. Revaz managed to convince Thuc that he was elected by the Virgin to save the Catholic Church from destruction in an era of general apostasy. With short notice, the Vietnamese prelate, therefore, travelled to Seville and El Palmar de Troya, where he arrived at Christmas 1975.¹⁵³

In his autobiographical notes, written towards the end of 1976, Thuc claims that Maurice Revaz suddenly appeared at his home, saying:

¹⁵⁰ Beltrán y Bachero 1989: 420–421. On Thuc, cf. Ruby 2002 and Schmitt 2006. See also a newly published book on the archbishop: Jarvis 2018.

¹⁵¹ *Acta Synodalia* 1971: 358–359 and *Acta Synodalia* 1972: 513.

¹⁵² Alonso & Canales 1976: 70.

¹⁵³ In an interview from 1976, Revaz told about how he joined the Palmarian movement, but he did not mention his role in bringing Thuc to El Palmar, see Uliá 1976: 140–144. Cf. *Vigilantes semper* 2015 on Revaz's background.

‘Excellency, the Holy Virgin sends me in order for me to send you to central Spain immediately to render her a service. My car is ready for you at the presbytery’s door, and we will depart immediately in order to be there for Christmas.’ According to his own testimony, Thuc then answered, ‘If it is a service that the Holy Virgin required, I am ready to follow you to the end of the world, but I must inform the priest because of the Christmas Mass and must pack my bag.’¹⁵⁴ On the journey, Revaz and Thuc were accompanied by the McElligotts, a married Irish couple who lived in Switzerland.

It was not the first time Thuc and Revaz met; they had talked during the archbishop’s visit to Ecône about a year earlier. In the meantime, Revaz’s interest in El Palmar de Troya was awakened by the McElligotts, who, apart from their Swiss home, owned a property on the Andalusian coast, close to the apparition site. A more concrete reason for Revaz’s interest in El Palmar and his active role in assisting them was related by Thomas W. Case in a series of articles published in *Fidelity* journal. The author wanted to prove a connection between SSPX and groups that he regarded as clearly heretical, such as the Palmarians. In the article, Case wrote about a ‘dwarf ... who claimed she heard “voices” and the Blessed Virgin told her that Thuc should begin a line of bishops through the seer Clemente.’ She was the McElligotts’ daughter. According to Case, Revaz believed in her messages and used them to convince Thuc.¹⁵⁵

Fr. A, who was a Palmarian bishop between 1976 and 1990, claims that the assertions of the daughter influenced Revaz, but stresses that Thuc was not convinced by her claims.

[She] told people she was the Blessed Virgin Mary and intelligent human beings believed this. They believed she was in a wheelchair because Our Lady could not walk on the ground. One of her principal supporters was Canon Revaz. No doubt, she did make comments (she was fluent in French) to Bishop Thuc regarding consecrations but

¹⁵⁴ Thuc [1976] 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Case 1993b, cf. Case 1993a.

the idea was born between himself and Lefèbvre. There is one thing that I cannot stress enough and that is that on agreeing to perform the Consecrations he specifically stated that Revaz was not to be one of them. Obviously, he was aware of his strange belief regarding the dwarf.¹⁵⁶

Though Revaz's belief in her claims contributed to his interest in Palmar, it is essential not to see it as the only reason. Revaz appears to have been a very committed 'marvelist', attracted by reports about heavenly messages, stigmata and Eucharistic miracles, that indicated that the End time was nigh. For him, people like André Althoffer and Josef Leuttenegger, former adherents of Clément XV, were essential contacts.¹⁵⁷ Just like the Palmarians, Revaz was convinced that Paul VI was held hostage in the Vatican, trying to persuade Marcel Lefèbvre to help him organise a rescue expedition. As he did not get any support from the archbishop, who did not believe in it at all, Revaz contacted the group at El Palmar de Troya and travelled there. He concluded that El Palmar was the hope of the Catholic Church.¹⁵⁸

Apart from the case of Maurice Revaz, it is interesting to investigate the relationship there was between the Palmarians and the SSPX at the time. Individual members of the Society seem to have been attracted by the antimodernist messages from Palmar, going there, and an Argentinean editorial connected to the Society printed extensive collections of messages from El Palmar.¹⁵⁹ This, however, does not prove a clear connection on a more organisational level.

Still, there are indications of a more indirect contact between Lefèbvre and El Palmar de Troya, which is alluded to by Fr. A. According to Noël Barbara, a French sedevacantist priest who reportedly talked to the archbishop about the matter, towards the end of 1975, Maurice Revaz had returned to Ecône from El Palmar de Troya, together with the

¹⁵⁶ Personal communication with Fr. A, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Boufflet 2002: 283–285.

¹⁵⁸ Boufflet 2002; cf. *Vigilantes semper* 2015: 12–13.

¹⁵⁹ Alfaro 1975; cf. *El Palmar de Troya* 1975–1979.

McElligott couple, to speak to him. They asked if the prelate was willing to go to El Palmar, where the Virgin was waiting for him, and if he could consecrate several episcopal candidates that she had chosen. Lefèbvre did not want to go but suggested that they should approach Archbishop Thuc, saying ‘He is orthodox and he is not at present occupied. Go and seek him out. He will most certainly agree with your request.’¹⁶⁰ Thus, according to this testimony, Lefèbvre pointed the Palmarians in the Vietnamese prelate’s direction, though it does not prove that the French archbishop was in favour of the Palmarian cause, instead of that he did not want to be involved directly.

The drive from Thuc’s home in Italy to Andalusia took three days, but by Christmas Eve 1975, he was in Seville and El Palmar de Troya, celebrating pontifical Masses, while Clemente received many heavenly messages that pointed to the great need of priests and bishops. Archbishop Bueno of Seville was aware of Thuc’s presence and intentions and tried to contact him, hoping to convince him not to ordain, much less consecrate, any Palmarians, but without any result. On New Year’s night, 1976, Thuc ordained Clemente Dominguez, Manuel Alonso, and two other men to the priesthood.¹⁶¹

The priestly ordinations, however, was just the prelude. Clemente claimed to have received various messages from the Virgin telling him that the church had an urgent need for traditionalist bishops. The communication was once interrupted when the Virgin through Clemente gave Archbishop Thuc the Jesus Child to hold in his arms.¹⁶² On January 11, the Virgin appeared again to Clemente bringing messages to Thuc:

Dearest children: The archbishop, my beloved son Peter [Thuc], ought to meditate and reflect on the transcendence for the universal Church, of the episcopal consecration, in this sacred place. Look at

¹⁶⁰ Barbara [1993] 2006: 67–68.

¹⁶¹ Letters from Bueno published in *ABC*, January 2 and 15, 1976; and letter from Thuc, January 1976 in Vidal 1976:144–149.

¹⁶² HVM, December 25, 1975; and HVM2, message January 10, 1976.

my image: La Divina Pastora, with a staff in her left hand, giving instructions with the right hand, and standing on the globe. If you recognize me as Divine Shepherdess, I am the one who has the authority given by God, to instruct you and to tell you that it is necessary to make episcopal consecration in this sacred place. And not in private, as you planned. It is very important for our mission in the Church and in the world that there be eyewitnesses to your episcopal consecration. - - - Dearest children: The solemn hour of the Palmar of Troya has arrived, to follow the Church, to lead it, and to restore the authentic doctrine.¹⁶³

In a middle-of-night five-hour ceremony at El Palmar on January 11, Thuc consecrated five of the Palmarians bishops, once again including Clemente and Manuel. The other three were Roman Catholic priests: the Spaniard Camilo Estevez Puga (1924–1997)—later known as Fr. Leandro María; an Irishman who was expelled from Palmar only a couple of months later; and Francis Bernard Sandler (1917–1992)—later known as Fr. Fulgencio María. The latter was a U.S. Benedictine who had been a parish priest in Sweden for almost twenty years, followed by a few years in Great Britain. He left the order twice, but returned and died at El Palmar, and was canonised and named ‘Protector of repentant apostates’ by Gregory XVII.¹⁶⁴

Suspensions and Excommunications

While the local hierarchy had been slow to comment on the apparitions, their reaction to the ordinations and consecrations was immediate. This is not surprising: a Roman Catholic bishop consecrated no less than five men in another diocese and against the explicit orders of the local bishop. That was unheard of. When informed that the ordinations to the priesthood had

¹⁶³ HVM2, message January 10, 1976.

¹⁶⁴ Beltrán y Bacheró 1989: 422; cf. Boyle 2007. On Fr. Leandro María of the Holy Face and of the Child Jesus, see PLS, vol. 2: 275–277. On Fr. Fulgencio María of the Holy Face and of the Dolours of the Most Holy Virgin, see PLS, vol. 5: 1418–1420.

in fact taken place, Archbishop Bueno declared them illicit.¹⁶⁵ Following the episcopal consecrations, he declared them irregular and all those involved to be suspended *a divinis* and thus barred from performing any clerical acts. In the exhortation, which should be read in every church in the archdiocese the coming Sunday, Bueno reminded the Catholic faithful that the reported apparitions at El Palmar de Troya were false, that Catholics should not attend the site, and even less take part in any liturgies, held by irregular clerics. He also declared the Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face unlawful.¹⁶⁶

The papal nuncio to Spain, Luigi Dadaglio, went to Seville where on January 15, 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.¹⁶⁷ In his declaration, the nuncio referred to a decree of the Holy Office, dated on April 9, 1951, which stated:

A Bishop, of whatever rite or dignity, who consecrates as a Bishop someone who is neither nominated by the Holy See nor expressly confirmed by that same See, and he who receives consecration, even if coerced by grave fear (c.229, 3, 3), incur *ipso facto* excommunication most especially reserved to the Apostolic See.¹⁶⁸

While the decree was written with Communist China in mind, it was used in the Palmarian case, too. The men who Thuc consecrated were clearly not nominated by the Holy See. Thus, by the very same consecration act, Thuc was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁶⁵ *ABC*, January 2, 1976. Answer from Thuc, January 1976, transcribed in Vidal 1976: 144–149.

¹⁶⁶ Bueno's pastoral exhortation, dated on January 14 was published in *ABC* January 15, 1976.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from the nuncio printed in Vidal 1976: 150–151.

¹⁶⁸ Holy Office 1951; English translation on www.traditionalmass.org/articles/article.php?id=59&catname=10

In September 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared Thuc and the men he had consecrated suspended *ipso iure* (according to Canon Law) but made no clear statement about whether the consecrations were valid or not. The most probable interpretation of the text is that the Congregation regarded them as valid but illicit.¹⁶⁹ In this context, ‘valid but illicit’ means that a bishop used his ability to consecrate someone according to the correct rite, thus conferring the apostolic succession in a technical sense, but without having first received the required authorisation from the Holy See. In any case, the Congregation did not recognise the consecrations made at Palmar de Troya, and the Palmarians were neither Roman Catholic priests nor bishops. The decree stated:

as regards those who have been ordained in this unlawful manner, or who may in the future be ordained by them, whatever about the validity of their orders (*quidquid sit de ordinum validitate*), the Church does not recognize their ordination nor shall it do so, and she considers them, as regards all legal effects, in the state which each one had beforehand and subject to the above-mentioned penal sanctions until they repent. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.¹⁷⁰

While first defending his actions, Archbishop Thuc later changed his mind about his Palmarian consecrations and was reconciled with Rome. Still, a few years later, he consecrated bishops for other groups, and once more received another notification from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁷¹ In his so-called Munich declaration in 1982, Thuc defended the sedevacantist position and consecrated bishops for such groups. Still, at his death in 1984, it seems that he was in communion with Rome, though some

¹⁶⁹ Sacred Congregation 1976; cf. Beltrán y Bachero 1989: 423–424.

¹⁷⁰ Sacred Congregation 1976; official translation.

¹⁷¹ Beltrán y Bachero 1989: 425.

traditionalists claim that the proofs are falsified, as he was held hostage by ‘modernist Vietnamese clerics’ in the United States.¹⁷²

While some of these details are difficult to establish, it is safe to say that the last decade in Archbishop Thuc’s life was eventful and bewildering. He might have consecrated as many as a dozen bishops, even if it is unclear whether all consecrations that have been reported took place at all. Some of the documents presented in support of particular cases are clearly fabricated.¹⁷³ Given the fact that Thuc became the most prolific consecrator of traditionalists, and other independent Catholics, the validity of his consecrations remains a constant matter of discussion in these circles.¹⁷⁴

The numerous bishops who today claim their apostolic succession via Thuc is a very diverse group, including Palmarians, sedevacantists, Old Catholics and theologically liberal independent bishops. In his inventory of modern episcopal lineages, Terrence Boyle is undoubtedly right when stating that the complex Thuc lineage ‘includes the broadest conceivable spectrum of theologies ever likely to be held by men all claiming to possess valid “Catholic” priestly and episcopal orders that are derived from a single prelate in their lifetimes.’¹⁷⁵

An Episcopal College in the End Time

With the Thuc consecrations in January 1976, the Palmarians asserted that they had secured their much sought-after apostolic succession and could start making bishops of their own. In the beginning, some thought that Thuc would remain in Spain, but the relation with the Vietnamese prelate soon faded away, though some of the new bishops visited him in Rome in early 1976. It was clear that Clemente Domínguez wanted to

¹⁷² Ruby 2002.

¹⁷³ For the complex Thuc line of succession, see Boyle 2007.

¹⁷⁴ See, e.g. Kelly 1997, Cekada 2006 and Derksen 2011.

¹⁷⁵ Boyle 2007.

create a prominent Episcopal College that would defend the true church. He believed that eventually Pope Paul VI would escape his prison guards in the Vatican and arrive in El Palmar de Troya, leading his bishops from there. On January 27, 1976, Clemente asserted that Christ had appeared to him saying:

My dear son: As the bishop you are, you have to exercise your power to lay hands, as it is my decision that the following should be consecrated bishops [Christ names three priests who are members of the Order]. I need many bishops, more than you think, as this flock has to be multiplied around the world. It is necessary to have an Episcopal College to be able to receive Pope Paul VI at this Holy Site, he who will rule and govern the Church from this Holy Site.¹⁷⁶

The day after, Clemente Domínguez, together with Manuel Alonso and Camilo Estévez consecrated not three, but four, new bishops. The new bishops included the man who had brought Archbishop Thuc to El Palmar in the first place: Maurice Revaz (later Fr. Hermengildo María). He left the Palmarians about two years later. One of the others left after some five months later, another in 1978, while the fourth, Paul Fox (later Fr. Abraham María), remains in the church four decades later.¹⁷⁷

In the months after the first consecrations, the Andalusian and national press continuously covered the rapidly unfolding series of events, and no less than seven journalistic books about El Palmar de Troya, mostly based on documents and interviews, were published within a year.¹⁷⁸ At this stage, it was still possible to interview representatives of the church.

¹⁷⁶ HVM2, message January 27, 1976.

¹⁷⁷ Boyle 2007.

¹⁷⁸ Alonso & Canales 1976; Barrios & Garrido Conde 1976; Cebolla López 1976; Gómez Burón & Martín Alonso 1976; Lama 1976; Uliá 1976; and Vidal 1976. See also a series of seven articles by Miguel Sagrado, which was published in several newspapers including *Mediterráneo* in October–November 1976.

Manuel Alonso remained the leading spokesperson, while Clemente made very few statements.¹⁷⁹

Though I have referred to several of these books, Pilár Ulia's *Los Excomulgados de El Palmar de Troya* is somewhat different from the others, as the author knew English. In that way, she could include interviews with a much broader group of bishops and nuns, who narrated their life stories and their journeys to El Palmar de Troya. Ulia arrived at the site shortly after the ex-communications. Still, the new friars and nuns gave testimonies of hopefulness and happiness. They thought that they had found the place Christ and the Virgin wanted them to be in and that they could concretely serve the church, making acts of reparation.¹⁸⁰

The bishops and seminarians who Pilár Ulia interviewed in early 1976 had very diverse backgrounds. Some had visited El Palmar already in 1970–1971, others had resided there for a year or more while others had arrived very recently and been consecrated almost directly at arrival. Two were Roman Catholic priests; three of them had entered religious orders for a brief period, one had been a seminarian. But there was also a teacher, a pilot and an industrial worker, and several had tried to make a living as artists. Most of them had become acquainted with El Palmar through printed messages or by talking to people at other apparition sites.¹⁸¹

During her visit to El Palmar, Pilár Ulia also managed to interview a group of Palmarian nuns. At that time, their first superior had already been forced to leave. Most of the nuns who testified had learned about El Palmar a few years prior by reading material published by the movement or talking to friends. Of the interviewees, four were German. One was born in Trinidad but had lived in Canada for some time, and several were Irish and English. All of the women had had salaried works before arriving at El Palmar: e.g. as social workers, shop assistants, secretaries and teachers.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Molina 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Ulia 1976:149–180 and 194–207.

¹⁸¹ Ulia 1976: 149–180.

¹⁸² Ulia 1976: 194–207.

In the early months of 1976, El Palmar had been crowded with journalists, but not surprisingly, media interest soon weakened. Two events later in 1976, however, would interest the Andalusian press. On March 11, the Palmarian bishops, no less than 16 at the time, were detained by the police for wearing the traditional black cassock, without being Catholic priests. Clemente and Manuel had to spend one night in jail. This legal process was described in detail in the newspapers.¹⁸³ The Palmarian prelates went in exile to France for three weeks. For a short period, they ceased to use the cassock but later wore it again, without any problems as the court decided that they were legally regarded as clerics, though illicitly ordained.¹⁸⁴

Another exception from the decreasing interest was the news about a car crash in the Basque Country in late May 1976, involving five Palmarian bishops. In the accident, the windshield broke and glass splinters severely hurt Clemente's eyes. He became blind, and his eye globes had to be removed at a hospital in San Sebastián. Consequently, the expression 'the blind seer' was coined. Still, he was convinced that the Virgin would miraculously restore his eyesight.¹⁸⁵

The accident occurred as the bishops returned from yet another journey to France. The Carmelites of the Holy Face had established a community in Derval in Brittany, installing a couple of bishops there. However, part of the community had soon been influenced by a mystic called Pierre Poulain, earlier an adherent of the French Pope Clément XV. While visiting the place, Clemente decided to close down the Derval community, but one of the bishops choose to stay with Poulain. Later, it was claimed that the devil had attacked their car on the way back, as

¹⁸³ *ABC* March 13, 18, 19, 20 and 23; April 7, 14 and 15, 1976; cf. Vidal 1976: 164–168.

¹⁸⁴ *ABC* April 8 and 30; and May 1, 1976; cf. Vidal 1976: 168–174 and the reproduced legal documents in *Ulía* 1976: 220–229.

¹⁸⁵ *ABC*, May 30, 1976; cf. Cebolla López 1976; Vidal 1976: 177–182; Molina 2006: 127–132.

Poulain cast a spell on Clemente, and that the curse directly caused the accident.¹⁸⁶

After the foundation of the Order, the institutionalisation of the Palmarian movement was rapid. By 1976, they had already developed a quickly growing ecclesiastical hierarchy, and in less than two years, they consecrated 91 bishops. Most of them were from Ireland (25 per cent) and Spain (20 per cent), but there were also French, English, Australian, Austrian, Yugoslavian, Swiss, Nigerian, Argentine, Canadian, Hungarian, and German bishops. Several were from the United States and some from Canada.¹⁸⁷

The normal procedure in this period was that Clemente claimed to have received a heavenly message, asking him to consecrate more bishops. Often, Christ or the Virgin clearly pointed out exactly who should be consecrated that same day or a couple of days later. An effect of this *modus operandi* was that males who entered the Carmelites of the Holy Face could become bishops within months, weeks or even days. Still, until 1984 it was possible to become ordained and consecrated at El Palmar without entering the order, thus serving as a secular priest.¹⁸⁸

The age span in the group of the first 91 bishops was between 15 and 73 years, but most were in their early twenties. A small minority of the consecrated Palmarian bishops—some 15 per cent—were or had been Roman Catholic priests, others had attended seminary, while most had no formal theological education. According to Clemente, who referred to heavenly messages, the church was in a state of emergency, and there was no time for any lengthy education. Moreover, all wisdom and theological knowledge were found at El Palmar.¹⁸⁹

Though the Palmarians consecrated numerous bishops from 1976 to 1978, some of them left the order very soon, sometimes within a couple of

¹⁸⁶ Boufflet 2002.

¹⁸⁷ Beltrán y Bachero 1989: 429; cf. Boyle 2007.

¹⁸⁸ See, e.g. MC, message, January 27, 1976, cf. Gregory XVII, Apostolic Constitution, December 27, 1984.

¹⁸⁹ *ABC*, November 22 and 23, 1976; cf. Beltrán y Bachero 1989: 422, 426–429.

months or even weeks. Many of them were probably just searching for an episcopal consecration to establish their own churches, but there were many conflicts and constant changes, which made some of them question the truth of El Palmar, leading to them leaving or being expelled.¹⁹⁰

Among many other things, Clemente's frequent visions implied rapid changes in the outward appearance of the clergy. They changed their religious habit on several occasions. Sometimes the messages dictated that clerics should have tonsure and grow beards; later they were ordered to shave. These rapid changes can be readily observed in photographs from the time. In fact, many of the heavenly messages Clemente (who was now known as Fr. Fernando) reported to receive during 1976 and 1977, had to do with details regarding the life of the male and female religious, including detailed dietary regulations.¹⁹¹

The growing number of clerics and nuns were housed in several large buildings and flats that the group acquired or rented in central Seville from 1976 onwards. One of the houses became the headquarters of the order, and other buildings were separate convents for men and women. In the main convent, a former hotel, there were several altars, and Mass was celebrated on each of them several times a day. From Seville, members of the order travelled daily to El Palmar de Troya.¹⁹²

The Papacy

Already in the early 1970s, Clemente Domínguez claimed that Pope Paul VI would be succeeded by both a true pope and an antipope. At that time, his assertions were quite general, but from at least 1975, he stated that *he* would become his true successor and that he would be named Gregory XVII. After Pope Paul VI's death, the followers of the true pope would be forced 'down in the catacombs'. Following the general pattern of Catholic

¹⁹⁰ Molina 2006: 119–124.

¹⁹¹ HVM2, messages 1976–1977.

¹⁹² ABC, November 23, 1976.

Apocalypticism, they would be persecuted by the antipope's many followers.¹⁹³ At that time, the true Catholic Church would not be Roman anymore.¹⁹⁴ On August 4, 1976, a couple of months after the car accident, Clemente claimed that after a long period of silence, Christ had appeared to him, saying:

No one should think that the palm-tree [El Palmar] is lying down. It is more upright than ever because victory is found in the passion and crucifixion. Then comes the resurrection ... It is time for the truth to be known: I am preparing you to become the future pope, step by step. Now you suffer this cross. Then there will come a greater one ... You will see, dearest son, if you remain firm to my will, I will make you a great pope ... You will be the future Peter, the pope who will strengthen the faith and the integrity of the Church, fighting heresies with great force, because legions of angels will assist you.¹⁹⁵

His blindness was a test, and if he passed it, he would be worthy of assuming the papacy. The Palmarians' views on the status and future of Pope Paul VI changed over time. For a long time, they asserted that he was held a prisoner in the Vatican. Later, they maintained that he was drugged or even replaced by a doppelganger. In any case, they prophesied that Paul VI would soon be able to escape his prison guards and arrive there in person to lead his faithful episcopal college.¹⁹⁶

These theories about the status of the pope were not original Palmarian ideas but existed among several other Marian Apocalypticist groups in the early 1970s. The first reports about the imprisonment of Pope Paul VI are found in the 1969 locutions to a Mexican nun, María Concepción Zúñiga López, the founder of Franciscan Minims of the Perpetual Help of Mary, whom Clemente met during a visit to Mexico.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ MC, messages February 8, April 5 and September 27, 1971; March 9, May 9, and September 5, 1972.

¹⁹⁴ MC, messages April 4 and August 4, 1976.

¹⁹⁵ MC, message August 4, 1976.

¹⁹⁶ MT, messages 1971–1978; cf. Alfaro 1975.

¹⁹⁷ Laycock 2015: 122–124.

In 1973, her ideas were integrated into the teachings in the Mexican ‘Holy City,’ known as Nueva Jerusalén, whose members constructed a house where Paul VI could live when he arrived.¹⁹⁸ Analogous testimonies appeared in the heavenly messages to Veronica Leuken at Bayside, New York in 1975.¹⁹⁹ French Pope Clément XV held another version of the idea. He maintained that Paul VI was an antipope, but taught that both Pius XII and John XXIII had been a hostage of the masonic curia.²⁰⁰

The assertions that Paul VI was replaced with a doppelganger appeared in several groups. They were found in the reported communications from demons, who were driven out during a long series of exorcisms of a Swiss woman in the mid-1970s. These messages were published in a popular book called *Mahnung aus dem Jenseits*, edited by Bonaventur Meyer, which was later translated into several languages, including Spanish.²⁰¹ A whole book about the doppelganger thesis was published in 1977: Theodor Kolberg’s *Der Betrug des Jahrhunderts*, filled with pictures, which according to the author, proved the existence of an actor playing the pope’s role at public appearances.²⁰²

Thus, apart from the many traditionalist groups that claimed that Paul VI was a manifest heretic, other groups claimed his innocence. In their view, he was a victim of international freemasonry, and in fact the greatest martyr alive. In fact, there are still minor groups that believe that the real Paul VI is still imprisoned in the Vatican dungeons. They are called ‘survivantists.’ In 2020, the true pontiff would be 123 years old.²⁰³

To most others, (the real) Pope Paul VI died on August 6, 1978. According to the Palmarians, he was poisoned to death by his Secretary of State, a freemason of the highest degree. At that time, Clemente (Fr. Fernando) was in Bogotá, Colombia together with a group of bishops,

¹⁹⁸ Leatham 2003.

¹⁹⁹ Laycock 2015.

²⁰⁰ See chapter 2.

²⁰¹ Meyer 1977. On the use of exorcisms and diabolical statements as theological arguments in traditionalist circles, see Döring 1985.

²⁰² Kolberg 1977.

²⁰³ Lundberg 2015c.

trying to recruit new friars and nuns. A couple of days before, however, they had been detained by the Colombian immigration office. When the news about the pope's death came, they were waiting to be deported from the country.²⁰⁴

Just hours after the demise of Paul VI, Clemente claimed to have become pope by direct divine intervention. Everything was prepared for the event and according to an apparition in early 1978; Clemente had already become the vice-vicar of Christ. At the mystical coronation ceremony on August 6, Christ himself placed the tiara on his head in the presence of St. Peter, St. Paul and the recently deceased Pope Paul VI, saying:

My dear son, my very beloved Vicar: This is the fulfilment of the prophecies. The martyr of the Vatican [Paul VI], the sublime martyr, has died. He was forced towards death, by permission of the Most High. In this way, he has been set free from his prison. Now he reigns with me. He has undergone all his purgatory during his pontificate. His was a pontificate full of sorrow and bitterness. He was cruelly martyred by my enemies; and these enemies are members of the Roman curia. Now he rejoices in heaven with great glory, as reward for his life of martyrdom during his pontificate. Now he will become the great intercessor of the Order of Carmelites of the Holy Face. He is filled with joy because he never committed the error of condemning the Order of Carmelites of the Holy Face. In his heart, he has always approved the Order, he approved the episcopate of Palmar de Troya and he always saw this episcopate as the continuation of Holy Church. Thus, he has died in great happiness, knowing that the Church will continue by means of Palmar de Troya.²⁰⁵

The original version of messages about the papal election included a passage that is not found in many of the later editions. Clemente confessed that he had committed a severe sin the night before his election and that

²⁰⁴ *El Tiempo*, August 3, 1978.

²⁰⁵ HP, message August 6, 1978.

Christ had permitted it so that the new pope would not be filled with pride and vanity, but know his sinfulness. According to several later testimonies by ex-bishops who were present in Colombia at the occasions, he had had sexual relations with a young man.²⁰⁶

The papal election was confirmed by a long series of other apparitions, featuring a host of saints. As foreseen, Clemente–Fr. Fernando—took Gregory XVII as his papal name, the name of “Great pope of the End times.” His papal motto would be *Gloria Olivae*—The Glory of the Olives, which was mentioned in the so-called *The Prophecy of the Popes by St. Malachy*.²⁰⁷ This work was published for the first time in 1595 by Benedictine Arnold de Wyon, who attributed it to a twelfth-century Irish archbishop, whose manuscript the editor claimed to have discovered. It has great importance for many Catholic apocalyptic groups. Still, it is safe to say that Wyon was the author, not only the editor.²⁰⁸

Having returned from Colombia to Seville, on August 9, Gregory XVII announced that the Holy See had moved from Rome to Palmar de Troya. Due to its apostasy, the Roman era of the church was over, and the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Palmarian Church was established. Trying to defend the earlier prophecies about the papacy, he argued that though Paul VI had not arrived in El Palmar in person, the Holy See had.²⁰⁹

After his celestial election, the Virgin appeared to instruct Gregory that nothing about the papal election should be made public at present and that he should be somewhat invisible in the church’s life, only appearing infrequently before the faithful. Gregory XVII decided that a consistory should be held, where he elected 24 cardinals, and finally, on the night of August 15, four cardinals—including his old friend Manuel Alonso, now Fr. Isidoro María—placed the papal tiara on his head at a ceremony.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Personal communication with ex-bishops.

²⁰⁷ HP, message August 6, 1978.

²⁰⁸ *The Prophecy* 1973.

²⁰⁹ HP, message August 9, 1978.

²¹⁰ HP, messages August 9 and 15, 1978.

When compared to the news about the episcopal consecrations two years earlier, not much was written in papers about the papal election. Moreover, the press reported that Gregory XVII he had been elected in a conclave; the claims about the celestial election were apparently not known outside the group.²¹¹ To say the least, journalists were critical. The relatively objective reporting from 1976 was long gone. As a comment on the papal election, an editor of *ABC* wrote:

To people abroad, the whole Palmar de Troya thing may look like a problem. In Seville, it is seen as nothing more than a string of grotesqueries, as nonsense. People have understood it and expressed it with their indifference. And the very protagonists of the farce have to hide from mockery, resorting to the mystique of early mornings and closed doors. Neither a ‘conclave’ to designate Clemente Domínguez as ‘Gregory XVII’, nor a ‘coronation’ of the unfortunate seer can survive the clarity of the day. Everything has to be opaque, occult, elusive and sinister, and perhaps a case for the Tax authorities: like a game of glass voles, like a picaresque, like the world of the fools.²¹²

Gregory XVII later declared Pope John Paul I (1912–1978; r. 1978), and his successor John Paul II (1920–2005; r. 1978–2005) antipopes and precursors of the Antichrist.²¹³ Approaching the first anniversary of his papal election, Gregory XVII and a group of twelve cardinals made an apostolic journey to the Holy Land. Driving through Europe and back, they met Palmarian faithful in several countries: Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, France, Great Britain and Ireland. In many places, Gregory claimed that he continuously received heavenly messages, which confirmed that he was the true Vicar of Christ. Still, his papal claims had caused an exodus of faithful.²¹⁴

²¹¹ See e.g. *ABC*, August 16, 1978; and *Blanco y Negro*, August 23, 1978.

²¹² *ABC*, August 16, 1978.

²¹³ *HP*, message August 9, 1978; see also DP 9 and 24–25.

²¹⁴ A long description of the journey is included as an appendix to DP (pp. 626–652).

During this long apostolic journey, on August 9, 1979, exactly one year after the translation of the Holy See from Rome to Palmar de Troya, Gregory and a group of bishops sat in a minibus outside the Sanctuary of the Miraculous Medal in Paris. There, the Virgin Mary gave an unusually verbose message to him: twenty closely written pages in some editions. As to further confirm and defend the move of the Holy See and Gregory's position, she told him:

My son: now you can see how rotten and corrupt the official church, the Roman Church is. Through her fornication, she has become the Great Whore. It is she who is in pact with the enemies of Christ. It is she who respects all religions. It is she who preaches truths and lies at the same time. This Roman church is now nourished by a beast, the usurper John Paul II—the true church is no longer Roman. The true church is Palmarian, as you have preached yourself, assisted by the Holy Ghost. It is no longer possible to be Roman [Catholic], as the Holy See has been moved by the order of Christ.²¹⁵

John Paul II was 'the Apocalyptic Goliath,' who would be conquered by 'the Apocalyptic David' Gregory XVII; the faithful remnant would win over the great Roman organisation, which Christ now had left. The long message from the Virgin thus reveals much about the Palmarian self-understanding in the post-1978 situation.

Pope Gregory did not only claim universal spiritual power but global temporal power, too: he would become the emperor of the coming Hispanic-Palmarian Empire and great caudillo of the faithful warriors in the fight against Antichrist and the conquest of Russia. This was a version of the much spread French prophecies about the great king who would appear in the End time. This empire would be Hispanic, as Spain had been faithful to Christ and the Virgin on many occasions through history. In fact, Spain was identified as the Second Israel, and Gregory XVII claimed

²¹⁵ MT, message August 9, 1979; my translation.

that he had ‘Jewish blood in his veins’ and that Judaism was Spain’s original religion.²¹⁶

The text is also a sign of the conflicts between the representatives of the church in different countries. Parts of the message from the Virgin include denunciations of Irish Palmarians, who wanted non-Spanish leaders, too. The Virgin defended the position of the Spanish pope and his two closest men, both Spaniards. These brothers-in-arms were Fr. Isidoro María and their friend Carmelo Pacheco: Fr. Elias María. The Virgin described them as a perfect team: the pope as the head and the others as his right and left arms. They were ‘three apocalyptic bulls who attack heretics with their mystical horns.’²¹⁷

After Latin, the Virgin considered Spanish the most eminent language. It should be the order’s official language, and she ordered all Palmarian Catholics to study it so that they would get a deeper understanding of the church’s teachings. Though documents were translated into other languages, Gregory asserted that the profoundness of the doctrine could only be grasped in Spanish: an almost divine tongue. That was a matter of controversy, especially since the pope claimed that English was mainly a Protestant language and had been much used to denounce true Catholic faith throughout the centuries.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ MT, message August 9, 1979; cf. DP 26 and HVM2.

²¹⁷ MT, message August 9, 1979; cf. HVM2.

²¹⁸ MT, message August 9, 1979; cf. HVM2.

5. Gregory XVII and the Palmarian Church

The Palmarian Church, founded in 1978, was formally named Santa Iglesia Católica Apostólica y Palmariana—the Holy Catholic Apostolic Palmarian Church. The religious order that made it up was officially known as Orden Religiosa de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz en Compañía de Jesús y María—the Carmelite Order of the Holy Face in Company with Jesus and Mary.

From its centre in El Palmar de Troya and Seville, the church expanded nationally and internationally. While groups of adherents had left when Clemente claimed to be the pope, including some ten bishops in 1979 alone, others joined. As a result, cenacles, chapels and mission centres were established in both Europe and elsewhere. The ecclesiastical institutionalisation often built on contacts that the Palmarians had created earlier. Both male and female religious joined and left the order at a rapid pace. From several of those who left, there were testimonies on the erratic behaviour of the pope and different types of abuse in the convents.

Ecclesiastical Structure

From its very foundation, the Palmarian church had a developed, top-heavy organisational structure, headed by Pope Gregory XVII. As pope, he had absolute power in the church. He was the High Priest, the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter. He was infallible when proclaiming doctrine and had the supreme spiritual and temporal authority in the universe, including both earth and other inhabited planets. The papal election was understood as an invisible eighth sacrament conferred by

Christ himself.²¹⁹ Still, it is evident that the first Palmarian pope and Fr. Isidoro María were close collaborators. Clemente Domínguez/Pope Gregory was the blind seer, the charismatic leader, while Manuel Alonso/Fr. Isidoro María was the *eminence grise* through whom all messages and dogmatic definitions passed. When the Palmarian Church was founded, Fr. Isidoro María became Secretary of State and Vice-General of the Order.

Number three in the hierarchy was the Vice-secretary of State Fr. Elias María–Carmelo Pacheco, who would remain so until his death in a car crash 1997 at the age of 49. He would have a role in the planning of the interior decoration of the Cathedral. Yet, even his hagiography in the *Palmarian Lives of Saints* points out that he had ‘a difficult character, which used to be a grave obstacle to normal coexistence with other Religiosos [friars].’ A fourth influential person was Fr. Leandro María–Camilo Estévez Puga—who had been a Roman Catholic priest in Galicia before joining the Palmarians. He was the only one in the quartet who had a formal theological education, and he was in charge of the friars’ education.²²⁰ With the deaths of number three and four in the hierarchy, in 1997 Gregory XVII lost two of his closest collaborators within two months.

As we have seen, from 1976 onwards, the Palmarians consecrated a large number of bishops. Mere priests existed, but they were clearly outnumbered by bishops. The typical situation was that a clerical member of the Carmelites of the Holy Face soon was elevated to the episcopacy and then elected cardinals, who were members of a curia, led by Fr. Isidoro María.²²¹ In 1987, Pope Gregory announced that since the foundation of the church, he had elevated 98 bishops to the cardinalate. Of the bishop-cardinals, some served in geographically defined dioceses or archdioceses. Alternatively, they were missionary-bishops with a broader field of work. Others lived permanently in Spain, and some held positions as vicars

²¹⁹ PKO2; cf. PCS.

²²⁰ On Fr. Elias María of the Holy Face and of the Sacred Heart, see PLS, vol. 2: 498–499. On Fr. Leandro María of the Holy Face and of the Child Jesus, see PLS, vol. 2: 275–277

²²¹ Boyle 2007.

general in charge of liturgy, cult, vocations, missions, propagation of the faith and the Inquisition in the Palmarian curia.²²²

In the early years, at some point, there were as many as 120 nuns in the Carmelite Order of the Holy Face. They were led by a mother superior, seen as the co-General of the Order. The available sources say little about the nuns as a group. Some had joined the order after leaving Roman Catholic convents, but most had no experience of religious life before. Just as in the case of the bishops, quite a number of the nuns left the order soon, while others remained for a long time.²²³ All Palmarian faithful, who were not either friars or nuns, became tertiaries, that is, members of the Third Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face.

Religious Life, Messages and Abuse

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Spanish newspapers published a series of testimonies by former Palmarian bishops. Some had been members of the order for several years; others a much shorter time. Being able to provide critical insider perspectives, they told about a rigorous life based on blind obedience to superiors, with continually changing rules, due to the contents of the reported heavenly messages to Fr. Fernando–Gregory XVII. His transformation from bishop-general to pope, however, did not affect daily convent life that much. He had been in charge from the very start.

Of course, the pope and his closest men were at the top of the hierarchy, followed by other cardinals. According to testimonies by ex-bishops, the highest leaders led quite a luxurious life, eating and living well. The ordinary bishops, priests and in particular, the non-ordained brothers lived in frugal circumstances. The days followed a strict and repetitive

²²² See decisions of the Ministry of Justice 1981–1982, transcribed in Catalá Rubio 2004: 307–311.

²²³ Personal communication with ex-members.

plan, and the members of the order were controlled continuously, deprived of sleep and were given too little to eat.²²⁴

The clerics were woken up at 7:30 AM, and their activities often continued until very late at night. After attending Mass and having breakfast, the friars went in line from their convent to the headquarters at Calle Abad Gordillo, where there was a roll call, at which public criticism against individual friars played a part. Often Fr. Fernando/Gregory XVII used apparitions as a way to denounce individuals. In a quite typical message from 1977, he referred to a heavenly message he just had received about a novice who had just entered:

As for Brother F., he has to learn a lot. And, above all, to respect the bishops of the Community. Since he speaks to them without any respect, correcting them. It cannot be like this. With this path he cannot continue in the Order. It is time to correct his behaviour! Therefore, he cannot yet receive Holy orders, until I say so. Because, you need to change a lot. And above all, not having any conversation with Father J. Any! Absolutely, not! No Abbot can authorize the two of them to speak. If Brother F. listens to Father J, he will walk towards perdition. And, also, you must know that, some of whom were before in the Order, were lost by the influence of the Father J., because he has no spirit of penitence and vanity reigns in him. There should be no conversation with those who do not speak of penance and prayer.²²⁵

After the roll call, classes of liturgy and Spanish began; most of the members were foreigners. Numerous Masses were celebrated on the many altars. At 2:00 PM, the friars had lunch, generally eaten in silence, if the pope did not give special permission for them to talk. Having finished their meal, the friars went back to their convent for a new roll call. In the late

²²⁴ For testimonies on the daily life in the Carmelites of the Holy Face, see e.g. *ABC*, December 4, 1977; December 17, 19 and 20, 1978; January 28, 30 and 31; and February 1, 1979; cf. Molina 2006: 119–124 and 147–158.

²²⁵ Gregory XVII, message September 26, 1977. I have anonymized the friars' names. Cf. HVM2.

afternoon, mostly all clerics, but generally not the pope, left for El Palmar de Troya. There, there were new Masses and pious practices, such as praying the penitential rosary and meditating over the Stations of the Cross. They generally returned to Seville at about one or two in the night, sometimes they continued their prayers until 4:00 AM. After that, the friars got a few hours of sleep before the next day began.²²⁶

Gregory was seldom present in the cathedral in El Palmar de Troya, and Fr. A, who was a Palmarian bishop between 1976 and 1990, states that the pope

was not too fond of prayer and penance, but would love to be at the Altar saying Mass with sermons that could go on for hours. Very rarely did he go to the *Lentisco* himself. The Cult would normally go from 6 PM to around midnight. He would time his arrival (and he did this very, very precisely) for around 15 minutes from the end, when everyone just wanted to return to their homes to have a meal and retire for the day. And then he would prolong the Cult until around five or six in the morning. There is something cruel in this, i.e. that he wanted to inflict pain on others to be their centre of attention. This is just one example. People accepted this humbly as they were trying to serve God.²²⁷

Although the Palmarian convents in Seville looked quite elegant from the outside and were centrally located, the ordinary clerics and nuns lived in run-down rooms. Different kinds of illness, both of a physical and psychological nature, were common. Frequently, the friars had to move from one building to another in the middle of the night, according to the contents of the pope's sudden visions. By 1981, however, these kinds of apparitions disappeared, and their living quarters became more stable.²²⁸

²²⁶ See *ABC*, December 4, 1977; December 17, 19 and 20 1978; *ABC*, January 28, 30 and 31; and *ABC*, February 1, 1979; cf. Molina 2006: 119–124 and 147–158.

²²⁷ Personal communication with Fr. A, 2017.

²²⁸ *ABC*, December 20, 1978; January 30 and 31, 1979; February 1, 1979; and September 13, 1981.

In the late 1970s and during the 1980s, the press sometimes reported events from the Palmarian convents. Irregularly, there was news about friars and nuns who had fled or who were literally thrown out on the street. Ex-friars testified about direct sexual abuse against individual male religious, as well as sexual relations between friars.²²⁹ On occasions, such relations were denounced openly. In a well-known case in 1978, a friar publicly accused the leaders of abuse, but then Fr. Fernando, not yet the pope, presented a heavenly message, hurling malediction against the friar.²³⁰

Among the most publicised was the news in 1982, about a young Cuban novice, who had injured his eyes and castrated himself to become totally pure and chaste, referring to the text in the Gospel of Matthew (5: 29): ‘If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.’ He survived after being treated at a hospital. In the end, the young Cuban was not ordained but expelled from the Order. Though this was the gravest case, there were several hospital cases of self-inflicted genital injuries in the decades to come.²³¹

There were also several stories about young people who had entered the order as friars or nuns without parental consent. Manuel Molina referred to a case in 1979 when a Venezuelan girl of 17 years had joined. Her parents accused the Palmarians of kidnapping their daughter. They met with Pope Gregory, who told them that she was a Bride of Christ, and remained faithful to him. The parents contacted the police and the Venezuelan consul, but in the meantime, the girl turned 18. In the end, and probably fearing worse problems with the state authorities, Manuel Alonso gave the parents the possibility to meet with their daughter, allowing her to choose whether to stay or go home; she decided to leave. According to an ex-bishop, Manuel Alonso then invented a story that he told the nuns:

²²⁹ See, e.g., *ABC*, December 31, 1979 and *Mediterráneo*, December 20, 1982.

²³⁰ HVM2, message December 11, 1978.

²³¹ Molina 2006: 210–217; cf. *Mediterráneo*, December 20, 1982 and *ABC*, October 6, 1990.

that her parents had contacted a criminal group, who would burn down the convent if they did not let the Venezuelan nun go.²³²

Overall, there are few news reports about the nuns. Still, in the *Palmarian Lives of Saints*, there are numerous biographies of those who have been canonised, but obviously, these texts have an edificatory purpose. For more than two decades one of the central figures in the Carmelite Order of the Holy Face was Frances Brenda O'Malley (1938–1999): Mother María Teresa of the Holy Face and the Miraculous Medal. She was Irish, born in Dublin. In her teens, she became active in Catholic lay organisations such as the Legion of Mary and Catholic Action. In 1959, she left her home country to work for the Legion of Mary in West Germany. Some years later, she moved to Sweden continuing her apostolate among the small Catholic minority, mainly made up by immigrants. There, she met Francis Sandler, a U.S.-born Benedictine priest who later would become a Palmarian bishop. They shared a traditionalist stance and opposed the post-conciliar developments and after clashing with the local bishop, whom they considered an enemy of the true faith both left Sweden for England in 1972.

In 1975, Francis Sandler, then a priest in London, went on a pilgrimage to El Palmar and decided to remain, and soon he convinced O'Malley that the true church was to be found at that very location. She went there, too, and became one of the first women who joined the order in December 1975. In September the following year, she was appointed superioress, as the first holder of the office was expelled, and she was present in Bogotá when Clemente Domínguez became pope. In the steady stream of visions that Domínguez claimed to experience in Colombia, he received a message from Saint Teresa of Avila who ordered the new pope to name Mother María Teresa Co-foundress and Mother General of the Carmelites of the Holy Face. She remained in charge of the female branch of the order until the mid-1990s, when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's

²³² Molina 2006: 186–191; cf. *ABC*, April 7, 1979.

disease, and died in 1999, immediately being canonised by Pope Gregory. He also declared her Doctress of the Church.²³³

Nevertheless, some non-official sources describe the individual lives of Palmarian nuns. In 2015, however, former Palmarian nun Maria Hall from New Zealand published her autobiography, *Reparation: A Spiritual Journey*, which narrates her life before, in and after El Palmar de Troya. It is the most detailed published account by any former Palmarian, and the first written by an ex-nun. Thus, her story is a unique testimony. Hall had joined a Roman Catholic teaching order in the early 1970s, but left after a couple of years, first living in Auckland, New Zealand and then moving to Melbourne, Australia. In 1980, her family became acquainted with the Palmarian church, which they soon joined.²³⁴

Maria Hall entered the Carmelites of the Holy Face in 1982 and stayed for eight years. When she arrived in Seville, the size of the female branch had largely decreased from its all-time-high at over a hundred. There were now about fifty nuns living in seven different convents in Seville, each inhabited by between five to twenty women. When entering the order, she received the name, Maria Paloma. In her book, Maria Hall tells about a highly regularised life, which included long days and arduous work. The only written material that the nuns had access to were the *Rule of the Order* and prayer books; no Bible reading was authorised, much less any other books or news media.

In the convent, Spanish was the only authorised language of communication, and many, including Hall, had little or no knowledge of it before entering. Communication was the exception; total silence was the rule, and the few letters written to and by family members were censored by the superiors. When outside the convent, the nuns wore black veils that totally covered their face. Maria Hall also tells that Pope Gregory suddenly enforced the use of boned corsets under the nun's habit, and the wearing of

²³³ PLS, see also www.palmarianchurch.org/important-persons-in-palmarian-church-history which includes hagiographies of five other pioneer nuns, too.

²³⁴ Hall 2015.

thick black stockings, instead of socks. In the Andalusian summers, this was hard to suffer.²³⁵

The nuns' daily schedule was similar to the friars, though generally, they slept even less. They woke up at 6:40 AM and often did not return to bed until 1:30 AM, making it a nineteen-hour day. The nuns were consequently only allowed five hours of sleep, sometimes less. Hard physical work was combined with prayer time, including long sessions of *brazos en cruz*, praying standing with their arms outstretched, the body forming a cross. At 3:30 PM, they went the 40 kilometres from Seville to the Cathedral-Basilica in Palmar de Troya in vans driven by clerics. At the cathedral, they attended series of Masses and took part in different kinds of devotions.

The nuns did often not return to Seville until after midnight, and on Saturdays, there was an all-night vigil until about 8:00 on Sunday morning. When driving from the cathedral back to Seville, Hall recalls that nuns shouted out prayers, so that the bishop-drivers should not fall asleep at the wheel. Still, road accidents were common, and several members of the order died in crashes and others were severely injured.²³⁶

With five hours or less sleep, the sleep-deprivation was constant for both nuns and friars. Moreover, periods of forced eating were followed by long periods of fasting. Maria Hall tells that they often had heavy meals in the middle of the night that made it hard to sleep. The lack of sleep and hard work affected their physical and psychical health. In some cases, it led to psychotic states. As the logic of the Palmarian beliefs was that they should suffer to make vicarious reparation for a sinful humanity, there was undoubtedly no incitement to improve living conditions.²³⁷

Religious life was governed by the *Rule of the Order*, but Pope Gregory often made rapid changes according to reported apparitions, for example allowing or forbidding certain kinds of food, or moving a nun or a friar from one convent to another. The religious thought that it was the

²³⁵ Hall 2015.

²³⁶ Hall 2015.

²³⁷ Hall 2015.

word of heaven revealed to Pope Gregory. It was also common belief that the leading triumvirate, the pope and his closest men, could read minds.²³⁸

Maria Hall is the only former Palmarian nun who published a more extended account about her years in the Order of the Holy Face. However, I have had personal communication with another nun, whom I refer to as Mother F. She spent more than twenty years in El Palmar and has a very different view of religious life there. Mother F. was one of the many Irish people who were attracted by the apparitions in the mid-1970s. Like the others, her family was bewildered and upset by the post-Vatican II developments in the Catholic Church. In that situation, they heard testimonies about the miraculous cures taking place at El Palmar de Troya and received extracts from the heavenly messages from representatives of the Irish Palmarian apostolate. Somewhat later, the family started to attend a recently founded Palmarian cenacle in their hometown.

By Christmas 1975, she made the pilgrimage to El Palmar de Troya with other family members, and the visit happened to coincide with Archbishop Thuc's ordinations of the first Palmarian priests and the subsequent consecrations of bishops. Somewhat later, she was among the many women, not least Irish, who joined the order in 1976. Looking back, Mother F. has problems remembering anything at the Palmarian convent at that time which diverged much from her ideal of a strict pre-Vatican II convent. When entering the Carmelites of the Holy Face, she expected lots of hard work and a spirituality based on penance and reparation.

In our communication, Mother F. also wanted to give her views on some claims which have been made about the Palmarian convents. One observation had to do with personal hygiene. She stated that the rule in the 1970s and 1980s allowed nuns to shower once a day or even twice during the hottest period. Thus, she does not understand the stories about an overwhelming smell. According to her, in the beginning, the restrictions on communication with the outside world were not overbearing. They were typical for a Roman Catholic enclosed order: two letters a month were

²³⁸ Hall 2015.

allowed. And just as in such religious orders, the correspondence was checked by superiors before being sent. She did not see this as strange but as a regular part of strict convent life. Further, she claims that the main reason nuns did not write to family and friends was that there was no time, given the demands of the physical work.

That silence was the norm was no news to her either; that would have been the case in a strict Roman Catholic convent, too. Still, according to her, this did not mean that they could not talk rather freely when working, such in the sewing department. Yet, she clearly states that the rules became stricter over the years, and that Pope Gregory's teachings and behaviour became increasingly erratic in the 1990s, and that this concretely affected the life of the nuns, too. Still, Mother F. does not see her many years at El Palmar as a bad experience. It included arduous work and suffering, but that was part of her spirituality and the enclosed life she saw as her vocation. She still regards much of the early Palmarian teachings as real and adheres to them, though she left El Palmar de Troya.²³⁹

A testimony from another angle makes an interesting comparison to the stories by male and female religious. In 2015, an Irish woman called Joan, who was an adherent 1975–1981, wrote about her childhood experiences of El Palmar. She was eight or nine years old when she arrived at El Palmar de Troya for the first time, together with her mother and a group of about 30 pilgrims from Ireland. As she refers to the recently blinded Clemente, it must have been in 1976. It is a story from a child's perspective about events that she felt were fascinating, but to a certain degree frightening, too. Joan starts by describing what it was like to come to the town of El Palmar de Troya, where they, as Palmarian pilgrims, did not feel welcome.

I had never been out of Ireland so for me it was amazing. Palmar for me was one very dusty street, with houses on either side, and no pathways. At the very end of the long street there was the village, which was not a square but opened out into a square like grid system

²³⁹ Personal communication with Ex-Mother F.

of streets. We never went in there except once, as there were bars and the cinema, and all these things were considered not good. Also a lot of the locals did not like these pilgrims coming and you could get into trouble in the village. The house we stayed in was like a youth hostel – bunk beds everywhere and a communal cooking area. Men in one house and women in another.²⁴⁰

Remembering the same pilgrimage, Joan provides a description of the nightly religious activities at the apparition site, where Clemente Domínguez played a central role.

On our first visit, I clearly remember doing a night vigil in the dark outside. Maybe about 100 people, only. I was very near Clemente Domínguez Gómez, as he was then [i.e., before becoming Pope Gregory]. Within feet of him and he fell to his knees in the dark and had a vision. For me he was really frightening looking, as his eyes were stitched down very crudely – you could clearly see there was nothing in the sockets. The skin was pulled taught. No eye patch, false eyes or glass eyes to cover anything up. I can't remember this early on if he had gloves, but certainly later he wore white gloves and they were blood stained in the centre as he was supposed to have the stigmata.

It may have been at this time, but I remember going into the area that would become the Basilica, but it was only an enclosure with a large metal gate. I can't remember anything indoors on that visit as we were praying outdoors. To enter the enclosure we would first walk up the dust street and then off road through a field track to the metal gate. I remember near the gate there was locals who spat and threw little stones. We would go as a group for safety and then knock and a priest would let us in. At that time, there was certainly one very large hammer and sickle drawn on the wall outside – it would have been 4 foot in diameter. The locals had obviously put it there. There was a large concourse outside – just an empty space surrounded by a very high wall/ barrier. Then the Basilica itself was huge – it would

²⁴⁰ Testimony by Joan, 2015 on www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/Christian/palmarian-church

fit maybe 2000. In my mind it was bigger than anything I had seen before. ... There were side alters with priests practicing saying Mass, [and] a very large altar at the top.²⁴¹

On one of the later occasions when Joan and her mother returned, it was Easter time. By then Clemente Domínguez had become Pope Gregory XVII, and she remembers the very long religious services in the unfinished cathedral.

Every night he [Gregory] was carried high on a very ornate chair on a platform held up by priests. He was always as far as I remember in elaborate white and gold buttoned long coats. He was a small round man, with a round face. I might have been 10 at this stage. My mother and I would do as many night vigils as we were able. She had made herself a brown hooded cloak. Brown was the 'in'-colour in Palmar. When I got too tired I would hide under it and go asleep. But I had an unusual way to go asleep a bit like counting sheep. I would sit in the Basilica and all the bishops and cardinals would be sitting on their seats on the altar in lines at the back – I remember about 30–40 at this stage. They had large pink hats and as they went asleep themselves the hats would slip and then they might make a start and wake up. So I would count how many sleeping cardinals and bishops were there. Eventually, I would nod off myself. Even at that stage I knew this was some scene for any 10 year old to witness.²⁴²

The childhood experiences that Joan recounts provides a fascinating testimony about the early Palmarian history. She describes the extended religious services and the contrast between the town of El Palmar de Troya and the colourful and solemn religious services in the unfinished Basilica.

²⁴¹ Testimony by Joan, 2015 on [www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/ category/ christian/palmarian-church](http://www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/christian/palmarian-church).

²⁴² Testimony by Joan, 2015 on [www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/ category/ christian/Palmarian-church](http://www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/christian/Palmarian-church).

An International Church

After the establishment of the Palmarian papacy, not many the new friars and nuns came directly from other traditionalists groups or from the Roman Catholic Church. By the 1980s, the vast majority of men who became bishops had at least one Palmarian parent. Still, just like the pioneers, they were an international group. There were natives of Spain, Ireland, Great Britain, Nigeria, the Philippines, Argentina, Switzerland, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, and the United States.²⁴³ Overall, 192 men were made bishops between 1976 and the death of Gregory XVII in 2005. 133 of them, or 70 per cent, were expelled or left voluntarily, 27 died in office, and only 32 remained at the end of the period. The female branch of the Carmelites of the Holy Face, which at its height included some 120 women, was down to about 50 by the time of Pope Gregory's death.²⁴⁴

Though Seville and El Palmar de Troya were the unquestionable administrative and spiritual centres of the church, most of the adherents lived in countries other than Spain. In fact, members were dispersed over all continents. To compute the number of Palmarians on a global basis presents a great challenge. In the 1980s, the church reported a maximum of 10,000 members worldwide. This claim should be taken with at least a pinch of salt. In 2011, Pope Gregory XVIII stated that there were less than 2,000 adherents left and that the number had steadily declined since the late 1980s.²⁴⁵

During at least part of the 1980s and 1990s, there were Palmarian missionary sees with more or less resident clergy, or at least with regular clerical presence, in Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Malta, Nigeria, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Brazil, the United States of America, Canada,

²⁴³ Clemente Domínguez Gómez–Gregory XVII, Consecration decrees 1976–1988; Boyle 2007; and Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

²⁴⁴ Gregory XVII, apostolic letter, 2005.

²⁴⁵ For the claim of 10 000 members, see e.g. <http://www.relinfo.ch/palmar/info.html>. Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh and India.²⁴⁶ However, in the early 2000s, the Palmarian international ministry imploded due to the expulsion of a large number of bishops, though it had declined even before that time. From 2001 onwards, few of these countries counted a single resident missionary-bishop. Few of the places counted with a separate church building, and most were chapels found in members' homes, where the Blessed Sacrament was at permanent display, and where Mass was read by visiting clergy.²⁴⁷

For longer or shorter periods, the Palmarian church has been present in several Spanish cities: Seville, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao, Las Palmas, Madrid, San Sebastián, Santander, León and Granada, but also much smaller locations such as Bermeo in the Basque Country and La Bañeza in León. By the 2000s, however, most of these centres had a weak Palmarian presence, if any at all. Until 2003, the large convents of male and female religious were in Seville, though for some time there was a nuns' convent in Granada, too. After that, the friars went to live at the church compound at El Palmar de Troya, and the nuns had already moved there some years earlier. Groups of faithful, both Spaniards and foreigners, lived there or in the nearby town, and all Palmarians living abroad would strive to visit the Basilica regularly, for example at Easter, Christmas and the Celebration of Our Lady of Palmar.²⁴⁸

From an early stage, the apparitions at El Palmar de Troya attracted many Irish people, and after the foundation of the church, there was a

²⁴⁶ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

²⁴⁷ To investigate the international presence of the Palmarian church has not been an easy task. The following, quite detailed overview is built on a number of different sources. Personal communication with ex-bishops and other ex-Palmarians have been of great importance. Apart from correspondence with a large number of people, I have had access to a large collection of photos of Palmarian chapels worldwide, most of which were taken in the early 2000s (referred to as *Photographic documentation*). My inventory is certainly not complete, and the places which counted with chapels have changed much through the years.

²⁴⁸ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

sizeable Palmarian community in Ireland, including families with many children. The Irishmen made up a sizeable share of the episcopate and greater Dublin area, where there was, and still is, a Palmarian residence and a separate chapel, as well as several smaller chapels in the city, and cenacles Gorey and Thurles.²⁴⁹ In Northern Ireland, there were chapels in Belfast and Portaferry. For a long period, Great Britain also had resident clerics, and chapels existed in London, Manchester, Southport near Liverpool and Hamilton in Scotland.²⁵⁰

Even before the foundation of the separate church, the German-speaking countries constituted an important mission field for the Palmarians, and many German, Swiss and Austrian pilgrims, travelled to El Palmar.²⁵¹ Beginning in 1976, several German-speaking bishops were consecrated, and after 1978, the Palmarian church established a few dioceses in the area. Still, the initial development was problematic, and several splinter groups were formed. In December 1979, the German missionary-archbishop who was based in Ruhpolding close to Munich left the church, claiming that the Palmarian leaders were just after money. He died in 1980, but the St. Michaels Bruderschaft, a Mass centre that he founded in Munich, survived. Another prelate in the German-speaking Palmarian world was a Hungarian who was named archbishop of Konstanz, covering parts of both Germany and Switzerland. He, too, became increasingly critical of Gregory XVII and therefore established a separate Catholic Archdiocese of Konstanz in the early 1980s.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*, cf. documentation found on the web site of Dialogue Ireland: www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/christian/palmarian-church

²⁵⁰ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*

²⁵¹ For reports on the Palmarian church in German speaking countries from Roman Catholic and Evangelical perspectives, see Valentin & Pacik 1983, and the group profiles at www.relinfo.ch/palmar/info.html; and http://www.bz-bx.net/referat_f_uuml_r_weltanschauungen/info_a%E2%80%9393z/00024299_Palmar-ianisch_katholische_Kirche.html.

²⁵² Valentin & Pacik 1983: 28–30.

By the 2000s, there were at least ten Mass centres left in Germany, four in Austria, four in Switzerland, plus a few in Liechtenstein. Most of them were located in rural areas and small towns. As only a small number of members lived at every given location, the places with Palmarian presence have changed over time. In Germany, there was or is Palmarian presence in cities like Augsburg, Munich, Mainz and Berlin, but above all in small towns and villages in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Nordrhein-Westfalen.²⁵³

In Switzerland, there were Palmarian chapels spread over the country, in towns and villages in at least seven cantons, both close to the border with Germany and close to Fribourg/Freiburg.²⁵⁴ In Austria, there exists or existed Palmarian chapels in different parts of the country, most of them are found in small towns and in rural areas, above all in Niederösterreich and Tirol.²⁵⁵ In northern Italy, very close to the border with Austria, there were home chapels in Tschengls and Innichen. Finally, in Liechtenstein, there were cenacles in Triesen and Triesenberg.²⁵⁶

Except for the very first years, the Palmarians have had a feeble presence in France. Still, there were French faithful who lived in Palmar de Troya, and the church printed central documents in French translations, as there were Francophone members in Switzerland, Canada and the Caribbean, too. Apart from that, there were a few French bishops,

²⁵³ I know of the existence of chapels in Singen, Waldshut Stockach, Niederschopfheim, Friedenweiler and a well-developed chapel in Unterschwandorf in Baden-Württemberg; Kempten, Glonn, Grafing in Bavaria; Bottrop and Delbrück in Nordrhein-Westfalen. See personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁵⁴ I know of the existence of Palmarian chapels in Aadorf (Thurgau), Andermatt (Uri), Kaisten and Oberwil (Aargau), Im Fang, Freiburg and Jaun (Fribourg), Oberwil (Aargau), Uster (Zürich), and Arth (Schwyz). Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*. For the Fribourg area, cf Mayer 2012: 15.

²⁵⁵ Austrian chapels include Hollenstein, Ludersdorf, Mittlern, Vergein, Oberperfuss, Sollenau, Leonding, and Salzburg. Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁵⁶ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

consecrated in Palmar in the 1970s, who later worked independently.²⁵⁷ Outside Western Europe, there were attempts to establish Palmarian missions in Poland, and though the endeavours were not very successful, a few bishops were Polish, and many doctrinal texts were translated into the language.²⁵⁸

From the start, the Palmarian church has been present in Nigeria. Even as late as in the early 1990s, there were at least 500 members there, and several Nigerians became nuns and friars. Two Nigerian missionary-bishops ministered the faithful in the country, but by the early 1990s, only one remained. In the southern part of Nigeria, there are chapels in several places, including separate church buildings. They were located in both small towns and major cities such as Lagos and Abuja.²⁵⁹ There were also minor Palmarian groups in Kenya and South Africa, which were very irregularly visited by missionary-bishops from other parts of the world.²⁶⁰

From the early 1970s, Latin America was an important mission field from the Palmarian movement, and Clemente Domínguez made several visits to the continent in the early 1970s. Several bishops were stationed in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, the work was concentrated to four countries: Argentina, Peru, Brazil and Paraguay.

In Argentina, there were chapels in Buenos Aires, Arequito, Deán Funes, Mar del Plata, Mendoza, Sierra Chica, and Tandil. In Peru, they were located in Lima, Huancayo, Pisco and Partidor Piura. In Brazil, chapels were found in Aracaju, Atibaia, Belo Horizonte, Ilheus, Passo Fundo, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Vitória. Paraguay was a relatively successful mission field, including a separate church building in Julio

²⁵⁷ Cf. Bouflet 2002: 285–296.

²⁵⁸ For notes about the translations made by a Polish bishop, see Gregory XVIII, Canonization decree, March 17, 2014.

²⁵⁹ In the early 2000s, there were chapels in Abatete, Abuja, Akpim, Asaba, Awkuzu, Enugu, Ihitta Ogada, Lagos and Nguru Mbaise. Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁶⁰ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

Augusto Saldivar, close to Asunción, and smaller chapels in Ciudad del Este and Villa Elisa.²⁶¹

The varying success of the Latin American missions had much to do with the individual bishop's strategies. In some, cases there was hardly any active apostolate at all, while in Peru and Paraguay the church attracted much bigger groups of faithful through active missionising.²⁶² The church presence in Colombia and Venezuela, which used to be important in the 1970s, was almost nonexistent in later decades. In the Caribbean, there were Palmarian cenacles in Curacao, Bonaire and Martinique.²⁶³

Though the Palmarians made attempts to missionise in the early era, the church has never been strong in North America. In the United States, one of the few more permanent chapels is located outside the town of Necedah, Wisconsin. The town was a centre for apocalyptically centred Catholicism. It was the home of Mary Ann Van Hoof, who claimed to receive messages from the Virgin from the late 1940s onwards but was excommunicated by the Catholic Church. Following the Roman Catholic interdict, no less than three alternative popes tried to dominate the site, and still another alternative pope was indirectly connected to it.²⁶⁴ First, in the early 1960s, French Pope Clément XV made Necedah a diocese. Later, a group of adherents to the pope that claimed to be his successor, the Canadian Gregory XVII, moved there. The pilgrim shrine as such was taken over by an Old Catholic group, whose bishop consecrated a man from Pennsylvania, who in 1977 claimed that he was the pope, and later took the name Peter II.²⁶⁵

By the mid-1970s, Necedah became a Palmarian mission field, too. At least three of the earliest Palmarian bishops, who were brothers, came from Necedah, and in 1978, the church consecrated a bishop at the site. An important reason for the Palmarians' presence in Necedah was that one of

²⁶¹ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁶² Personal communication with ex-Fr. C.

²⁶³ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁶⁴ About Van Hoof and the apparitions at Necedah, see Zimdars-Swartz 1989.

²⁶⁵ See Lundberg (forthcoming).

the church's main benefactors, a woman who owned a very successful company, lived there until her death in 2001. A church building in Arkdale, close to Necedah, is still in use.²⁶⁶ In the United States, there were also chapels in Chicago; Livingstone Manor, New York State; Sonoma, California; as well as in Tacoma and Yelm in Washington state. Earlier, there were Palmarian cenacles in other mainland locations, too. Small groups of Palmarians also lived in Hawaii and American Samoa, where clergy visited them on a very irregular basis.²⁶⁷ From the early 1970s, large groups of pilgrims came to El Palmar from Canada, and Clemente Domínguez made several journeys there. Most of the members were Francophone. The Canadian Palmarians left in 2000, supporting their expelled local bishop instead of the pope.²⁶⁸

There was a Palmarian presence in Oceania ever since the 1970s. In Australia, there was a group of Palmarians concentrated in Melbourne, where there was a maximum of 25 members in the 1980s. Cenacles also existed in Daylesford and Musk in the state of Victoria.²⁶⁹ In New Zealand, there were Palmarian cenacles in Hamilton and Auckland. However, by the early 1990s only a dozen faithful remained in the country, and by 2001, the clerical presence in Oceania was minimal. One missionary-bishop served Australia and New Zealand, but at the same time, he was responsible for the United States, Canada and India.²⁷⁰ Small groups of Palmarians lived in India and Bangladesh, as well as the Philippines.²⁷¹

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pope Gregory XVII made new apostolic journeys. Some of the more extended ones were documented in some detail, published and sent out to the adherents. The lengthiest and most wide-ranging took place in 1988 and lasted for about four months. Gregory and a group of bishops began with a two-month tour through

²⁶⁶ Boufflet 2002, cf. Boyle 2008, and personal communication with ex-members.

²⁶⁷ Personal communication with ex-members and *Photographic documentation*.

²⁶⁸ HVM.

²⁶⁹ Personal communication with ex-members.

²⁷⁰ Ischei 1991 and Hall 2015.

²⁷¹ Personal communication with ex-members.

several Latin American countries, from Chile and Argentina in the south to Mexico in the north. After that, they proceeded to the United States, Canada, the Philippines as well as to New Zealand. On the way back to Europe, they went to less expected places like India, Egypt and Greece, finally making a radical detour to Nigeria, a Palmarian stronghold, before returning to Spain.²⁷²

Five years later, in 1993, Pope Gregory made a two-month apostolic journey together with other prelates visiting Palmarian faithful in a large number of European countries. After visits to a few Spanish cities, the pope and his bishops went to German-speaking areas in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Liechtenstein. There they spent a long time, and they ended this part of the journey on the continent with a brief visit to Warsaw, where there was only one Palmarian. After that, they spent an entire week in Sweden and several days in the neighbouring Nordic countries, areas where there was not a single known Palmarian. However, that detour was made for a very special reason. Gregory wanted to reach the Arctic Circle, from where he would bless the whole world. It is, however, noteworthy that on this journey, he did not visit the biggest Palmarian community in Europe: the Irish, though he made individual journeys there.²⁷³

Legal Matters

Despite its general condemnation of the outside world and the denunciation of the principles of freedom of religion, the Palmarian church wanted to become an officially recognised religious group. Following the promulgation of the 1980 Spanish law on religious freedom (*Ley Orgánica Sobre Libertad Religiosa*), they filed applications to the Ministry of Justice to be included on the list of recognised religious entities. Ironically, the Spanish law built firmly on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

²⁷² Gregory XVII, Viaje apostólico 1988

²⁷³ Gregory XVII, Viaje Apostólico 1993.

(1948); a document that the Palmarians looked upon as the primary expression of the power of international freemasonry.

As preparation for application, the Palmarians formalised the statutes of an organisation called 'Iglesia Católica, Apostólica y Palmariana, Orden Religiosa de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz en Compañía de Jesús y María.' Somewhat later, the notarised documents were sent to the Ministry of Justice as part of the application for inscription in the Register of religious entities (*Registro de Entidades Religiosas*). In August 1982, however, the Director-General of Religious Affairs denied them inscription. Among other arguments, he pointed out that terms such as 'Catholic', 'Pope' and 'Cardinals,' which the Palmarians employed, were confusing, as they were traditionally used by the Roman Catholic Church. Due to this 'excessive resemblance,' the Palmarian Catholic Church could not be granted separate legal personality. A further problem for the Director-General was that the Palmarians did not, in fact, claim that it was something different from the Catholic Church. Instead, the Palmarian Church maintained that it had displaced the Roman Catholic Church in 1978.²⁷⁴

A few months after the rejection, the Palmarians submitted a new set of statutes for two organisations named 'Iglesia Cristiana Palmariana de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz' and 'Orden Religiosa de los Carmelitas de la Santa Faz en Compañía de Jesús y María' respectively. Thus, in the official context, the church no longer used the label 'Catholic' but rather 'Christian'. Nevertheless, in internal documents, Pope Gregory made it clear that this church was identical with the Holy Apostolic Catholic Palmarian Church. Despite the revisions, they were not successful with their application. Though the new statutes toned down the similarities with Roman Catholicism, the Director-General concluded that the changes were 'merely semantic.' Therefore, the church appealed to the Audiencia

²⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis of the legal process, see Seco Caro 1988. The full text of the 1982 decision is found in Catalá Rubio 2004: 307–311; cf. his commentary on pp. 224–225.

Nacional (the National Court), but on June 8, 1985, the tribunal only confirmed the General Director's decision.²⁷⁵

The Palmarians, however, persisted and appealed to the Spanish Supreme Court. Eventually, on November 2, 1987, the Court ruled that the Palmarian church and the Carmelites of the Holy Face could indeed be included in the Register, as they met the formal requirements for a religious association. The Supreme Court concluded that both the Ministry and the National court had interpreted the Law on religious freedom incorrectly, being 'too rigorist.' The Supreme Court maintained that a non-confessional state, such as Spain, should not do a qualitative evaluation of an organisation, as long as it 'appeared religious.' If an entity fulfilled the formal criteria, it could and should be included in the Register.²⁷⁶

Ironically, the Palmarian church was first inscribed as a 'non-Catholic church' (*iglesia acatólica*). Today, it is officially listed as an 'Evangelical church' (*iglesia evangélica*) as all 'Catholic entities' in the Register are related to the Roman Catholic Church. Still, the Roman Catholic Church as such is not included, as its legal status is regulated by the Concordat with the Holy See from 1953, and the agreements that were reached between the two parties following Franco's death and the promulgation of the New Constitution in 1978.²⁷⁷

The Supreme Court's decision in favour of the Palmarians gave rise to criticism in the Spanish media and from some researchers and others, who looked upon the Palmarians as a dangerous cult and a suspect business organisation, mostly interested in the collecting of riches. They argued that

²⁷⁵ Seco Caro 1988: 586–588. For the Palmarian teaching on the church's name, see TM, chapter 35, v. 47.

²⁷⁶ For the final decision, see Tribunal Supremo 1987. The full text is also included in Seco Caro 1988: 580–585; cf. his analysis on pp. 588–600. For the Spanish legislation and the problems to define what constitutes a 'religious entity', cf. Catalá Rubio 2004: 224–225 and 307–311; and Seglers 2004.

²⁷⁷ For updated information about the Palmarian Church in the Registro de Entidades Religiosas, see maper.mjusticia.gob.es/Maper/DetalleEntidadReligiosa.action?numeroInscripcion=000302

the Law on Religious Freedom was too formalistic, and opened opportunities for fraudsters using a religious undercover.²⁷⁸

Another legal aspect which has a bearing on the Palmarian Church relates to education. In several European states, Palmarian parents have tried to have their children exempted from obligatory moments in school, for example, swim classes or gymnastics. In 1985, Gregory XVII established a new set of *Norms for Palmarian Christian Decency* that, among other things, prohibited members from attending public baths. In the same year, a Palmarian couple from German Bavaria approached the local school authorities, arguing that due to their religious conviction, their two daughters should be exempted from taking part in swimming classes. The school did not grant them the exemption, and the couple took the case to court. The Munich tribunal ruled against them. The judge stated that according to law, health-related issues were the only valid reasons for not taking part in obligatory education. He maintained that though it would be possible to make other exceptions, a favourable decision ‘would open up for all kinds of requests.’²⁷⁹

A more inclusive case was considered by the Swiss Federal Court as late as 2012, where a Palmarian couple wanted to exclude their children from taking part in some school activities: visits to churches and other religious buildings, movies, concerts and theatre as well as from singing classes. Following the decision of the cantonal court, the Federal tribunal ruled against the Palmarian parents.²⁸⁰

El Palmar in Popular Culture

During the 1970s and 1980s, as El Palmar and the Palmarian Church and its pope became well known in Spain, the characters and the stories about them appeared in theatrical plays, movies and songs. The most well-known

²⁷⁸ *ABC*, January 3 and 13, 1988; cf. Molina 2006: 240–245.

²⁷⁹ *Die Zeit*, March 7, 1986.

²⁸⁰ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 16, 2014.

of the film was the comedy *Manuel y Clemente* (1986), directed by Javier Palmero, who also wrote the script, and with Juan Jesús Valverde and Ángel de Andrés López in the title roles. The movie is introduced by an explanatory textbox:

All the events that are related in this film have been taken from reality. Possibly their protagonists would have liked that this movie had been more supernatural, more mystical, more exemplary ... But the truth is that the events happened like this ...

The idea behind the movie is straightforward: El Palmar de Troya was an astute business opportunity discovered and developed by the duo from Seville and had nothing to do with religious convictions. Manuel and Clemente were presented as two picaresque characters. They worked together, but are fired for being homosexuals and looked for a way to earn good money. In their search, they are drawn to the newly established apparition site at El Palmar, where many people gather. According to the script, they do not believe in it at all but understand that people are gullible and that they can take advantage of the situation.

To the filmmaker, it is evident that Manuel Alonso was the brain behind the operation. He is presented as cunning and manipulative. Clemente, on the other hand, is portrayed as a simpleton without any will of his own. Still, he learns his script well and improves his acting skills. As the story moves on, the brothers-in-arms succeed in convincing an increasing number of pilgrims that Clemente is the greatest seer at the site, and manage to secure sizeable donations. The rest of the movie follows the two through the foundation of the order via the consecration and ends with the papal coronation of Clemente, presented as the climax of the whole hoax.²⁸¹

La de Troya en El Palmar (1984), directed by José María Zabalza, was another comedy related to the events. The title is a play with the Spanish colloquialism ‘armar la de Troya’ which means to cause a conflict

²⁸¹ *Clemente y Manuel* 1986.

or create a mess. If *Manuel y Clemente* received some critical acclaim, it was not the case with this earlier movie. *La de Troya en el Palmar* is a clear example of a cinematographic production from the period in Spanish cultural history known as *El destape*, the relaxation of censorship in the post-Franco era when many sexually explicit low-budget movies were produced. *La de Troya* is not focused on the story of Clemente and Manuel; the main story is about a bullfighter, interpreted by Cassen (Casto Senda Barrufet), who retires to take care of his handicapped brother. Through a series of events they end up at the apparition site and meet Pope Gregory, though here as elsewhere referred to as ‘Papa Clemente.’²⁸²

However, the Palmar de Troya phenomenon appeared in a movie as early as 1978: *Vivir en Sevilla*, directed by Gonzalo García Pelayo. The film is an example of the vibrant Sevillian underground culture in the late 1970s; a bricolage of documentary, fiction, art, music and readings. In one passage, the filmmaker includes images from the apparition site at El Palmar and ceremonies going on there. In this context, the narrator says that the Spanish press currently writes a lot about the phenomena, referring to the apparition movement as absurd and repugnant. He continues: ‘That is why, Luis [one of the protagonists], always surprised by the city’s tradition of madness and with his deeply felt of non-acceptance of reality respectfully attended this strange place in the company of his friends.’²⁸³

The story of El Palmar also emerged on the musical scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1977, Andalusian singer-songwriter Carlos Cano recorded ‘El Milagro del Palmar,’ a satirical chronicle of the events at El Palmar and the role of Clemente until the consecration of the first bishops and their brief exile in France. The song appeared on the album *A la luz de los cantares* that was popular at the time.²⁸⁴

In 1983, the Spanish punk band Siniestro Total released their second album, *El Regreso* where they included “(I left my heart in) El Palmar de

²⁸² *La de Troya en el Palmar* 1984.

²⁸³ *Vivir en Sevilla* 1978.

²⁸⁴ Cano 1977, cf. lyrics on www.lettras.com/carlos-cano/1883448/

Troya”, a song which, despite its title, is in Spanish. It is a quite brutal and sexually explicit satirical piece on El Palmar and its pope, which remains a punk classic.²⁸⁵ A much less known and even more explicit tune, “Clemente, Clemente,” was recorded by another Spanish punk group: Los Muertos de Cristo as late as 1994.²⁸⁶ Thus, at least for some time the Palmarian Church, and not least Pope Gregory, always referred to as Papa Clemente, became part of Spanish popular culture.

²⁸⁵ Siniestro Total 1983, cf. lyrics on www.lettras.com/siniestro-total/el-palmar-de-troya/

²⁸⁶ Carrera 2019: 240–241.

6. Changes and Conflicts by the Turn of the Millennium

The 1990s, particularly the second half, was a turbulent time in the Palmarian church that eventually led to the expulsion of no less than 18 bishops and seven nuns in the year 2000. Gregory XVII accused them of heresy and of planning to overturn his papal rule. Some of the expelled religious who did not return directly to their home countries, formed an independent Palmarian community in Archidona, close to Malaga in Andalusia.

Though decimated, part of this community stills exists, although it is no longer in Archidona. They believe that the early apparitions to Clemente Domínguez/Gregory XVII were authentic and that he indeed was the true pope, and they regard the *Treatise of the Mass* (1992) as true doctrine. Nevertheless, they assert that he was not the true pope after circa 1995, as he had become a heretic. From that time, they argue, the Holy See was vacant. Thus, they are Palmarian sedevacantists. Still, many of the friars and nuns who were expelled or left around the turn of the millennium, now look upon the Palmarian enterprise as an elaborate hoax that was orchestrated by Clemente Domínguez and Manuel Alonso.

Changes and Scandals

According to Fr. B, one of the independent Palmarian bishops of the Archidona community, severe problems in the church began in the early 1990s. Ever since the car accident in 1976, Gregory XVII maintained that

the Virgin had promised the miraculous recovery of his eyesight—if he only corresponded to grace; that is if he led a virtuous life. After waiting for many years, he expected the miraculous cure to take place in 1992.

It was a symbolic year in Spanish history: the 500-year commemoration of the Conquest of the Americas, but for the Palmarians it also marked the end of their twelve-year-long Council. Pope Gregory became convinced that the awaited miracle would occur on October 12, the exact day of the Quincentenary. However, as the date passed without any miracle, he became very disappointed and depressed. According to Fr. B, at that point, his personal characteristics became even more evident than before:

[Gregory] started behaving more strongly and carelessly according to his own will—having the desire to be the centre of attention his entire time in our Order, without taking away the real penances he performed in his earlier years when he was chosen to be the principal seer. ... That desire to do as he pleased became his total downfall. He not only cared nothing about fulfilling his duties as a pope and as a Christian from that time period (1995), but his behaviour became more scandalous than ever (yes, he created scandals throughout his entire life in the order), culminating in an incident that drew the attention of just about the entire Order, which prompted a correction by Father Isidoro to whom not a few complained. That correction turned into a test for him: accept the correction and humbly apologize—or—reject the graces and be filled with revenge! ... He chose the latter.²⁸⁷

Another Palmarian ex-bishop explains that these scandals involved both heavy drinking and sexual activities. He writes ‘What generally occurred was the following: Clemente would go out drinking etc. [and] arrive home late. Then call for his lover to go to his room. This was a continuous

²⁸⁷ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

occurrence.’ What was new in 1997 was that one of the bishops went to Gregory himself, confronting him right to his face.²⁸⁸

Another ex-bishop gives a more detailed picture of the events. The trigger for the direct criticism was that the pope had been very drunk when he should be saying Mass before a large group of Palmarians who had made the pilgrimage to the Basilica. It was not uncommon that he turned up in church in a very drunken state. At this occasion, however, he even hit the chaplains who would assist him. The pope used to be friends with the bishop who criticised him, but now he was considered *persona non-grata* and Gregory prohibited the others from talking to him.

As a direct effect, the whole community was affected by the pope’s reaction, and he ordered them to increase the pious practises in the cathedral well into the night. Earlier, the rule for the friars was to say turns of six or seven Masses in an hour. Now Gregory increased it to sixteen an hour. With the journey back from El Palmar and dinner in the middle of the night, the friars would get a few hours’ sleep. At the same time, they also got less food.²⁸⁹ Fr. B describes the situation from a somewhat different angle.

Pope Gregory, quite adamant in his state of revenge and *literally angry with God* with no grace of humble repentance for his increasing cold-hearted attitude toward everyone who wasn’t blindly obedient to him, became worse in every way which led him to embrace other doctrinal errors, which, once rejecting correction, led him into personal heresy.²⁹⁰

The ‘personal heresy’ mentioned relates to events that followed when in 1997, Gregory XVII suddenly claimed that the prophet Elijah had appeared to him. The prophet told him that, throughout the ages, the enemies of Christ had introduced lies in the Bible. Therefore, its contents must be thoroughly reworked. Referring to the apparition, Gregory

²⁸⁸ Personal communication with ex-Fr. C, 2017.

²⁸⁹ Personal communication with ex-Fr. D, 2017.

²⁹⁰ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017; emphasis in the original.

announced that the goal of the revision was nothing less than to establish the true meaning of the texts, precisely as the divine author had conceived them.²⁹¹ Another ex-bishop related the context when Gregory began his work with the new Bible:

[At the time] I heard that on one of those nights [when Gregory was in his room] listening to flamenco music and drinking, he stated that Elijah had appeared to him book in hand and showed him the book. The prophet told him that for centuries Jews and masons had manipulated the Catholic Bible and that it was up to him to correct it and make a new Bible.²⁹²

As part of his development of the *Palmarian Bible*, in 1998–1999 Gregory held no less than 19 very long sermons, in which he referred to the new teachings and the current situation in the church. They were all published. Though the Palmarians had printed papal sermons before, the sheer number and size had no precedent. It is clear that Gregory XVII, who for long periods had been almost invisible in the church, actively tried to disseminate and defend the ongoing doctrinal changes and to prepare the faithful.²⁹³ Still, the membership steadily decreased, and though seven new bishops were consecrated between 1994 and 1999, due to deaths, exits and expulsions, the total number continued to decline.²⁹⁴ In a 1998 sermon, Pope Gregory commented on the situation, claiming that the faithful remnant would be even smaller soon:

There will come terrible times, worse than the ones which we have lived through until now. In fact, we are already living in these terrible times. The apostasies by friars, nuns and lay people are frequent. In other cases, We have had to expulse people. One has to

²⁹¹ Personal communication with ex-members, both clergy and laypeople; cf. the description of the *Palmarian Bible* in chapter 10 of this book.

²⁹² Personal communication with ex-Fr. C, 2017.

²⁹³ Gregory XVII, *Sermons 1998–1999*, cf. Sermon, January 6, 1999 where he also mentions that he has read 4,359 Masses during 1998.

²⁹⁴ *Agon* 2005.

be either inside or outside. One cannot have one foot inside the Church and the other outside. One has to have both feet inside the Church.²⁹⁵

It is evident that the new Bible became a severe point of discord, not least since the faithful were ordered to hand over their traditional Bibles to be destroyed. In the future, they should only use the Palmarian version.²⁹⁶

The Great Expulsion

With this background, in the year 2000, there were some significant changes and events in the Palmarian church. The pope obviously distrusted many in the episcopal college, and in 1995, he suppressed the cardinalate, thus removing the possibility of a conclave after his death.²⁹⁷ In 2000, Gregory designated his old brother-in-arms, Fr. Isidoro María to succeed him when he passed away. At this time, the pope was not yet 55 years old, but he had had severe health problems for many years. The text of the decree of succession is brief:

We, with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and Our own personal authority: On this very day, we name as our successor to the Cathedra of the Apostle Saint Peter, immediately following our death, our Secretary of State, Most Reverend Father Isidore Maria of the Holy Face and of the Cross (Manuel Alonso Corral in the world).²⁹⁸

That the decree was issued at precisely that time was no coincidence. It was a clear sign of that Gregory thought that a rebellion was on its way and at about the same time, his first mass expulsion of friars and nuns became a reality.

²⁹⁵ Gregory XVII, Sermon, July 20, 1998; my translation.

²⁹⁶ Personal communication with ex-members.

²⁹⁷ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, March 30, 2005.

²⁹⁸ Gregory XVII, Apostolic letter, October 24, 2000.

According to Fr. B, one of the bishops who was expelled in the year 2000, there developed a group of friars, who were very worried by Gregory's behaviour, as well as the ongoing doctrinal changes. In the beginning, the group hoped for changes for the better but soon experienced that the pope became more inconsistent and unpredictable than before. Fr. B. states, 'We did our best to assist friars, nuns and faithful to bear the pain of being victims of a bull let loose out of the barn!' ²⁹⁹ The bull was Gregory XVIII.

The strict control of the community made it difficult for the increasingly critical group members to communicate, but in secrecy, a few in the group managed to obtain cellular phones, which were used for that purpose. They also talked with nuns. Fr. B continues:

Eventually, there were errors committed amongst the group, providing enough information that reached Gregory that there was a band of rebels within the order! Even the careless use of the mobile phone here or there was discovered. Those blindly faithful to Gregory gathered enough information to send us to the proverbial scaffold. And that's when we were named one by one, not being accused of anything but belonging to a rebellious group, and Gregory, furious, wanted each one to give the names of all the rest who dared such an enterprise.³⁰⁰

This was in October 2000, and as a continuation and through a formal decree dated November 7, Gregory expelled no fewer than 18 bishops and 7 nuns, accusing them of heresy, apostasy and of planning to overthrow him as the pope, and even kill him. He claimed that Fr. Isaac María, who had been his confessor and chaplain for many years, was the leader of the rebellion together with Mother María Goretti. In his decree, Gregory summarised the decisions taken during the last month, when he came to accuse an increasing number of religious of apostasy:

²⁹⁹ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

³⁰⁰ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

We with the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and Our Own Personal Authority, on this very day, ratify the anathema and the excommunication hurled by Us, in the respective moment, against the following apostate and heretical bishops:

1. The heresiarch ex-father Isaac Mary of the Holy Face and the Most Holy Trinity, founder of an anti-church or tenebrous sect within Our Holy Palmarian Church, with the main object of overthrowing Us and appropriating Our most high Dignity as Successor of St Peter Apostle.
2. Ex-father Guido Mary of the Holy Face and St Joseph.
3. Ex-father Hermengild Mary of the Holy Face and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
4. Ex-father Gedeon Mary of the Holy Face and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.
5. Ex-father Cyril Mary of the Holy Face and the Holy Rosary.
6. Ex-father John Mary of the Holy Face and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
7. Ex-father Laurian Mary of the Holy Face and the Holy Family.
8. Ex-father Noah Mary of the Holy Face and St Joseph.
9. Ex-father Joshua Mary of the Holy Face and the Holy Cure of Ars.
10. Ex-father Lucian Mary of the Holy Face and St Louis Gonzaga.
11. Ex-father Urban Mary of the Holy Face and Most Holy Joseph.
12. Ex-father Ferdinand Mary of the Holy Face and St Therese of the Child Jesus.
13. Ex-father Gonzalez Mary of the Holy Face and Most Holy Joseph.
14. Ex-father Damasus Mary of the Holy Face and the Most Holy Trinity.
15. Ex-father Francis Mary of the Holy Face and the Holy Ghost.
16. Ex-father Adam Mary of the Holy Face and the Divine Shepherdess.
17. Ex-father Abdias Mary of the Holy Face and St Pio of Pietreleina.

18. Ex-father Formosus Mary of the Holy Face and St Pio of Pietrelcina.³⁰¹

In the same manner, he continued to name the nuns that he regarded as equally liable for what he saw as a diabolically induced revolution.

We, with the Authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and Our Own Personal Authority, on this very day, ratify the anathema and the excommunication hurled by Us, in the respective moment, against the following apostate and heretical nuns:

1. The co-heresiarch ex-mother Mary Goretti of the Holy Face and Our Crowned Mother of El Palmar, co-founder of the above-mentioned anti-church or tenebrous sect within Our Holy Palmarian Church.
2. Ex-mother Mary Blanca of the Holy Face and St Anthony.
3. Ex-mother Mary Clare of the Holy Face and the Immaculate Conception.
4. Ex-mother Mary Christine of the Holy Face and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.
5. Ex-mother Mary Presentation of the Holy Face and St Bernard.
6. Ex-mother Mary Faith of the Holy Face and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
7. Ex-mother Mary Judith of the Holy Face and St Joseph.³⁰²

Referring to his own Apostolic Constitution of July 30, 1982, Gregory withdrew all priestly and episcopal powers from the expelled bishops. He banished all 25 members from the order and imposed a threat of excommunication on Palmarians who had any contact with any of them.

Being expelled, many of the friars and nuns lived in an independent Palmarian community in the Andalusian town of Archidona. In the beginning, this alternative community were made up of twelve friars and

³⁰¹ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, November 7, 2000.

³⁰² Gregory XVII, Apostolic Decree, November 7, 2000.

six nuns. Although they still regarded early apparitions to Clemente Domínguez as veracious and believed that Gregory XVII indeed had been the true pope, with the development of the Palmarian Bible (or even from the mid-1990s), he had become a heretic who thus had lost his papal authority.³⁰³ In 2001, part of the group tried to establish a community in Paraguay, but it was not long-lived.³⁰⁴ Through the years, the ‘Archidona group’ was gradually reduced, and today (2020) the group is constituted by a few friars and nuns.³⁰⁵

More bishops and nuns were expelled from Palmar in the coming years. When thrown out of the order, in the best of circumstances, they were given a ticket to return to their home countries; nothing else. Still, the group of friars and nuns who were expelled in the year 2000 or shortly after that did not constitute a theologically distinct group. Some concluded that the Palmarian teachings, from beginning to end, were devoid of any truth, and some thought Gregory had become a heretic sometime in the 1990s, while at the same claiming that he had indeed been a true pope.³⁰⁶

Today, many of the religious who left the church in the 2000s have eventually concluded that the Palmarian affair was a fraud from beginning to end. Writing more than fifteen years after he was expelled, one of the ex-bishops, ex-Fr. D, gives his view on the reported visions to Gregory, their form and contents, and way they were constructed:

In my experience and after having seen unpublished documents of the Palmarian church dealing with the visions of Clemente, from the beginning, messages transcribed in the books of messages given to Clement which did not resemble much to the original audio recordings. Many of them are full of heresies, contradictions, sarcasm, as well as lack of respect and humility in the voice of Clement. The celestial characters described by Clement in his visions were vacillating, impatient, gossiping, accomplices of scandals and

³⁰³ See their confessional statements on laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com

³⁰⁴ Personal communication with ex-Fr. C, 2017.

³⁰⁵ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

³⁰⁶ Communication with Fr. B and ex-Fr. C.

vices of himself, narcissistic, abusive, irrational worldly, capricious, unjust, and obsessive ...³⁰⁷

As has been shown, the continuously reported apparitions dealt with both greater and smaller things and often contradicted each other, making life unsure and chaotic for the religious and the faithful at large. Writing about his views on Gregory and Isidoro María, Fr. D is totally convinced that the messages were fraudulent, actively and deliberately fabricated by the leaders as part of their search for money and power:

In my opinion and after investigating the past and later life of Clemente, I came to the conclusion that he, with the help and malice of Manolo [Manuel Alonso] and Carmelo [Pacheco], deceived us and constructed the whole system that until today makes the Palmarian church a destructive sect, a source for economic profit and an arena of spiritual and social coercion. The pathology of deceit and lies made a story that still continues, trapping its followers with its tentacles.³⁰⁸

Back in the last months of 2000, Gregory XVII sought to take control over the crisis that followed in the wake of the expulsion of more than a third of the bishops. Several of them had been missionary-bishops in other parts of the world, and the expulsion led to the implosion of the international ministry. In less than two months, between October 27 and December 17, 2000, Gregory preached eleven very long sermons, each lasting between two and four hours. Most of the printed versions fill 30–40 closely written pages each.

Not surprisingly, the central theme of the sermons was the recent events in the church, which Gregory XVII regarded as attempts to build an antichurch, ‘a tenebrous sect’, and to overthrow him as the pope. Though he named some of the other expelled bishops, a considerable

³⁰⁷ Testimony by ex-Fr D on the Palmarian Church/Iglesia Palmariana Facebook group; my translation.

³⁰⁸ Testimony by ex-Fr. D on Palmarian Church/Iglesia Palmariana Facebook group; my translation.

portion of the sermons is about or directed to Fr. Isaac María, comparing him to the ‘heresiarch’ Martin Luther. Gregory also accused individual members of the group of planning to kill him.³⁰⁹ Referring to documents written by members of the group, which his closest men unearthed, Gregory related the main accusations against him: that he was crazy, a heretic and a tyrant. The pope’s men had found hidden diskettes containing letters and other documents. He was especially upset by their opposition to his ongoing project—the Palmarian Bible—and saw their rejection of this final revelation as blasphemy and a sin against the Holy Spirit, something that could not be forgiven.³¹⁰

Gregory accused Fr. Isaac María of wanting to turn himself into the pope, but stated that it would be impossible since he was one of the two popes in history directly elected by Christ, the other being St. Peter; and even if they managed to kill him, Fr. Isidoro Maria would still become his successor.³¹¹ He argued that due to the revolt, the safe Ark of the Palmarian Church had been at risk in a stormy sea and that it had been necessary to dispose of some ‘ballast’, i.e. the apostate bishops and nuns. He also claimed that the church still smelt of ‘pus, of ulcer because of the venom introduced by the false reformers’. This called for prayer and the making of acts of reparation among the religious and the faithful.³¹²

In his sermons at the end of the year 2000, Gregory repeatedly confessed that he had committed many mortal sins, both before and after assuming the papacy. At the same time, he stated he had converted and made reparation for his transgressions. He admitted that he had caused many scandals through his sinful behaviour and that he had been an obstacle for the faithful. In fact, he stated that ‘the cathedral in Palmar de Troya would not be big enough, to house all his sins.’ From the papal cathedra, he confessed to gluttony, to heavy drinking and to sins against

³⁰⁹ Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

³¹⁰ Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

³¹¹ Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

³¹² Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

chastity.³¹³ Trying to defend his authority, the Palmarian pope argued that it was necessary ‘to separate Gregory from Clemente,’ that is, the papal office from his person.³¹⁴

The drinking habits of Pope Gregory were famed, and he sometimes appeared very drunk at church services and on apostolic journeys. According to ex-members, this was accepted, or at least not openly criticised by the faithful, as Gregory was the Vicar of Christ and the great seer of Palmar. The pope simply behaved in that way.³¹⁵ Among the episodes that caused much consternation among local people was the pope’s and other friars’ presence at the Feria de Abril, Seville’s weeklong popular celebration, where they took part at least until the early 1990s. One ex-bishop writes about these events:

Clemente would take groups of up to 20 bishops with him. We were often invited into private booths. Bishops often would begin dancing in the feria. On top of the scandals caused there was the expense incurred. There were no limits. And if Clemente ran out of money somebody would be sent back to father Isidoro to get extra cash. Most times the group would arrive home at about 6am. This was not an isolated occasion in the sense that for the feria week, Clemente could go every second day. But this is just the tip of the iceberg.³¹⁶

According to many former members, including ex-bishops, homosexual relations between clerics had been common, and there were reports of sexual abuse. Despite the unambiguous teachings of the church and the vow of chastity that the friars took, these acts were generally not counteracted by the foremost leaders; quite the contrary. In his sermon on October 27, 2000, the pope made explicit reference to his aberrant behaviour, but claimed that he had mended his ways:

³¹³ Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

³¹⁴ Gregory XVII, sermon, 2000.

³¹⁵ Personal communication with ex-members.

³¹⁶ Personal communication with ex-Fr. C, 2017.

One could accuse Us ... of scandals related to the excess of drinking and to some aspects related to chastity: this is true, this is true. But in these last years, from October 1997, three long years, you should know for certain, that We, as far as We know, We have not committed a cardinal sin of any kind.³¹⁷

Gregory XVII had made public confessions of this kind earlier in his pontificate, too. In fact, in one of his official pontifical decrees from 1980, he confessed that he had been committed to gluttony and was guilty of numerous acts of lascivious behaviour. In this context, he saw his blindness as a blessing, helping him counteract his sinful urges.³¹⁸ In the year 2000, Gregory maintained: '[n]ever in Our pontificate, never has it occurred that We have been two days in succession in mortal sin, never.'³¹⁹ He also referred to a formal document in which he had offered his whole life to make reparation for his and others' sins, continuing

Recently, through a Sacred Apostolic Decree, We have offered Ourselves to God voluntarily as victim soul, to serve as holocaust in the service of Christ Jesus our Lord and God and His Immaculate Spouse the Church, the Holy Palmarian Church. This offering of victim soul is to the extent that We have renounced the promised miracle of the recovery of Our eyes. Do you know what this means? A blind man renouncing the promise of a miracle to regain his eyes, for Our spiritual good, for it is Our desire to obtain, in perpetuity, the grace of Chastity We have been enjoying for a little over three years now.³²⁰

In this context, he thought that the opposition of the ex-fathers and ex-nuns were particularly strange, as he had undergone such a profound change. In a later sermon, on the feast of St. Lucy, he referred to himself as 'the Vicar of Christ, Gregory XVII, "De Gloria Olivae," the Blind

³¹⁷ Gregory XVII, Sermon, October 27, 2000; my translation.

³¹⁸ PD 27.

³¹⁹ Gregory XVII, Sermon, December 10, 2000.

³²⁰ Gregory XVII, Sermon, November, 26, 2000.

Watchman of the Church.’³²¹ Especially in the last few sermons, Gregory related that he and his closest men had talked to Fr. Isaac María and Mother Maria Goretti at various occasions until they did not answer anymore. Gregory XVII gave them and others the chance to return before December 23, which would be the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Carmelites of the Holy Face.

Following an abjuration and a declaration of each infallible teaching of the pope, with a few exceptions, the expelled members would be able to re-enter the order. He once more made a distinction between Clemente and Gregory. It was the latter, not the former, they should revere and obey. Neither Fr. Isaac María, nor any other of the expelled friars or nuns returned. With the help of a lawyer, they accused Gregory and his closest men of harassment.³²² They were not impressed by invitation by the pope, and some of the ex-bishops testify that on many occasions Gregory phoned them threatening, pleading and shouting.³²³

Economy

The turbulence around the year 2000 coincided with a financial crisis. Throughout most of its history, many people have wondered how the Palmarian Church became and remained so wealthy. It has always been challenging to know precisely how the Palmarians were able to assemble such substantial funds, despite being a rather small and steadily shrinking organisation. During the 1970s, 1980s and, to some extent, into the 1990s, they had a massive capital influx from many sources. People paid part of their salary to the church, and it became the beneficiary in many last wills and testaments. The messages that they sent to adherents often included pleas and appeals for donations.³²⁴ They could also count on a few

³²¹ Gregory XVII, Sermon, December 13, 2000.

³²² Gregory XVII, Sermons, December 10, 13 and 17, 2000.

³²³ Personal communication with ex-Fr. C and ex-Fr. D.

³²⁴ Personal communication with ex-members.

individual members, who regularly provided the church with very substantial contributions. For almost 25 years, until her death in 2001, one of the main benefactors was the very wealthy woman, who lived in Necedah, Wisconsin.³²⁵ Yet another benefactor was a man from the same region, who has continued to provide substantial financial support, as did members from different parts of the world, including Switzerland, Austria, and Germany.³²⁶ The two most generous individual donors seem to have been a Swiss woman who died in the mid-1980s and a German woman who is still a church member.³²⁷

In the late 1970s and with the help of the donations, the leaders acquired around fifteen properties in the city-centre of Seville totalling around 3,000 square metres, which served as headquarters and convents. They also bought houses in the town of El Palmar and in the regional centre of Utrera. They were also 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. Its construction began in the late 1970s but was not finished until more than three decades later.³²⁸

Further, the cathedral was filled with precious, Baroque style objects. It had one very lavishly decorated main altar where the images of the Holy Face and Our Lady of Palmar were placed, and fourteen lateral altars overflowing with elaborate golden ornaments which were commissioned, as well as many gold, silver and jewelled statues of saints, a large number of liturgical vessels, and a colossal monstrance. The church also commissioned seventeen large and richly decorated *pasos*—floats that are used in religious processions. Moreover, the large group of bishops had very elaborate liturgical vestments in different colours. Generally, the Palmarian leaders only accepted garments of the utmost quality. They

³²⁵ Personal communication with ex-members, cf. PLS, vol 1: 240–241.

³²⁶ Garrido Vázquez 2004 and Garrido Vázquez 2008; cf. *Diario de Sevilla* October 5, 2003.

³²⁷ Personal communication with ex-members, cf. PLS, vol. 5: 1421–1422.

³²⁸ Molina 2006; cf. *Diario de Sevilla* October 5, 2003.

kept some of the finest jewellers and embroiders in Andalusia busy for years.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the church owned at least fifteen vans, which went to and from El Palmar de Troya daily. Though most of them lived a frugal life, there was significant daily expenses involved with feeding a large number of clerics and nuns. The international missionary work and the ministry to Palmarians around the world also included high costs for travelling, though the international activities became much less extensive in the 1990s as the membership decreased. Another costly part of the ministry was the printing of a large edition of books and booklets in several languages, as well as the costs of distribution.³²⁹

Although the liturgical paraphernalia, the convent life and the dissemination of Palmarian prints involved high costs, there were other expensive activities. Testimonies abound about the spending of vast amounts on food, drink and travel for a select few at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, including the pope and his closest men. Many, both ex-bishops and outsiders, testify to the extravagant and ample drinking and eating at the most excellent restaurants in the city and in other places, as well as stays at exquisite hotels.³³⁰

The decreasing number of members meant a dwindling influx of capital, and in 2003, the Palmarians had to sell their remaining properties in Seville; other real estate had been sold before, together with some of the jewellery used for images in the cathedral.³³¹

The Apocalyptic Noah

In the first years after the turn of the millennium, the Palmarian church was an organisation in crisis. Interestingly, at the time of the secessions and

³²⁹ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

³³⁰ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

³³¹ For Palmarian economy, see *Diario de Sevilla*, October 5, 2003; and *El Mundo*, March 27, 2005; cf. Molina 2006.

expulsions at 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 formalised and institutionalised, had Gregory XVII fallen into *public* ecstasy, claiming to receive heavenly messages before the eyes of the faithful at a religious service. After 2000, it happened again.

For example, there is a video recording showing the pope's entry in the Basilica in Palmar de Troya on January 1, 2001. Under a canopy and surrounded by bishops, he is falling in ecstasy kneeling, smiling and making the sign of the cross, after that waking up, looking bewildered. Images of this and other ecstasies just after the turn of the millennium were distributed to the faithful.³³² Official Palmarian documents reported an hour-long 'extraordinary vision' in the basilica, on January 21, 2001, where Christ thanked Gregory XVII for his expulsions of friars and nuns in the previous year.

O beloved Vicar of Mine, I am pleased, because you have made known to the whole Church the names of the perverse bishops and perverse nuns you expelled a short time ago. Yes, beloved Vicar of Mine, you are right: they formed an anti-church, and hence a tenebrous sect. They tried to abolish your Papal Authority, but you are here and they are outside. Let all pray for them. They are like sheep without a shepherd. The whole Church should give thanks to Me for having elected a strong Vicar for these Last Times. The Church of Mine should have perfect clarity on the matter of the withdrawal of priestly powers. From whomever you take away priestly powers they are taken away: for you gave them, and you take them away. O beloved Vicar of Mine that is how I like you to be: valiant. Away with false charity. Make use of the flaming sword in defence of the Holy Palmarian Church. Do not allow those who work against Her to stay inside of Her.³³³

³³² See, e.g. a leaflet entitled 'Cristo está con su vicario' (Christ is with his Vicar) with photos of the ecstasies on January 1, 2001 and another leaflet with photos of an ecstasy on February 21, 2002, cf. HVM2.

³³³ HVM2, message February 21, 2001.

These public ecstasies were undoubtedly a way to present evidence that Christ and the Virgin were on Gregory's side, thus defending his papal authority, while the expelled friars and nuns served Satan. According to the pope, the faithful members of the visible church under his absolute rule were about to enter the Ark of Salvation, whose door soon would be closed. The End was near. In a sermon on the 25th anniversary of his papal election in 2003, he stated

Gregory XVII is now in Noah's Ark as the new Noah, the apocalyptic Noah. The only thing that is lacking is that Christ says, 'Close the door to the Ark,' and not as it used to rain [in the time of Noah], but according to this age, this era, as God's way to punish this misled humanity.³³⁴

In a 2005 apostolic letter, themes of martyrdom and isolation from non-Palmarians were central. The Palmarian faithful must be willing to give his or her life for the church (bloody martyrdom), but every day should be characterised by heroic fulfilment of the will of God, even if outsiders will persecute and ridicule them (un-bloody martyrdom). According to the pope, the church was once again being forced to live in the catacombs. These 'spiritual catacombs' are the Palmarian teachings and morals that distinguish the faithful from the fallen world. These were indeed not new themes, but now they totally dominated the messages.

In Gregory's view, the church militant was minuscule, but it consisted of the only people that obey the divine, and by consequence, papal will. To remain faithful Christians, they were ordered to break with non-Palmarian family members (in particular, 'apostates' who had left the church), and contact with people at work or in school should be kept to an absolute minimum.

³³⁴ Gregory XVII, Sermon, August 6, 2003; my translation.

[I]t is essential that we valiantly break with all that can stain our souls. If the integrity of our Palmarian Catholic Faith so requires, we should break valiantly with our own family, however close and dear they may be to us, with our friendships and with many other things around us. In brief, we must dispense with all that combats our Faith, God's Law and Church dispositions that is if we truly wish to be Palmarian faithful. ... See how His Holiness Pope Gregory XVII, zealous guardian of souls, ever on the watch and wide-awake, is further modelling and purifying our Christian lives, and ever further straightening the way we are to follow, with the aim of isolating us from the worlds seductive depravities.³³⁵

All contact with ex-members was thus strictly forbidden, and photos and other memorabilia of them should be destroyed to wipe out their memory. Many former Palmarians who have grown up in the church, but left as teenagers or young adults, testify that they can meet their Palmarian parents, siblings or old friends on the street, and they either do not greet them, or they just turn around. They hang up the phone when trying to call them and do not answer any letters. If family members who still belonged to the church interacted with ex-members, they would be automatically excommunicated. The total shunning of 'apostates' was thus an absolute rule, and there are many testimonies about this way of acting that make the life of former Palmarians even more difficult.³³⁶

The Cathedral-Basilica

By the turn of the millennium, it was possible for outsiders to attend evening services at the Cathedral-Basilica in El Palmar de Troya, if the armed guard at the gate of the five-meter high wall that surrounded the compound thought that visitors met the Palmarian dress regulations. In July 2001, half a year after the mass expulsion of bishops and nuns, I had

³³⁵ Gregory XVII, Apostolic letter, January 24, 2005; my translation.

³³⁶ Personal communication with ex-members.

the opportunity to go there, along with two others. We were two men and one woman, clad according to Palmarian norms, or so we thought. I wore a dark suit and buttoned-up shirt. The woman wore a very long dark skirt, dark pantyhose and her head was covered with a shawl. The two of us could enter, while our friend could not. He wore a buttoned-up shirt and dark pants that we thought were strict enough. That was a mistake, as his trousers had a fifth pocket, which the guard said was jeans-related and thus a sign of intolerable modernism. It would be a sacrilege to enter the holy site dressed in that way.

The day we visited the Basilica was very hot, as is typical in southern Andalusia in the middle of the summer: 43 degrees Celsius. The two of us who were let in passed the guard and walked down the plaza towards the cathedral. At its entrance, we were met by a bishop and a nun, who placed us on different sides of the aisle. I sat on the left side and she on the right. We had to be on our knees the whole time we attended church, about two hours, supervised by the bishop and the nun. It was certainly no option to sit down, even if we felt dizzy in the heat.

At the front was the imposing main altar with images of the Holy Face and Our Lady of Palmar. There were also fourteen lateral altars. As we entered the Basilica, religious services were already going on. At the main altar, a bishop celebrated Mass turns, and two other bishops assisted him as deacon and sub-deacon. Mass turns were read on several of the lateral altars, too, all celebrants being bishops. Still, there were hardly any lay people present, about ten, and those attending were well spread out in the church building, dressed in different shades of brown. Most of them were elderly people on their knees, scapulars around their neck, praying the Penitential rosary. In short, there were more bishops than laypeople present in the cathedral. To the right of the main altar, there were some thirty or forty nuns, their faces totally covered with black veils, who could only be glimpsed behind grills.

After about two hours we left, but the religious service continued, probably well into the night. Just before leaving, we talked to the bishop and the nun who handed over booklets and images, where the recent public

ecstasies of Pope Gregory featured prominently. We did not receive any sermons from the year 2000, which included the accusations against the expelled friars and nuns. From this brief visit to the Palmarian cathedral, we could see that the interiors were very richly decorated, and that Mass turns were celebrated on several altars at the same time. Many bishops and nuns were present, but that the number of lay people was meagre. The combination of the enormous Basilica and the few people present was an unambiguous indication of the membership crisis.

Excursus: La Cruz Blanca

Though Clemente Domínguez and the group around him physically took over the apparition site in the early 1970s 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, a visitor to El Palmar de Troya can see a white cross with a picture of the Roman pope just outside the high walls of the Palmarian church compound. It is La Cruz Blanca, which is the gathering site for the seers who do not belong to the Palmarian church as well as 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 gathers at the site, including pilgrims from abroad. According to the group's website, through the decades the number of apparitions at the Cruz Blanca and in their chapel nearby, the Santuario del Corazón de María, is estimated to be about 10,000 to date. Of these, around a thousand have been transcribed, and a selection of messages from 1980 to 2013 is available on the website.³³⁷

In the beginning, several of the old seers claimed to receive heavenly communications at La Cruz Blanca, including Pepe Cayetano and Manuel Fernández, but in later years, only Rosario Arenillas claimed to receive

³³⁷ See the group's webpage, www.cruzblancapalmar.es

messages. Until his death in 2005, the group was led by Félix Arana, a former Roman Catholic priest. He was consecrated a Palmarian bishop in 1976, but he only stayed for a few months and then opposed the movement as it had developed, writing books and articles.³³⁸ Arana served as La Cruz Blanca's spiritual leader. He recorded the messages of the seers, and he transcribed, published and interpreted them. A whole series of books were published. Fr. Arana also celebrated daily Tridentine Masses in the chapel.

Christ and the Virgin are those who most frequently have appeared to the seers by La Cruz Blanca, followed by St. Joseph and Padre Pio. After his death, Father Arana also appeared on a few occasions, to invigorate the faithful. The messages often have a clear apocalyptic component. They are very critical of the modern 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 the pontiff suffers 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.³³⁹

The Cruz Blanca group's only relation to the Palmarian church referred to 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.

³³⁸ *ABC*, November 23, 1976; cf. Arana 1977. In the 1990s and 2000s, Fr. Arana also published a number of books on La Cruz Blanca.

³³⁹ A selection of Heavenly messages 1980–2015 and other information is available on www.cruzblancapalmar.es.

7. Pope Peter II

Holy Week in 2005 was a crucial time in the history of the Palmarian Church, as Gregory XVII died on March 21. In later years, he had once again become increasingly invisible in the life of the church and only appeared in Palmar de Troya on extraordinary religious festivities, being carried in his gestatorial chair, tiara, mitre or white biretta on his head. At his death, there was no conclave as he had already named Fr. Isidoro María successor. The latter was crowned on March 24, taking Peter II as his papal name.³⁴⁰ It is not known whether he regarded himself as Petrus Romanus, the last pope in history, according to the prophecies of St. Malachy.³⁴¹

The early biography of Manuel Alonso Corral–Fr. Isidoro María–Peter II is mainly known from Palmarian hagiographical texts. He was born in 1934 in Cabeza de Buey, Badajoz, Spain, where his father was a schoolteacher. During the Civil War, the family fled to Zamora, and after the war, they lived in Madrid. He wanted to enter a religious order, but according to the hagiography, his poor health prevented it. In 1952, at the age of 18, he made a vow of perpetual Slavery to Mary before an image of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Through this vow, he claimed to have been cured of severe lung disease.

In 1956, Manuel Alonso began working for the Nuclear Energy Board and took up Law studies, obtaining an academic degree in 1963. After that, he continued with Management studies and received another degree. During this period, Manuel was also an active member of Catholic Action and attended Mass on an almost daily basis. In 1968, he became the

³⁴⁰ Peter II, First Apostolic Letter, 2005; cf. *ABC*, March 23, 24 and 27, 2005.

³⁴¹ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree on the canonization of Peter II, July 31, 2011.

manager of a Catholic insurance company's branch in Seville. Shortly after moving to Seville, the news of the first apparitions in Palmar de Troya arrived. He met Clemente Domínguez in May that year, and they would soon begin to visit the site together.³⁴²

The primary sources for the study of the papal administration of Peter II are a series of thirty apostolic letters that he issued between 2005 and 2011. There are no published sermons. In his first apostolic letters, Peter II defended his position as the true successor of Gregory XVII the Very Great, whom he immediately canonised.³⁴³ Peter II never claimed to receive any private apparitions, but he had worked in tandem with Clemente since 1969, often being looked upon by critics as 'the brain behind it all.'

As pope, he mainly looked upon himself as the defender of teachings defined by Gregory XVII during his 27-year-papacy, concluding with the publication of the *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*. Thus, Peter II made few dogmas. One exception was a dogmatic definition on October 22, 2006, when he infallibly declared that Antichrist had been born in the year 2000. Another was a decree that dogmatically stated that he was a descendant of the Spanish king St. Ferdinand and of the parents of St. Teresa of Avila.³⁴⁴

During his pontificate, Peter II made several consecrations, in this context meaning the setting apart of something for the service of God, following, for example, Pius XII's consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1942. Peter II consecrated the Church Militant to the Eternal Father in 2008. In the same year, when reading Masses in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, he consecrated Russia to the Holy Face, to Our Crowned Lady of Palmar and to Our Crowned Saint Joseph of Palmar to promote the country's conversion to the Catholic faith. Already in 1980, Gregory XVII had consecrated Russia to the Immaculate

³⁴² Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree on the canonization of Peter II, July 31, 2011.

³⁴³ Peter II, Apostolic letters 1, April 23, 2005; and 3, May 22, 2005.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree on the canonization of Peter II, July 31, 2011.

Heart of Mary, following the message at Fatima. Finally, in 2010, Peter II consecrated the entire universe to the Holy Face.³⁴⁵ Still, these are exceptions to the rule; the vast majority of the apostolic letters deal with the necessity of Palmarians isolating themselves from the surrounding world; Satan was angrier than ever, trying to lure the faithful remnant from the right path.

Isolation and New Regulations

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. Many ex-members testify that they experienced this in a very concrete way.³⁴⁶ Messages about the necessity of breaking with the surrounding world and living according to strict Palmarian norms were present in every apostolic letter. One sign of the increasing isolation was that the digital presence of the Palmarians now became null. By the turn of the millennium, they still managed a website, but it had not been updated for a long time. Currently, it has closed down entirely. Even for a traditionalist group, this is highly unusual. Moreover, there is no official email address to the church, and it is even difficult to find the church's postal address or telephone number. [That changed only in 2018 with the new web site].³⁴⁷

On several occasions, Peter II reiterated the idea that the Palmarian Church was 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; they were 'woodworms'. Membership demanded much from an individual. They must destroy their TV sets, videos, mobile

³⁴⁵ Peter II, Apostolic letters 1–30 (2005–2011); cf. Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree on the canonization of Peter II, July 31, 2011.

³⁴⁶ Personal communication with ex-members 2005–2007.

³⁴⁷ On the Internet use in Marian apparition movements, see Apolito 2005. For Catholic Apocalypticist groups and the internet, see Cadone 2007: 164–214.

telephones and computers so they would not be infected by the ‘repugnant moral leprosy rampant in the world,’ as the pope phrased it.³⁴⁸

The only reading material that the Palmarian faithful should access were the documents of the church. Other books should be handed over to the church authorities to be destroyed. Members should also destroy all Palmarian material printed before the year 2001 when the new *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible* became a central confessional document.³⁴⁹ Collections of early heavenly messages were reprinted in the 2000s, and revised versions of the catechisms, prayer books and the *Treatise on the Mass* appeared in the first year of Peter II’s pontificate. According to their titles, all publications had been revised ‘in light of the teaching of the *Sacred History*.’³⁵⁰

As we have seen, to distinguish the faithful remnant from the world around, the Palmarian popes have established a long series of rules that members should obey. During the papacy of Peter II, the number of detailed regulations increased considerably, and many of the older ones have become even stricter. From its beginning, the Palmarian church has had a strict dress code, applicable both inside and outside the church buildings. In fact, clothes have an enormously central place in the church’s teaching, as they are considered tangible signs of membership, decorum and obedience. Not to be clad according to the norms inevitably lead to ex-communication. The first papal documents from 1978–1980 contained rules for dressing, as did a special apostolic decree 1985, but the norms have continuously been revised and made stricter. Around 2005, there appeared a special document called *Norms of Palmarian Christian Decency*.³⁵¹

For males, the dress regulations included a ban against the use of jeans and shorts, and pants should be loose-fitting and have no pockets in the trouser legs. In fact, there was a general prohibition against denim, a

³⁴⁸ Peter II, Apostolic letter 15, June 3, 2007.

³⁴⁹ Peter II, Apostolic letters 2, May 8, 2005; 6, November 20, 2005; 9, April 30, 2006; and 10, May 25, 2006.

³⁵⁰ See, e.g. PKO2, PG and TM; and personal communication with ex-members.

³⁵¹ DP, NP; and Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, October 9, 1985.

symbol of satanic modernism. Shirts should have long sleeves, always be buttoned up, and socks should be worn at all times. Sport shoes were banned, as were shirts and sweaters with texts or images. Men were not allowed to have long or dyed hair and should not have earrings.

Women should cover their heads both inside and outside of the church. Their dresses should be long-sleeved and not close fitting, and skirts should not be shorter than thirty-five centimetres above the ground and have no slits. Blouses should be buttoned up. From the age of fourteen, females must always wear dark stockings covering most of their legs. Women should, under no circumstances, use pants or even pyjamas, as it is considered men's wear. In practice, many Palmarian women wore long dark-brown or black clothing that almost reach the ground. Any transgression of the dress code would lead to excommunication, in many cases reserved to the pope.³⁵²

Many other rules distinguish Palmarians from what they see as the total moral depravity of the surrounding world. Church members are forbidden to visit beaches or swimming pools, attend nightclubs or discos, or listen to modern music or see movies (including cartoons), where characters are not dressed according to the rules. Taking part in or looking at sports where the players are not dressed according to Palmarian norms is also banned. Palmarians are not allowed to vote in general elections or enter the church buildings of other denominations, or to attend baptisms, weddings or funerals of non-Palmarians, including close relatives. Even more far-reaching was the general ban against talking to people not dressed in the Palmarian way, or non-Palmarians at large.³⁵³

Some rules are exact: Birthday candles are prohibited, as are Christmas trees. Parents are not allowed to say that Christmas presents are from Santa Claus, as he does not exist, and gifts should not be given on December 25 but on January 6. If members do not conform to these norms, ex-communication awaited them.³⁵⁴ To provide an example of how the

³⁵² NP.

³⁵³ Peter II, Apostolic letters, 1–30 (2005–2011).

³⁵⁴ Peter II, Apostolic letters. 1–30 (2005–2011).

rules could be phrased by Peter, it might be illustrative to quote the ban against listening to modern music:

Modern music, i.e. rock and all its derivatives, and suchlike, is the work of Satan himself. By means of that music, free rein is given to all man's lower passions. Hysteria, fanaticism, drug addiction, excessive drinking and many other psychical and physical disorders are fomented. Modern music is contrary to God's Infinite Beauty, the Sound Morals and to good taste in art. Consequently, it is a grievous peril for man; and so he is obliged to avoid all co-operation with and influence from such music, and openly reject it. It is a moral sin to have tapes or disks of that music, or to listen to it with attention. It should be born in mind that to hear is not to listen; so there is sin when, the music having been noted, it is expressly listened to. ... All those who still have any disks, mobile telephones or other apparatus forbidden by the Church, should hand them in quickly to their Missionary Bishop to be destroyed. ... We impose this duty under pain of excommunication reserved to Us. We hope that those who have been followers of satanic modern music bear forever in mind that this perversion is strictly forbidden by the Church.³⁵⁵

The number of Palmarians was continually decreasing during the pontificate of Peter II, and very few outsiders joined. Thus, the only chance for the church to grow was through reproduction. According to Peter II, for Palmarian couples, procreation was an 'unavoidable duty'; families should be large for the sake of the church. The pope even wrote about the 'priesthood of procreation.' Palmarian couples should not hinder pregnancies in any way, but should give birth to 'as many children as God may wish.' The pope also wrote about the 'heroic act' of a mother dying when giving birth to a new church member.³⁵⁶

Apart from the general membership crisis, there was a severe lack of vocations to the first and second orders, i.e. friars and nuns. Still, the pope was clear that it was better if the number of friars and nuns decreased,

³⁵⁵ Peter II, Apostolic letter 18, February 2, 2008.

³⁵⁶ Peter II, Apostolic letters 12 and 14, 2006.

rather than not living a wholehearted religious life: ‘Lukewarmness is the greatest evil in a religious order’. To reach perfection, it was, therefore, necessary to ‘dispense with the rotten apples’ as ‘slackness causes nausea to God Himself.’³⁵⁷

Leaving El Palmar

Though large groups of friars, nuns and laypeople left the church in the late 1990s and early years of the 2000s, it is imperative to note that many of those who abandoned the church did not do so for specific theological reasons. Many of the laypeople who left were teenagers or young adults who had grown up in the church but found the increasingly strict and ever-changing rules and the superiors’ attempts to take and retain total control unbearable. Numerous testimonies are recounting similar stories about young people abandoning the church, having to leave their family members behind, and slowly accommodate themselves to live outside.³⁵⁸

Testimonies about the shunning of ex-members were frequent on different web-forums, even before the death of Gregory XVII. On these forums, ex-members often stated that they had not met their parents or siblings after leaving. Some wrote that when they met family members or old friends in the street, the latter did not utter a single word, except perhaps to say ‘I cannot talk with you’. Letters were not answered, and phone calls were hung up on. Otherwise, they would be excommunicated for having contacts with apostates.³⁵⁹

From 2004 onwards, there was a long discussion thread on the *FACTnet* forum (related to anti-cultist group ‘Fight Against Coercive Tactics Network’), which provided many stories, mainly written by young Irish people, who had left the church in the last couple of years. Many of those who took part were ex-members, including former bishops, who

³⁵⁷ Peter II, Apostolic letters 11 and 14, 2006.

³⁵⁸ Personal communication with ex-members.

³⁵⁹ Personal communication with ex-members.

wrote about the history and the development of the church. Another forum at FACTnet was opened for Spanish speakers.³⁶⁰ At the same time, there appeared an Irish based support group for ex-Palmarians, which maintained an internet site. There, the group published information about the church, including the new list of *Norms*, as well as a collection of testimonies by former members. This site was not updated after 2006.³⁶¹ A Yahoo discussion group was founded in 2005. It still exists, but it was most active in the early years.³⁶²

Between 2007 and 2009, there was a discussion on the *Above top secret* forum, where several well-informed former members took part. At the same time, there were discussions about the church on Spanish web forums.³⁶³ In 2008, some Irish ex-members established the Palmarian Church Opposition movement. Under the pseudonym ‘Apostate Anonymous,’ they posted messages on YouTube, including readings from Peter II’s newly issued apostolic letters and from the Palmarian Bible. They feared the development within the church and accused Peter II of severe abuse and fraud. In what ‘Apostate Anonymous’ named the second phase, the opposition group posted a list of accusations at the Palmarian headquarters in Dublin to be delivered to Peter II. The group was most active until 2009.³⁶⁴

At this time, there were many testimonies about growing up in the Palmarian church, and about how the teachings of the church had affected their life. One, written in 2006, is by an anonymous Irish former member, who was born into the church but left at sixteen.

³⁶⁰ The www.factnet.org discussion threads are not on-line anymore, but in 2006, I secured copies of the English and Spanish discussion threads that counts to no less than 280 pages of text.

³⁶¹ [Palmar de Troya Support: www.homepage.eircom.net/~palmardetroya/index.htm](http://www.homepage.eircom.net/~palmardetroya/index.htm)

³⁶² [Palmar de Troya: groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/palmar_discussion/info](http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/palmar_discussion/info)

³⁶³ ‘The Palmarian Church: Anyone familiar with these guys?’: www.above-topsecret.com/forum/thread306649/pg1

³⁶⁴ For details, see *Apostate Activist* in the list of references under the subheading “TV, Radio, Films and Photos”.

From a very young age, I attended Catechism, religious class. This was a blatant tool to expose the young mind to Palmarian Doctrine and all it contained. My head was regularly filled with the apocalyptic imagery and prophecies, always with the drilling that if you stay in the Palmarian Cult you will be saved. If you were to leave, your fate would be so much worse than someone who was never Palmarian, you chose to reject the truth and so are automatically damned—no question. These classes were a calculated attempt to instil the mortal fear of the doom-laden future into the young mind, with the only chance of redemption being membership of the Cult. The aim of this? To ensure you never leave and with time become as dependent on the Cult as your parents. There were several different classes, each with 8 or more people. I can remember the glazed expression on some, the puzzlement on others, I have seen some become fanatical their whole behaviour change, some impassive and even some liberal, these were usually the ones to leave.

It did work I must admit, some of my earliest memories centre around the terror evoked by images of an apocalyptic future, everything that I loved and knew were to be taken away from me in the most brutal and violent way possible, all my friends were to die, Ireland was to be destroyed in a blaze of fire. The end was to come suddenly and we should lock our doors and not answer to anyone, no matter if we knew them, or how terribly they would scream, as the terrible retribution rained down upon them. These images were presented to me as fact by my 'teachers' and verified by my parents, the people I should trust more than anyone in the world; this made it all the more real and terrifying. Objective questioning was frowned upon, even stopped abruptly; common occurrences were when a question would be put to the priest that had no answer for so he would try to bluff it, dithering his way through a half-baked concept. We would tend to accept this as we generally held him in high regard and interpreted his dithering as an attempt to find the words to

explain complex beliefs to children, it never dawned on us that he didn't have an answer to begin with.³⁶⁵

Another vital testimony, published in 2015, but mostly referring to events more than a decade earlier, is Catherine Rhodes's autobiographical essay *Freedom's Price*. Rhodes grew up in the United States with Palmarian parents and grandparents. Like many others, she testifies to an increasing number of exact rules in the early 2000s.

The list of things we couldn't do, see, hear and watch was long. We couldn't let our wrist, knees or the indent on our necks show. We couldn't listen to music or read books not approved by the church. We couldn't speak to anyone who left the church. We couldn't date anyone who was not a member of the church, and friendships with outsiders were discouraged. The pages of rules kept in Mom's little wooden desk held sacred words etched by his holiness, our self-elected pope. To question any of his infallible words was grounds for excommunication.³⁶⁶

Though her life was curtailed, she met a man who was a Protestant, fell in love with and eventually left her home. This must have been around the year 2005. Her only sister, with whom she had had a very close relationship, shunned her according to church rules, just sending an email to her: 'You had a choice, and you made it. I will only talk with you if you come to us repentant and wanting to come back to the church.' Catherine Rhodes ends the essay by writing about her sister, a passage that illustrates the practice and personal experience of shunning.

I am trying to remember all her little quirks, when I realize, after nine years I am losing them. What was that silly dance she did when she won a game? We had a nightly ritual: pray, hug, and then... it's gone. What is seared in my memory is the last glance of her slamming

³⁶⁵ Testimony by ex-member, 2006, see Palmar de Troya Support: homepage. www.eirconet.net/~palmardetroya/index.htm

³⁶⁶ Rhodes 2015.

the door in my face, my last letter to her returned unopened, and that powerful last touch before I left. I am tormented by what she must now think of me. A sinner? A traitor? Will these tortured feelings end if the Palmarian Catholic church crumbles?³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ Rhodes 2015.

8. Pope Gregory XVIII

After six years in office and a long period of grave illness, Pope Peter II died on July 15, 2011. His assigned successor was Fr. Sergio María, who was born in 1959 in Mula, Murcia as Ginés Jesús Hernández Martínez. The available sources to his early life are few and hagiographical. According to his own testimony, he grew up in Valencia and frequented the apparition site at Palmar de Troya from the early 1970s. For a brief period, he attended a Roman Catholic priest seminary, but believing in the papal claims of Clemente Domínguez, he joined the Carmelites of the Holy Face in September 1978, only to leave four months later. According to many sources, he later became a military officer, but in sermons and later interviews, Hernández stated that he, in fact, worked as an electrician.³⁶⁸

In 1984, he returned to the Carmelites of the Holy Face and was consecrated a bishop before the end of the year. When joining the order, Fr. Sergio María became his religious name. With time, he assumed increasingly important positions in the Palmarian hierarchy. By the end of the 1990s, he was at the very pinnacle. In 1997, both Fr. Leandro María and Fr. Elias María died. At their deaths, Sergio María replaced Fr. Elias María as Substitute Secretary of State and thus became number three in the Palmarian hierarchy. His role became even more central after the great expulsion in 2000.

When Gregory XVII died in 2005, Sergio María advanced to the position of Secretary of State and Vice General of the Carmelites of the Holy Face. As second in rank, he acted as the primary administrator of the church under the increasingly frail Peter II. As the Palmarian cardinalate

³⁶⁸ SHP; Gregory XVIII, Sermons, 15 August 2011 and January 20, 2013; cf. Mayer 2011.

was abolished in the mid-1990s, the reigning pope should name his successor. Having been severely ill for an extended period, on March 3, 2011, Peter II formally appointed Sergio María as his successor.³⁶⁹

Towards the end of Peter II's papacy, several ex-Palmarians, both clergy and laypeople, told me that they feared that the conditions in the church would deteriorate even more if Sergio María came to power. Without exception, all my informants at the time described him as an irate and unpredictable person. They also claimed that his position was questioned in the church and that he had many critics among the bishops. Thus, if he came to power, there would probably be new expulsions of groups and individuals.³⁷⁰

Pope Peter II died during the novena of Our Crowned Mother of Palmar when many faithful had gathered at the Cathedral-Basilica. As his successor was appointed, the papal transition went fast, and Sergio María was crowned on July 17, taking the name Gregory XVIII. On that occasion, he immediately canonised his predecessor as St. Peter II, the Great, and declared him Doctor of the Church. At the same time, the new pope appointed Fr. Eliseo María of the Holy Face and St. Joseph, a Swiss bishop originally called Markus Josef Odermatt, as his Secretary of State.³⁷¹

Shortly after the papal coronation, Gregory XVIII declared 2012 a Holy Year, with special indulgences for those who attended the Basilica and convened the bishops to a Third Palmarian Council to begin in January 2012.³⁷² The Council was probably a way for Gregory to strengthen his own position, which was internally questioned, and establish stricter rules of behaviour. He had to show that he would continue in the footsteps of the pioneers, Gregory XVII and Peter II. In the official presentation of the Palmarian Church and its popes that were printed

³⁶⁹ SHP; Peter II, Apostolic decree, March 3, 2011, cf. Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, July 31, 2011.

³⁷⁰ Personal communication with ex-members 2010–2011.

³⁷¹ SHP; cf. Mayer 2011.

³⁷² Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, 2011; cf. Mayer 2011.

shortly after his coronation, he gave the following description of his papal role:

From the Mystical Desert of El Palmar de Troya, His Holiness Pope Gregory XVIII, as true Vicar of Christ, on the watch and wide awake, continues to shepherd the flock of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Palmarian, confided by him by her Divine Founder, Our Lord Jesus Christ. In a world of general apostasy, this Great Caudillo of the Tajo, combats present-day errors and aberrations with firmness and courage thus preparing the Church for coming apocalyptic events, which will culminate with Christ's Second Coming, very close.³⁷³

The text clearly stressed the continuity with his predecessors; anything else would have been revolutionary. The new pope presented himself as a defender of the church against the forces of darkness that reigned outside the Palmarian Ark of Salvation. He was also the Great Caudillo, the spiritual-military leader, who would lead the faithful in the final battles against Antichrist and his followers. Thus, in his presentation, he closely followed traditional Palmarian rhetoric.

Still, the new papacy meant a generation shift. Gregory XVIII was born in 1959, while his predecessors were born in 1946 and 1934 respectively. Moreover, he was not among the bishops consecrated in the 1970s, though many of them were not much older. The new pope was above all a manager and administrator, and not much of a theologian. According to both himself and others, he lacked the charismatic authority of the seer, Gregory XVII, or the writing skills of Peter II. Shortly after Gregory's ascent to the papacy, *El Correo de Andalucía* published an article about him, entitled "La llegada del papa-gestor"—The Coming of the Manager-Pope. The article was based on an interview with journalist Jorge Molina, who had covered the Palmarians for a long time. He characterised the new

³⁷³ SHP.

pope as an astute administrator, but also stated, ‘He is a person without any mystical pedigree, and does not have the glamour of the pioneers.’³⁷⁴

The Manager-Pope

Apart from testimonies by ex-members, the primary sources to the papal administration of Gregory XVII are eight encyclicals and eight published sermons. Moreover, I have had access to a complete series of his apostolic decrees and other documents that were sent to members between 2011 and 2016.

Little less than a month after his coronation, on August 15, 2011, Gregory XVIII signed his first encyclical. On the same day, he held a long sermon, which later was printed. This sermon is quite unstructured. His colloquial style was very unlike the sermons of Gregory XVII, which were filled with dialogues between him and various celestial beings or verbose interpretations of biblical texts or dogmatic teachings, and Peter II, who used a quite complex, meandering language in his Apostolic Letters.³⁷⁵

Most often, Gregory XVIII began his sermons by stating that he had not planned to preach, but that he felt compelled. He also mentioned that the sermon would not be long, but they all were. Many were two or three hours long, and in printed form, they reached between 20 and more than 40 closely written pages. It is evident that he did not preach from notes but at liberty. In the sermons, he generally stated that he would revise them before printing them. Still, several ex-Palmarians who were present at those occasions indicate that the spoken sermons were very different from the printed ones; they were very harsh and included rebukes of individuals.

However, even in the printed sermons, the new pope comes through as annoyed and quite aggressive. Throughout, he reprimanded the faithful, though not mentioned individually, for not living according to the norms of the church, and for not realising what a great privilege it was to be a

³⁷⁴ *El Correo de Andalucía*, July 30, 2011.

³⁷⁵ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August, 15, 2011.

Palmarian. They should not complain. The church was under constant attack; it was threatened from all sides and by lukewarm people from within, whom Peter II had referred to as ‘woodworms’ that made the structure unstable. There was no place for any half-heartedness in the Church Militant. Gregory said that many young people had apostatised and he thought that many others were close. This was particularly the case in Ireland, which he singled out in other documents as the most problematic part of the church.³⁷⁶

In his first sermon, Gregory XVIII indicated that the Palmarian church continued to shrink and that nothing indicated that the drainage would end anytime soon. Some would leave, and others would be expelled. In the current era of general apostasy, prayer and penance were the only means available for the Palmarians; those were the methods for reparation indicated by Christ and the Virgin through the heavenly messages to Clemente Domínguez. He emphasised that all faithful should pray for their own and other Palmarians’ salvation, but not for outsiders, as they were not worthy of such intercession. The church was the Ark of Salvation and to remain on-board was difficult, but it was necessary not to perish. A constant fight against oneself and the world at large was required to have even a chance to escape eternal damnation.³⁷⁷

To be able to remain in the Ark, Palmarians should be separated from all others. In increasing degree, that had been a norm since the foundation of the church. Still, it became increasingly central towards the end of Gregory XVII’s papacy. During the pontificate of Gregory XVIII, radical separation from the outside world became *the* central issue in official documents.³⁷⁸ In the first sermon, he emphasised that the faithful’s contacts with non-Palmarians should be minimal. There should be only necessary communication at work or in school. Schoolchildren were prohibited from talking or playing with their peers at breaks, and workers

³⁷⁶ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁷⁷ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Peter II, Apostolic Letters 1–30 (2005–2011).

should only do their job in the strictest sense, not interact with colleagues in other ways.³⁷⁹

When meeting outsiders, Palmarians should end the conversation as soon as possible, for example, by saying that he or she could not talk with a person not dressed according to the norms. Friendships between Palmarians and non-Palmarians was impossible. At most, there could be acquaintances. Moreover, and most importantly, members should not have any contact whatsoever with former Palmarians—apostates. Not mincing matters, Gregory XVIII stated that one word to an apostate meant excommunication.³⁸⁰

According to Gregory, the *Palmarian Norms* should be well known by all faithful. In this context, the concept referred to a long list of rules and prescriptions, which were initially issued in 2004–2005, but revised and expanded on several times in the decade to come. According to Gregory, nobody could claim to be unaware of these norms. They had existed for a long time and were very clear, according to him. He said that many still claimed that were not sure how to interpret the rules, and tried to find ways to escape or compromise. This was unacceptable.³⁸¹

Gregory XVIII contended that it was St. Gregory XVII, the Very Great, who together with him drew up the original list of Norms, based on his alleged private revelations. In that way, he asserted that they were the work of his predecessor and that he had been an entrusted co-worker in this crucial task. The words of the seer of Palmar de Troya could hardly be questioned, as he received them directly from God. Gregory thus followed in the steps of the elect seer.³⁸²

In his first sermon, and on many later occasions, Gregory XVIII told the faithful that they were free to leave the church whenever they wanted; they were no prisoners. But to leave had consequences; they would become apostates and could not be saved from eternal damnation. Expulsion was

³⁷⁹ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁸⁰ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁸¹ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁸² NPC; cf. NPD.

also a constant threat to the members. The pope made decisions about whom to expel, and his word was final. Thus, the faithful believed that they would end up in hell if the pope decided that they were not worthy. Taking into account his bad temper and inconsistent behaviour, he was undoubtedly feared. In a later sermon, he put it clearly. It was better to leave than to be half-hearted.

No one keeps you tied down; no one. Whoever does not want to be inside Holy Mother Church has only to go; out of respect tell the Missionary: 'I am leaving the Church', so that we cross out the name, and that's that; and so know that such-and-such a person is an apostate, if he wants to, and if not, time will tell. It is only God who obliges us; God.³⁸³

While preaching in 2011, Pope Gregory XVIII stated that the church probably had less than 2,000 members. They were just a couple of thousand in a world of about seven billion people—not including those living on the Planet of Mary, and other inhabited planets. In most countries of the world, there was not a single Palmarian. Thus, they were divinely elect. Though already reduced, the faithful remnant would probably become even smaller. Gregory XVIII referred to his predecessor Gregory XVII, who prophesied that at some point in the future, only fifteen friars would remain in the Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face. At the time of the sermon, there were about 40 left.³⁸⁴

He urged every young Palmarian who felt any kind of vocation to religious life, to join the Order. At the time, the median age of the friars was 54 years. For nuns, it was 58 years. In his Christmas sermon in 2013, Gregory said that he did not remember the last time a novice had taken vows, and only two men had entered as friars in latter years.³⁸⁵ These two men were, indeed, ordained priest and consecrated bishop in December 2014. One of them was a 32-year-old Spaniard, the other a 19-year-old

³⁸³ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, March 19, 2012.

³⁸⁴ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August, 15, 2011

³⁸⁵ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, December 25, 2013.

German. As far as is known these were the first, and last, consecrations during Gregory's pontificate.³⁸⁶

As before, the only way for the church to grow seemed to be through reproduction, and that single members should enter the order. Gregory XVIII stressed that it was of utmost importance for young people to consider whether they had a vocation for religious life or if they should marry. They should 'find their state in life' early on, and preferably marry or enter the order before the age of 21. Gregory wrote that neither religious life nor matrimony were easy paths, but to remain unmarried without entering religious life was egotistic. In this context, the pope mentioned that religious life had never been easy for him. He had never felt 'any spiritual delights and joys,' but always acted out of duty, and so should all faithful.³⁸⁷

In his sermon, Gregory XVIII drew a parallel between the Palmarian Church and the Jesuit missions in colonial South America. The Jesuits wanted the Christianized Indians, with whose souls they were entrusted, to live apart from the world. But according to Gregory, by the mid-eighteenth-century, Freemasonry had entered deeply into both state and church. Consequently, the Jesuits were expelled from the missions and the Spanish empire at large. Somewhat later, the order was extinguished. Gregory asserted that the threat against the true church came from the same source today. Freemasonry was the global enemy, and masons would do everything in their power to destroy the true church. In the End time, Satan's force was greater than ever, and to obey the pope was, therefore, more important than ever before.³⁸⁸

During his first months as pope, Gregory XVIII made some quite dramatic changes in the liturgical calendar. The most important was that Easter would no longer be a moveable feast. Beginning in 2012, Holy Friday would always be on 25 March, which was the precise date of Christ's

³⁸⁶ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, December 28, 2014.

³⁸⁷ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

³⁸⁸ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August, 15, 2011 and First Encyclical, August 15, 2011.

death according to the *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*. It did not matter whether it was a Friday or not. At the same time, he also decreed that Corpus Christi should not be celebrated in June, but on October 13, the day after the Feast of Our Lady of Palmar, and, if known, feasts of the saints should be moved to their exact death dates.³⁸⁹

Gregory XVIII also announced that several new official documents would be made public soon. On the day of the sermon, he would sign his first encyclical. The Palmarian *Lives of the Saints*, a collection of hagiographies which he had worked on for many years, which would be printed in six volumes, as well as an updated version of the *Palmarian Devotionary*.

In fact, revisions of official Palmarian texts were continuous. On various occasions, the faithful were ordered to destroy old documents and books. They should be replaced by revised versions so that they did not contradict the ‘infallible revelation’ in the *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*. Until new versions of some books such as the *Palmarian Catechism* were printed, the church sent out revisions on sticker paper that should be taped over the obsolete texts.³⁹⁰ As the Palmarian dress code became stricter, they were even ordered to censor images that appeared in church publications. They should paint over the bare arms of humans and angels that were depicted.³⁹¹

Separation and Shunning

Gregory XVIII held another very long sermon on November 8, 2011. In the printed text of 48 pages, there is a clear focus on the borders against the outside world, just as in the earlier one. Five days later, he published

³⁸⁹ Gregory XVIII, First Encyclical, August 15, 2011; cf. *Invitations to the Holy Week at Palmar de Troya, 2012–2015*.

³⁹⁰ I have access to several copies where portions of the texts have been taped over.

³⁹¹ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, August 15, 2011.

his Second Encyclical that dealt with similar issues.³⁹² Nevertheless, the sermon included some radical news; the pontiff stated that he had signed a decree concerning apostates. As from the day of the sermon, all ‘apostate children’ over the age of 18 had to leave their family’s home. After that, the faithful should not have contact with them. Even when still living at home, i.e. before turning eighteen, ‘apostate children’ were shunned by Palmarian family members; communication should be kept to a minimum. Contacts with ex-Palmarians were thus considered the most harmful relations of all, as they were among the worst enemies of Christ. They had had the privilege to be among the few elect but made an active choice to counteract divine grace.³⁹³

Gregory XVIII once again emphasised that the Palmarian membership continued to shrink. He stated that he was unaware of the exact number, given the high number of ex-communications and expulsions, but they were probably down to between 1,000 and 1,500. Many of those who left were young people, and that would, in turn, mean that few Palmarian children would be born in the future, even if most families had many children.

To save the shrinking remnant, it was most important to reduce the risks posed by the evil outside world. In this context, the use of different means of communication became a central issue. The pope claimed that newspapers, radio, TV and the Internet were controlled by Freemasons and Zionists. In the encyclical, he described what he saw as a great international Jewish-masonic conspiracy that appeared in the form of, e.g. United Nations, European Union and the Bilderberg group. The ever-increasing strength of the conspirators was a clear sign that Antichrist had been born. There was no reason why Palmarians should read newspapers since they were filled with lies, written by enemies of Christ. Nevertheless, some had special permits from his predecessors to read the daily paper, if it

³⁹² Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 8, 2011, cf. Second Encyclical, November 13, 2011.

³⁹³ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 8, 2011.

was censored; large parts were cut out. With his sermon, all such permits were abolished through a papal decree.³⁹⁴

Internet use seems to have been a more complicated matter for the new pope, and the church policy changed over time, ever since the technology developed in the 1990s. Peter II prohibited the use of the internet, but in the longer run, there was no total ban. By 2011, faithful were still allowed to access the internet at home, on the condition that computers were connected to a locked device that made it possible to control their use; i.e., parents should be able to oversee their children. Nevertheless, Palmarians were prohibited from accessing the internet through mobile phones, at internet cafes or public libraries. They could solely use it outside their homes if consulting was an integral part of their studies or work. By the end of 2011, Gregory XVIII indicated that the whole internet issue should be discussed at the Third Palmarian Council in the following year. After that, he would take the final decision.³⁹⁵

Gregory XVIII held yet another sermon before the end of 2011, on 20 November. It is 39 pages in length. The tone is even more annoyed than earlier ones': the pope was fuming. *The Norms of the Church* was the central issue once again. The first theme related to the Palmarian prohibition against going to beaches or public pools. The pope was upset when finding out that some members recently transgressed this rule. He thus wanted to emphasise that the prohibition was still valid and that it was not even permitted for Palmarians to use inflatable pools in their own garden or to play with a garden hose or water balloons. Such behaviour would lead to ex-communication.

In this context, Gregory thought it necessary to point out that the church was not built on consensus or collegiality. The faithful could not make or change any rules, and the friars could not act against the pope. It was up to the pontiff as the Vicar of Christ and Universal Father to take universally binding decisions. He stated that they should use the coming

³⁹⁴ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 8, 2011; cf. Second Encyclical, November 13, 2011.

³⁹⁵ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 8, 2011.

Nativity fast to contemplate their sins and consider if they lived by *The Norms*, or whether it was time to leave. The pope further stated that there would be no compromises: ‘When We name someone an apostate, apostate he stays. The time for playing games has ended, the time for amusements and not paying attention has ended.’³⁹⁶

In his sermon, Gregory XVIII devoted many pages to the threats of the current era, with emphasis on freemasonry and its dominant role in world politics and economics. As has been shown, freemasons played a pivotal role in Palmarian apocalypics. They would remain the church’s main enemy until the end:

Until Antichrist comes and Antichrist seats himself in the temple on the throne, they will not be satisfied that at last they have put an end to Christ’s Church. Their joy will be short-lived. But until that moment they will not cease in their endeavour. Such is their hatred; such is the power they have.³⁹⁷

Gregory XVIII admitted that it was hard to be a true Christian. The cross was heavy, and obedience was the only path. He ordered the faithful to ‘be humble, and allow that the Guides [priests] tell you: What it is that you have to do, where it is that you have to go? That they correct you, that they chastise you if it should be necessary.’ Just because they were members of Christ’s true church, they did not ‘have a saint’s halo, a holiness label’. They had to remain faithful until death. To criticise or contradict the pope or disobey *The Norms* was to invite Satan. Finally, before giving his benediction, Gregory XVIII ordered all excommunicated Palmarians to make a General Confession of their whole life and recommended all others to do the same.³⁹⁸

After the closing of the brief Third Palmarian Council, the pope issued several decrees on internet use. As from August 16, 2012, there was

³⁹⁶ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 20, 2011.

³⁹⁷ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 20, 2011.

³⁹⁸ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, November 20, 2011.

a total ban. Under pain of ex-communication reserved to the pope, the faithful should destroy every internet-related item they had at home, such as cables and routers, though not the computers as such. Evidently, there had also been some special permits to use mobile internet for work purposes during his papacy, but now he abolished them, too. Still, internet use that was necessary for school or work was tolerated. The almost total ban of the internet made the separation between the Palmarians and the outside world even stricter.³⁹⁹

I have had access to text messages that were sent by a missionary bishop to Irish Palmarians in the latter half of 2012. The more formal documents aside, such text messages were essential means of spreading the news and orders from the Palmarian Holy See. The missionary-bishop informed the Irish faithful about the pope's many recent decisions, including the ban against the internet. The text messages that were forwarded from Palmar de Troya had the same annoyed tone, as in the sermons, and in many cases, they were very detailed.

Most messages were, in one way or another, related to the separation from the outside world or dress regulations. For example, Palmarians were forbidden to donate clothes or other things to charity shops: 'The Holy Father does not want people who do not dress properly befitting from your goods'. Further, they were not allowed to 'buy products that support masonic organisations (such as bananas with the Unicef sticker).' In the same context, the pope also saw it fitting to remind the faithful that going to masquerades is a grave sin.⁴⁰⁰

Many communications to the members deal with the status of excommunicated people, i.e. those who had committed a deadly sin, not those who had been expelled. The excommunicated were forbidden to enter a Palmarian chapel without making an Act of Contrition before, and when they had entered the building, they should confess immediately, if a missionary-bishop was present. Some texts messages deal with the conduct

³⁹⁹ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, August 16, 2012.

⁴⁰⁰ Text messages, 2012, published on www.facebook.com/Palmarian-church-Iglesia-palmariana 704456922952910/?ref=ts&fref=ts

of not-yet-married Palmarian couples, who were not allowed to sleep in the same house (or caravan or tent), go on unsupervised picnics, kiss, hug ‘or do something worse’.⁴⁰¹

Between 2013 and 2014, Gregory XVIII only issued three sermons; the last documents of that kind that he made public. When the year 2012 had passed, the pope had to defend the teachings of the church. According to his 2006 dogmatic definition, Pope Peter II declared that Antichrist was born in the year 2000 and would ‘make a brief entry to the world’ in 2012. Many Palmarians had expected something to happen before the end of the year. Some even left when the prophecy failed.⁴⁰² In a sermon on January 20, 2013, Pope Gregory dedicated large part to this issue. He said that God could freely avert such an event and that perseverance was the main Palmarian virtue. The great miracle—that the Virgin should appear at Palmar de Troya could come in 2013, but it could happen at a much later stage. Nobody should try to compute any exact dates. The only thing to do was to remain faithful to Palmarian doctrines and the pope.⁴⁰³

Gregory XVIII knew that he was questioned in the church by people who claimed he was uneducated and uncultured, and that he was accused of being a tyrant, that he invented new rules without any foundation and that he had left the road of his predecessors. His answer was clear: He was the supreme pontiff, the true Christian could not choose to disobey him; he was the chosen successor, and he only acted for their salvation. On his part, Gregory accused members of being lazy. He claimed that many did not come to church even if they lived close to the Basilica. Moreover, people in other countries did not appear when a bishop-missionary went to their country.⁴⁰⁴ In his sermon of June 1, 2013, he was unequivocal there would be no liberalisation of the *Norms* during his pontificate.

⁴⁰¹ Text messages, 2012, published on www.facebook.com/Palmarian-church-Iglesia-palmariana704456922952910/?ref=ts&fref=ts

⁴⁰² SHP.

⁴⁰³ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, January 20, 2013, cf. Sermon, December 25, 2013.

⁴⁰⁴ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, March 19, 2012.

[L]et no one dream, let no one aspire, let no one believe, that things are going to change. They are not going to change, we say clearly. And thus, let' see whether some of you with one foot here and another there, now yes, now no, now no, now yes: leave. We speak as plain as that, children, We, every night, have a pile of faxes which the Missionaries send in; save a very few exceptions, all forgiven, all forgiven, all forgiven; and hearing that they did not know, that they had not interpreted it like that, it's just that ... saying well, Lord, well, Lord, well, Lord, pardoned, pardoned, pardoned, trying to act as Christ acts. But the moment comes when that person, overnight, has apostatized; well, that was logical, it was seen coming.⁴⁰⁵

Apart from the few sermons, there only appeared three new encyclicals between 2013 and 2015. The later encyclicals dwelled much on the role of international masonry, the conflicts and crises in the end-time, and the sinful laws established by democracies. Gregory also dealt with the series of Marian apparitions, underlining that Palmar de Troya was the final revelation. Every truth was to be found in the Palmarian church's text; nothing else was needed. In fact, large portions of the encyclicals were quotations from his earlier letters, documents by his papal predecessors or quotations from newspaper articles about 'antipope Francis's heresies'.⁴⁰⁶ Apart from that, the pope sent out brief messages to the faithful before and after the celebration of the three major feasts in the Cathedral-Basilica in Palmar de Troya: Holy Week in March, the principal feast of Our Lady of Palmar in July and Christmas-New Year.⁴⁰⁷

Sources of Income

Despite the rapid decrease of members, the Palmarian economy seems to have improved during Gregory XVIII's pontificate, at least compared to

⁴⁰⁵ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, June 1, 2013.

⁴⁰⁶ Gregory XVIII, Fourth Encyclical, October 27, 2013; Fifth Encyclical, 20 July 2014; Sixth Encyclical, February 8, 2015; and Seventh Encyclical, July 19, 2015.

⁴⁰⁷ Gregory XVII, Apostolic letters, 2014–2015.

the late 1990s and early 2000s. To secure financial resources, much pressure was put on the remaining members. They should contribute much more than before.

A papal decree from January 26, 2012, and the Third Encyclical issued a week later, indicated a critical source of incomes: the selling of members' homes for the benefit of the church. Gregory had infallibly defined that elderly Palmarians were required to move to a place where they could receive the sacraments on their deathbed. In practice, this often meant that they should move to Palmar de Troya or to a retirement home in southern Germany, connected to the church. Under the threat of excommunication reserved to the pope, they were prohibited from letting 'apostates' or 'public anti-Palmarians' to inherit anything, apart from the minimum that was declared in the laws in some countries.⁴⁰⁸ To keep the money away from enemies of the church, he advised them to reflect over a biblical verse—to 'be intelligent as serpents and simple as doves.'⁴⁰⁹

The church still kept part of the profit from selling the properties in Seville in 2003, as well as from the later sales of the Palmarian residences in Manchester, Augsburg and Leonding in Austria.⁴¹⁰ In early 2013, the Andalusian press claimed that the church's monetary influx had increased much in recent years and allegedly, they had established missions in France, Switzerland and Vietnam, while supporters in the United States and Germany continued to provide large sums. After a decade-long long standstill, the works on the Cathedral-Basilica in Palmar de Troya speeded up considerably. Press photos from 2014 and 2015 showed a finished Basilica, the towers completed and the façade filled with a series of new statues. The construction work that began more than 35 years earlier was

⁴⁰⁸ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, January 26, 2012 and Third Encyclical, February 2, 2012; cf. Sermon, March 19, 2012. For the retirement home, see www.troya.gmbh

⁴⁰⁹ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, January 20, 2013.

⁴¹⁰ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, January 20, 2013.

⁴¹⁰ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, January 20, 2013.

thus more or less finished, though work continued on other buildings within the church compound.⁴¹¹

Still, the construction work was costly, and in a sermon from early 2013, Gregory claimed that there was a deep economic crisis in the church. He put it bluntly: ‘we have no money on any bank account, we have no investment funds, we do not have any oil resources, we do not have any investments abroad: we have nothing.’⁴¹² Likewise, his sermon on May 10, 2014, was dedicated to one topic alone: Palmarian finances. There, he stated that due to the high building costs, there were virtually no funds left for running the convents and the ministry. He said that he had travelled around to most of the countries where Palmarians still lived, asking for donations. A tithe, a tenth of the income, was a minimum contribution from the members. Not to pay a tithe was a mortal sin according to an apostolic decree that was made public through the printing of the sermon.⁴¹³

During the papacy of Gregory XVIII, the primary sources of income seemed to be donations from members (at least a tithe, but often more), money inheritances, and in particular, the selling of real estate that was ceded or willed to the church. Many ex-members accuse church leaders of money laundry and tax evasion. As far as I know, Spanish authorities have made no formal investigations into the matter. In May 2016, the English edition of *El País* quoted an anonymous ex-member who claimed, ‘only a year and a half ago a missionary brought €500,000 taped to his body from Augsburg in Bavaria – the proceeds from the sale of a house belonging to the church. I drove the car from Germany. I was a witness.’ This testimony indicates that the selling of real estate was an essential source of income and that large amounts of cash were smuggled into Spain.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ *El Correo de Andalucía*, July 30, 2011; *ABC*, March 11, 2013; *Andalucesdiario.es*, July 11, 2013; *El Mundo*, October 7, 2014; and *ABC*, January 3, 2015.

⁴¹² Gregory XVIII, Sermon, January 20, 2013; my translation.

⁴¹³ Gregory XVIII, Sermon, May 10, 2014.

⁴¹⁴ *El País*, May 26, 2016.

Testimonies about the Papacy

There is an increasing number of testimonies by former Palmarians, who left the church during the papacy of Gregory XVIII. Like before, many of them are from young people who grew up in the church but exited as young adults, and many have family members who remain in the church, including parents and siblings. In this context, the testimony by the Irish ex-member, Joshua Daly is significant. Apart from being a well-written and detailed account, Daly did not leave the Palmarian church until early 2015. That means that he experienced most of Gregory's papacy and the effects it had on the ordinary faithful.⁴¹⁵

In his text, Daly gave some interesting indications about the current size of the Palmarian church. Shortly before leaving, a friar told him that there were only 130–140 faithful left in Ireland; just a fraction of what there used to be. At the same time, there were some 250 Palmarians in Germany, Switzerland and Austria combined, about the same number in Nigeria, and less than a hundred in Spain. According to Daly, most of the other members live in the Americas, the Philippines, and in Great Britain. Born in 1991, he stated that the number of Palmarians had steadily decreased throughout his life, and his view concurs with many other former members', as well as with Gregory XVIII's own statements.

In fact, Joshua Daly's testimony echoed many of the themes that were emphasised in Gregory's first sermons, but of course, they were described from another angle. He writes about the shunning of 'apostates' and the forced expulsions of young people, stating that 'ex-members [were evicted] from family homes above the age of 18, be they at school or a university student, regardless if they have any financial independence.' In this context, he also mentions a related practice that was introduced in Gregory's time: the 'obligatory signing of a document that declares the

⁴¹⁵ Daly 2016.

member accepts these terms of eviction if they were ever to leave [the church]. This ‘agreement’ is enforced at the age of 10 and upwards.⁴¹⁶

Daly writes about Gregory’s emphasis on making an early choice whether to join the order or marry. He testifies to the ‘increased pressure through teachings and peers to “find a state in life”, which was becoming dangerously close to arranged marriage’ and continues with a description of what this could mean in practice. He ‘became part of a list of single youth, and ... was summoned before Gregory XVIII and two other members of the Church hierarchy, and questioned on my future “state in life.”’⁴¹⁷ Other ex-members stated that young people, who had not ‘found their state in life’, were shamed before the community or even beaten.⁴¹⁸

According to Joshua Daly’s testimony, Pope Gregory’s increasingly strict rules led to almost total isolation as well as uncertainty. The ban against various means of communication was an essential factor in this development. He writes,

Through 2011 to 2012 Gregory XVIII ... clamped down on all forms of media by banning cinema, television, newspapers, magazines, video games, and virtually all communication with non-members. This was the kind of control being exercised by the hierarchy late 2014 and early 2015.

In his text, Daly also mentions that the church authorities were ‘deliberately concealing the death of its members from non-Palmarian relatives and friends’, thus making further demarcations against outsiders, but also avoiding quarrels about testamentary bequests in favour of the church.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Daly 2016.

⁴¹⁷ Daly 2016.

⁴¹⁸ Personal communication with ex-members, 2016.

⁴¹⁹ Daly 2016.

The End of a Papacy

Despite his earlier messages, on January 14, 2016, Gregory XVIII suddenly published an encyclical, his eighth, entitled: *The Easing of Several Norms*. It was a brief, four-page document. Just as in his other documents, the pope's tone was annoyed. He now claimed that the faithful 'mortified' him and the friars with all their questions regarding the interpretation of the *Norms*, and stated:

One should not and cannot have a continual morbid fear of falling into excommunication, though we know that there will still be some who will not overcome it. Faithful fulfilment of the Norms is one thing and morbid scruples another.⁴²⁰

Apart from the nuisance that the flurry of questions caused him and the Palmarian clergy at large, the pope saw the queries as a way for the faithful to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions. As expected, many of the issues in the encyclical had to do with the separation between El Palmar and the world. The encyclical might have been a way to ease the norms, but only dealt with details, which to an outsider might seem utterly absurd. Still, the decisions were unexpected, as the rules of conduct had become increasingly harsh during Gregory's papal administration. In the encyclical, he explained the changes by stating: 'We [i.e. the pope] do not want extremism', referring to the 'morbid scruples' of some faithful. Therefore, the norms were somewhat eased, so that the faithful could follow them.

Among the themes he discussed in the encyclical was defining that tights are indeed women's clothing, not trousers, i.e., male clothing. They could, therefore, be used under long skirts. Moreover, he made clear that the general prohibition against logos and texts on clothes, established by Gregory XVII, did not include small brand names. He also mentioned some issues related to the very prevalent censorship of schoolbooks. Images of

⁴²⁰ Gregory XVIII, Eighth encyclical, January 16, 2016.

church exteriors and crosses would not be necessary to cut out anymore, and if the intention of pictures of church interiors was to describe different architectural styles, they could be kept uncensored.⁴²¹

Regarding various means of communication, Gregory XVIII wrote, ‘Of course the ban using Internet on mobiles, without express permission, continues’. He stressed that nobody was allowed to have any kind with ‘apostates, anti-Palmarians, concubines or those opposed to God’. Nevertheless, he permitted Palmarians to have contact with non-Palmarian friends by phone and letter, even if they usually did not dress according to Palmarian norms. This was perhaps the most essential news in the encyclical. Earlier, this had been forbidden. In his early sermons, Gregory stated that Palmarians could not be friends with non-Palmarians, but now he evidently admitted that it could be possible, and even permissible. Schoolchildren would now be permitted to talk with their peers at recess, but never with girls wearing trousers.

Like many other habits, smoking was a matter of discussion in the Palmarian church. For laypeople, there had never been a general ban, but there were continually changing rules on the maximum amount of cigarettes permitted per day. Nevertheless, there had been an absolute prohibition on expectant women to smoke, but the pope decided that ‘if they cannot give them up completely during pregnancy. We allow them to smoke just six cigarettes in the course of the day.’⁴²²

Summarising the contents in the encyclical on ‘the easing of norms’, Gregory XVIII precluded that some members would think that the decisions went in the wrong direction, while others would wish that the *Norms* should have eased more. Still, now there was nothing more to discuss.

And now, at last, We say that even knowing that it will seem marvellous to some, to others it will not be as much, and we hope not to have to correct excesses or infringements of these Norms now

⁴²¹ Gregory XVIII, Eighth encyclical, January 16, 2016.

⁴²² Gregory XVIII, Eighth encyclical, January 16, 2016.

eased. Neither do we await another flood of question and questions; we have already told you to use your conscience and intelligence, and when in doubt desist.⁴²³

The encyclical was the last formal decree that Gregory XVIII wrote before stepping down from the papacy three months later, on April 22, 2016. Still, apart from the encyclical, other things occurred in the first quarter of the year that indicated that something was happening in the church. Gregory established a uniformed papal guard, wearing red berets, which followed him around at all times. That was a sign that he felt endangered, and in this period members of the papal guard threatened and mishandled some ex-members.⁴²⁴

Suddenly, in mid-April 2016, well-informed sources reported that the Palmarian nuns were not wearing their veils anymore. Something extraordinary was indeed happening in El Palmar. At the same time, there were reliable reports about the pope being seen on his own, not wearing the cassock, that he had a girlfriend, and that he was about to leave the papacy. Finally, on April 22, the same sources confirmed that Gregory XVIII had indeed left the papacy and church on that very day.⁴²⁵ Gregory had already elected his Secretary of State Fr. Eliseo María, as his papal successor in 2013, and one day before leaving, he had signed a deed where the two and yet another bishop became the lawful owners of a new property in Lusk outside Dublin, having sold their old residence.⁴²⁶

The Ex-pope and the Media

In the years before the escape of the pope, newspaper articles on the Palmarian church were scarce. Spanish TV and press covered the death of

⁴²³ Gregory XVIII, Eighth encyclical, January 16, 2016.

⁴²⁴ Personal communication with ex-members, 2016.

⁴²⁵ Personal communication with ex-members, 2016.

⁴²⁶ See blog post on September 9, 2016 on www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/christian/palmarian-church/

Peter II died in 2011 and reported when a statue of St. Francisco Franco suddenly appeared on the façade of the Basilica in 2014. To erect a monument of the Generalissimo, even behind a five-metre high wall was against Spanish Law, and in late 2015, the Palmarians removed it from public sight after pressure from the authorities.⁴²⁷ In the early 2010s, the general view of the journalists who wrote about the church was that the Palmarian church was bizarre, very secretive and wealthy, and that the number of members was steadily decreasing, and that not much was known about current developments. The Spanish press hardly includes any testimonies by ex-members.

In Ireland, where there used to be a sizeable community, the media situation was somewhat different. There were several TV documentaries and radio programs about the church's activities in the country, including many testimonies by ex-members.⁴²⁸ In late 2015, Irish media reported on the case of an 84-year-old Palmarian woman who was found in her home, after being dead for approximately two months. As with other Palmarians, she had lived a very secluded life, and the news implied that the church did not care for its members, as she had obviously been left alone for such a long period without anyone checking on her. Evidently, she had been excommunicated shortly before for not wanting to cede her house to the church. In the aftermath of this sad event, in January 2016, *The Sunday Times* published an extensive article on the Palmarians, which put the death of the woman in context.⁴²⁹

Then, from late April to early June 2016, the Palmarian church suddenly came into the centre of Spanish media attention.⁴³⁰ The news

⁴²⁷ *ABC*, March 4, 2015.

⁴²⁸ Irish TV 3, 2011; cf. www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com/category/christian/palmarian-church/

⁴²⁹ *Mail on Sunday*, November 22, 2015; *Irish Independent* November 23 and 28, 2015; *RTE Radio, Liveline*, November 30, December 1 and 2, 2015; cf. *Sunday Times*, January 3, 2016.

⁴³⁰ For a list of media coverage between April and September 2016, see www.magnuslundberg.net/2016/08/19/media-coverage-of-the-palmarian-church-

about Ginés Jesús Hernández Martínez leaving the papacy to live with a woman was intriguing to many. That he soon publicly stated that he saw the Palmarian church as a massive hoax made the news even more exciting.

On 25 April 2016, three days after the escape, Spanish media started to report on the Palmarian church. TV channels broadcasted reports on the unexpected events, and national and local newspapers covered the recent developments, publishing feature articles on the history of the church and its popes.⁴³¹ After a couple of days, the ex-pope started giving interviews. He appeared both on TV and in newspapers, and his constant message was that he had been fooled for over three decades, not realising that the church was built on lies until very recently. When finding out that it was a fraud, he had decided to leave. He claimed that he had done everything right, and despite having been a Palmarian bishop for 32 years and the pope for five, he presented himself as a victim of others' wrongdoings.⁴³²

The interviews with Hernández were hardly critical. Not surprisingly, media were eager to talk with a person, who until recently, had claimed that he, and not the man in Rome, was the true pontiff. The ex-pope was not pressed on issues that related to his actions and was able to speak quite freely. In the media, Hernández turned into a kind of general expert on all things Palmarian, commenting on the current development, rather than the man, who had been the absolute leader of the religious group until a week ago. In the interviews, there was also much focus on the love story; that he now lived together with his girlfriend, and that they would get married. To see ex-pope Gregory XVIII in blue jeans and buttoned-down shirt, chitchatting and hugging his girlfriend, must have

april-august-2016/ Cf. the list of references to this book under the subheading Radio, TV, Photos and Films.

⁴³¹ See e.g. *ABC*, April 25, 27 and 30, 2016; *El País* May 23, 2016; and *El País in English* May 26, 2016. See also an ambitious TV documentary on *Telecinco* May 10, 2016 and a series of brief documentaries on *Telecinco* in between May 24 and 31, 2016. Cf. the list of reference in this book under the subheading TV, Radio, Photos and Films.

⁴³² Interviews with the ex-pope in *ABC*, April 26; *El Español*, May 1; *La Sexta TV*, May 18; *Antena 3*, May 23; *Telecinco*, May 23; and *Antena 3*, May 26, 2016.

been a very strange experience for former Palmarians, not least since the dress code had been one of the most central issues during his papacy.

The first of what would become a long series of interviews with the ex-pope was published in the Seville edition of *ABC* on April 27, 2016. In the interview, he asserted that he had not stolen the ‘pope-mobile’ (a luxurious BMW), of which he had been accused. It was a personal gift to him, and there was a notarised deed stating that it was his property. He also forcefully denied that he had stolen money or valuable objects from El Palmar de Troya, saying that ‘he now was unemployed, looking for a job’. His overall message was that he wanted to leave everything Palmarian behind him.

[I want to] turn the page, and start a new life. I have left all in a good way, and a radical change of life does not happen overnight, but I am satisfied because it has been a very thoughtful decision. ... I am calm, having breakfast now and sunbathing, I have nothing of fear because I am just another citizen.⁴³³

On May 1, 2016, *El Español* published a substantial article, based on a four-hour interview with the ex-pope. There, Hernández provided some more details about his leaving. He told the reporter that his fiancée Nieves Triviño, an ex-Palmarian herself, established contact in late 2015, informing him that a group of former Palmarians planned to ‘rob and beat him.’ At that time, he began to make investigations into the church: ‘As a result, I began to make inquiries which were later confirmed by other sources. And there are some things that are aberrant in every way, both economic and sexual’. Through a study of documents and conversations with others, the ex-pope thus concluded that the Palmarian church was a set-up or a fraud (*montaje*). No details about what kind of evidence he had found were provided.⁴³⁴

⁴³³ *ABC*, April 26, 2016.

⁴³⁴ *El Español*, May 1, 2016.

Given his reputation as a hardliner and difficult person, the reporter asked him if he had left many friends in the church, Hernández stated ‘Many. In addition, those who know me well know that unlike my predecessors in office, I have been like a father with his children.’ He thus claimed that he had been closer to the faithful than his predecessors had, describing his relation to them as that of a benign father. Answering to the allegations of despotism, he said that they were false, though admitting that he has a bad temper, but always tried to counteract it:

I have a strong character, and I do not like being forced to do what I do not want. In those situations, I lose the concepts because I have an adrenaline level, which is probably sixty times higher than usual. If I get nervous, I explode. I try to avoid it.⁴³⁵

In the extended interview in *El Español*, Hernández was asked whether the new Palmarian leaders should fear him, as he had so much inside information. According to him, they should not, and that he had no interest in church politics anymore and claimed that his successor knew everything.

They know that I will never go against them. I'm not going to throw garbage at El Palmar. And the one who is [pope] now, Peter III, knows about all these inquiries. He heard testimonies from those affected ... but I want to turn the page. I don't want to think about the past but focus on my new life.⁴³⁶

By September 2016, the media coverage took a drastic turn with an article in the men's magazine *Interviú*, a publication combining articles on crime, politics and famous people with pictures of lightly clad women. Under the headline ‘I was the Mata Hari of El Palmar de Troya’, the journal published an interview with Nieves Triviño interspersed with pictures of her posing semi-nude. On the first article spread, the ex-pope and his wife-

⁴³⁵ *El Español*, May 1, 2016.

⁴³⁶ *El Español*, May 1, 2016.

to-be mimicked the Adam and Eve scene, her tempting him with an apple.⁴³⁷ This image must have been hard to swallow for many ex-Palmarians. This was a man who half a year earlier, had excommunicated people, even children, for not wearing ‘decent pyjamas and nightgowns’ when in their own homes. Two weeks later, *Interviú* covered the wedding of Nieves Triviño and Ginés Hernández in a new 10-page article.⁴³⁸

Excursus: An Invented Church

In the media coverage of the Palmarian developments, there were some references to alleged relations between (ex)-Palmarians and a group called La Iglesia Católica Remanente—the Remnant Catholic Church, based in Argentina.⁴³⁹ The background is somewhat complicated and needs explanation. When searching for Palmarian church or Iglesia Palmariana on the internet, one of the first things one encounters is a site called laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com. It is well designed and looks serious, and contains official Palmarian documents, which were initially published up until the early 1990s.⁴⁴⁰

The site was initially developed by a former Palmarian bishop, connected to the Archidona community. Around 2007, the contents of the website partially changed. Suddenly, it was stated that the group had accepted the papal claims of Alexander IX of the Catholic Remnant Church. This church, which is very active on the internet, claims large cardinal college, as well as numerous bishops.⁴⁴¹ Nevertheless, it has never proved its existence outside the cyber world. Without any doubt, it is a

⁴³⁷ *Interviú*, September 5, 2016.

⁴³⁸ *Interviú*, September 19, 2016.

⁴³⁹ See e.g., *Correo de Andalucía*, May 29, 2016.

⁴⁴⁰ www.laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com

⁴⁴¹ www.ica-remanente.blogspot.com

web hoax, invented by persons with good knowledge of Catholic traditionalism and movements like the Palmarians.⁴⁴²

The Catholic Remnant Church claims that they established contact with a group of independent Palmarian bishops in 2006. As a result, their first pope, Leo XIV established a separate community, the Congregation of the Holy Face. It was conceived as a particular religious order for ten former Palmarian bishops, who had joined the Remnant church. After a couple of years, Pope Alexander IX asserted that he discovered that its members had not abandoned their earlier Palmarian beliefs and rituals, and therefore abolished the order. At that time, the order had no less than 59 members.⁴⁴³

Despite this, Alexander IX stated that the Catholic Remnant Church planned to establish itself in Spain and maintained that between 2011 and 2013, he had active contact with other Palmarian ex-bishops. He even asserted he was in touch with the current Palmarian leadership. According to the Argentinean pope, the church had enough resources to finish the Basilica at Palmar de Troya, and thus take over the apparition site—and ultimately the Palmarian church.⁴⁴⁴

However, it is not the false stories about the relations between the Palmarian and the Remnant churches that have circulated most on the internet. It is a note on the fraudulent Palmarian website, stating that the Palmarian church has canonised Adolf Hitler. In a brief list of saints, the hoaxers included some people, who are indeed Palmarian saints, such as Francisco Franco and Christopher Columbus. But, they also included Hitler among the canonised. It is an assertion which is untrue. The notice about the Führer's sainthood later found its way into Wikipedia and other media.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² The first website is discontinued, but a cached version is found on web.archive.org/web/20070817211817/ar.geocities.com/popeleoix/ The current webpage is www.ica-remanente.blogspot.com

⁴⁴³ www.ica-remanente.blogspot.com

⁴⁴⁴ www.laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com/2012/12/la-muerte-de-papa-greg-orio-xvii-y-sobre.html

⁴⁴⁵ laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com/2012/12/santoral.html

It is, of course, never good that erroneous information circulates, but in this case, the planting of false data has had some unforeseen consequences. Some ex-Palmarians have told me that the church leadership actively used the news about Hitler's canonisation as proof that the media were lying. Because of this, they tried to convince the faithful that the internet, press and TV were totally dominated by freemasons and Zionists, who wanted to destroy the true church.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ Personal communication with ex-members.

9. Pope Peter III

In 2013, Gregory XVIII named his Swiss Secretary of State, Fr. Eliseo María–Markus Josef Odermatt—as the man who would succeed him after his death. Born in Stans in the canton of Nidwalden, Odermatt was consecrated a bishop in 1985. During more than 15 years, he had been a missionary-bishop in South America.⁴⁴⁷

The Palmarian Church Law foresaw the possibility of papal apostasy and decreed that in such a case, the apostate-pope’s succession decree should still be respected. Only if no such decree existed, a conclave should be held. On April 22, 2016, the very day Gregory XVIII left, Eliseo María assumed the papacy, taking Peter III as his name.⁴⁴⁸

About a week later, he appointed his closest men: Fr. Benjamin María–Manuel Ambrosio Sánchez became his Secretary of State, and Fr. Abraham María–Paul Fox became the Substitute for the Secretary of State. The latter was among the bishops consecrated by Clemente Domínguez in 1976.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, March 6, 2013.

⁴⁴⁸ Peter III, Apostolic decree on the succession to Cathedra of Saint Peter, May 2, 2016; cf. First Apostolic letter, May 2, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Peter III, Apostolic decree, May 2, 2016, cf. the Registro de Entidades Religiosas of the Spanish Ministry of Justice from 2016, where the three leaders appear as legal representatives of the Palmarian church: www.maper.mjusticia.gob.es/Maper/DetalleEntidadReligiosa.action?numeroInscripcion=000302.

Changes and Continuation

Through his first apostolic letter to the Palmarian faithful, dated on May 2, 2016, Peter III commented on the ‘sad events in the church’ that had recently occurred. He first stated what everybody already knew: that pope Gregory had apostatised. Not surprisingly, Peter III gave a very dark picture of his predecessor. He told that before leaving, Gregory XVII confessed to having lost his faith altogether. Since Easter, he had not said Mass, nor prayed the Penitential rosary.

In the letter, there is no detailed explanation as to how the ex-pope reached this conclusion, only that he had met an ‘apostate woman’ and ‘lusted for her.’ According to Peter, when leaving the church, the ex-pope took the papal car with him, and a couple of days later, they discovered that jewellery from the images of Christ, the Virgin, St Joseph and St Teresa of Avila was missing. Peter III thus accused his predecessor of theft and claimed that he had withheld vast sums from the church in his private accounts.

The new pontiff continued his apostolic letter with a veritable list of the ex-pope’s central vices: He did not show any love. He did not think about anyone but himself. His temper was insufferable. He enjoyed luxury and was extremely vainglorious. Despite living a relaxed life himself, for others, Gregory XVIII established unnecessarily harsh norms. In this context, Peter III made comparisons between Gregory and the six popes, who according to Palmarian teaching, are in hell, including the infamous Alexander VI (Borgia).⁴⁵⁰

As Gregory XVIII resigned from the papacy, there would at least not be another pope in hell. Still, there was no doubt to Peter III that it would be the post-mortem destination of the apostate pope. Gregory’s papal motto was *Receptor Christi*—The Receiver of Christ—but due to his

⁴⁵⁰ Peter III, Apostolic letter, May 2, 2016.

apostasy and the grave sins he had committed, he would become ‘The Receiver of God’s Anger.’ Peter III even referred to the ex-pope as a ‘cursed beast,’ thus almost equating him with the devil. He would never be readmitted into the true church, even if he came begging for mercy.

Peter III asserted that Pope Peter II knew that Fr. Sergio María was very vain and bad-tempered, but that he could not find any other suitable successor. From the very beginning, it turned out to be a very bad pontificate: one of the worst in church history, according to Peter III. Now things would change, he promised. Interestingly enough, he used the same expression as the ex-pope when referring to the future: that it was time to turn the page. In the current situation, all Palmarian faithful should make acts of reparation for the ex-pope’s sins and all the harm he had caused God and the true church.⁴⁵¹

According to Peter III, the pope should be a father, not a tyrant, and the new pope asked them to pray for him so that his reformation work would contribute to their salvation and holiness. One should love *The Palmarian Norms*, and the case of the ex-pope provided a clear example of what could happen if one did not. All Palmarians had the responsibility of defending the honour of God, pope and church. They all were soldiers of Christ. Therefore, no special papal guard was needed, and the security force, recently established by Gregory XVIII, was abolished. Peter III maintained that since Gregory had left, convent life would be very different from before. His papal motto would be *De Gloria Ecclesiae*, and it should be understood as the spiritual glory of the church, not material wealth. Finally, the new pontiff informed that his solemn coronation would take place on July 16, on the feast day of Our Lady of Palmar, underlining the importance of the faithful’s presence.⁴⁵²

The media’s great interest in the events in the Palmarian church slowed down in June 2016, but two later events were reported. The first was that a fire broke out in the convents at El Palmar on the night of July 8. The fire had started in the area of the church archive, and though the

⁴⁵¹ Peter III, First Apostolic letter, May 2, 2016.

⁴⁵² Peter III, First Apostolic letter, May 2, 2016.

religious community had to be evacuated, the injuries were mainly material.⁴⁵³

Another dramatic event occurred on the day of the papal coronation, July 16. An Irishman, who had been a Palmarian bishop, but expelled in 1984, had returned to Palmar, where he died during one of the ceremonies. During his time in the order, he was reportedly sexually abused, and since then he had suffered from severe psychical and physical conditions. By July, the 49-year-old Irishman had been persuaded to return to El Palmar. According to church authorities, a couple of days after coming back, he suffered a heart attack during one of the church services related to the papal coronation on July 16, and died a few hours later, after just a couple of days in El Palmar. His family was not convinced and showed that no ambulance had been called. They also accused the church of taking advantage of a seriously ill man, luring him back with promises of an ecclesiastical career. The death certificate was signed by the church's own doctor.⁴⁵⁴

During 2016, Peter III issued a further three apostolic letters, in which he presented his view on the current situation. Understandably, the accusations of the ex-pope continued. On June 29, he decreed that the Third Palmarian Council, convened by and presided over by the ex-pope, should be erased from the list of universal church councils. While he did not consider the meeting a 'robber council,' a heretic gathering, Gregory XVIII had only used it to establish many 'unnecessary norms'. He had not called the council for the good of the church, but only so that he would be able to satisfy his own vanity and pride.⁴⁵⁵

Most of Peter III's second apostolic letter, however, had to do with the membership crisis and especially the great need for priests and nuns. By mid-2016, there were 32 friars, of whom just seven had entered in the last two decades. The nuns counted 40, and only a tenth of them had joined

⁴⁵³ *ABC*, July 8, 2016.

⁴⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, July 18, 2016.

⁴⁵⁵ Peter III, Apostolic decree, June 29, 2016; RTE, *Liveline*, July 11, 13, 18, 19 and 20, 2016; and broadcasts on *Telecinco* on July 21, 2016.

in the last 20 years. The remainder of the letter was a call for new vocations, exalting the immense value of consecrated life.⁴⁵⁶

The third apostolic letters focused on central Palmarian devotions and the correct understanding of the virtue of charity, while his fourth letter, dated December 8, 2016, included diatribes against ex-Palmarians and anti-Palmarians, who wrote and talked critically of the church. He ended this passage by cursing all Palmarians who had contact with ex-bishops, providing them and others with internal information, thus trying to destroy the true Church from within:

We, Peter III, hurl malediction against those perverse so-called ‘palmarian faithful,’ and may God’s wrath fall upon them. And may they know that they are apostates, outside the true Church, in grievous sin against the Holy Ghost, and that they are committing terrible sacrileges. They are traitors, so many other Judas Iscariots. They deserve to be wiped off the face of the earth. God Himself will take charge. There is no lighting one candle to God and another to the devil.⁴⁵⁷

Recent Developments

In my conclusion to the first edition of *A Pope of their Own*, I asked: ‘What is the future of the Palmarian Church?’ answering ‘Of course, that is hard, if not impossible, to predict. The experiences of recent Palmarian history makes this particularly clear.’ That prediction has undoubtedly turned out

⁴⁵⁶ Peter III, Second Apostolic Letter, June 29, 2016; cf. Summary of Worship celebrated in Palmar during Christmas, New Year’s Eve 2016 and New Year’s Day 2017, January 7, 2017. See also footage from the religious services: *New Years Celebrations* 2017.

⁴⁵⁷ Peter III, Fourth apostolic letter, December 8, 2016; cf. Third apostolic letter, September 8, 2016.

to be accurate, and the church has become known by more people than ever.

One reason for the more global interest was the ‘Dan Brown effect.’ In October 2017, the author of *The DaVinci Code* published *Origin*, a novel where ‘the Palmarian Church’ has a central place in the plot. In this context, I deliberately use scare quotes. Despite Brown’s assertions that the book is based on careful research, he repeats many of the most common errors found in easily accessible online resources. He even manages to misunderstand correct information found there. While the book hardly provides the readers with any knowledge about the real Palmarian Church, they became acquainted with the name. Readers might have been encouraged to search for information found on the internet.⁴⁵⁸

Apart from that, several dramatic events involving the Palmarian Church took place in 2018 and 2019, and once more the Palmarians became front-page news, at least in Spain. In mid-2018, the ex-pope Ginés Hernández and his wife Nieves Triviño reappeared on the scene in a way that nobody could have foreseen. According to press reports and legal documents, on June 10 in the late afternoon, they climbed over the high wall and entered into the church compound at El Palmar de Troya. They were armed with at least one knife, bringing tools that could be used to open doors and locks. It was the time for Mass, and most friars, nuns and faithful were inside the Basilica. However, a bishop discovered them, and another prelate soon arrived there. In the subsequent tumult, all four were injured, but while the three others received relatively minor wounds, Hernández himself was seriously hurt.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ Brown 2017. For a hard criticism of the book, see Thompson 2017. For a detailed critical assessment, see Lundberg 2018.

⁴⁵⁹ The press coverage was immense. Some examples are found in *Diario de Sevilla*, June 11, 2018; *El Español* June 12, 2018. For links to many other media reports, see www.magnuslundberg.net. Two very ambitious feature articles could be mentioned, one in Spanish and the other in German: Prieto 2018 and Feldhaus 2018. There is also a very recent Spanish monograph on the Palmarians: Carrera 2019.

Nieves Triviño was immediately arrested for armed robbery and attempted homicide as was Hernández a couple of days later when he was allowed to leave the hospital. The court dropped the charges of attempted homicide, but the couple were accused of ‘armed robbery with aggravating circumstances,’ and placed in custody. Initially, the public attorney called for ten years in prison for both of them.⁴⁶⁰

Almost a year after the events outside the cathedral, on May 17, 2019, a Sevillian court sentenced Ginés Jesús Hernández to six years in prison and Nieves Triviño to five years for ‘armed robbery, grave assault and assault’. However, the sentences were suspended. The probation conditions establish that they would be imprisoned if they commit any crime during the next five years. The couple was also fined approximately 33,000 Euros, including damages to the two bishops who were injured. Furthermore, the probation conditions state that they are not allowed to approach the Basilica or the two prelates for ten years. As a result of the verdict, the ex-pope was released from prison where he had remained for almost a year.⁴⁶¹

In an interview after being released from prison, published in the Spanish newspaper *El Confidencial*, in February 2020 Ginés Hernández gave a very different description of the events at El Palmar. According to him, he and his wife did not go there to rob the Basilica. Instead, he claimed that they had been in contact with one of the Palmarian bishops, Fr. F., who stated that he wanted to leave the church and that he would be able to provide him with important information about the church’s internal affairs. As before, Hernández claimed that soon after he left the papacy, somebody broke into their home and stole a hard disk, where he kept sensitive information about the Palmarian Church.

According to Ginés Hernández on June 10, 2018, he and Nieves Triviño arrived in El Palmar de Troya at 6:30 AM. They had decided that they should meet Fr. F and he told them that he had left the keys to the

⁴⁶⁰ See, e.g. *Diario de Sevilla*, June 13, 2018.

⁴⁶¹ See, e.g. *ABC*, June 17, 2019.

church compound at the Cruz Blanca. This large cross is located just outside the compound, which used to be a meeting place for the seers at El Palmar who were not affiliated with the Palmarian Church. Hernández called Fr. F, who told him that it was not possible to meet until the evening. Therefore, the couple had to wait hidden outside the walls, behind the Basilica.

At 6:00 PM, they went into the compound using the keys. The couple proceeded to the friars' monastery. As Fr. F. had promised, the door was open. But instead of Fr. F, they met another bishop, Fr. S. and then three other prelates, Frs. A., J. and L. arrived. The couple realised that they had been fooled, and a fight between them and the bishops ensued. As a result of the struggle with Hernández, Fr. A. broke his tibia and his left fibula, Fr. S received several injuries by a knife as did Triviño, and Hernández was very severely injured. According to the ex-pope's testimony, Fr. L. stabbed him in the chest with a cutter.⁴⁶²

In the interview in *El Confidencial*, the journalist asked Hernández about his experiences in prison, and he stated that he had a rather hard time, not knowing how long he would remain there. Still, he said that he was well treated by the other prisoners. When in prison, some policemen questioned him about what he knew about violence, sexual abuses, suicide attempts, and money laundering within the Palmarian church. Hernández tried to negotiate. He said that he would tell them where the church kept its stash of weapons in exchange for a less severe verdict, but they turned down his offers.

In the interview, Hernández also claimed that the weapons were not to be found on the compound any more. When he was the pope, he ordered that they should be moved elsewhere. According to him, the church has rifles, machine guns, pistols, and lots of ammunition which they have acquired illegally.

Ginés Hernández maintained that he did not steal any money when leaving the church though he had access to a security box that was found

⁴⁶² *El Confidencial*, February 19, 2020.

in the basement of the cathedral. At the time he left, there were about 300,000 Euros in cash. Moreover, the church had around 270,000 Euros deposited on a bank account to which he had access. Still, Hernández maintained that he did not bring anything but the ‘popemobile’, the BMW, which he saw as his private property. He also stated that during his five years as the pontiff, the church spent about 6 million Euros to finish the works on the cathedral. In short, the Palmarian church handled large amounts of money, mainly in cash.

When the journalist asked if he regretted anything, Hernández stated that he should have remained pope a few months longer, as he was convinced that he could have closed down the whole church. Although he did not explain how, he expressed confidence that the Palmarian church soon will break down. At least, he said, there will be ‘a schism within the schism’, i.e., that the Palmarian church will split into smaller groups.⁴⁶³

During this intense period, the Palmarian Church did not make a single public comment. Due to its closed nature and its relations to the news media, anything else would have been sensational. Therefore, for outsiders, it was astonishing that the Palmarians suddenly launched a multilingual website on December 8, 2018. There were more complete versions in Spanish, English and German. Still, large portions are available in French, Portuguese, and Tagalog, too, and later some parts were translated into Polish and Romanian.

It is described as the only official website of the Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face in Company with Jesus of Mary and the ‘One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Palmarian Church, The true Catholic Church of all times, founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ Legitimate Succession of the Cathedra of Saint Peter Ruled by His Holiness Pope Peter III, *De Glória Ecclesiæ*.’⁴⁶⁴ This is significant, as much of the website emphasises the

⁴⁶³ *El Confidencial*, February 19, 2020.

⁴⁶⁴ Quoted from from the English version: www.palmarianchurch.org; cf. www.iglesiapalmariana.org (Spanish); www.palmarianischekirche.org (German); www.igrejapalmariana.org (Portuguese); www.eglisepalmarienne.org (French);

continuity between the Roman Catholic and the Palmarian Catholic Church, explaining that in a situation of almost general apostasy and following a divine mandate, in 1978 the Holy See moved from Rome to Palmar de Troya, where the true pope now resides.

The website features pictures and videos from important events during the Palmarian Church Year. However, there are also a growing number of digital publications available, including presentations of the church, collections of heavenly messages to Clemente Domínguez/Gregory XVII, catechetical literature, extracts from the Palmarian Bible and the *Palmarian Lives of Saints* as well some of the current pope's apostolic letters.⁴⁶⁵

During 2019, the Palmarians also opened official accounts on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, whose contents are connected with the website.⁴⁶⁶ Thus, within months, the Palmarians went from total non-presence online to something completely different. The explicit reason for going on-line is mission and apology. They want to spread their faith and counteract what they see as lies.⁴⁶⁷

Since the launch of the website, the Church publishes monthly reports on its impact. The reports are valuable sources regarding the Church's self-image and view of outsiders, not least those considered 'enemies of the Church.' The reports also include statistics recording the growing number of countries and territories from which people have found their way to the website. In this way, the church can claim a global missionary enterprise. By the end of 2019, the Church reported that the site had received visitors from all countries except North Korea. Though

www.palmarianongsimbahan.org (Tagalog); www.kosciol-palmarianski.org (Polish) and www.bisericapalmariana.org (Romanian).

⁴⁶⁵ www.palmarianchurch.org

⁴⁶⁶ www.youtube.com/iglesiapalmariana; www.twitter.com/ipalmariana; www.facebook.com/PalmarianCatholicChurch

⁴⁶⁷ www.palmarianchurch.org

the exact order varies month by month, most visitors are from Spain, Argentina, the United States, Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria.⁴⁶⁸

Already in January 2019, one month after launching the site, they explained the reason for going online and their expectations. Though the tone is triumphalist, they do not seem to expect vast numbers of conversions, at least instantaneously.

The first stage of publicizing the True Church of Christ in all corners of the world has been fulfilled. Soon we will begin to see the fruits of this apostolate. They will be great, we are already seeing them. Finally, souls have found the truth they have sought after so much. How many times souls were in search of the truth and found lies! Lies on top of lies hiding the truth. Now the Palmarian website rises above the lies, spreading the Light of the True Church of Christ. The streams of lies have been broken. - - - The Church does not need multitudes of faithful to be called 'True Church.' For it truly to be the True Church, it only has one requirement: to have the true Pope.⁴⁶⁹

They see the need to tell the truth about the true church in the End time, as it is the only hope for humanity. Now, there is no reason for people to claim that they do not know where the true church is to be found. In fact, the Palmarians understand their online apostolate as a kind of digital Pentecost.

Now is the moment to profit from the outpouring of blessings coming from Heaven in order to get to know the True Church of Christ - - - the Church is no longer hidden, the true Church of Christ displays herself to mankind, for them either to accept or reject.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Reports on the website of the Holy Palmarian Church, January–December, 2019 and January–May 2020 (All reports are available on www.palmarianchurch.org/2019 and www.palmarianchurch.org/2020 respectively)

⁴⁶⁹ First Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, January 2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Seventh Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, July 2019.

In the reports, the church warns visitors from reading texts that ‘the enemies of the True Church of Christ publish,’ as they ‘render a service to Satan himself.’ Though this condemnation includes all non-Palmarian sites, publications and media reports, they state that the worst attacks against the church are published by ‘apostate bishops’.⁴⁷¹ They do not name names but devote a special section to the criticism brought forward in the texts and podcasts by ex-Father Dámaso María, one of the bishops who left in 2000.⁴⁷²

According to the Palmarians, the whole truth about the church and the faith is only found on the official website, as it is authorised by Pope Peter III, the Vicar of Christ and the successor of St. Peter in the current era. However, for some reason, they point out that the contents of the monthly reports are not part of the papal teaching, but the work of the Palmarian Catholic Action. Still, it is hard to believe that the pope would not give his imprimatur to the reports before publishing them.⁴⁷³

They underline that the Basilica at El Palmar de Troya is the unquestionable centre of the church, but there is Palmarian presence in many different countries. They claim that the Palmarian church is currently (2020) present in twenty countries: Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cameroon, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Kenya, Liechtenstein, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United States, and Venezuela.⁴⁷⁴

Though this might very well be the case, it becomes clear, even from official sources, that the missionary presence in most of these countries is very feeble, and no membership statistics are provided. According to official Palmarian sources, one missionary-bishop serves both the United States and the whole South American continent, and another missionary-

⁴⁷¹ Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Reports on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, April, May, and June, 2019.

⁴⁷² The podcast of ex-Father Dámaso María: www.anchor.fm/juan-marquez

⁴⁷³ Tenth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, October, 2019.

⁴⁷⁴ www.palmarianchurch.org/missions

bishop has not only the responsibility for Ireland and Great Britain but also the Philippines and New Zealand.⁴⁷⁵ It is clear that the latter two countries receive few clerical visits. In New Zealand there are very few—possibly only three—members left, but the Filipino community seems comparatively sizeable. Apart from that, there is at least one resident missionary-bishop in German-speaking Europe as well as one in Nigeria. Still, almost all clerics live more or less permanently in El Palmar de Troya, and all missionary-bishops have to spend at least a few months there each year.⁴⁷⁶

That the geographical distribution of the clergy is uneven is evident, but there is also a more general lack of clergy, especially younger ones. Vocations were the central theme of one of the first of Peter III's apostolic letters in 2016, and he returned to the issue in several more recent documents, most prominently in his tenth and the fourteenth apostolic letters.

The tenth letter, titled 'Generosity of Priestly Vocations' and dated in June 2018, includes almost forty tightly written pages. There the pope states that there, indeed, is a severe vocational crisis. The number of bishops is low. In videos of processions on important feast days, there seems to be about 30 present, some of them very old and in wheelchairs. In the context of the apostolic letter, it is interesting to note that Peter III cites few Palmarian sources but take recourse to church fathers and pre-Vatican II Catholic saints and theologians to underline the exalted status of the priesthood.⁴⁷⁷

In 2018, there were, indeed, two episcopal consecrations, but both bishops were about 80 years old. Moreover, in recent years, at least three bishops who left the church or were excommunicated during the pontificate of Gregory XVIII or earlier have been allowed to return, and the church

⁴⁷⁵ Peter III, Tenth apostolic letter, June 28, 2018.

⁴⁷⁶ Personal communication with ex-Palmarians.

⁴⁷⁷ Peter III, Tenth apostolic letter, June 28, 2018. See also www.youtube.com/iglesiapalmariana and www.palmarianchurch.org/principal-pilgrimages

actively tries to persuade others to do the same. On the other hand, Peter III states that there are many more female vocations than in previous decades. In videos, one can count at least 50 nuns, including some very young, though the majority appear to be older than seventy.⁴⁷⁸

From the reports on the impact of the website, one gets to know that clergy from different parts of the world do contact the church, wanting to work for the Palmarian apostolate in their home countries. Probably most of these persons are independent Catholic clergy, who want to be ordained and consecrated *sub conditione*, i.e., that they are already ordained priests and consecrated bishops but wish to receive apostolic succession through Archbishop Thuc and El Palmar, too. However, the Palmarian Church requires all to join the Carmelite Order of the Holy Face in Company with Jesus and Mary before even being considered potential clergy.

[They] must first enter our Carmelite Order in order to learn the doctrine enriched by the Palmarian Councils. Moreover they need to live in our monasteries to imbibe the spirit of prayer and penance we live in the Religious Order of the Carmelites of the Holy Face, a spirit of prayer and penance far superior to that of the religious orders of apostate Rome. They then have to receive Holy Orders in the Holy Palmarian See. They must take into account that the Church has been renewed in every aspect.⁴⁷⁹

On the whole, the monthly reports oscillate between the hope of conversions and the presumption that the church will remain small. The last document of 2019 summarises the result of its first year of internet apostolate and makes predictions. Parts of the report are positive.

In a short period of time, millions of souls will know the True Church of Christ, the Holy Palmarian Church. Virtuous souls will not be left out of the True Church for being unaware of its existence, as was the case until now. We will not say any more, only that the Palmarian

⁴⁷⁸ See www.youtube.com/iglesiapalmariana

⁴⁷⁹ Tenth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, October, 2019.

apostolate is prepared to carry out a triumph that Christ himself, Son of God, will be supporting wonderfully. An apostolate that the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph will be pushing with the fire of their love for the salvation of souls.⁴⁸⁰

Still, the report states that they ‘do not expect multitudes to arrive and prostrate at the feet of the Vicar of Christ in El Palmar de Troya, but we do expect some. God has no need of millions to save souls. A few very devout souls are what He needs. One holy soul does for millions.’⁴⁸¹ In the same vein, they write: ‘It is clear to us that for these people to convert to the True Church of Christ, many miracles will be needed. It is easier to convert a pagan than a relaxed Catholic who has become cold in the practice of his religion and seeks comfort rather than sacrifice.’⁴⁸²

In short, reading the reports and apostolic letters from 2019 and early 2020, it becomes clear that few outsiders have joined, though they claim interest from many people. In the first monthly report of 2020, dated on January 12, they write somewhat more explicitly: ‘We are certainly glad for the few conversions we have had lately. We would be glad if there were many more, but if there are none, we remain at peace because we have done our best to help souls to convert.’⁴⁸³

In this context, they refer to the saying in the synoptic gospels of the New Testament that ‘it is easier for a camel to pass through the ‘Eye of the Needle’, than for a man unduly attached to the things of this world to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:25).’ Their basic argument is that to enter and remain in the Palmarian Church is hard and that it is only for those who are willing to give up everything for God to reach their eternal salvation through the true Church.

⁴⁸⁰ Twelfth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, December, 2019.

⁴⁸¹ Seventh Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church July, 2019.

⁴⁸² Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Reports on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, April, July, and August, 2019.

⁴⁸³ Thirteenth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, January 2020.

In the February 2020 report, the emphasis is on Palmarian spirituality. However, they also write about conversions and re-conversions and the hopes for the near future.

We welcome the Palmarian faithful who have returned to the Church and also those who are preparing to return. We are very happy with the new flock. We hope that the triumph of the Holy Palmarian Church will soon be even more magnificent. Above all, because this year we celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the enthronement of the Holy Face of Christ in the Sacred Place of Apparitions of El Palmar de Troya in 1970. Christ, who is continuously supporting His Holy Church, has many surprises to gladden his most beloved Palmarian faithful in this Glorious Palmarian Holy Year of the Holy Face.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ Fourteenth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, February 2020.

10. Doctrines

From its foundation, the Palmarian Church has been a very text centred religious organisation, publishing a long series of doctrinal works. Most of them exist in English, Spanish and German parallel versions, but there are also translations in French, Portuguese, Polish and Italian. Taken together, the documents from 1978 to 2016 provide evidence of continuous doctrinal development from a rather typical, though clearly apocalyptically centred Catholic traditionalism, into an increasingly different belief system, though it is not as unique as authors on matters Palmarian often have asserted.

The focus in this chapter is on current Palmarians teachings, also taking into account the historical development. At the same time, I search for theological sources of inspiration from 19th and 20th-century private revelations, but also from other traditionalist groups, not least the Renewed church of French Pope Clément XV, with which there are significant doctrinal similarities. I will also compare them to Roman Catholic official doctrine.

After presenting the doctrinal works that I use as sources, the analysis will focus on five central theological themes: 1) Christ and his role in the redemption of humanity: Christology. 2) The Virgin Mary and her role in salvation history: Mariology. 3) St. Joseph and his role in the salvation economy: Josephology. 4) Palmarian ecclesiology, i.e. their understanding of the church and its function from creation to the current era. 5) Palmarian eschatology and apocalypticism; i.e. their teachings on death, judgment, heaven, hell and purgatory, as well as prophesies about End-time events.

Doctrinal Texts

Before the establishment of the pontificate in 1978, the Palmarians published little apart from the series of *Heavenly Messages* to Clemente Domínguez. In 2012, they printed a complete two-volume collection of revised versions of visions and messages between 1969 and 2002, which was edited by Pope Peter II.⁴⁸⁵

The first doctrinal texts that were made public after the foundation of the church were 47 *Pontifical documents*, dated between August 1978 and the opening of the First Palmarian Council in March 1980. They included many dogmatic definitions on a wide array of theological subjects, including some new Mariological dogmas, but not least, thousands of canonisations, including brief hagiographies. First printed separately, the *Pontifical documents* were later brought together in book form. In the 2010s, they were published in a somewhat revised form, ‘in light of the Holy Palmarian Bible.’⁴⁸⁶

For the understanding of the church’s teachings, the *Palmarian Credo* is of great importance. In contrast to traditional Christian Creeds, it is a very lengthy and detailed document. In the latest edition which I have had access to (2012), it fills 50 pages. The original text was promulgated at the inaugural session of the Palmarian Council on March 30, 1980, but it has been revised on several later occasions.⁴⁸⁷

The main result of the First Council was the *Treatise on the Mass* (TM). This voluminous work was first successively published in a series of 25 instalments, and eventually, in 1992, in a single volume. The *Treatise* is

⁴⁸⁵ The most complete version is the two-volume set from 2011, of which I use the English version (HVM), see also the thematic collections MC, MT and SF. All the acronyms refer to the documents under the subheading ‘Official Church documents’ in the list of references. See also e.g. *El Palmar de Troya. Mensajes sobrenaturales* 1975–1979 and Isaiás María de la Santa Faz. 1981

⁴⁸⁶ I have consulted a Spanish edition from 1980 (DP) and an English version from the same time (PD).

⁴⁸⁷ I have had access to a Spanish version from 1980 (CP) and English and German editions from 2012 (PC, PC2).

above all an allegorical interpretation of the biblical texts from the perspective of the Sacrifice of the Mass. Among many other things, it includes detailed biographies of Christ and the Virgin, and much-elaborated versions of Old Testament stories, above all, based on private revelations to Gregory XVII. Throughout, there is much emphasis on establishing exact dates for events and the description of concrete situations. Still, the main narration is interspersed by papal definitions and decrees about many other subjects. Thus, the *Treatise on the Mass* became the complete acts of the First Council.⁴⁸⁸

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 5, in 1997, Gregory XVII began to develop the work that would be called *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*. Claiming that the Prophet Elijah had appeared to him to explain that the current Bible was filled with errors that had been introduced by Judeo-masonic groups through the centuries, it was his mission to revise it. In 2001, the Bible was published in a five-volume edition, while the most recent editions of the most advanced version are in just two volumes.⁴⁸⁹ Eventually, *Sacred History* was published in three variants—advanced, intermediate and primary levels—as well as in a richly illustrated children’s edition.⁴⁹⁰

To an even higher degree than *Treatise of the Mass*, *Sacred History* is an extensive and very detailed reworking of the biblical books, based on the continuous private revelations to Gregory. The revisions were dramatic. Many parts of the biblical books were not included at all, and numerous stories are almost unrecognisable due to the allegorical and apocalyptic interpretations, which Gregory claimed reflected the original

⁴⁸⁸ I have consulted a Spanish version from 1992 (TM).

⁴⁸⁹ Personal communication with Fr. B, 2017.

⁴⁹⁰ I have had access to several editions of the *Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*: the five-volume superior grade version from 2001 (SH) and a two-volume superior grade version, printed in 2012 (SH2). Apart from them, I have studied a German edition for children (HG) and an elementary-grade Bible in the same language (HG2). See also the digitized extracts from the Palmarian Bible: E1, E2 and PDRA on www.palmarchurch.org as well as the documents available on www.magnuslundberg.net.

intentions of the divine author. All of this makes the work very different from the traditional Bibles, both in structure and content.⁴⁹¹ The prologue to *Sacred History* states that the work is ‘the narration of events in the history of the People of God, or Holy church, contained in the Old and New Testaments.’ Still, the Testaments are preceded by a Treatise of the Holy Trinity, as a background to everything in history.⁴⁹² Then, it follows the biblical accounts according to Palmarian chronology.

The exact dating of events is an integral part of this work, too. The reader gets to know that the Tower of Babel was begun in the year 2847 after creation; and that Moses, ‘the Lawgiver and Caudillo of the People of Israel’ received the stone tablets on Friday, August 5, year 3690 in the early morning. *Sacred History* also claims that Virgin Mary founded the Order of Mount Carmel, also called the Essenes, on July 16, year 4280; and in the year 4843, the Prophet Daniel and his companions were put in the furnace.⁴⁹³

An integral part of the *Sacred History*, later published separately, was the *Historical Review of all the Popes*, an official interpretation of church history from St. Peter onwards, of course including the Palmarian pontiffs of the End times.⁴⁹⁴ The work includes brief papal biographies with an assessment of their work and morality. Through the *Historical Review*, Pope Gregory XVII dogmatised that six popes are in hell, but that most popes who had committed errors of a dogmatic character were not to be blamed, as they had powerful enemies, who did everything they could to counteract the true church. In fact, the *Historical Review* includes a whole series of named antipopes from the late 16th century onwards; most of whom were installed by French rulers. From the 1720s, these antipopes are presented as masons. It is Palmarian belief that most post-Tridentine popes

⁴⁹¹ Gregory XVII, Sermon July 20, 1998, cf. SH.

⁴⁹² SH, part 1, book 1–2.

⁴⁹³ HS, part 2, book 7; part 3, book 2; part 9, book 1; part 10, book 4.

⁴⁹⁴ I have consulted an English version from 2013 (HRP).

were poisoned to death by the enemies of the church, most often found within the curia.⁴⁹⁵

A condensed doctrinal summary is found in the *Palmarian Catechism*, which has been issued in many editions throughout the years. At least one revised version has been made public in the last three pontificates. Like several other Palmarian works, the *Catechism* exists in three versions: from basic via intermediate to advanced level.⁴⁹⁶ Other documents issued by the four Palmarian pontiffs have served as complement sources for me: apostolic decrees, apostolic letters, encyclicals and sermons. Nevertheless, the most essential teachings in these documents are also included in the more extensive doctrinal works.

Christ

On a basic level, the Palmarian Church follows the Trinitarian teachings in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325/381), and the further Christological definitions at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), which are accepted by many Christian churches. According to Palmarian teachings, God is one in essence, in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which are distinct and equal. God is the creator of everything.⁴⁹⁷ The Palmarian *Credo* commences with the following passage:

I believe in one true God, Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: eternally existing of Himself, Purest and Most Simple Spirit, Eternal, Living, Almighty, Creator. One sole Godhead in Essence and Three truly distinct Persons, but coequal and coeternal One with Another.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ HRP, book 1, chapters 52–88.

⁴⁹⁶ I have had access to a many Palmarian catechisms. I have consulted the 2012 edition in English for all three levels (PCE, PCI, PCS), as well as German versions from 2005 and 2016 (PKG, PKO, PKO2).

⁴⁹⁷ PCS 2-4.

⁴⁹⁸ PC.

Apart from that, however, Palmarian doctrine includes a belief in the pre-existence of the soul of Christ, which is much more uncommon. While maintaining that the Son—Christ—is God, and thus uncreated, they teach that God, in fact, created the *human* soul of Christ before everything else. Therefore, his human soul became the co-creator of the universe.⁴⁹⁹ These are not original Palmarian teachings but existed in the Early Church, for example, in works by the early third-century theologian Origen of Alexandria, several whose ideas were condemned as a heretic at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. The Council not only declared many of Origen’s writings anathema but also theologians who had developed his teachings, so-called Origenists.⁵⁰⁰ In Palmarian theology, there is a clear and consistent attempt to rehabilitate Origen’s status, most evident through the teaching on the pre-existence of souls.

Furthermore, it is Palmarian belief that Christ’s human soul first assumed a human body when he appeared as the High Priest Melchisedech, and then, ultimately incarnated in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ’s soul has a clear parallel in the teaching on the pre-existence of Virgin Mary’s soul. Her human soul was created by God, directly following the creation of Christ’s soul, and from the very beginning, the souls of Jesus and Mary were ‘spiritually espoused’; they were a union. When Christ’s soul assumed the body of Melchisedech, High Priest and King of Salem, Mary’s soul assumed the body of Essenia, Queen of Salem. Later, she assumed the body of Mary, the Mother of God.⁵⁰¹

These teachings on the pre-existence of Christ and Mary, and their eternal union, permeate much of the Palmarian theology, which will be evident in the following paragraphs. It was also an essential part of the

⁴⁹⁹ PCS 5.

⁵⁰⁰ Here is not the place to delve deeply into Origen and Origenism and the teachings on pre-existence. For an excellent study on Origen’s ideas on pre-existence and creation, see Martens 2015. I thank Fr. B for discussions on this issue.

⁵⁰¹ PCS 6 and 11.

later teachings of the Renewed Church of Clément XV.⁵⁰² Such ideas, though less elaborated are found in teachings by St. Jean Eudes and St. Marguerite Marie Alacoque in the seventeenth century, while the more refined version that the two hearts were unified by the Holy Spirit is found in the 1950s-apparitions to Jeanne-Louise Ramonet in Kirizenen.⁵⁰³

According to the Palmarian Creed, Jesus Christ was born on December 25, 5199 years after the Creation. In the incarnation, his pre-existent soul assumed a human body. Christ was a single person, but he had two natures: divine and human. To Palmarians, Christ is *the* saviour of humanity, but given the eternal union with Mary, the spiritual espousal, she becomes a co-redeemer of humanity. When incarnated, Christ did not end being God. He had his divine nature, but he chose to suffer in a human body for the sake of humanity. Through his suffering and death on the cross and his life at large, Christ made reparation for the sins of humanity. According to Palmarian teaching, Christ died on March 25, in the year 34. On March 27, he rose from the dead, and forty days later, on May 15, he ascended to Heaven.⁵⁰⁴

As regards the description of the human existence, ministry and death of Jesus Christ and his mother, Palmarian theology includes many traditional Catholic elements, but they are interpreted and developed by private apparitions, both to Clemente/Gregory XVII and his favourite mystics such as Spanish Conceptionist nun Maria de Jesús Ágreda (1602–1665) and German Augustinian canoness regular Anna Katharina Emmerich (1774–1824). Both nuns claimed very concrete visions of the lives of the Virgin and Christ, which widely expanded the contents of the canonical stories in the Bible.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Cf. Chapter 2.

⁵⁰³ See Badone 2007.

⁵⁰⁴ PCS 5, 11, 12, 14–15 and 18–20.

⁵⁰⁵ The *Treatise of the Mass* includes clear reference to both them. María de Ágreda's most important mariological work is the enormous *Mística Ciudad de Dios*. On the book, see e.g. Otero Lázaro 2003. The main works, based on Anna Katharina Emmerich's testimonies are *Das Leben unseres Herrn und Heilandes Jesu Christi*,

Virgin Mary

The Roman Catholic Church has made few infallible dogmatic pronouncements, which are binding for Catholics; the Palmarian popes, especially Gregory XVII, have made hundreds, if not thousands, on matters big and small. During his first days as the pontiff, Gregory XVII promulgated a series of new Marian dogmas. Many of them had been discussed by Roman Catholic theologians for centuries. In the Early Church, it was taught that the Virgin Mary was a (perpetual) virgin and the mother of God (*Theotokos*). After that, it would take a long time before the church made any other binding teaching on the Virgin. In 1854, the Holy See announced a new dogma, the Immaculate Conception, that the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. Finally, in 1950, Pius XII infallibly proclaimed ‘the fourth Marian dogma’– the Assumption of the Virgin: that Mary at her ‘dormition’ (she did not die) was brought to heaven in body and soul.⁵⁰⁶

The Palmarian Church would develop this body of articles of faith at a rapid pace. For them, the Virgin has come to have almost equal status with that of Christ. In short, it is a very Mario-centric theology, and their Mariology can be described as maximalist. Among other things, the Virgin has been declared Co-mediatrix, Co-redemptrix, Co-reparatrix and Advocate. None of these titles was unknown in the Roman Catholic tradition, and several modern popes had made use of the terms and of similar constructs, but they had not been made dogmas. Other Palmarian teachings, however, are less traditional, including the declarations on the pre-existence of the soul of Mary.⁵⁰⁷

According to Pope Gregory XVII, the soul of the Virgin was shaped before the creation of heaven and earth. In fact, it had existed in the mind of God eternally. Therefore, the pontiff declared Mary to be God’s

Das bittere Leiden unseres Herrn Jesus Christus and Leben der heiligen Jungfrau Maria. On Emmerich, see e.g. Landfester 2005.

⁵⁰⁶ For a useful summary of Catholic Mariology, see Pelikan 1996.

⁵⁰⁷ PD 34; PCS 5 and 11.

‘companion’ in the creation of the universe: she was, in fact, a co-creator, given her union with the soul of Christ. The Palmarians later elaborated on this union. The church teaches that a particle of Christ’s heart was ‘enthroned’ in her, and a drop of his blood was ‘enthroned’ in her, and vice-versa. The idea of ‘enthronements’ is a central part of Palmarian soteriology, the teaching about human redemption, and Christ’s and Mary’s role in the economy of salvation.⁵⁰⁸

As Mary, through the Immaculate Conception, was conceived and born into the world without original sin, the Palmarians teach that she did not have to suffer at all during her life. Nevertheless, she actively chose to be born to suffer for the benefit of humanity. They claim to know that the Virgin saw the light of day in Jerusalem on December 8, 5180 years after the creation, and at her ‘dormition’, she ascended to heaven, in body and soul on August 15, 57 AD.⁵⁰⁹

While Christ is seen as *the* redeemer of humanity, the Palmarians declared Mary Co-redemptrix, since she suffered together with Christ during his life and in his death on the cross. She gave her son’s life for the redemption of humanity in an act of obedience to God. While Christ gave his life through a bloody sacrifice, the Palmarian pope declared that the Virgin suffered an un-bloody martyrdom; she died a ‘spiritual death’ beneath the cross, where her son died.⁵¹⁰ Still, she is regarded as dependent on and secondary to her son. In the Palmarian *Credo*, it is stated:

I believe that Mary is Co-redemptrix of mankind, because She united the sufferings and countless afflictions of Her life to the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, not as mere co-operation, but as authentic suffering of the Passion, She being the Co-Victim of Calvary.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ PD 34; PCS 5 and 11.

⁵⁰⁹ PCS, 12, 16 and 21.

⁵¹⁰ DP 2; TM, chapter 34, v. 131–139.

⁵¹¹ PC, p. 19.

The title of Co-redemptrix has not been dogmatised by the Roman Catholic Church, even if many faithful have urged the Holy See to proclaim ‘the fifth Marian dogma’. Sometimes, as in the Amsterdam apparitions to Ida Peerdeman, the teachings on Mary as Co-redemptrix, Co-mediator and Advocate were brought together in one dogma. Several twentieth-century pontiffs, however, have used the term Co-redemptrix or terms with a similar meaning, and scholastic ideas about the double intercession of Christ and Mary moved in that direction, too. Thus, it is certainly not an original Palmarian doctrine of faith, though it has reached a more prominent position, making it an infallible dogma.

According to the teachings of Pope Gregory XVII, the Virgin is universal Co-mediatrix, which means that she is the dispenser of all the graces won through the death and resurrection of the Lord. Christ is seen as the supreme mediator between God and humanity. But as he came to the world through the body of the Virgin Mary, and mixed his blood with hers and ‘enthroned’ a particle of his heart in hers, the faithful’s road to Christ goes through Mary (*ad Jesum per Mariam*), a phrase used by the French priest and mystic Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort.

In Gregory XVII’s second pontifical document (1978), it is stated that this dogma was a direct consequence of the Virgin giving birth to Jesus Christ. Her mediation can be understood in two ways. First, she gave birth to Jesus Christ (the saviour) and then she gathers humankind’s supplications and prayers and presents them before her son.⁵¹² The Palmarian *Credo* reads:

I believe that Mary Most Holy is Universal Mediatrix in the Dispensation of all Graces, Suppliant Omnipotence, prerogatives She uses continuously, as is well proven at the Marriage of Cana, when She hastened the hour of the first public miracle, or manifestation of the Divinity of Christ.⁵¹³

⁵¹² PD 2; cf. PD 35. For a monograph study on the concept of co-redemptrix, see Miravalle 2003.

⁵¹³ CP, p. 19.

Elaborating on these ideas, Gregory XVII dogmatised that the Virgin is Co-reparatrix. This term has a similar meaning to that of Co-mediatrix, but it focuses on the repairing of the broken relationship between God and creation that followed the introduction of sin into the world. Standing by the cross, the Virgin suffered in spirit what Christ suffered in his body as to present an offering to God for the benefit of humanity.⁵¹⁴ The Palmarian Creed relates to the dogma in the following way:

I believe that Mary is Co-Reparatrix, because she suffered spiritually all the pains Christ suffered in Soul and Body, offering up to the Eternal Father the death of Her Divine Son; and also Her own Spiritual Death when deprived of the beatific vision for seven seconds, in her most painful delivery giving Birth to the Church or Mystical Body of Christ. With these sufferings, Mary accomplished a Co-priestly mission with Christ.⁵¹⁵

After this proclamation, the Palmarians took one further step in declaring that both Christ and the Virgin Mary are present in the Eucharist, as she never left the side of Christ. It is also stated that her presence in the Eucharist is in no way symbolic, but real. Not only the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist, but also the Virgin, kneeling beside him. In one of the papal documents, this is explained in the following way:

We teach as infallible doctrine that - - - [s]he who is able by grace really and truly to suffer the Sacred Passion of Christ, also by grace is able to be present in the Sacred Eucharist, since, at no moment has Mary ever been, or will be, removed from her Son. Now that, with sure and irrevocable faith, you know this presence of Mary in the Eucharist as Co-adjutrix of the Eucharistic Christ, you have, as a result, more strength to implore Mary, in order that, Mediatrix that she is, she obtains from God all your spiritual necessities, as well as the material if they do not oppose the spiritual. Her presence

⁵¹⁴ PD 35 and 45.

⁵¹⁵ PC, p. 19.

kneeling in the Eucharist shows her adoration of God and her Omnipotence, which is omnipotence of supplication.⁵¹⁶

This teaching is not common in Catholic theology, but at least existed in a few maximalist Mariological works from the seventeenth century, including Franciscan recollect friar Zephyrinus de Someire's, *La dévotion à la mère de Dieu dans le très-saint sacrement*, which was included in the Index of Forbidden Books in 1698. Someire taught that after consecration, the Virgin's body, blood and milk was present in the Eucharist. Spanish Jesuit Cristóbal de Vega taught similar ideas in his extensive synthesis, *Theologia Mariana* (1653), which is a clear example of seventeenth-century maximalist Mariology. In his theological argumentation, he included the contemporary medical views that parts of the blood and milk of the mother remained in the child during his or her entire life. Thus, according to Vega, the body and blood of the Virgin were substantially present in the Eucharist.⁵¹⁷ The Renewed church of Clément XV also taught the real presence of Mary in the Eucharist.⁵¹⁸

Being born without sin, and not having committed a single sin during her lifetime, the Palmarians claimed that the Virgin Mary did not need to be redeemed through the death of Christ; she was 'irredeemed'. Apart from that, they teach that if the Virgin had sinned even once, it would have been a contradiction of her being immaculately conceived.⁵¹⁹

St. Joseph

Just as there is precise parallelism between Christ and the Virgin in Palmarian theology, there is explicit parallelism between the Virgin and St. Joseph. Nevertheless, Joseph is subordinated to the Virgin, as she is subordinated to Christ. The Palmarian Josephology is in no way as detailed

⁵¹⁶ PD 45.

⁵¹⁷ Stöhr 1988: 408–409. On Cristóbal de Vega, see Riestra 2006.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Chapter 2.

⁵¹⁹ PD 31.

as its Mariology, but still substantial and detailed, and has a prominent place in its *Credo*. In one of the first papal documents, promulgated in 1978, it was taught that Joseph was pre-sanctified in the womb of his mother in the third month of his conception. From that time, he was freed from the stain of original sin. Thus, he was born without the ability to commit any sin during his entire existence. Just as the Virgin, he did not have to suffer, as suffering was the effect of the fall, but to help humanity, he chose to do it anyway.⁵²⁰

In the Palmarian *Credo*, it is stated that Joseph was 26 years old when he betrothed the Virgin Mary, thus distancing themselves from certain traditions that claimed that he was an old man at the time. The *Palmarian Catechism* teaches that Joseph was born in Bethlehem on July 20, 5172 years after the creation and died on March 19, 34 AD, just before the death and resurrection of Christ. He was resurrected a year later. Shortly after that, he was brought to heaven, in body and soul. The Palmarian pope thus dogmatised the ‘Assumption of St. Joseph’. The Palmarians also impart that Joseph remained a virgin throughout his life and that he never questioned the perpetual virginity of Mary.⁵²¹ He was named father and doctor of the church and co-priest with the Virgin Mary. In the Palmarian *Credo*, it is stated:

I believe that Joseph Most Holy is Father and Doctor of the Church. And that due to his loftiest dignity of Virginal Father of Jesus and Virginal Spouse of Mary, he exercises, as Coadjutor of the Exalted Mother of God, the Prerogatives of Co-Reparator, Co-Redeemer, Co-Mediator, Co-Treasurer and Co-Dispenser, and many other exalted privileges.⁵²²

In Palmarian theology, St. Joseph becomes a Co-redeemer, who takes part in the redemption of humanity, as he was the foster-father of the Redeemer and spouse of the Co-redemptrix. Thus, just as the Christian’s road to

⁵²⁰ PC; cf. DP 3.

⁵²¹ PCS 17, cf. PKO2 17.

⁵²² PC, p. 26.

Christ goes through Mary, their path to Mary goes through Joseph.⁵²³ French Pope Clément XV taught similar doctrines, though the position of St. Joseph is even more elevated there; he is, for example, present in the Eucharist and also, together with Mary, part of an expanded Trinity.⁵²⁴

Ecclesiology

According to Palmarian teachings, the current church is Christ's Mystical Body. This church has been preceded by the Church of the Mystical Souls of Christ and Mary, formed at Creation, and the church of the Mystical Body of Mary. The latter stage had a relatively brief existence from the immaculate conception of Mary—i.e., when *she* was conceived in the womb of St. Anne—until the incarnation of Christ. The Church as Christ's Mystical body was founded at the Calvary, when the soldier's lance pierced his side and by continuation his heart. The church was born through blood and water that poured out from the side wound. Continuing with their consequent parallelism between Christ and the Virgin, the Palmarians believe that at that very moment, the heart of Mary was spiritually pierced.⁵²⁵

Following traditional Roman Catholic teaching, the Mystical Body of Christ is made up by Church Triumphant (angels and the blessed human souls), the Church Suffering (the souls in purgatory), the Church Militant (the faithful on earth) and the Church Expectant (the children in limbo). The visible part of the church is the Church Militant under the pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth, who, in the End times, reigns from El Palmar de Troya. The Palmarians make a distinction between two types of members of the Church. There are the living parts, who are in a state of grace, and the dead parts, who are in mortal sin and must confess, but who are still in communion with the pope. The members of the Church Militant take part

⁵²³ PCS 17, cf. PKO2 17.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Chapter 2.

⁵²⁵ PCS 22; cf. SH part 14, book VII, chapter 25.

in the espousal of the hearts of Mary and Christ; the blood drops of Mary and Christ are enthroned in them.⁵²⁶

In the End time, there are five marks of the true Church, including the four traditional Roman Catholic. The church is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Palmarian:

One in the faith because the truth revealed by God is the same; One in government, because there is one sole visible Head, the Pope; and One in the sacraments, because they are the same for all the Church's faithful.

Holy, because of her Founder is Holy; her doctrine is Holy her aims and many of her members are Holy.

Catholic, because she is universal, for she embraces all truths and is for all peoples.

Apostolic, because her hierarchy and her doctrine derive from the Apostles.

Palmarian, because her See is now at El Palmar de Troya (Seville, Spain).⁵²⁷

According to Palmar belief, the Holy See was first located in Jerusalem, and then for a short time in Antioch— for four months in the year 42. By divine decree, on June 29, in the year 42, the Apostolic See was translated to Rome, but because of Rome's apostasy, in 1978 it was translated by divine decree, to El Palmar de Troya in Spain. However, before the End of the Universe, it will return to Jerusalem.⁵²⁸

Eschatology

To the Palmarians, humanity's time on earth is rather short. According to them, the year 2020 C.E. corresponds to the year 7219 after the Creation of the universe. This chronology is based on the revelations to Gregory XVII.

⁵²⁶ PCS 22–28.

⁵²⁷ PCS 30.

⁵²⁸ SH, part 16, book 3, chapter 1.

Thus, they are creationists, defending the ‘young-earth position.’ The church teaches that the divinely created human being is made up of three parts: the soul, the essential body, which is spiritualised matter, and the accidental body, which is pure matter. These distinctions are crucial to understand Palmarian eschatology and apocalyptic prophecies.⁵²⁹ The official Roman Catholic teaching on eschatology is not detailed, while the Palmarians claim exact knowledge about all these matters, and every moment is infallibly defined.⁵³⁰

In line with their understanding of human nature, the Palmarian church distinguishes between two stages of death: clinical death of the accidental body and true death of the essential body. The two stages are normally separated by just a few minutes. During this brief time, the particular judgement of the person takes place before Christ. The trial has four stages. First, Satan preaches to seduce the clinically dead individual, and then Mary preaches conversion to those in sin and gives a foretaste of heaven to those in a state of grace. Then it is up to the individual to decide who to follow. Even if the person is in mortal sin, he or she could convert. In the fourth and final stage, Christ passes his sentence. Then true death occurs and soul and body separate. According to the judgment of Christ, the soul goes to heaven, purgatory or hell.⁵³¹

According to Palmarian doctrine, heaven, hell and purgatory are not locations but states, which the soul experiences individually. In heaven, angels and saved souls see God, face to face, in complete happiness. Hell is the state of eternal damnation and horrific suffering, which demons and damned humans experience. They do not see God but only perceive the universe as chaotic and formless. Purgatory involves horrific suffering, but unlike hell, it is temporal. Souls are there to purify to reach eternal bliss.⁵³² The souls are in these post-mortem states until the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. The Purgatory will cease to exist at the

⁵²⁹ PCS 7–10.

⁵³⁰ See, in particular, SH, part 18.

⁵³¹ PCS 62.

⁵³² PCS 63–65.

Second Coming of Christ, and then the unbaptized children who are in Limbo will be released, too.⁵³³

The other aspect of Palmarian eschatology has to do with the End-time events, as has been shown throughout this study. Being Marian apocalypticist, the church has prophesied the end of the world on many occasions. End dates between 1980 and 2015 have been mentioned, but the date has constantly been moved forward. Prophecy has failed on several occasions or expressed in another way, it was averted.⁵³⁴ According to Palmarian belief, the apocalyptic age began in 1917, with the apparitions at Fatima. In their view, Seven Seals in the Book of Revelations describe the events from then onwards; and in *Sacred History* and other works, Pope Gregory XVII interpreted them. According to *Sacred History*, the Great War in Europe became the First World War in 1917. That was the main sign of divine chastisement.⁵³⁵

The Palmarian version of Book of Revelations testifies about a critical phase in which Freemasonry and communism gained ever-increasing power. In the decades that followed the influence of the enemies of Christ led to a general apostasy of the Roman Catholic church, but in this apocalyptical era, the true faithful are assisted by the Virgin, most prominently through her messages at El Palmar de Troya, which became a beacon of true light in the End time from 1968 onwards.⁵³⁶

The pre-established order of the End-time events was outlined in detail in the *Palmarian Bible* and earlier publications, but there were some important additions after the death of Gregory XVII's death. In 2006, his successor Peter II 'infallibly defined' that Antichrist was born in Bethlehem in the year 2000. According to many ex-members, this was seen as a dramatic and unexpected announcement. Building further on the secrets at La Salette, and later apparition traditions, Peter II also declared

⁵³³ See also SH, part 18, books VII-IX.

⁵³⁴ Personal communication with ex-members.

⁵³⁵ SH, part 18, books I-IV.

⁵³⁶ SH, part 18, book V.

that Antichrist was the son of a ‘Jewish nun,’ the Anti-Mary, and ‘an apostate Palmarian bishop’,⁵³⁷

The life of Antichrist, as presented by Peter II, was clearly modelled upon the life of the incarnate Jesus Christ, which he tries to mimic to lure people into his fold. According to the dogmatic definition, Antichrist would make a brief entry into the world in 2012. Antichrist might look like a human being, but according to Peter II, he is Satan in human disguise; he has no human soul, as he is possessed with an evil spirit. At the age of thirty, in 2030, Antichrist will begin his public apostolate, proclaiming himself the Messiah and initiate persecutions against the true Christians, i.e. the Palmarians.⁵³⁸

According to this Palmarian End time chronology, the triumphal Second Coming of Christ would be in 2034. Still, in the encyclicals and sermons from 2013 onwards, Pope Gregory XVIII declared that though Antichrist was indeed born in the year 2000, the Palmarians should not see it as an absolute date for Christ’s Second Coming, as it is up to God to decide. The teaching in the newest edition of the *Palmarian Catechism*, published by Peter III in 2016 is identical, though it was not mentioned that Antichrist was fathered by an apostate Palmarian bishop.⁵³⁹ Moreover, in a papal message from September 2019, the End time predictions are much more general: ‘Nobody wants to recognise that we are in the Last Times, but the prophecies show that we are really living it. We do not know how many years it will last.’⁵⁴⁰

Though heaven, hell, purgatory and limbo are states, not locations, there are two physical places, other than earth, that have an importance in the End time drama. The Palmarians teach that there is a Planet of Mary, where sin is absent. It is the dwelling-place for people, whom angels

⁵³⁷ See also SH, part 18, book VI.

⁵³⁸ PKO2, cf. PCS; SH, part 18, books VII-VIII; Peter II, Apostolic Letters; and Personal communication with ex-members.

⁵³⁹ PCS.

⁵⁴⁰ Ninth Report on the Website of the Holy Palmarian Church, September 2019, cf. Peter III, Seventeenth Apostolic Letter, March 10, 2020.

have transported from the earth and other inhabited planets. They are in a state of grace and will be saved.

The inhabitants of the Planet of Mary will help the church militant on earth in the final battles against Antichrist. Many of them will die martyrs together with the last Palmarian pope, including John the Evangelist, who was brought to the planet in the year 100, but also prophets Elijah, Henoch and Moses live there. According to Palmarian belief, the prophet Elijah uses the Planet of Mary as a basis for his missions on other inhabited planets.⁵⁴¹ The existence of the Planet of Mary and its role in the Last times was found among the doctrines of Clément XV in the late 1960s. The Palmarians have developed the teachings further in *Sacred History*, while at the same time tuning down the French pope's clear UFO and alien focus.⁵⁴²

According to official Palmarian teaching, there is also a Planet of Lucifer. It is the exact opposite of the Planet of Mary. It is inhabited by godless people from earth and other planets, under the leadership of Satan. They have 'delivered themselves up in body and soul to Satan's service,' and were transported there by demons, and are destined to eternal condemnation. The inhabitants of the Planet of Lucifer will assist Antichrist in the last fights between Good and Evil, and when losing the apocalyptic war, they will all be cast into hell.⁵⁴³ While I have not been able to find references to the Planet of Lucifer in the documents of the Renewed Church, just like them, the Palmarians teach that there are several other inhabited planets. But all inhabitants on these planets are subject to the rule of the pope of El Palmar de Troya; the parallel to the French pope's 'Intergalactic church' is evident.⁵⁴⁴

The Palmarians have very concrete teachings about the concrete, historical events that are related to the Second Coming of Christ. Before the Second Coming, there will appear a shining cross over the Calvary that

⁵⁴¹ PKO2 67, cf. SH, part 5, book II, chapter 5; and part 9, book II, chapter 7.

⁵⁴² Cf. chapter 2.

⁵⁴³ PCS 68, cf. PKO2 68 and SH part 18, book VIII.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. chapter 2.

can illuminate people so that they recognise their sins; a theme that is present in the apparitions at Garabandal and in the Renewed Church.⁵⁴⁵

The appearance of the shining cross will be followed by the so-called, Three days of darkness. During this period, many evil people will perish while others will repent. Most of the elect will survive, but some, including the pope, will be killed in the final battles. The teachings on the Three Days of Darkness elaborates on Exodus 10, are found among many Catholic mystics, most extensively in early 19th-century Italian nun Anna Maria Taigi and the Breton stigmatic Marie-Julie Jahenny. In traditionalist circles, there is an ongoing discussion about whether Padre Pio of Pietrelcina endorsed the view⁵⁴⁶

After the three days of general destruction, Christ will return, and in that same moment, the general resurrection of the flesh will take. Then souls and bodies unite. At last, Christ in union with Mary will judge all humans, in the Last or Universal Judgment. At his return to earth, Christ will establish his Messianic Kingdom, where the inhabitants of the Planet of Mary and the elect will dwell. In the Messianic era, there will be those who are in a blessed state, but others who are not. In the case of the latter, some of them will procreate, and their children will be born without original sin, and directly enthroned in the Trinity through the hearts of Mary and Christ.⁵⁴⁷

At the end of the Messianic Kingdom come the Nuptials of the Lamb, when other elect are enthroned in the Trinity. After the Nuptials of the Lamb, God will continue ‘creating unimaginable things for all eternity, and all the Blessed will be instruments of the new creations as co-creators together with the Supreme Maker of all.’ At the same time, for the damned comes the Nuptials of the Dragon, which is followed by their enthronement in Satan’s heart. ‘At that instant [the Nuptials of the Dragon], God will

⁵⁴⁵ PCS 72, cf, PKO2 72 and SH part 18, book VIII.

⁵⁴⁶ PCS 73, cf, PKO2 73 and SH part 18, book VIII. For the apocalyptic teaching of the three days of darkness more generally, cf. Cadone 2007: 202–203.

⁵⁴⁷ PCS 74–77, cf. SH part 18, book IX.

expel all the damned from the Great Orb of the Universe, creating for them an immense unknown thing where they will wander about for all eternity.⁵⁴⁸ Though the details are different, this series of End time prophecies follows in the tradition of apocalyptically centred 20th-century-apparitions.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ PCS 78, cf. SH part 18, book IX.

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Chapter 2.

11. Rituals

Just as the Roman Catholic Church, the Palmarians hold that Christ instituted seven sacraments during his earthly existence. Nevertheless, they also teach that in this End time, the mystical election to the papacy is an eighth, invisible sacrament, directly conferred by Christ.⁵⁵⁰ The Palmarian sacramental theology is developed in many church documents, including papal documents and decrees, catechisms, and the *Treatise of the Mass and Sacred History or Holy Palmarian Bible*.

The central Palmarian pious practices are found in the *Palmarian Devotionary*, which has been issued in several languages. Apart from that, liturgical calendars are published every year, and descriptions of festive liturgies that are held in the Cathedral-Basilica of Our Crowned Mother of El Palmar are found in particular reports that are sent to the faithful. Canonisations are another vital ritual, and the church has canonised a large number of people. In this context, the papal decrees of canonisations are an essential source, as is the six-volume edition of the *Palmarian Lives of Saints* published in the early 2010s.

Sacraments

As shown throughout this study, the Palmarians have a very exclusive ecclesiology and soteriology; it is only possible to reach salvation within the visible Palmarian Church in union with the pope, though there is an opening for others in the individual judgement between the clinical and the definitive death of a person. In the present time, all divine graces are

⁵⁵⁰ TM, chapter 34, v. 78–80.

distributed through the Palmarian Catholic Church since the Roman era of the church has ended. A most important means of divine sanctifying grace are the sacraments.

Given the exclusive status of the Palmarian church, for them the sacraments of other churches, including the Roman Catholic, have no value whatsoever as the Holy Spirit does not work through them. Thus, they are not sacraments at all, but empty rituals that, in fact, constitute acts of blasphemy and bring damnation on those who administer and receive them. Already at its foundation, the Palmarian Church held similar views, but it is stated particularly clearly in a series of papal decrees from 1982, which has been re-published on many occasions.⁵⁵¹

The documents from 1982 had a concrete pre-history. They were issued shortly after Pope Gregory's visit to Alba de Tormes outside Salamanca, where relics of St. Teresa of Avila rest in the Carmelite church. During the visit, there were rumours among people that the Palmarians planned to steal the remains of the *Santa* and bring them to their cathedral. Moreover, when walking through the convent church, the Palmarian pope and other bishops, who were very drunk, shouted that John Paul II was an antipope, whom they wished dead, that Gregory XVII was the true pontiff and that women wearing pants in the church building were whores. Some of the bishops also made physical attacks. Taken together, the rumours and the events in the church led to a popular uprising, where people threw vegetables on the bishops and attacked them in different ways. Several of the prelates were beaten, and at least one of their cars was thrown into the river. To escape the popular ire, the Palmarian Holy Face Carmelites had to hide in the Roman Catholic Carmelite convent until the National Guard intervened and brought them away from the site.⁵⁵²

Two months after the debacle in Alba de Tormes, Pope Gregory made several declarations on sacraments, relics and images. He stated that the sacraments administered in Roman Catholic churches were valueless

⁵⁵¹ DP 9 and 25; TM, chapter 34, v. 169–206; PKO2 22–28; Gregory XVII, Apostolic decrees, July 30 and 31, 1982.

⁵⁵² *El País* May 18, 1982.

and that the relics and images kept at such places had no miraculous power for Roman Catholics; they were veiled for them. The Palmarians, however, could receive graces and indulgences from relics and images at a distance, but they were under no conditions allowed to visit any Roman Catholic Church buildings.⁵⁵³

There are considerable differences between Roman Catholic and Palmarian sacramental theology. One original aspect of that Palmarian theology, as explained in chapter 10, 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, and its presence contributes to her sanctification. The sacraments also ‘enthroned’ and strengthen a piece of Christ’s heart in the faithful.⁵⁵⁴

As in many other Christian churches, baptism is the door to the church and other sacraments. Children should preferably be baptised within eight days of their birth and not later than fifteen days, following traditional Roman Catholic practice. According to Palmarian doctrine, through baptism, the child (or adult) receives Mary’s blood drop, which takes away original sin as well other sins. Just as in many Christian churches, baptism has an undeletable character; it could and should not be repeated. The sacrament of confirmation should ideally be administered very shortly after baptism or even in direct connection to it. It strengthens the blood drop and makes the individual stronger in his or her fight against Satan. Only a bishop can confirm.⁵⁵⁵ If a person commits a cardinal sin, the blood drop of Mary disappears. Confession of mortal sins to a Palmarian priest is necessary to re-enter into the state of grace.⁵⁵⁶

The Eucharist is the most important sacrament for the Palmarians, and Mass should be read as many times as possible to increase the Treasure

⁵⁵³ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decrees July 30 and 31, 1982. For an analysis of the Palmarian self-understanding, see Steinhauer 2014: 108–109.

⁵⁵⁴ PKO2 22, 27 and 37, cf. PCS.

⁵⁵⁵ PKO2 38–39, cf. PCS.

⁵⁵⁶ PKO2 40, cf. PCS.

of the Church. In his first papal decrees in 1978, Pope Gregory XVII declared that the only rite that should be used was the so-called Tridentine Mass, promulgated in 1570 by Pius V.⁵⁵⁷ Shortly after that, however, he introduced several new elements, and, in 1980, he referred to the rite as Latin-Tridentine-Palmarian.

A much more significant change came on October 9, 1983, when the pope promulgated a new, much briefer Mass order, which is concentrated to the offertory, consecration and sacrificial communion. In a sermon two months after the reform, Gregory defended the radical liturgical changes, referring to the will of God.

It is true that until recently, we, the Palmarians, defended the Tridentine Mass with all our strength putting our lives at risk ... because at that time, it was what God wanted. Now We and those who adhere to us are ready to give up our lives in defence of the Palmarian Mass as it is what God wants now.⁵⁵⁸

Making the Order of the Mass very brief, around five minutes, each cleric could and should read several masses a day; in fact, they read turns of Masses, not individual ones. Likewise, concelebrating was banned, as it would lessen the number of Masses that could be read per day.⁵⁵⁹ In this way, the Palmarian views resemble the practice in the Renewed Church of French Pope Clement XV, who in the 1960s introduced a much reduced Mass liturgy, celebrating series of Masses instead. Still, unlike the Renewed church, the Palmarians only say Mass in Latin.⁵⁶⁰

A Palmarian priest who is going to say Mass starts by making the Sign of the Cross and kisses the altar. Turning towards the faithful and with his palms extended, he says the words ‘Orate Fratres’—Let us pray—then he

⁵⁵⁷ DP 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Quoted in Carrera 2019: 113; my translation.

⁵⁵⁹ DP 4–5 and 8; TM, 45, chapter 34, v. 105–168. For the changes in the rite, see Steinhauer 2014: 110–111, referring to several of Gregory XVII’s sermons in the early 1980s.

⁵⁶⁰ Heim 1970, Kriss 1972 and Delestre 1985; cf. Lundberg (forthcoming).

turns back towards the altar, which he kisses. The kiss indicates the beginning of the Offertory, the first essential element of Mass. He raises the bread and the chalice, directing his eyes towards Heaven, offering the Divine Victims, that is, Christ and Mary.

Offertory completed, by kissing the altar again, the priest indicates that the second essential element, Consecration, is about to begin. He pronounces the consecration words over the bread, by which bread is transubstantiated into the Body of Christ and Mary. He kisses the Sacred Host and genuflects. He then elevates it, so that those present can worship, kisses it and adores it by kneeling. Then he stands up and pronounces the consecration words over the wine in the Chalice, following the same ceremony as with the bread. The consecration is accompanied by the ringing of bells.

After Consecration, the Priest kisses the altar, signalling the beginning of the third essential part of the Mass: the Sacrificial Communion or Immolation. After genuflection, he splits the Sacred Host in two and makes the sign of the cross with them. After kissing the Host, he communicates; if any lay communicants are present, he administers the sacrament to them. When finished, in the Chalice, he disposes of any remaining particles of the Host that are found on the paten. After making the sign of the cross with the Sacred Chalice, he kisses it and partakes. At this moment, faithful can communicate sacramentally by receiving the consecrated Host. At the end of the rite, the priest gives the blessing, symbolising with it the shedding of the Blood of Christ over the whole Church. Then the next Mass begins.⁵⁶¹ The full Palmar Ordo Missae is thus very brief, and the following is the complete text.

In nomine Patris et Filii +, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Orate, fratres ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem. Per + Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

⁵⁶¹ Personal communication with ex-members.

Offero Tibi, Pater, hanc immaculatam hostiam, pro me et pro omnibus fidelibus christianis vivus atque defunctis: ut mihi, et illis proficiat ad salutem in vitam aeternam. Amen.

Offero Tibi, Pater, calicem salutaris, pro mea et totius mundi salute. Amen.

In + nomine Christi.

Hoc est corpus meum.

Hic est Sanguis meus.

Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam. Amen.

Sanguis Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam. Amen.

Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus + Sanctus. Amen.

Before the communion of the faithful, which may be included in one of the individual masses, the priest says the following words:

Misereatur vestris omnipotens Deus et dimissis peccatis vestris perducat vos ad vitam aeternam. Amen.

Indulgentiam + absolutionem, et remissionem peccatorum vestrorum tribuat vobis omnipotens et misericors Dominus. Amen.

Ecce agnus Dei, ecce qui tollis peccata mundi.

Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum; sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea. Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam. Amen.⁵⁶²

According to Palmarian doctrine, the body, soul and blood of Christ and Mary are present in the consecrated bread and wine. To communicate a person must be in a state of grace; otherwise, it constitutes a sacrilege. Communion should only be taken on the tongue, and the recipient must be kneeling when receiving the sacrament. The communion of the faithful is only received in one species; they only receive the Eucharistic bread. If due to long distances to the nearest Palmarian priest, it is not possible to attend Mass, the faithful should pray a Penitential Rosary instead. According to the precepts of the church, Palmarians should take communion at least every third month, but almost all Masses in the Basilica in El Palmar de Troya are celebrated without laypeople taking communion. Still, if in a state of grace, a layperson is allowed to communicate several times a day.⁵⁶³

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. When receiving the sacrament, a person must be in a state of grace, and it should, therefore, ideally be preceded by confession. It should be received in cases of severe illness or before undergoing surgery.⁵⁶⁴

In the Palmarian church, there are three degrees of clerical ordination: deacon, priest and bishop. All clerics are members of the Carmelites of the Holy Face, and to be ordained, a man should be in a state of grace. At ordination, the priest becomes inhabited by the soul of Christ in the form of a radiant cross, and he becomes a representative of the saviour on earth.⁵⁶⁵ In practice, a candidate to the priesthood is often consecrated bishop on the same day, or at least with a very short interval. In this aspect, the differences with the Renewed Church are significant.

⁵⁶² Personal communication with ex-bishops, 2018.

⁵⁶³ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, February 27, 1981; TM, chapter 34, v. 155; and PKO2 32–36, 41 and 53; cf. PCS.

⁵⁶⁴ PKO2 42, cf. PCS.

⁵⁶⁵ PKO2 43, cf. PCS.

Unlike the followers of French Pope Clément XV, all Palmarian clerics take a vow of chastity, and the church certainly does not ordain women.⁵⁶⁶

The seventh sacrament is marriage. Its main reason is to give children, new members, to the church. Still, virginity, i.e. to become a friar or nun, is the preferred state. At the wedding, the spouses must be in a state of grace, and according to church law, marriage is only permitted when both partners are Palmarian.⁵⁶⁷

Devotions

There are many prayers, hymns and other devotions used in the *Palmarian Devotionary*, but four of them have an especially central place in the life of the church. They are all acts of reparations made for the sins of humanity.

The first is the frequently mentioned Holy Penitential Rosary, also known as the Holy Palmarian Rosary or Penitential Rosary of Padre Pio, which should be read on a daily basis. A complete Rosary consists of altogether fifty Our Fathers, fifty Hail Mary, fifty Glory and fifty Hail Mary Most Pure.⁵⁶⁸ Each Rosary is divided into five mysteries with ten of each prayer. Each series of the ten prayers is called ‘a complete Our Father.’ The reflection on each mystery is preceded by an act of contrition and followed by a hymn, and the entire penitential rosary concludes with the Litany of Loreto and an act of consecration to Our Crowned Mother of El Palmar. Every week, beginning on Sunday, when praying the Penitential Rosary the faithful should reflect over altogether thirty-five mysteries, which follow the life of Christ and the Virgin according to Palmarian teaching, that is, from the creation of the soul of Christ to the coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Heim 1970; cf. Lundberg (forthcoming).

⁵⁶⁷ PKO2 44; cf. PCS.

⁵⁶⁸ PD 8.

⁵⁶⁹ DPA and PDE.

The second of the main devotions is the Holy Way of the Cross of the Holy Face of Christ. The Palmarian *Viacrucis* includes fifteen stations, starting with Christ being sentenced to death and ending with his burial. It begins with an act of contrition and preparatory prayers. The opening prayers at each station are followed by one complete Our Father and an invocation of the Holy Face and Our Crowned Mother of Palmar. The *Viacrucis* ends with a full Our Father and an Act of Consecration to the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, followed by a hymn.⁵⁷⁰

The third of the central devotions is the Holy Trisagion to the Most Holy Trinity. It begins with an Act of Contrition and a hymn. After that, it includes prayers to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, followed by Praises to the Most Holy Trinity, a prayer, and praises to the Divine Mary as the Temple and Tabernacle of the Most Holy Trinity. The Trisagion is concluded by a Litany to St. Joseph and a Consecration to the Most Holy Crowned Joseph of El Palmar.⁵⁷¹

The fourth and last of the most central devotions is the Holy Josephine Rosary, divided into five mysteries. For each mystery, the faithful read one Our Father, ten Josephine Aves, one Glory be to the Father, one Hail Mary Most pure and invocations to the Holy Face and Our Lady of Palmar.⁵⁷²

Apart from the daily or at least regular devotions, there is a special Palmarian Liturgical Calendar, indicating the special celebrations during the Year of the Church. Great feast days for the Palmarians include of course Christmas and Easter. Shortly after becoming the third pope, Gregory XVIII decreed that from 2012 onwards, the Holy week would always take place between March 20 and 27. The death of Christ should thus always be remembered on March 25, even if not a Friday, as according to Palmarian doctrine, he died on March 25 in the year 34. Holy week is a very solemn occasion at the Cathedral-Basilica in Palmar de Troya.

⁵⁷⁰ DPA and PDE.

⁵⁷¹ DPA and PDE.

⁵⁷² DPA and PDE.

Altogether, fourteen big, richly decorated floats feature different sacred images are that are carried around outside the church.⁵⁷³

Other important, obligatory feast days are The Circumcision of Christ (January 1), the Crowned St. Joseph of Palmar (March 19), Our Crowned Mother of Palmar (July 16), Holy Anne, Mother of Our Lady (July 26), the Assumption of Our Lady (August 15), the Birth of Our Lady (September 8), the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady (December 8).⁵⁷⁴

Canonisations

Through the years, the Palmarian church has canonised a vast number of people. Just in the period between 1978 and 1980, some 1,400 named individuals were declared saints by Gregory XVII. In fact, the lion's share of the *Pontifical documents* during these years is made up of brief hagiographies and decrees of canonisation. These early canonisations have been followed by many others.

The first Palmarian saints are of many kinds. They lived in many different parts of the world and died between the eleventh century and the current era. Still, the majority were Spanish. One sizeable category of Palmarian saints is bishops, priests and nuns killed during the Spanish Civil War. Apart from the saints explicitly named, Gregory XVII canonised an 'innumerable' group of people, who fought on the nationalist side in the war. He explained that though the war was a crusade, not everybody killed in battle was a saintly crusader: some did not join the army for the right, Christian reasons.⁵⁷⁵

English martyrs, died during the sixteenth and seventeenth-century persecutions of Catholics, constitute another large group, as do missionaries who died as martyrs. Gregory XVII also canonised an 'innumerable' group of Irish martyrs, killed because of their Catholic faith. Founders of religious

⁵⁷³ Gregory XVIII, Apostolic decree, August 15, 2011.

⁵⁷⁴ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, July 25, 1989.

⁵⁷⁵ PD.

orders and congregations, kings and queens, mystics, many earlier popes and virtuous male and female religious also appear among the canonised. The first person canonised in August 1978 was the Italian Capuchin Padre Pio, who died in 1968.⁵⁷⁶

Among the other saints canonised in 1978 was the recently deceased Spanish leader Francisco Franco, but other twentieth-century right-winged politicians such as the Fascist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera and Francoist minister Luis Carrero Blanco were elevated to the altars, too. General Franco is looked upon as a very prominent saint as he is considered the saviour of Spain through his victory in the Civil War. In 1980, Gregory XVII even made him a co-patron saint of Spain, together with St. James and Teresa of Avila, traditional patronal saints.⁵⁷⁷

In 1987, Gregory XVII issued a document where he stated that by then he had made 2,164 canonisations (of course not including the collective canonisations of the ‘innumerable martyrs’).⁵⁷⁸ As the years have passed, recently deceased Palmarians have been canonised, and within days of their deaths, the first two Palmarian popes were made saints: Pope Gregory the Very Great and Pope Peter the Great.⁵⁷⁹

Apart from ample documentation from the late 1970s, I have had access to a large number of decrees of canonisations and beatifications issued in the 2000s, which include quite detailed, rather straight-forward biographies of the individuals, both clerics, nuns and lay tertiaries. The texts bear a greater likeness to obituaries in newspapers than traditional hagiography.⁵⁸⁰ Still, the most complete collection of biographies is *Palmarian Lives of the Saints* that Gregory XVIII published in six volumes in 2011–2012 organised according to the liturgical year, i.e. the death dates

⁵⁷⁶ PD.

⁵⁷⁷ PD.

⁵⁷⁸ Gregory XVII, Apostolic decree, 1987.

⁵⁷⁹ Peter II, Apostolic letter no. 1, April 23, 2005; Gregory XVIII, Canonization of Peter II, July 26, 2011.

⁵⁸⁰ Peter II, Canonization decrees 2005–2011; Gregory XVIII, Canonization Decrees 2011–2016; Peter III, Canonization decrees, 2016–2017.

of the saints. This work covers all the canonisations from the foundation of the church onwards.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ PLS.

12. Concluding Remarks

To end this broad study of El Palmar de Troya and the Palmarian Church, in this concluding chapter, I will reflect somewhat further on the two questions that I posed in the beginning. Both have to do with reasons and explanations for a historical process, and therefore I will present arguments for what causes were the most important for the evolution of the Palmarian movement and the Palmarian Church from 1968 onwards. My first question was which factors contributed to the foundation of the Palmarian Church in 1978?

It is tempting to read the history backwards, knowing that the result of the reported apparitions in Andalusia became so unusual. Therefore, it is important to stress that El Palmar de Troya had a similar background and early development as many other modern apparition cases. The initial reports could very well have passed under the radar, having only a local, short-lived impact, if any at all. That is probably the fate of most modern apparition testimonies.

In the case of El Palmar, however, the stories soon became known outside the locality, getting regional, and increasingly national, attention, which prompted an influx of people to a field outside the small town. People heard about the events through the grapevine or read about them in local newspapers. Just as at many other sites, the initial stories attracted several other seers, including both women and men, who claimed to receive both visions and heavenly messages. Apart from that, solar miracles, mystical communions and other prodigies were reported, just as in many other 20th century cases.

In 1969, Clemente Domínguez and Manuel Alonso arrived at El Palmar, and the former soon claimed to receive apparitions on a steady

basis. He reported heavenly messages, from not only Christ and the Virgin, but also from an increasing plethora of saints. However, in this case, too, it is important not to read history teleologically. It was not self-evident that Clemente would become the most influential actor at the site, and his testimonies came more than a year after the first reports of heavenly visions. Still, though other seers, most of them women, remained active and influential, Clemente Domínguez, always seconded by Manuel Alonso, gradually moved towards the centre of the Palmarian apparition scene during the first years of the 1970s.

The messages at El Palmar de Troya were apocalyptically centred and interpreted as a direct continuation of the apparitions at Garabandal in the first half of the 1960s. In the post-World War II Catholic world, such cases were constantly counteracted by local church authorities, though the basic episcopal strategy concerning apparition reports was to remain silent. Due to stricter church policy, from the 1950s through the early 1980s, it became almost impossible for seers to receive ecclesiastical support for newly reported apparitions. It was even less probable to receive some kind of official recognition if the reported heavenly messages were numerous and the seers were adults. That was the case of German Heroldsbach, Italian San Damiano, Portuguese Ladeira do Pinheiro, and Spanish El Palmar de Troya. Realising that the phenomena would not fade away, in 1970 the archbishop of Seville clearly denounced the apparition testimonies and the cultus at El Palmar. This unfavourable decision was reiterated on several later occasions.

Many of the post-World War II apparitions included severe criticism of the contemporary church: modernism, freemasonry and sometimes Zionism were gradually taking over the institution, and it would get worse as time passed. The changes in the wake of the Second Vatican Council had an influence, and the reform of the Mass liturgy was the most visible and audible change for laypeople. Many people did not recognise their church and saw the post-conciliar developments as a break with the past. For many, the church hierarchy's denunciations of popular apparitions were probably an equally or even more important factor for their growing

criticism. The fact that the Holy See, in 1960, decided not to make the so-called Third Secret of Fatima public also contributed. As a result, many apocalyptically minded Catholics, who held the private apparitions in high regard, reached the conclusion that the church hierarchy did not listen to the warnings from heaven.

The messages to Clemente Domínguez at El Palmar included increasingly harsh denunciations of modern society and the modern Roman Catholic Church. As many other seers, he prophesied that a series of divine chastisements was on its way, that apostasy was general, and that the end-time was nigh. Prayer, penance and conversion were needed to make reparation to God. The messages included familiar tropes; that freemasons and communists infiltrated the church and that they had a dominant presence in the curia. Still, the messages at El Palmar freed Pope Paul VI from any guilt. He was apparently drugged, held hostage or even replaced by an actor. None of these theories was uniquely Palmarian; they were known in other apocalyptic groups, too.

That Clemente Domínguez and the messages to him became increasingly central to pilgrims was a combination of Clemente's personal charisma, indeed a quality difficult to define, and Manuel Alonso's managerial skills. Through visits to El Palmar or by reading heavenly messages, groups of people were convinced that Clemente was an important seer and a voice box of heaven. On his journeys, Clemente went to many other apparitional sites. There, he claimed to fall in ecstasy and receive messages, thus putting El Palmar on the apparitional map. Clemente also distributed messages that he claimed to have received at El Palmar. In that way, he connected El Palmar with other popular sites, and strengthened the case of the new Andalusian apparition site, while at the same time strengthening the case of the other sites.

From 1972 onwards, the Palmarian movement around Clemente was able to secure significant financial resources, which enabled them to institutionalise the movement and spread the messages more effectively and actively. They could make long mission journeys through Western Europe and the Americas, where they disseminated messages to bishops,

clerics, nuns and laypeople. Increasingly, El Palmar became a link in national and international apparitionist networks, and an international group of 'marvelist' priests, who were connected to other sites, furthered their mission. The donations from wealthy individuals enabled the group around Clemente to purchase the apparition site, thus taking control over the sacred space and the beginning of construction of a shrine, which with time would evolve into the enormous Basilica that today stands there.

Still, El Palmar was not a continuous success story. As at many other apparition sites, the initial enthusiasm could easily have faded away after some time. In the message collections, there are signs of a backlash. In 1973, in particular, Clemente transferred numerous messages, urging pilgrims to return to the site. At the same, his heavenly communication often presented El Palmar de Troya as the only beacon of light in the end times, having superseded the others. El Palmar was the only present-day location where heaven worked in such a concrete manner; the other modern apparition sites faded away in the Palmarian discourse.

The cultus at El Palmar survived this crisis, and the number of pilgrims, not least from abroad, grew again. These groups also included clerics. It is easy to argue that 1975 and 1976 were critical years in the history of Palmar when the institutionalisation and clericalisation of the movement increased in a very significant way. A growing number of priests with different canonical status came to El Palmar to celebrate Mass, despite, or maybe thanks to, the archbishop's clear denunciations. Some of these priests were placed under indict; others were about to leave their home parishes or were not active in pastoral work.

A few priests who actively supported El Palmar and were present at the site had a background as adherents to French Pope Clément XV and the Renewed Church. He claimed to receive a similar kind of apparitions as Clemente Domínguez and tried to make connections to other sites and seers, just as Clemente did. The French pontiff died in 1974. By that time, the Renewed Church was severely weakened, and several splinter groups were formed both before and after the pope's death. Thus, there were personal connections between the Renewed Church and the Palmarians,

and the latter were undoubtedly aware of the former. Clément XV provided the Palmarians with a role model, as regards to both organisational patterns and doctrine. Still, no official Palmarian documents mention the French pope, and for them, Paul VI was the only true pontiff.

French archbishop Marcel Lefèbvre and the Society of St. Pius X were important traditionalist actors at the time. By the mid-1970s, SSPX did not have a formal canonical status anymore, and the conflict with Rome deepened, though some adherents still thought that the archbishop was too lenient. Apart from that, Lefèbvre remained unwilling to consecrate bishops through the 1970s and most of the 1980s, but many traditionalist groups saw the consecrations of traditionalist bishops as a necessity to save the true church from destruction in an era of general apostasy. Though there were contacts between El Palmar and individual adherents of Lefebvre's, there seems to have been no official connections.

In this eventful and dramatic period, the Palmarians were able to get a trump card, via a priest connected to the SSPX seminary in Ecône. They managed to convince the exiled Vietnamese archbishop Pierre-Martin Ngô-dinh-Thuc to come to El Palmar and consecrate bishops for them. To receive apostolic succession from a Roman Catholic bishop put the Palmarians in a unique position. At the time, the very few traditionalist bishops who claimed apostolic succession were consecrated by Old Catholic prelates. At the same time, Clemente founded the Carmelites of the Holy Face, a religious order that would supersede all others.

The Thuc consecrations in January 1976 gave rise to a very rapid episcopal expansion at El Palmar. Within two years, almost a hundred men were made bishops. Apart from the case of the Renewed Church, a similar development was, and still is, unique in the post-Vatican II traditionalist world. While some of the Palmarian bishops had been Roman Catholic priests or seminarians, most of them had little or no formal preparation, and many were very young. While many were consecrated, many also left El Palmar quickly. In fact, at least 70 per cent of those consecrated there have either left or been expelled from the order. Though many of them were

not active clerics after leaving, some continued as independent bishops and, in their turn, consecrated bishops of their own.

That Rome considered the Thuc consecrations illicit and excommunicated the consecrator and the new bishops was no problem to the Palmarians; they were convinced that the real Paul VI supported their work and that he indeed would arrive in El Palmar to govern them. For years, the reported messages to Clemente Domínguez had indicated that after Paul VI's death there would appear both a true pope and an antipope, thus following several nineteenth and twentieth-century prophecies. Later, the messages to Clemente made it clear that *he* would become pope, and just as Clément XV had asserted before, he would not be elected in a conclave. After the death of Paul VI, in 1978, Clemente proclaimed that Christ had crowned him pontiff, that the Holy See had moved from Rome to El Palmar, and that the One, Holy, Apostolic, Catholic, Palmarian Church was founded. At that moment, the Roman era of the church was over.

The development towards the establishment of the Palmarian church was thus prompted by a combination of several factors: the seer's charismatic authority and the messages he claimed to receive, managerial skills, economic resources, apparition networks, mission journeys and publications in large editions. Still, the critical factor, I argue, was the Thuc consecrations, which became a catalyst for everything that would follow. Thus in less than a decade, Clemente Domínguez had moved from the position of being one of several seers at El Palmar to become the Vicar of Christ, and the sole leader of the universal church whose see, due to Rome's apostasy, had been transferred to the Andalusian apparition site.

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The second question I posed in the preface was how the Palmarian church has survived through its four decades of existence. Though the membership is low today (2017), somewhere between 1000 and 2000 people, the church has indeed subsisted. It survived the suppression of the traditional Mass

ritual with a Palmarian one. It survived the transferral from the leadership of the divinely elect seer, Gregory XVII, through the direction of the designated successors: Peter II, Gregory XVIII and now Peter III, none of whom have claimed to receive heavenly messages. It survived the repeated failed prophecies about the End time events as well as Gregory XVII's personal behaviour; his public exhibitions of drunkenness, even at church services and on apostolic journeys, and his unchaste behaviour, which to a certain degree was acknowledged by himself. And it survived the expulsion of about a third of the bishops in the year 2000 and the ban of traditional Bibles, supplanting it with the Palmarian *Sacred History* in the following year.

Nevertheless, though it still exists, the forty years of Palmarian church history has hardly been a success story, and each factor mentioned has contributed to a loss of members. The number of members has dwindled for decades, and vocations to Palmarian religious life have been almost inexistent for decades. Very few men and women have entered the first and second orders of the Carmelites of the Holy Church. The Palmarian church has had an international presence, but after the year 2000, the clerical attendance to the faith abroad has become increasingly weak, though a series of home chapels still exist.

With the publication of *Sacred History* in 2001, the Palmarian doctrinal development almost ended. At the same time, the faithful were ordered to dispose of older Palmarian publications. Every text that contradicted current Palmarian teaching should be erased, and each official document should be revised 'in light of the Palmarian Bible.' According to Gregory XVII, all the errors that the enemies of Christ had introduced in the canonical texts had been expurged. In *Sacred History*, the whole history since creation was defined in detail and the full doctrine had been revealed; there was nothing else to add. Though there are many sources to the Palmarian beliefs, I have been able to point out striking similarities between many of the more unusual Palmarian teachings and the doctrines established by French Pope Clément XV in the 1960s and 1970s.

When the era of Palmarian doctrinal development ended around the turn of the millennium, the age of *Palmarian Norms* began. The *Norms* was a rapidly growing set of exact rules, which the faithful remnant should obey, otherwise facing ex-communication. Most of the rules had to do with the separation of Palmarians from the surrounding world and from many everyday activities. The number of regulations grew under the papacy of Peter II (2005–2011), and they became even more numerous, and exact, under his successor Gregory XVIII (2011–2016). Towards the end of his papacy, they came to include 300-400 detailed rules, which were made known both through formal church documents and through missionary bishops. No single list was compiled. Though general rules of separation had been a part of the Palmarian church from the beginning, the sheer number of constantly revised prohibitions, which all led to ex-communication, was something new.

Many ex-Palmarians testify that the time from around 2005 became increasingly difficult due to the new rules. They had grown up in a less strict environment. Many also thought it humanly impossible to keep track of all the new prohibitions. Many young people were expelled or left, and many clerics, nuns and ordinary members who had been adherents since the 1970s faced expulsion. As many other closed religious groups, the Palmarians practise “shunning”, meaning that the faithful should have no contact whatsoever with ex-members, including, for example, children or siblings. To be an ‘apostate’ is considered worse than anything else. The threat of shunning (and eternal damnation) might be the single most crucial factor for the church’s survival until today.

Though it is impossible to provide exact numbers, testimonies agree that the Palmarian membership has decreased continuously since the 1990s. Today, almost all new members are children born into the church. The number of new members coming from outside seems to be very low, while, during the current papacy of Peter III (2016-) there appear to be active attempts to convince ex-members to return. Today, the Palmarian church has a very limited active apostolate, and unlike many other traditionalist groups, the Palmarian church has no internet presence at all.

Though the Basilica at El Palmar might be open for outside visitors, most Palmarian chapels in the world are found in members' homes.

Through the twenty-first century, the Palmarian popes have clearly admitted the membership crisis and the lack of religious vocations. The underlying image is that the church is the apocalyptic Ark of Noah, and the most important is to keep the faithful on board, closely following the doctrines and norms. It is also a central apocalyptic belief that the number of true Christians is and will continue to be small, and in the End time, it will probably be even less numerous, as the faithful remnant is tested.

The economy is an essential factor for survival. From the 1970s, the Palmarian Church has received huge donations from individual adherents and supporters, but also sizeable contributions from the general membership. Still, the decrease in the number of members, and the lavish spending became problematic in the early 2000s. One solution to improve the economy was the selling of ecclesiastical real estate during the 2000s and that individual members sold properties for the benefit of the church.

By 2017, it is safe to say that the Palmarian church is in crisis, but, as has been shown throughout this book, this is no news. The current core group is made up of families or elderly members who joined in the 1970s, as well as second and third-generation adherents. There are no clear indications that the number of members decreased with the exit of Gregory XVIII in April 2016; rather the opposite. At the same time, there are no clear indications that larger groups of ex-members are returning as Peter III has assumed the papacy. The magnificent cathedral in El Palmar de Troya remains quite empty, and even at its main festivities, the number of pilgrims attending is reduced.

What is the future of the Palmarian Church? Of course, that is hard, if not impossible, to predict. The experiences of recent Palmarian history makes this particularly clear. Few could foresee that Gregory XVIII would leave the papacy and the church, publically stating that it is an elaborate hoax. The most likely development is a slow but continuous decrease of membership, that the median age of the religious communities will increase, and that many young people will continue to leave. Still, unlike

in recent years, the Palmarians who are teenagers today have lived most of their life in the period of the *Palmarian Norms*, and have not experienced anything else. This situation might contribute to the development. If there were any hopes that the papacy of Peter III would lead to significant reforms, they have been blighted. Peter III might have a different personality than his predecessor, and another, more theological and less brutal, way of expressing himself. Nevertheless, the vast majority of rules, including those issued by Gregory XVIII, remain.

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The first edition of this book, published in May 2017 ended here. This revised edition summarises the quite dramatic and partially unexpected developments of the Palmarian Church during the three years that followed.

By May 2017, Pope Gregory's apostasy had generated substantial media interest. Not surprisingly, the ex-pope and his wife's robbery attempt and the legal processes did not decrease the fascination with the church. Though Dan Brown's *Origin* did not contribute to any knowledge of the real Palmarians, it doubtless caused readers to realise the existence of the church, which they most certainly had not done otherwise.

Though certain ex-members, including ex-clergy, have returned as Peter III assumed the papacy, the number of members has probably not grown considerably, and the number of new vocations remains low, at least as regards males. The median age of both the clergy and the nuns remains high despite the new internet presence.

One more time it is pertinent to ask: What is the future of the Palmarian Church? And once more one can answer: Of course, that is hard, if not impossible, to predict.

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Apostolic journeys

Apostolic Letters

Sermons

Peter II (2005–2011)

Apostolic Decrees

Apostolic Letters

Canonization Decrees

Gregory XVIII (2011–2016)

Apostolic Decrees

Apostolic Letters

Canonisation Decrees

Encyclicals

Sermons

Summaries of the Celebrations of Religious Feasts at the Basilica

Peter III (2016–)

Apostolic Decrees

Apostolic Letters

Canonisation Decrees

Summaries on the Celebrations of Religious Feasts at the Basilica

Several of the Palmarian sources are made available on and through my website:

www.magnuslundberg.net

Palmarian online resources

The official website: www.palmarianchurch.org

The official Facebook account: www.facebook.com/PalmarianCatholicChurch

The official Instagram account: www.instagram.com/carmelitas_de_la_santa_faz

The official Pinterest account www.pinterest.se/iglesiapalmariana

The official Twitter account: www.twitter.com/IPalmariana

The official Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/iglesiapalmariana

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- http://www.bz-bx.net/referat_f_uuml_r_weltanschauungen/info_a%E2%80%9393z/00024299_Palmar-ianisch_katholische_Kirche.html (Information on religious groups by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bozen-Brixen) on February 10, 2020.
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- <http://www.cruzblancapalmar.es> (Transcriptions of apparition messages from La Cruz Blanca) on February 10, 2020
- <http://www.dialogueireland.wordpress.com> (Irish investigative site, including many news about the Palmarian Church) on February 10, 2020.

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http://www.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/palmar_discussion/info (Palmar de Troya: discussion on Palmar de Troya and the Palmarian church. URL down, copy in author’s archive)

<http://www.homepage.eircom.net/~palmardetroya/index.htm> (Palmar de Troya Support, critical homepage with ex-members’ testimonies. URL down, copy in author’s archive).

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<http://www.laiglesiapalmariana.blogspot.com> (The false page, constructed by the inventors of the hoax Catholic Remnant Church, on February 10, 2020)

<http://www.magnuslundberg.net> (Author’s web site with much information about the Palmarian and other modern alternative popes, on February 10, 2020)

<http://maper.mjusticia.gob.es/Maper/DetalleEntidadReligiosa.action?numeroInscripcion=000302> (Entry on the Palmarian Church in the Registro de Entidades Religiosas, on February 10, 2020).

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Personal communications

Fr. A, Palmarian bishop 1976–1990.

Fr. B, Palmarian sedevacantist bishop, consecrated in 1983.

Ex–Fr C, Palmarian bishop until 2000

Ex–Fr. D, Palmarian bishop until 2000

Mother F, Palmarian nun for more than twenty years from 1976.

Ex-Palmarians (anonymised), laypeople, mainly from Ireland and Spain; communication between 2005 and 2019.

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