

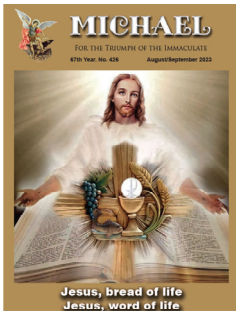
MICHAEL

FOR THE TRIUMPH OF THE IMMACULATE

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Jesus, Bread of Life
Jesus, Word of Life



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MICHAEL

A journal of Catholic patriots for the Kingship of Christ and Mary in souls, in families and in nations

For social justice through Economic Democracy in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church through the vigilant actions of heads of families, and not through political parties

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Letter from the Editor

The importance of educating people on the monetary question

Once again, as in every issue of MICHAEL, you'll find a wide range of articles on every topical issue, and especially on the economy, which is a daily concern for just about everyone. For example, the aim of economics is quite simple—to produce the goods and services that people need, and to ensure that these goods reach the people who need them (*see page 4*). Unfortunately, it often happens that what are considered to be economic dogmas do not correspond at all to reality, and even produce the opposite effect to what was intended. For example, one of these false dogmas is that inflation must be fought by raising interest rates, when more and more people are realizing that it is precisely the rise in interest rates that is driving up prices and the cost of living. Just think of the payments that have to be made on mortgages.

What MICHAEL is aiming for through Economic Democracy is a civilization of financially liberated people (*see page 8*). While a sufficiency of material goods does not necessarily make people virtuous, the absence of material goods makes the practice of any virtue impossible. The products exist; it's just the money, the means of obtaining them, that's lacking.



Alain Pilote

And when money is short, failing to correct the financial system, the only solution left for many young people, especially in Africa, is to go into exile in richer countries, hoping to find a better future there, even though many of them die on the way at sea before they get there. This is what the bishops of Central Africa are denouncing, and they realize that the cause of this emigration of young people is essentially economic (*see page 10)*, which is why they have invited the Louis Even Institute to take part in their colloquium, to explain Economic Democracy (*see page 12*).

To bring about this change in the financial system, we need to educate people about money, as recalled by Bishop Benjamin Almoneda of the Philippines, who died recently (*see page 18*). Everyone needs to understand that all the money in existence comes from loans from commercial banks, and must necessarily return to the banks with interest. In other words, if nobody borrowed from the banks, there would be no money in circulation at all. This gives people the unacceptable choice between going into debt or starving.

For Economic Democracy to become a reality, we need real political democracy, i.e. for citizens to be able to obtain results from their elected representatives, so that the latter no longer give in to pressure from the financiers, but instead serve the interests of the people. This will be achieved by educating the people, to form a public opinion that is powerful enough to ensure that the population is listened to by its elected representatives.

Everyone is aware that the present times are worrying, not only from an economic point of view, but also from a moral one, and we can add to this the risks of a world war, but the Virgin Mary reminds us that to obtain peace, we must pray the Rosary to avoid great punishments (*see page 15*).

Today, many people who call themselves intelligent declare that belief in God is incompatible with science. Yet one of the greatest geniuses of all times, Blaise Pascal, thought exactly the opposite, as Pope Francis explains in his apostolic letter for the 400th anniversary of the birth of this great French scientist, philosopher and mathematician (*see page 28*).

When one reads the life of a saint, we know that God never abandons us. For example, by reading the life of St. Mary MacKillop (*see page 24*), we can discover the capacity we have with God's grace to follow in her footsteps, in total and generous dedication for the salvation of souls.

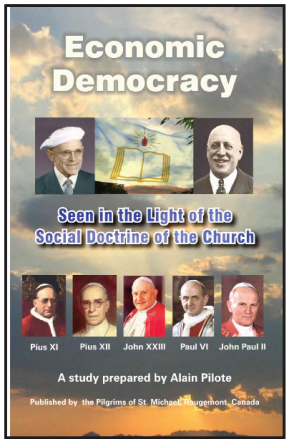
And finally, another testimony to the fact that God and His holy Mother, the Virgin Mary, do not abandon us, is the extraordinary story of the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel at the shrine of Genazzano, Italy (*see page 19*). We all need the advice of God and Mary, who tells us, as she told the servants at the wedding feast at Cana: "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5). Happy reading! ❖

Alain Pilote, Editor

The end of economics: goods must meet the needs of individuals

Since 2006, study sessions are organized in Rougemont on economic democracy (or social credit), seen in the light of the social doctrine of the Church. This teaching is given by Alain Pilote, who used the writings of Louis Even to make a summary of the financial proposals of C.H. Douglas in a few lessons.

The lessons of these sessions are reproduced in the book "Economic Democracy", which can be ordered from our office, and is also available on our website. Here are excerpts from the first lesson:





***by* Alain Pilote**

Ends and means

When one speaks of economics, one must first distinguish between ends and means. Furthermore, means are to be subordinated to ends, and not the opposite.

However, in the running of public affairs, means are often mistaken for the end. And we find ourselves amazed by the resulting chaos. According to you, what is the end of economics:

A. To create jobs?
B. To reach a favourable balance of trade?
C. To distribute money to people?
D. To make the goods that people need?

The correct answer is D. Yet, for most politicians, the end of economics is to create jobs. But jobs are just one means to make products, the objective sought, the true end of economics. Today, thanks to the heritage of progress, goods can be made with less and less labour, leaving people with more leisure time to invest in other activities such as taking care of their families or accomplishing other social duties.

Besides, what would be the point in continuing to make a given good when human needs for this good have been satisfied? This would lead to a useless waste of natural resources. And if we insist on full employment, what will become of those who cannot be employed in the production system: the handicapped, the elderly, the children, the housewives—should they all starve to death? Not all human beings are producers but all are consumers.

With respect to B: If you submit the following expression to a reality check, you will see that a favourable balance of trade, where you export to other countries more products than you import from them, means that you will end up with fewer products in your country and therefore be poorer in real wealth.

Many may be tempted to answer C, for it seems obvious that money is a necessity of life in a modern society unless you be self sufficient in all things—which is the exception in today's society, with its division of labour where one person is the baker, another the carpenter and so on, each one accomplishing a specific task and producing specific goods.



Money is a means of acquiring products made by others. Take note: It is a means, not an end! First, goods have to be made and put up for sale on the market. If there are no products for sale, money would be worthless and of no use. What would be the purpose of having a million dollars if you end up at the North Pole or in the Sahara Desert with no products to buy with your million dollars? Now, compare this situation to that of a man, without a penny, but who lives on an island that has all the water and food he needs to live comfortably. Of the two, who is the richer?

Let it be said once more, and later explained, that money is not wealth but a means to obtain real wealth, i.e products.

Let us not mistake ends for means. The same can be said of systems. Systems were invented and established to serve man, not man created to serve systems. Therefore if a system is harmful to

man, must we allow the multitudes to suffer for the system, or should we alter the system so that it will serve the multitudes?

Since money was established to facilitate production and distribution, do we have to limit production and distribution to money, or do we need to relate money to production and distribution?

From whence we see that the mistaking of ends for means and means for ends, and of subordinating ends to means is a gross and widespread error that causes much disorder.

The end of economics

The word economy is derived from two Greek roots: *oikia*, house; *nomos*, rule. Economy is thus concerned with the good administration of a home, with the orderly use of its possessions.

We may define domestic economy as good management of domestic affairs, and political economy as good management of the affairs of the larger communal home, the nation.

But why "good management"? When can the management of the affairs of the small or large home, the family or the nation, be called good? When it reaches its end.



The present financial system is not the exact reflection of reality.

A thing is good when it attains the results for which it was instituted.

Man engages in different activities and pursues different ends, in different orders, in different domains.

There are, for example, man's moral activities, which concern his progress towards his final end. Cultural activities influence the development of his intellect, the ornamentation of his mind, the formation of his character. In partaking in the general good of society, man engages in social activities.

Economic activities deal with temporal wealth. In his economic activities, man seeks to satisfy his temporal needs.

The goal, the end of economic activities, is therefore the use of earthly goods to satisfy man's temporal needs. And economics reaches its end when it places earthly goods at the service of human needs.

Man's temporal needs are those which accompany him from the cradle to the grave. Some of which are essential, others which are not as vital.

Hunger, thirst, bad weather, weariness, illness, ignorance, create for man the need to eat, to drink, to clothe himself, to find shelter so as to warm or cool himself, to rest, to take care of his health and to educate himself: Needs, all of the above are needs.

Food, drink, clothing, shelter, wood, coal, water, bed, medications, a teachers' lessons, book : Each is a good to satisfy a particular need.

To allow goods to satisfy needs—this is the goal, the end of economic life.

If it does this, economic life reaches its end. If it does not do this or if it does it poorly or only partially, economic life fails to reach its end or reaches it only imperfectly.

In everyday language, it could be said that economics reaches its end when it is sufficiently well regulated for food to enter the hungry stomach, for clothes to cover the body, for shoes to cover naked feet, for a good fire to warm the house in winter, for the sick to receive the doctor's visit, for the meeting of teachers and students.

Morality and economics

Although economics is responsible for the sole satisfaction of man's temporal needs, the importance of sound economic practices has been stressed, time and time again, by those in charge of souls. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that a minimum of temporal goods are normally required to foster the practice of virtue. We have both a body and a soul, both material and spiritual needs. As the saying goes: "Words are wasted on a starving man." Missionaries in poor countries know this. They must first feed the hungry before preaching the Good Word. Man needs a minimum of material goods to accomplish his short pilgrimage on earth and to save his soul. A money shortage can cause inhuman and catastrophic situations.

This led Pope Benedict XV to write: **"It is on the economic field that the salvation of souls is at risk."**

And Pius XI: **"It may be said with all truth that nowadays the conditions of social and economic life are such that vast multitudes of men can only with great difficulty pay attention to that one thing necessary, namely their eternal salvation."** (Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno,* May 15, 1931.)

In the same encyclical, Pope Pius XI summarizes the social and very human end of the economic order:

"Only will the economic and social organism be soundly established and attain its end when it secures for all and each those goods which the wealth ▶

and resources of nature, technical achievement, and the social organization of economic affairs can give."

ALL (individuals) and EACH (individual). THOSE goods that nature and industry can provide.

The end of economics is therefore the satisfaction of the needs of ALL of the consumers. The end is consumption. Production is but a means to reach an end.

Limiting economics to production only is to cripple it. Economics must not finance production only; it must also finance consumption: Production is the means, consumption is the end.

A truly human economy is social: it must satisfy ALL men. It must allow all men, ALL and EACH, to give their orders to the production of goods—at least until their basic needs are satisfied, for as long as the productive system is capable of answering these orders, i.e until it has reached its capacity.

The policy of a philosophy

Social Credit is not an utopia, but it is based on a proper understanding of reality, on the proper relationship between man and the society in which he lives. In Clifford Hugh Douglas' words: "Social Credit is the policy of a philosophy."

A policy is the actions we take to attain a goal, and this policy is based on a conception of reality, that is, upon a philosophy.

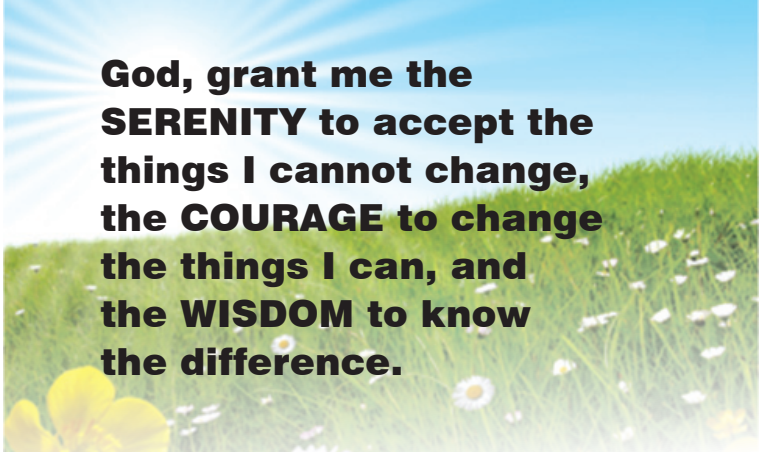
Social Credit proclaims a philosophy that exists since men have lived in society, but which is totally ignored in practice, more so now than ever.

As old as society itself, and therefore as old as mankind, this philosophy is the philosophy of association. Or as the Church's social teaching would put it: The philosophy of the common good.

The philosophy of association is therefore: The association of all the associates for the benefit of all of the associates, of each associate. Social Credit is the philosophy of association applied to society as a whole, to the province, to the nation. Society exists for the benefit of all of its members, for each and every one.

Social Credit is the doctrine of society for the benefit of all citizens. This is why Social Credit is, by definition, the opposite of any monopoly, whether it be economic, political, for prestige, or for brutal force.

The aim of Social Credit is to "bind back to reality" or "express in practical terms" in todays world, and especially the world of politics and economics, those beliefs about the nature of God, of man



Money is a man-made system, not a system created by God: It then can be changed by man.

and of the universe which constitute the Christian Faith as handed down to us by our ancestors, and not this new version, altered and perverted to suit modern politics and economics.

God's laws and human laws

Men live in society, in a world submitted to God's laws: The laws of nature (the physical laws of creation), and moral laws, given by God and inscribed in our hearts (the Ten Commandments). The acceptance and knowledge of these laws implies recognizing the consequences of violating them.

To accept Natural Law is to recognize an inescapable reality: That all people, individually or collectively, are subject to Natural Law. Every event that occurs in the physical realm is proof of the existence of physical laws that regulate the universe. For example, if a man jumps out of an airplane, he does not break the law of gravity… he only proves its existence. This observation applies to all laws.

These laws of nature, created by God, may not be abrogated by man; they cannot be disobeyed. We cannot avoid the sanctions that occur from their violation.

The chains individuals have forged for themselves (agreements, associations, man-made laws) are optional, whereas Natural Law and its consequences are inescapable.

Money is a man-made system, not a system created by God or nature: it can then be changed

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by man. The equilibrium that exists between all living things, the environment, cannot be broken without consequences. If we make products without respecting the environment, if we pollute the planet and waste the resources given to us by God, we have to suffer the consequences.

Social Credit: the confidence that binds society together

In his book entitled *What is Social Credit?*, Geoffrey Dobbs wrote: "The social credit (without capital letters) is the name of something which exists in all societies but which never had a name before because it was taken for granted. We become aware of it only as we lose it.



Geoffrey Dobbs

"'Credit' is another word for 'faith' or 'confidence', so we can also call it the faith or confidence which binds any society together — the mutual trust or belief in each other without which fear is substituted for trust as the 'cement' of society... Though no society can exist without some social credit, it is at its maximum where the Christian religion is practized, and at its minimum where it is denied and derided.

"The social credit is thus a result, or practical expression, of real Christianity in society, one of its most recognizable fruits; and it is the aim and policy of social crediters to increase it, and to strive to prevent its decrease. There are innumerable commonplace examples of it which we take for granted every day of our lives. How can we live in any sort of peace or comfort if we cannot trust our neighbours? How could we use the roads if we could not trust others to observe the rules of the road? (And what happens when they don't!)

"What would be the use of growing anything in gardens, farms, or nurseries if other people would grab it? How could any economic activity go forward — whether producing, selling, or buying — if people cannot, in general, rely upon honesty and fair dealing? And what happens when the concept of the Christian marriage, and the Christian family and upbringing, is abandoned? We see, do we not? — that Christianity is something real with desperately vital practical consequences, and by no means a mere set of opinions which are 'optional' for those to whom they happen to appeal."

In Paragraph 32 of his Encyclical Letter Caritas in veritate, published in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI used the words "social capital" to describe this confidence that binds together all the members of society: "Social capital, that is to say, the network of the relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence... This calls for a new and deeper reflection on the meaning of economics and of its finalities."

One could add that without this respect of the social credit, of the laws ruling society, any life in society would become impossible, even though you put a police officer on every street corner, since you could not trust anybody.

Social discredit

Mr. Dobbs continues: "Just as there are social crediters, conscious and unconscious, trying to build up the social credit (the confidence that we can live together in society and benefit from it), so there are others — social discrediters — trying to destroy it and break it down, at present with all too much success. The conscious ones include the Communists and other revolutionaries, who quite openly seek to smash all the links of trust and confidence which enable our society to function until the Day of the Revolution dawns... But it is the unconscious social discrediters who are responsible, in the West, for the present success of the conscious ones....

"So now at last I have come to the question of money, which is what some people think that Social Credit is all about; but it isn't! Social Credit is an attempt to apply Christianity in social affairs; but if money stands in the way, then we, and every Christian, must concern ourselves with the nature of money, and just why it stands in the way, as it surely does.

"There is a dire need for more people to look deeply into the operation of our monetary system, though that is not everyone's job. But when the consequences are so desperate, everyone can at least grasp the outline of what is wrong, and could be put right, which will enable them to act accordingly..." ❖

Alain Pilote

MICHAEL's Annual Congress

House of the Immaculate
1101 Principale St., Rougemont

September 23-24-25, 2023

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A civilization of men financially free

***by* Louis Even**

One day, Douglas, the founder of the Social Credit school, was asked what he expected the propagation of his doctrine to achieve. The great man answered as follows:

"I will tell you, generally, what we are striving for. We are trying to bring a new civilization into this world, something which extends far beyond the bounds of a change in the financial system. We are hoping, by various means that are chiefly financial, to enable the human community to step out of one type of civilization into another, and the first requirement, as we see it, is that of absolute economic security."

A liberation

What will this new civilization be like? What will the conduct of men be in their relationships with one another? Will they be better than they are today? What will be the characteristics of this new Social Credit civilization in which, according to Douglas, men will be able to accede.

No one can give exact answers to such questions. Social Credit has never pretended to be a blueprint for a particular way of life for anyone. It would emancipate man, but it has no wish to dictate to him.

Or, as another Social Credit writer put it, Social Credit is not a panacea but liberation. A panacea is a universal cure for all physical or moral disease. Obviously panaceas are not a reality; this is something like a utopia. Social Credit is not a panacea.

Under a Social Credit system, it will still be necessary to maintain production; there will be difficulties to surmount, diseases to be cured, sorrows to bear, studies to be pursued, evils to be fought, and virtues to be acquired. Arrogant desires will have to be restrained, injustice will have to be addressed, and charity practiced.

Why do we speak of a new civilization? Because the men, who will build and live in this new civilization, will be free from the perpetual anxieties about tomorrow, so long as the earth brings forth enough wheat to supply bread and other necessities of life to everyone.

Today, grain elevators are full to breaking point and farmers decry the ever-increasing surplus of wheat. Yet there are still many who go hungry. Under a Social Credit system, such a situation would be impossible. The supply of bread would be determined by the supply of wheat, and not by money. There would be money equivalent to the supply of wheat necessary to make bread; that is to say, there would be both wheat to make bread and money with which to buy the bread. The same would be true for all the other goods and services that are available to meet the necessities and needs.

The right of all to material goods

Our present civilization certainly abounds in material and cultural riches, and religion offers its spiritual wealth in abundance.



Yet our civilization is a civilization of men in bondage, of men subjected to conditions which make it difficult or impossible for them to share in these material and cultural treasures. Even the pursuit of the spiritual is hampered because a man absorbed in the battle for material necessities does not live in a climate favorable to the contemplation and acquisition of virtue.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, pointed out the necessity of a certain amount of material goods for the practice of virtue. This is not to say that the mere possession of wealth in itself renders a man virtuous. He must still work at the practice of virtue. However, the lack of this prerequisite, of necessary material conditions, creates an obstacle and it is the duty of the economic and social order to remove this obstacle.

The same holds true for culture. Earning a livelihood should not occupy a man so that he has no time for other human activities which are more important. But this invariably happens when a man is trapped by the anxiety about tomorrow.

Absolute economic security

We admit, then, that Douglas is right when he says that, in his mind, the first condition necessary for the foundation of a new and better civilization is "absolute economic security".

"Absolute"—that is without condition. In other words, the guarantee of one's daily bread because of the simple fact of having been born into a world that is able to give abundance to all.

Relatively few people enjoy such absolute security today. Even among the people who possess the means of making a living for their families, the majority are never sure that they will have these means tomorrow, or in ten or twenty year's time.

Yet, if our socio-economic system were well ordered, and the acquisition of the goods and products of nature depended only upon the existence in suf-

ficient quantities of such goods, then everyone in the world would be able to enjoy absolute economic security.

But when the reception of goods depends upon financial conditions which are not in accord with the existence of goods and needs, then absolute economic security is impossible. Security depends then upon fluctuating conditions over which the individual has no control; and any security is then degenerated into insecurity.

In physical reality, we have a basis for security but our financial system is the root of insecurity. And since finance is given priority over reality, it follows that insecurity prevails over security.

Hence the statement of Douglas regarding the emergence of a new civilization presupposes the application of certain measures, especially in the field of finance. And this is the specific goal of Social Credit's financial propositions which Douglas himself formulated.

What will result?

— What effects would this absolute economic security have upon individuals?

— What implications would it have upon you personally?

Let us suppose that a sum of money (or capital) were invested in your name. You cannot withdraw the capital thus invested but it brings you an annual revenue to the end of your days, a revenue that is sufficient to permit you to live decently and comfortably. This would be absolute economic security for you. In what way would this affect your life?

One thing is certain: You would immediately lose any uncertainty about being able to provide for your needs. Would you continue to work for a salary? You might, if you liked the work and if the extra revenue permitted you to live a larger and fuller life. Perhaps you would choose to leave your occupation in search for another which, though less lucrative, would be more to your taste (for you now no longer live in the shadow of debt). Perhaps you might choose to work for yourself, profitably or otherwise, making your own choice regarding what type of work you want to do.

You are now, financially speaking, a free man. Your neighbor also would enjoy this privilege, were he to benefit from absolute economic security. And so also would all citizens when, according to the Social Credit principles, they are endowed with this absolute economic security.

It becomes apparent immediately that certain inevitable changes would take place spontaneously.

Since purchasing power would belong (for the most part) to the consumers, they would dictate what the producers would manufacture. The economy would belong to the consumer and, in this way, regain its true function and goal.

Again, the relations between employer and employee would automatically take on a new aspect. There would no longer be any question of workers unions and syndicates fighting amongst themselves. Once assured of their daily bread, men would no longer have to submit to the imposition of disagreeable nor intolerable conditions. The various groups of those employed in production would surely take new forms, associationism would gradually replace payment by salary.

When men are set free by economic security, arrogant dictators will no longer have the power to make them kneel and grovel. This is why those who wish to dominate over the world are so violently opposed to Social Credit.

The fear of abuse

— But will not some people abuse this new liberty?

Would you yourself abuse it? If you had the chance to acquire this freedom, would you wish to have it withdrawn for fear you might abuse it?

But let us admit for argument's sake that some might misuse it. Is this a good reason for holding on to economic slavery, an economics that propagates extreme anxiety for the future, when economic security is possible?

Pope Pius XI noted that a certain level of ease and culture does not hinder but instead facilitates the exercise of virtue, providing one makes wise use of such benefits. He knows some will misuse them but nevertheless, he wishes that conditions of a well-constituted economic and social system would exist. (Encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*)

We have previously stated that, even under a system of absolute economic security, there would still be problems to be resolved. But they will no longer be problems of finance but only relate to the functions of man. There will be educational, civic, medical, moral and religious problems—as there are today. Are we afraid of them? Does anyone imagine that the influence of our existing financial system can replace or aid any educator or priest in any degree, or help morality and religion in any way?

Should not a man be able to learn mastery over himself by some other means than that of the continuous fear of going hungry?

Why should it be necessary for this spirit of fear for the future be perpetuated through the conniving money masters, when our granaries are full to the point of bursting?

The present system is nothing but economic heresy—it is starvation in the presence of abundance. Social Credit would substitute for it a true orthodox economy, an economy of security for everyone—justified by the evidence of concrete, physical facts.

Report on my tour in Cameroon

***by* Philbert Bagilimana**

June 9-17, 2023, Philbert Bagilimana, a Canadian citizen born in Rwanda and representative of the Louis Even Institute for Africa, visited Cameroon at the invitation of ACERAC (Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Central African Region), which comprises six countries—Cameroon, Chad, Central Africa, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Congo (also known as Congo-Brazzaville, to distinguish it from the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose capital is Kinshasa).

At their plenary assembly held in July, 2022 in Mongomo, Equatorial Guinea, the bishops of ACERAC made a firm commitment to fight effectively against the phenomenon of migration among young people from their six countries. This phenomenon has become a social malaise, depriving these countries of their rising generations, and giving false hope to these young people, who often die in their efforts to leave the African continent in search of better economic conditions in Europe and other continents.

To tackle this burning issue head-on, the bishops appointed Most Rev. Samuel Kleda, Archbishop of Douala in Cameroon and head of the ACERAC Migrants Commission, to organize an international conference in Douala, with a view to drawing up a pastoral guide on the phenomenon of migration in Central Africa. The conference, held June 12-17, focused on the theme: "Challenges and prospects for migration with a human face". Archbishop Kleda, who has come to Rougemont several times to attend our study sessions on economic democracy, had entrusted the scientific organization of this conference to Father Clement Aboudi Nola, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences at the Catholic University of Central Africa (located in Cameroon), himself a long-standing friend of the Louis Even Institute and responsible for teaching our study sessions on economic democracy at this university.

Fr. Clement therefore suggested to Archbishop Kleda to invite the Louis Even Institute from Canada to take part in the presentations at this conference, and it was decided that Mr. Philbert Bagilimana would represent the Institute at this conference, in addition to a video presentation by the Directors of MICHAEL— Marcelle Caya and Alain Pilote.

Mr. Bagilimana was welcomed on his arrival at Yaounde Airport on June 9 at around 11 p.m. by Fr. Clement, and spent the night at the Bishops' Conference. The following day, Fr. Clement introduced Mr. Bagilimana to the Secretary General of the CENC (Cameroon National Episcopal Conference), Most Rev. Jervis Kebei Kewi. This meeting allowed the ideal of the Louis Even Institute to be presented and relationships to be networked for the advancement of the Work, with the Secretary General opening the doors to possible collaboration with the Louis Even Institute in Canada.



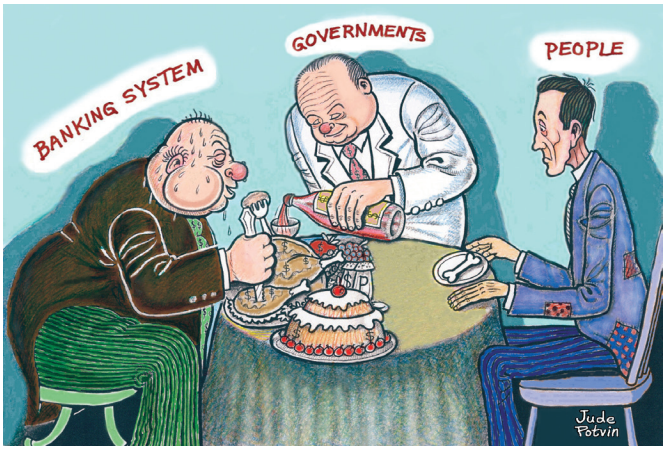
Most Rev. Samuel Kleda and Philbert Bagilimana

Mr. Bagilimana then gave a presentation on economic democracy to the students gathered in the amphitheatre of the Catholic University of Central Africa, followed by a question-and-answer period and a time for sharing. The students already had a good idea of what economic democracy is, having followed Alain Pilote's video lessons on the internet.

At the end of the meeting with the students, we were very pleased with their ability to learn and to the fact that they had made their own our battle for social justice, being Mr. Alain Pilote's lessons demonstrated the injustices they suffer on a daily basis.

After a meeting with the Pilgrims of Saint Michael from Cameroon, the day ended with a press conference attended by Cameroon's written press, radio and television stations, so that the message conveyed by the Louis Even Institute could reach as many people as possible.

Before the press conference, I was allowed to distribute the printed material of the Louis Even Institute; the cartoon defining the true masters of the world (see below) was particularly popular.



I arrived in Douala on June 10. Before the conference began, we had to prepare the deployment of the Louis Even Institute and its members (a team from Yaoundé who had accompanied me). Activities were planned with a view to identifying the key figures to be met and to establish an agenda with them for future collaboration. It was also a question of defining all the activities to be carried out throughout the conference.

The meetings with the bishops were a time for sharing, exchanging ideas and structuring a strategy to popularize the teachings of the Louis Even Institute. They provided an opportunity to gauge the interest of the ACERAC bishops in economic democracy and in their desire to propagate it in their dioceses. These meetings provided the opportunity to schedule a meeting with the Institute's board of directors. At the same time, meetings were held with people from the academic world to see together how these teachings could be propagated at all academic levels, from primary school to university, because economic democracy is a project for society.

To sum up the meetings, the Louis Even Institute has obtained agreements in principle to collaborate with:

1. Most Rev. Antonio Mabiala, Secretary General of ACERAC, who opened the door for us in the six countries of the sub-region to spread economic democracy;

2. Most Rev. Jean Vincent Ondo, President of the Episcopal Conference of Gabon, successor to Most Rev. Mathieu Madega, who has visited Rougemont several times;

3. Most Rev. Nicolas Nadji Bab, Bishop of Laï (Chad);

4. Fr. Romain Guelbe, Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference of Chad;

5. Fr. Dr. Gustave Mohomye, Deputy Administrator of the Saint Jérome Catholic University in Douala and Director of the Institute of Religious Sciences in Douala;

6. His Majesty Dr. Emmanuel Pohowe, General Administrator of the St. Jerome Catholic University Institute.

Speech by the Louis Even Institute

The highlight of my visit as the African representative of the Louis Even Institute, was my speech at the conference. I began by introducing the Institute to the audience before presenting an original paper (see text on next page) which showed how the lack of economic democracy in Africa drives young people to put their lives at risk in irregular adventures in search of better living conditions. By popularizing and teaching economic democracy, young people would have the living conditions needed to avoid the risk of exile in search of a better life.



Most Rev. Ondo of Gabon and Philbert Bagilimana

Prior to my departure for the Douala Airport and my return to Canada, Archbishop Samuel Kleda thanked the Directors of the Louis Even Institute in a live video exchange for their great collaboration in these meetings, the aim of which was to present the importance of the monetary issue in the problem of immigration, hence the need to make everyone aware of economic democracy. ❖

Philbert Bagilimana

The Louis Even Institute for Social Justice explains the cause of poverty amidst plenty and the solution of Economic Democracy



This is the text of the presentation that Mr. Philbert Bagilimana gave (prepared jointly with Mr. Alain Pilote) at the symposium in Cameroon in June, 2023, on behalf of the Louis Even Institute:

Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to thank Most Rev. Samuel Kleda, Archbishop of Douala; a special thank you to Father Dr. Clément Aboudi who is the representative of the Louis Even Institute in the ACERAC region. In closing, I would like to mention that Archbishop Samuel Kleda is a great friend of the Louis Even Institute, having come to Canada three times to follow our courses on economic democracy. We have also had the privilege of receiving several bishops who are members of ACERAC at our head office in Canada:

Most Rev. Joseph Atanga, S.J., Archbishop of Bertoua, President of the Cameroon Episcopal Conference;

Most Rev. Jean-Vincent Ondo Eyene, Bishop of Oyem Gabon here present;

Archbishop Basile Mve Engone of Libreville, Gabon;

Bishop Cyr-Nestor Yapaupa of the Central African Republic;

Bishop Mathieu Madega of Gabon.

We also had the great privilege of welcoming the rector of the University of Saint Jerome, His Majesty Emmanuel Pohowe, in 2012.

What is the Louis Even Institute

The Louis Even Institute for Social Justice was founded by Mr. Louis Even in Canada in 1935, with the aim of publicizing the economic reform of the Scottish engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas, known as economic democracy, which would guarantee economic security for every individual. The head office is in Rougemont, Quebec, Canada, a village that some of us know well.

The Institute is also known as the Pilgrims of St. Michael or the White Berets, and publishes five times a year a magazine called MICHAEL.

The Institute's aim is to achieve economic democracy by educating the people, since the power of the financiers comes from the people's ignorance of the creation of money in the form of debt by private banks.

The causes of poverty amidst plenty

There are enough resources on earth to feed everyone several times over, but it's the distribution that's lacking, as most people lack the purchasing power and monetary means to buy the necessities of life.

Whether a person lives in Africa or in Canada, they can do the same amount of manual work. The main reason for the difference in living standards between Western countries (Europe, Canada and the United States) and Africa is that Africans do not have access to the technological heritage of inventions which would enable them to produce more with less human labour.



Saint John Paul II

And this access to new technologies is blocked for financial reasons. Give Africans these same resources, and they will astonish the whole world. On this subject, we like to repeat the words that Pope John Paul II addressed to the President of Nigeria on February 12, 1982, during his second visit to Africa:

"It is my conviction that all Africa, when allowed to take charge of its own affairs, without being subjected to interference and pressure from any outside powers or groups, will not only astound the rest of the world by its achievements, but will be able to share its wisdom, its sense of life, its reverence for God with other continents and nations, thus establishing that exchange and that partnership in mutual respect that is needed for the true progress of all humanity."

No one can remain indifferent to the problem of poverty and hunger in the world. Every day on the planet, more than 40,000 children die of hunger or illnesses that go untreated for lack of money. Worldwide, more than 1.7 billion people have to rummage through rubbish bins to find something to eat and stay alive. More than 100 million children around the world live on the streets, homeless, abandoned by their parents who can no longer support them.

According to Swiss sociologist Jean Ziegler, United Nation's (U.N.) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2000 to 2008, 100,000 people die from hunger daily throughout the world; 37,000 are children below age ten. A child dies of hunger every five seconds today. According to the World Food Report of the FA0 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N.), in 2008, the world's agricultural output could feed 12 billion people. The population at the time was 6.3 billion. There is enough food for everyone, yet thousands of children and adults die of hunger. Ziegler concluded: "The children who die of hunger are being murdered. This is the scandal of the century."

More than 5,000 deaths have been recorded on European migration routes since 2021; migration is caused by poverty and hunger, and these are deaths that we are able to count. Just imagine the people who lose their lives on inter-regional journeys or between neighbouring countries.

Human beings need a minimum of material goods to complete their short pilgrimage on earth, because while God created men and women with immortal souls, he also created them with material needs: food, clothing and shelter. But to be able to buy food, clothing and housing, human beings must have money to pay for them. Otherwise, the products will rot on the shelves, and the penniless person will starve.

In other words, money is the individual's right to live: without money, the individual will soon die. Those who have the power to create money—the bankers—literally control our lives, as Pope Pius XI rightly said in his encyclical letter Quadragesimo Anno in 1931:



Pope Pius XI

"This power becomes particularly irresistible when exercized by those who, because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment, for that reason supplying, so to speak, the lifeblood to the entire economic body, and grasping, as it were, in their hands the very soul of production, so that no one dare breathe against their will."

A few lines later, the Pope added that **"governments have fallen into the rank of slaves" and have "become the docile instruments" of the money powers.**

The vice of the current financial system is that practically all the money in circulation is issued in the form of debt. Issuing paper money is a sovereign function of the State, but the commercial banks, by lending at interest loans that are accepted just as if they were paper money, have succeeded in putting every country in the world into debt.

In fact, the country with the most products, the United States of America, is also the country with the most debt. And this money created by the banks now forms the vast majority of the money in the countries, with paper money issued by central banks representing only a small percentage of the total (less than 5% in Canada and the United States).



The problem is that when the loans are repaid, the banks demand repayment of money that does not exist, hence the need to take out new loans and go further into debt. At the very beginning of his institute, Louis Even wrote a fable called "The Money Myth Exploded", which explains this process of money creation in the form of debt:

On the one hand, there are five castaways on an island, producing the various necessities of life; on the other, there is a banker who lends them money. To simplify our example, let's say there is a single borrower on behalf of the whole community, whom we'll call Paul.

Paul decides, on behalf of the community, to borrow enough money from the banker to keep the island's economy going, say $100 at 6% interest. At the end of the year, Paul has to pay back the 6% interest to the bank, i.e. $6. 100 minus $6 = $94, so there is still $94 in circulation on the island.

But the $100 debt remains. The $100 loan is therefore renewed, and another $6 must be paid at the end of the second year. 94 minus $6 leaves $88 in circulation. If Paul continues to pay $6 in interest every year, after 17 years there will be no money left on the island. But the $100 debt will remain, and the banker will be authorized to seize all the property of the island's inhabitants.

▶

So, instead of paying the $6 interest each year, they decide to borrow the 6% interest from the bank to keep the $100 in circulation (increasing the debt to $106 the first year, and $106 plus 6% interest the second year, and so on); this only delays the problem, because after a few years, even all the money in circulation, which is still $100, is not enough to pay even the interest on the debt. The debt can never be repaid, not even in the first year.

The solution: economic democracy

Under the current system, we seem to have no choice but to go deeper into debt, or starve to death. This control of money by private interests is the greatest swindle of all time, and has led to disastrous consequences such as wars, economic crises, etc.

It was for this reason that Louis Even decided to propagate the doctrine of economic democracy, or Social Credit—a set of financial principles and proposals first enunciated by the Scottish engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas in 1918. The words "social credit" mean "social money"—money issued by society, as opposed to today's money which is "bank credit"—money issued by banks).

We prefer to use the words "economic democracy" to describe Douglas's solution, to avoid confusion with the Chinese social credit system, which is an instrument to control the population. Economic democracy would ensure that the economic and social organism effectively achieves its goal, which is to satisfy human needs, to ensure that goods, products and services meet human needs. And what enables human beings to have access to goods is money.

Economic democracy teaches that all men and women are co-heirs, co-owners of natural resources and progress, of the inventions of previous generations. This is essentially what Pope John Paul II wrote in 1981 in his Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* on human labour (n. 13):

"Through his work man enters into two inheritances: the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources, primarily by developing technology, that is to say, by producing a whole collection of increasingly perfect instruments for work."

This is what Douglas calls cultural heritage—natural resources and progress—which are the two greatest factors of production, far more important than human labour or finance.

What economic democracy proposes is that money should be created without debt, to finance the country's needs. What it proposes is that everyone should really be a capitalist—not in the sense that Marxists give to the word capitalist, as being one who exploits the people, but in its original sense, that of owners of capital, as Pope St. John XXIII mentioned in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, paragraph 115:

"It is necessary to modify economic and social life so that the way is made easier for widespread private possession of such things as durable goods, homes, gardens, tools requisite for artisan enterprises and family-type farms, investments in enterprises of medium or large size."

The truth is that all the inhabitants of a country are shareholders in that country and co-owners of its natural wealth, a free gift from God, so each citizen would be entitled, as a shareholder in that country, to a dividend, part of the country's income.

Can anyone here explain to me why some people can monopolize the natural wealth created by God for free and leave others to starve (living near a cocoa field without knowing what chocolate tastes like). I know people who grow coffee, but after selling it as a raw material, they are unable to go and buy the finished product in the shop. The list could go on...

For this economic democracy to become a reality, we need real political democracy, i.e. for citizens to be able to obtain results from their elected representatives, so that the latter no longer give in to pressure from financiers, but instead serve the interests of the people. This will be achieved by educating the people, to form a public opinion powerful enough to ensure that the population is listened to by its elected representatives.

Conclusion

If certain countries such as Canada have the best social laws, such as old age security, child benefit, unemployment insurance, etc., this has not fallen from the sky; it is a society that has banked on education and has succeeded in understanding that corruption and social injustice do not move a society forward.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Louis Even Institute, I extend my hand to you to follow in the footsteps of Louis Even by deepening the teachings of the doctrine of economic democracy, and more particularly I request the collaboration of ACERAC to set up a mechanism in the sub-region to educate the young and the young at heart about what social justice is. Thank you. ❖

Messages of Our Lady in Akita, Japan

"Each day recite the prayers of the Rosary... I alone am able to still save you from the calamities which approach."

Mary's role in the history of human salvation and Her unique and sublime collaboration with the work of her divine Son, Jesus, led the Church to declare that each January 1st we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. This is so that all may entrust themselves, at the beginning of the year, to the protection and intercession of Mary, the mother of us all. For example, Pope Francis ended his homily for the Mass on January 1st, 2019 at the Vatican Basilica as follows:



The statue of Mary at the convent

"God himself needed a Mother: how much more so do we! Jesus Himself gave her to us from the cross: 'Behold your mother' (Jn 19:27). He said this to the beloved disciple and to every disciple. Our Lady is not an optional accessory: she has to be welcomed into our life. She is the queen of peace, who triumphs over evil and leads us along paths of goodness; who restores unity to Her children; who teaches us compassion."

Mary's only wish, as a servant of the Lord, is to lead all her children to Her Son, Jesus. He gave Her to us as our mother while on the cross. As She told the servants at the wedding feast in Cana: "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5). Mary continues to repeat this message of conversion in each of her apparitions throughout the world and over the centuries.

Sixteen of these Marian Apparitions have been officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, including Fatima in 1917 and Lourdes in 1858. In this article, we are going to talk about one of these sixteen apparitions, whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating in 2023, the one that took place in Akita, Japan in 1973, where Mary delivered three important messages for mankind. In many ways, these messages given by Mary in Akita are a continuation of those given 56 years earlier in Fatima, which stated that great punishments would befall humanity if the world did not convert, and that the solution lay in prayer—reciting the Rosary every day—and penance.

The future may seem bleak, but it is not determined or fixed in advance: everything depends on our response to Our Lady's requests: prayer, penance and sacrifice. Out of love for her children, Mary never ceases to warn us in all her apparitions of the threats weighing on humanity, and gives us the remedy for the evils of today: recitation of the Rosary and penance. If God told Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah could be saved by the prayers of just ten righteous men (Genesis 18:32), then each of us can make the difference in this final battle between good and evil, by answering "yes" to the requests of our heavenly Mother.

A. Pilote

The beginning

A few pious religious sisters, known as the Institute of the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist, led a quiet, hidden life of prayer in Yuzawadai, just outside of Akita, Japan in the diocese of Niigata. The community was founded by the local Bishop, Most Rev. John Shojiro Ito. They welcomed into their novitiate Sister Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa on May 12, 1973. She was 42 years old, deaf, a convert from Buddhism and was blessed with mystical gifts. Soon this convent would become so well known that their little chapel would attract pilgrims from around the world.

In 1973, the Blessed Virgin Mary gave Sister Agnes three messages through a statue of Mary. The wooden statue was about 3 feet tall and had ▶



The convent of the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist

been carved by an artist at the request of the sisters. Bathed in a brilliant light, the statue came to life and spoke with a voice of indescribable beauty to Sister Agnes. Sister Agnes' guardian angel also made appearances and taught her to pray.

The statue of our Blessed mother wept on 101 occasions over the course of several years, from January 4, 1975 until September 15, 1981 (which was the Feast of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows). The statue also perspired profusely with a sweet perfumed scent. Her right palm bled from a wound that was in the form of a cross.

Hundreds of people witnessed many of these events. Scientific analysis of blood and tears from the statue was provided by Professor Sagisaka of the faculty of Legal Medicine of the University of Akita and confirmed that the blood, tears, and perspiration collected from the statue were indeed human tears, sweat, and blood.



Sister Agnes Sasagawa

Sister Agnes also has the stigmata on the palm of her right hand. A Korean woman with terminal brain cancer was miraculously and immediately healed while praying before the statute in 1981. The miracle was confirmed by Dr. Tong-Woo-Kim of St. Paul's Hospital in Seoul and by Fr. Theisen, President of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Seoul. A second miracle occurred when Sister Agnes' hearing was fully restored.

Miraculous events

The first miraculous event at Akita occurred on June 12, 1973, only one month after Sister Agnes' arrival to the convent. On this occasion, a brilliant light shone from the tabernacle. This happened several times and was often accompanied by something resembling smoke which remained near the altar. During one of these episodes, Sister Agnes saw "a multitude of beings similar to angels who surrounded the altar in adoration before the Host." At the time, Bishop Ito was residing at the convent to conduct a week of devotions. Sister Agnes confided to him the circumstances of this vision as well as all the events and apparitions that followed. Bishop Ito and the convent's spiritual director, Rev. Teiji Yasuda, were witnesses to many of these events.

Sister Agnes was also favoured with visitations of her guardian angel. Asked to describe the angel, Sister Agnes replied that the angel had "a round face, an expression of sweetness…[and was] a person covered with a shining whiteness like snow..." The guardian angel confided messages and often prayed with her, guided and advised her.

On June 28th, on the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Sister Agnes again saw rays of blinding light from the Blessed Sacrament accompanied by a multitude of angels surrounding the altar in adoration before the Host.

In the evening, another mysterious event occurred. While praying in the chapel, Sister Agnes felt as though something pierced the palm of her left hand. There, in the centre of her palm, were two red marks in the form of a cross. As days went by, the pain from these marks became increasingly intense.

On July 6, Sister Agnes' guardian angel appeared and said: "Do not fear. I am the one who is with you and watches over you. Do not fear. Pray with fervour, not only because of your sins, but in reparation for those of all men. The world today wounds the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord by its ingratitude and injuries. The wounds of Mary are much deeper and sorrowful than yours. Let us go and pray together in the chapel."

Messages of Mary

In the chapel, the statue of the Virgin Mary came to life and a voice of indescribable beauty struck her deaf ears. **"My daughter, my novice, you have obeyed me well in abandoning all to follow me. Is the infirmity of your ears painful? Your deafness will be healed, be sure. Be patient. It is the last trial. Does the wound of your hand cause you to suffer? Pray in reparation for the sins of men. Each person in this community is my irreplaceable daughter. Do you say well the prayer of the Handmaids of the Eucharist? Then, let us pray it together:**

"Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, truly present in the Holy Eucharist, I consecrate my body and soul to be entirely one with Your Heart, being sacrificed at every instant on all the altars of the world and giving praise to the Father, pleading for the coming of His Kingdom. Please receive this humble offering of myself. Use me as You will for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls.

"Most holy Mother of God. Never let me be separated from your Divine Son. Please defend and protect me as your special child. Amen."

As her guardian angel had told her, a cross shaped wound, similar to that of Sister Agnes, appeared in the right hand of the statue of the Blessed Virgin. Blood began to flow from the wound.

On the First Friday of the month, August 3, 1973, Sister Agnes received the second message from Mary: **"Many men in this world afflict the**

Lord. I desire souls to console Him to soften the anger of the Heavenly Father. I wish, with my Son, for souls who will repair, by their suffering and their poverty, for the sinners and ingrates.

"In order that the world might know His anger, the Heavenly Father is preparing to inflict a great chastisement on all mankind. With my Son, I have intervened so many times to appease the wrath of the Father. I have prevented the coming of calamities by offering Him the sufferings of the Son on the Cross, His Precious Blood, and beloved souls who console Him and form a cohort of victim souls.



Between 1975 and 1981, the statue of Mary shed tears 101 times.

"Prayer, penance, and courageous sacrifices can soften the Father's anger. I desire this also from your community, that it love poverty, that it sanctify itself and pray in reparation for the ingratitude and outrages of so many men. Recite the prayer of the Handmaids of the Eucharist with awareness of its meaning; put it into practice: offer whatever God may send in reparation for sins. Let each one endeavour, according to her capacity and position, to offer herself entirely to the Lord.

"Even in a secular institute, prayer is necessary. Already souls who wish to pray are on the way to being gathered. Without attaching too much attention to the form, be faithful and fervent in prayer to console the Master."

On Saturday, October 13th, Mary gave Sister Agnes the third message: **"If men do not repent and better themselves, the Father will inflict a terrible punishment on all humanity. It will be a punishment greater than the deluge, such as one will never have seen before. Fire will fall from the sky and will wipe out a great part of humanity, the good as well as the bad, sparing neither priests nor faithful. The survivors will find themselves so desolate that they will envy the dead. The only arms which will remain for you will be the Rosary and the sign left by my Son. Each day recite the prayers of the Rosary. With the Rosary, pray for the Pope, the bishops and the priests.**

"The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church in such a way that one will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against other bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres. Churches and altars will be sacked. The Church will be full of those who accept compromises, and the demon will press many priests and consecrated souls to leave the service of the Lord.

"The demon will be especially implacable against the souls consecrated to God. The thought of the loss of so many souls is the cause of my sadness. If sins increase in number and gravity, there will no longer be pardon for them. Pray very much the prayers of the Rosary. I alone am able to still save you from the calamities which approach. Those who place their confidence in me will be saved."

During the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, on the last Sunday in May, 1982, Sister Agnes was completely cured from her deafness.









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Approval of the Bishop and Rome

After having been an eyewitness of the events and having carefully investigated them for years, Most Rev. John Shojiro Ito, Bishop of Niigata, declared the events of Akita, Japan, to be of supernatural origin, and authorized throughout the entire diocese the veneration of the Holy Mother of Akita. In a message which was to be read in every parish of the diocese on Easter Sunday, April 22, 1984, he advised that "the message of Akita is the message of Fatima."

Bishop Ito went to Rome a third time in June, 1988 to seek the opinion of the Holy See. "I was worried because of the seriousness of the message," he said. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, reassured Bishop Ito that he had acted properly and gave definitive judgement on the Akita events and messages as reliable and worthy of belief. ❖





Most Rev. Benjamin Almoneda, Bishop of Daet in the Philippines from 1991 to 2007, died on January 6, 2003 at the age of 92. He was the first non-Canadian bishop to come to our congress in Rougemont in 2004, paving the way for several bishops from other countries. (He had written to us earlier asking how Social Credit could be applied in the Philippines; we invited him to our congress, and he accepted).

Bishop Almoneda subsequently came to Rougemont several times for our congresses and study sessions, and liked to describe himself as "the first Social Credit bishop". In October 2004, he invited our full-timer Melvin Sickler on a two-month tour of the Philippines, ensuring, among other things, that Economic Democracy was presented to all the Filipino bishops. (Bishop Almoneda sent the *Money Myth Exploded* flyer to each bishop as a Christmas present that year.) He then had our main writings translated into Tagalog (the language spoken in the Philippines), including, of course, the *Money Myth Exploded.*

Here is what Bishop Almoneda said at our Rougemont Congress in 2007: "In the 15 years that I have known Social Credit, I have discovered a treasure, as we call Social Credit a treasure. But during this week, I appreciated this treasure even more. As Miss Tardif said many times, this week has been a great light. What I learned during this week is that the important thing to do now is education, to educate. They say that the mark of an educated person is someone who is able to communicate with anyone, the highest person to the lowest person... They talk about me as being Bishop Emeritus of Daet. Emeritus means retired. To understand this means you have to do something else after. And that is what I will continue to do even more: to share the ideals of Social Credit."

Thank you, Your Excellency, for all your efforts. We are certain that God will reward you a hundredfold, and we ask Him to send us other "Social Credit bishops" like you !



Mrs. Luke Murphy (née Katherine Shiposh), of Chicoutimi, and formerly of Charlemagne, died on April 28, 2023, at the age of 93. A Pilgrim of Saint Michael since l978, she faithfully attended all the monthly meetings of the Pilgrims of Saint Michael, both in Montreal and Rougemont. She was a regular participant in the Rosary Crusade's visits to families in Montreal, for as long as her strength allowed. Living in Charlemagne, a suburb of Montreal at the time, she took the bus early in the morning to join the team, and travelled by bus again in the evening after the day's apostolate. She would also crusade in her community with a companion. She always welcomed visiting pilgrims to her home for meals and accommodation. She was the mother of our pilgrim Léonard Murphy, who is responsible for the Saguenay Lac Saint-Jean region.

Saint Mary MacKillop

Educator of the poorest
"Freedom to educate, freedom to choose"

Among the saints of the 19th and 20th century who dedicated their lives to the service of God, today we will meet St. Mary of the Cross (Mary Helen MacKillop), the first Australian saint, whose feast is celebrated on August 8. Her great mission was directed towards young people, especially the poorest. Concerned with the education of the most disadvantaged, she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sacred Heart in Sydney, Australia, which she directed for several years with total dedication to prayer, contemplation and action. Here is her life as described in the letter of December 17, 2010 from the Abbey of St. Joseph de Clairval in France.[1]

***by* Dom Antoine Marie O.S.B.**

"If we cannot excuse everything, we can at least excuse the intention." These words reveal a benevolence rooted in the Gospel's teachings, facilitating human relations and building peace in society. They were written by Mother Mary MacKillop at a time when she was suffering greatly because of certain prelates of the Church. John Paul II beatified her on January 19, 1995, and Pope Benedict XVI canonized her on October 17, 2010.

Mary MacKillop was born on January 15, 1842 in Fitzroy, close to Melbourne, Australia. Her parents were Scottish immigrants. For several decades, the island continent of Australia had been an adopted country for a growing number of immigrants, many of whom had come from Great Britain and Ireland. At the time Mary MacKillop was born, a Benedictine monk from Downside in England, Bishop Bede Polding, had just been named the first administrator for the new apostolic vicariate that included all of Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand. At that time, this vast vicariate had 28 priests to serve 40,000 Catholics, in an area nearly as big as Europe!

A look that you could not forget

Mary grew up in a difficult context, in which her father's lack of common sense, her mother's sometimes excessive demands, and the birth of many brothers and sisters forced her to carry heavy loads. While still young, she rode the wildest horses with ease, and was only too pleased to lead a herd of cows—yet this did not keep her from being a girl like the others and loving to dance. Sent in 1860 to live with her uncle, she became a governess for her young cousins, who would later testify to her beneficial influence: "You could not face cousin Mary with ill-done work; she would give you a look you couldn't forget."



Saint Mary MacKillop of the Cross

At this time, she made the acquaintance of Father Julian Tenison Woods, who was trying to create a congregation of teaching nuns in Australia to provide an appropriate education for young Catholics, especially the poorest. Mary felt that God was calling her to devote her life to Him, and this encounter with Father Woods was decisive. In 1866, she opened, with two of her sisters, a school in Penola, South Australia, under the direction of Father Julian. The following year, Father Julian was called to Adelaide to assist the new bishop. This was a providential transfer that allowed the new institute to be located in the capital of South Australia. On August 15, Mary—who took as her religious name Sister Mary of the Cross—and her companions made their ▶

1 www.clairval.com/index.php/en/letter/?id=2151210

vows. Thus was born the first Australian religious congregation for women: the Institute of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, who would be known as "Josephites". Benefiting from the patronage of Saint Joseph, the Sisters combined a great zeal to educate youth with a particular insistence on poverty and a great abandonment to Divine Providence. In a letter to her mother, Sister Mary allowed her joy at belonging completely to God to overflow: "What a happiness it will be to you to think that some of your children are endeavouring to serve God in holy religion—their one great wish being to lead souls to Him... How many are lost through indifference and coldness of those who might and should think more of their eternal welfare and far less of this miserable world?... Think, dear Mamma, of the work that is to be done, and how few there are to do it, and thank God for permitting a child of yours to be one—the least worthy—of the workers."



Fr. Julián Tenison Woods

It was a bold undertaking. Father Julian wrote in his journal: "God would have His work succeed by His aid alone, and not from the human elements of success... I had at my disposal what the Government with all its resources could never buy, and that was zeal and disinterestedness for the glory of God, which were eminently conspicuous amongst those who gave themselves to the Institute of St. Joseph." In fact, God sent numerous vocations. Soon, Fr. Julian was receiving requests from all over for these new religious to be sent to run schools. In 1869, the institute numbered 70 members, most of whom were teachers in twenty-some schools in Adelaide and other towns in this vast diocese. In addition, the Sisters devoted themselves to other activities—caring for the elderly, the sick, orphans, vagabonds, and endangered young women.

A fundamental right

Father Julian and Sister Mary of the Cross were convinced that the unique qualities of Catholic education should in no way be compromised by unwarranted intervention from the State. They preferred to be poor and remain faithful to the principles of the faith, rather than have all the financial means and then lose their freedom to educate, which is essential to providing truly Christian formation. They were also aware that, if parents receive from God the responsibility of providing for their children's education, they must have the freedom and the opportunity to be helped by competent individuals of their choosing.

"As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible, parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, no. 2229). Indeed, schools play a decisive role in forming the individual, particularly in forming the moral conscience: "The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart. In the formation of conscience, the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church" (ibid., nos. 1784-1785).



Mary at age 16

For Sister Mary and her companions, the educator must perform her task in a great spirit of abandonment to God, following the example of the foster Father of the Holy Family: "St. Joseph's schools are humble, but strictly and purely Catholic—intended only for the humble poor, and having nothing to do with the great and learned. The sisters of these schools are also humble and poor in worldly knowledge. They only undertake to teach because it is on God, through their glorious Patron, St. Joseph, that they rely for the necessary means to enable them to do so. Conscious of our weakness, we dare not undertake that which we do, but that our sole trust is in Him, and that we know He delights in manifesting His glory through the very weakness and misery of His instruments."

During Mary MacKillop's beatification ceremony in Sydney on January 19, 1995, Pope John Paul II

pointed out the importance of Saint Joseph's patronage for the new congregation: "Saint Joseph... committed His whole being and life to God's loving Providence. Joseph of Nazareth was a man of boundless trust. Only in this way was He able to live out the unique calling He had received from God, to become the spouse of the Virgin Mary and the guardian of God's own Son."

"He invites us to rest in Him"

In May 1867, Father Julian drafted the constitutions of the institute, which would be approved by the bishop of Adelaide the following year. In December 1869, the Sisters founded a house in Brisbane, Queensland. But soon difficulties appeared. Mother Mary wrote to Father Julian: "We feel ourselves alone and little thought of—and have no kind, familiar heart to come in and help us on—but, oh, my Father, I am wrong ! We have One. You know we have the Sacred Heart—that Heart above all hearts, and instead of leaving us lonely when we are tempted to be so, it comes and so lovingly invites us to rest our weary minds awhile with It... Ah ! if it were not for the love of the Sacred Heart—and the ever-watchful and tender care of our Immaculate Mother, we would be weak and lonely indeed; but near them we are strong and without fear—no matter what storms threaten..."

Even worse storms were brewing. During Mother Mary's absence, the difficulties in Adelaide increased: a group of priests from the diocese, fiercely opposed to the new institute, wished for it to be dissolved. It was in this atmosphere of animosity that Bishop Sheil of Adelaide found himself, tired after a long trip to Europe where he had taken part in the First Vatican Council. At first he was impervious to the accusations being made against the Sisters—he was the one, after all, who had erected their institute. Yet, little by little he was won over to the cause of the malcontents, whose main grievances were the Sisters' refusal to accept the governmental stipend, and the supposed inability of several of them to teach.

Bishop Sheil allowed himself to be persuaded that he had to change the constitutions, and, going beyond his authority, eventually wanted to impose his will. But the Sisters could not agree to this. In fact, according to the law of the Church, once the constitutions of a religious congregation have been recognized by the appropriate authority, they cannot be modified without the approval of the general chapter of the institute. Faced with Mother Mary's refusal, Bishop Sheil took an extreme step—on September 22, 1871 in the presence of the community, he pronounced the foundress' excommunication. The Sisters almost unanimously preferred to be released of their vows than to accept the constitutions



he wished to impose on them, but that they had not made a vow to observe. In a matter of days, they were scattered, stripped of their religious habit, and forced to rely on the charity of the faithful—the Congregation no longer existed.

Closer to God than ever

Mother Mary described, in these words, her feelings when the bishop, surrounded by several priests, pronounced the sentence on her: "I felt, oh, such a love for their office, a love, a sort of reverence for the very sentence which I then knew was being in full force passed upon me. I do not know how to describe the feeling, but I was intensely happy and felt nearer to God than I had ever felt before. The sensation of the calm beautiful presence of God I shall never forget." Charitably received by friendly families and morally supported by a community of Jesuit priests, Mother Mary saw herself forced to avoid contact with the Sisters so as to avoid scandal, and to don secular dress, which cost her greatly. She wrote from the solitary place to which she had withdrawn: "I have never enjoyed so sure and certain peace of mind as of late. The majesty of God's ways seems so beautiful... Something seemed to whisper: 'A few years and this trying scandal will be completely obliterated from the minds of men and the case of the Church more firmly established than ever—not in Adelaide alone, but in all the colonies.'"

The following February, Bishop Sheil fell gravely ▶

ill. Shortly before his death, he realized that he had been ill-counseled, repented of the injustice he had committed against the Sisters, and lifted the censure he had pronounced on Mother Mary. For the feast of Saint Joseph, March 19, 1872, the Sisters had the joy of taking up their religious habit again. However, there was no shortage of difficulties, particularly financial ones. Some days, the Sisters did not have enough to eat. One of them wrote, "But what did it matter? We had Mother Mary and our habits again and were as happy as the day is long." For Mother Mary, the resolution of the situation was a victory. However, far from shouting in triumph, she made no illusions about the future. She wrote to her mother, "My path, dearest Mamma, will yet be that of the Cross. I seek nothing else, and oh, I love and bless the sweet Will which gives this chosen portion to me. It is utterly impossible for me to have any other portion."

"Christ...calls His disciples to take up [their] cross and follow [Him] (Mt. 16:24), for Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). In fact, Jesus desires to associate with His redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries ... Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven (Saint Rose of Lima)" (CCC, no. 618).

On March 28, 1873, Mother Mary embarked for Rome to request the Holy See's approbation for her Congregation. She relates her meeting with Pope Pius IX in these words: "Sunday, the feast of Pentecost, I had the happiness of seeing the Holy Father, and of obtaining a warm blessing from him for myself and my dear Sisters... What he said and how he said it when he knew that I was 'the excommunicated one', ... let me see that the Pope had a father's heart, and when he laid his loved hand upon my head, I felt more than I will attempt to say." She left Europe only after she had visited several other countries and had obtained information on the best methods of instruction. When she returned to Australia at the end of 1874, she was greeted by her Sisters with the greatest joy. She convened a general chapter of the Congregation for the following March 19, to share decisions from Rome—the Congregation was recognized by the Holy See, contingent upon several modifications in the nuns' way of life.



"As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental."

Catechism of the Catholic Church

An admirable charity

As she had anticipated, there was no lack of difficulties, in spite of support from Rome. The new bishop of Adelaide, Bishop Reynolds, once such a great supporter of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, allowed himself to be persuaded that Mother Mary was not worthy of her position. Along with other Australian bishops, he had never agreed that the Institute of the Sisters of Saint Joseph should be recognized as a congregation of pontifical right, with a central government that was not under the jurisdiction of diocesan bishops. Eventually, Bishop Reynolds expelled the foundress from the diocese of Adelaide and assumed the rights of canonical superior. Having gone to Sydney, Mother Mary was pleasantly greeted by the new archbishop, Cardinal Moran, who became a great friend and protector of the Institute.

The Cardinal was soon appointed by the Holy See to study the charges brought against the foundress by Bishop Reynolds. In a letter to her Sisters, Mother Mary showed an admirable respect and charity toward the bishop who had treated her unfairly: "Let us all believe that everything was done with a good intention, and let us never forget what the good bishop was to us in a very painful past, and oh, surely I need not ask any true child of mine—anyone who really loves me as she professes—I need not ask her never by word or act in this trying time to say or do aught that would reflect upon the Bishop, either his priests or his people. Now more than ever, we should be humble, patient, and charitable and forgiving.... for out of this sorrow much good has come and more will follow."

Here Mother Mary saw the painful events of her life through the eyes of faith, and in doing so, reminds us of the teaching of Saint Paul: in everything God works for good with those who love Him (Rom 8:28). "The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth: St. Catherine of Siena said to those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them: 'Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man. God does nothing without this goal in mind' " (CCC, no. 313).

In fact, Providence would reward the Sisters' patience. On July 25, 1888, the Sacred Congregation

of Propaganda confirmed the central government of the Sisters of the Institute of Saint Joseph and transferred its mother house to Sydney.

"Would Saint Joseph recognize us as His children?"

The month of March, 1891 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Institute. Mother Mary wrote to her Sisters: "O my Sisters, let us with great confidence turn to our glorious Patron on his Feast Day—let us ask him to obtain for us all we need to make us humble and faithful. Unless we have the spirit of humility, we shall only be Sisters of St. Joseph in name. Saint Joseph, our Father, was humble and hidden. Unless he sees in us the desire to imitate him in this, how can he recognize us as his children, how plead for us as such with his foster Son?... Make an offering of every wrong, real or imaginary, to our glorious Patron to be presented by him to our Divine Spouse, his Foster Son, and pray that you may never remember such things again. How can we have peace or charity whilst constantly recalling past injuries?"

In the years that followed, Mother Mary visited the various houses of the Congregation in Australia and New Zealand. In January, 1899, after having given up her position for several years, she was once again elected Superior General. However, her health was deteriorating. In 1902, she suffered a stroke that left her unable to walk and paralyzed on her right side. Slowly she regained the use of her limbs, and was able to walk again with the help of a walker. However, her strength was declining. She rendered her soul to God on August 8, 1909. Today, there are about a thousand Sisters of Saint Joseph, scattered across Australia, New Zealand, East Timor, Europe, and South America.

"In the vastness of the Australian continent," Pope John Paul II emphasized, "Blessed Mary MacKillop was not daunted by the great desert, the immense expanses of the outback, nor by the spiritual 'wilderness' which affected so many of her fellow citizens. Rather she boldly prepared the way of the Lord in the most trying situations. ... Just as in Mother MacKillop's time, so too today the Christian community is faced with many modern 'deserts': the wastelands of indifference and intolerance, the desolation of racism and contempt for other human beings, the barrenness of selfishness and faithlessness: sin in all its forms and expressions, and the scandal of sin magnified by the means of social communications. If the Church continually recalls God's law, inscribed in the human heart and revealed in the Old and New Testaments, it is not because of some arbitrary attachment to past tradition and outmoded views. It is that man detached from his Creator and Redeemer, cannot fulfill his destiny and will not have peace."

Let us ask Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop to lead us, through humility, forgiveness, and a profound charity towards everyone, in the way of true Peace, Who is Jesus Christ! ❖

Dom Antoine Marie o.s.b.

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Statue of Mary MacKillop outside St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Adelaide, Australia



The extraordinary history of the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Genazzano

Genazzano is a small town of around 6,000 inhabitants, 60 kilometres east of Rome in Italy. Since 1467, the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel has been venerated here, having miraculously arrived from Albania, across the Adriatic Sea, through heavenly intervention. A multitude of miracles have been performed there ever since. Here is the wonderful—and also true—story of this image and its shrine.

In the first half of the 15th century, Antonio Polani and his wife, Blessed Petruccia da Janeo, lived in Genazzano. Both were very devout, as well as being benefactors of the Augustinian monks who officiated in the church of Santa Maria del Buon Consiglio in Genazzano. Petruccia, who was widowed in 1426 at the age of 39, devoted her entire life to prayer and works of piety. As the Augustinian church was in a poor state, she had the idea of restoring it, using up all her possessions and even selling her house in 1451. Since her property was not enough to complete the restoration work, people began to make fun of her. But she calmly reassured them: "Don't worry, my friends; before I die, the Blessed Virgin and Saint Augustine will finish repairing the church."

And then a much greater obstacle appeared than a simple lack of resources. Petruccia had in fact declared that she had begun her enterprise and had been encouraged to persevere in it, mainly by relying on an inspiration, vision or revelation that she believed she had received from God; and the Church, in order to guard against the abuses which had sometimes arisen from paying attention to alleged supernatural messages of this kind, had now enacted a law forbidding the dealing with such things unless they were corroborated by some other external and independent testimony; the mere assertion of a dream, vision or revelation was not to be obeyed under any circumstances. Petruccia's work had therefore not only been suspended; for lack of means, it was also canonically forbidden. Such was the state of affairs in Genazzano until April 25, 1467.

To the east of Italy, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, lies Scutari (Shkroda in Albanian), a small town in Albania where, from time immemorial, a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary was venerated: all Catholics had recourse to her, particularly in the most difficult of times. The miraculous Virgin quickly established herself as the Patron Saint of Albania, and her shrine soon became the country's largest centre of religious devotion. Unfortunately, Scutari and Albania fell to the Muslim Turks.

But God willed that the sacred image, publicly



The original image as it appears at the Genazzano sancutary today; on the previous page, a more recent version by an artist inspired by the original image.

venerated in Scutari, should be miraculously saved from destruction by the Muslims. The Virgin herself appeared in a dream to two of her devotees, Sclavis and Giorgi: She told them that the image would leave Scutari before the country lost its faith, and asked them to follow her. As Sclavis and Giorgi prayed before the image, it detached itself from the wall of the church and, enveloped in a white cloud, rose into the air and headed towards the sea. The two devotees bravely followed it and managed to make it out, since it appeared by day as a cloud and by night as a pillar of fire; they too crossed the sea, walking dryly across the Adriatic. But once they reached Rome, they lost sight of the image... which they providentially found again in Genazzano a few days later.

April 25, 1467 was the feast of Saint Mark, patron saint of Genazzano; the village was packed with people who had come to celebrate the occasion. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the compact crowd of pilgrims, gathered in Piazza Santa Maria, were amazed to hear celestial harmonies descending from the heavens... It was as if the gates of heaven had opened...

At that moment, much higher up, a white cloud was seen spreading bright rays of light on all sides, enveloped in celestial music, in a splendour that veiled the sun itself. It gradually descended, coming to rest on the wall of the little unfinished chapel.

Miraculously, the church bell began to ring joyfully while, almost at the same time, the other churches in the city echoed this miraculous sound with their chimes, without anyone operating them. Gradually, the rays of light ceased to shine, the cloud slowly disappeared, and a very beautiful object appeared before the eyes of the crowd: It was the image from the sanctuary of Scutari, representing the Blessed Virgin holding the Infant Jesus in her arms, but the people of Genazzano did not know where it came from.

Petruccia came out of her house to ask what had happened, just like the others. When she saw the miraculous image, she fell to her knees and greeted it with outstretched arms. Then she got up and, turning to the people, told them in a voice half-strangled by tears of joy and gratitude, that it was the Gran Signora, the Great Lady she had been waiting for so long, who had now come to take possession of the church that should have been prepared for her, and that the bells were ringing in this miraculous way just to honour her.



Sclavis and Giorgi follow the image and cross the Adriatic Sea.

At these words, the people fell to their knees and began to pour out their prayers before this marvellous image, which they did not know how to describe other than as the Madonna del Paradiso, the Virgin of Paradise. It's easy to imagine the emotion produced by this event on the people who witnessed the miracle. All activities were abandoned... in unison a cry went up: "Long live Mary! Long live our Mother of Good Counsel!", while others shouted: "A miracle! A miracle!"

People from all over Italy travelled to contemplate the image, coming in procession from small villages and large towns alike. There were prodigies and miracles: between April 27 and August 14, 1467 alone, 161 miracles were recorded. The alms that were now permitted (due to a clear sign from Heaven) exceeded all expectations, even during Blessed Petruccia's lifetime, and not only was the church rebuilt, but it was even possible to build a beautiful convent. Miracles abounded: the blind, the mute, the lame and the sick of all kinds were healed, the possessed were freed... people everywhere were talking about the apparition.

Let's come back to the two Albanians, Sclavis and Giorgi. Two or three days after their arrival in Rome, they learned that an image had appeared in a very strange way in Genazzano, and that its appearance had been followed by many miracles. They immediately set off to visit it, where they recognized it and proclaimed its identity. Later, other Albanians, who were scattered abroad in different parts of Italy, came to see the image and confirmed its identity. Sclavis and Giorgi decided to settle in Genazzano. The Sclavis family died out in the early 1700s, while Giorgi's descendants are still there today.

The Pope at the time, Paul II, was informed of the events and, shortly afterwards, sent two bishops to Genazzano: Gaucerio de Forcalquier, Bishop of Gap in France, and Nicola de Crucibus, Bishop of Hvar in Dalmatia, to investigate the situation. Their investigation proved positive. The miracles continued, and so many donations arrived that the church was completed in no time. Blessed Petruccia died in 1472, and her body was buried in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin.

Immediately after the apparition, there were numerous miracles attested to by notaries. A certain Guglielmo de Orlandis from Terni, aged 25, blind from birth, who had just entered the church, recovered his sight; Antonietto from Castelnuovo had begged the Virgin of Genazzano to restore the life of his faithful servant, Constantino de Carolis from Castelfollit: he was granted his wish.

The very image of Mary in Genazzano is a miracle. The image appears sometimes benevolent, sometimes sad, sometimes illuminated by rosy colours, depending on who is approaching it. What's more, the suspension of the image is miraculous: it's not a painting executed on a panel or canvas, so it can be easily removed and leave no trace behind; it's a simple fresco on a very thin layer of plaster, which no human skill could have detached from the wall in one piece, let alone transported from one place to another without breaking it.



The image of the Virgin miraculously arrives in Genazzano

Subsequently, the provenance of the image was even more clearly established by the testimony of people who spoke under oath, not only to the exact shape and size, as corresponding to an empty space that was then still visible on the wall of the church in Scutari, before its demolition by the Communists in 1967. In 1895, Our Lady of Good Counsel was proclaimed Patron Saint of Albania.

In the liturgical calendar, the feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel is celebrated on April 26. Among the readings at Mass is the Gospel passage from the wedding feast at Cana (John 2), where Mary says to the servants: "Do whatever Jesus tells you." These words are also addressed to each one of us.



John Paul II at the Genazzano Shrine on April 22, 1993

If Mary is the Mother of Good Counsel, it is because she is the mother of the "Wonderful Counsellor", according to the words of the prophet Isaiah (9:5) to designate Jesus. We also know that counselling is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gift of counsel is the ability to discern good from evil and the Will of God according to the circumstances, because it is not enough for a thing to be good in itself for it necessarily to correspond to the Will of God in given circumstances.

Saint John Paul II visited the shrine of Genazzano on Thursday, April 22, 1993. He wanted to become a pilgrim at the feet of the Mother of Good Counsel in preparation for his pastoral visit to Albania a few days later. Here is his speech after the recitation of the Rosary:

"Dear friends, you are well aware of the deep connection between this shrine (of Genazzano) and the town of Shkodra, where next Sunday I will celebrate the Eucharist and ordain four Albanian bishops. The image of Our Lady of Good Counsel venerated here comes from Shkodra: According to a pious tradition, it migrated from the church that housed it, thus miraculously escaping the Turkish invasion of 1467. I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and for the large attendance at today's meeting. I also commend you to all our Albanian brothers, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, with whom you are so closely linked through this image of Our Lady of Good Counsel."

On the following Sunday, April 25, 2023, in Shkroda (Scutari), John Paul II blessed the foundation stone of the new sanctuary of the Mother of Good Counsel, to be rebuilt on the exact spot where it stood before it was destroyed in 1967 by the sacrilegious hand of the Communist regime. The Pope also donated a copy of the image of the Mother of Good Counsel of Genazzano, painted by Dante Ricci of Genazzano, to symbolise the return of the Lady and Protector of Albania to her homeland. ❖

Source:immaculate.one/mary-of-the-day-april-25-1467-part-one-our-lady-of-good-counsel-genazzano-italy/

Blaise Pascal, a "tireless seeker of truth"
Apostolic letter of Pope Francis

On June 19, 2023, Pope Francis published an apostolic letter entitled "Sublimitas et miseria hominis" (The grandeur and misery of man) to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), one of the greatest geniuses of his time, and perhaps of all centuries, proposing him as a "tireless seeker of truth" and companion in our search for true happiness and the discovery of faith in Jesus our Saviour.

Pascal was a mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher, moralist and theologian. Among other things, he invented the first calculating machine and the first public transport system in Paris. The most famous of his writings is his "Pensées" (published two years after his death), a collection of thoughts and aphorisms.

In this book, we find what is called "Pascal's wager", a philosophical argument that goes like this: "God is, or He is not. But to which side shall we incline? You must wager. It is not optional... Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."

Pascal argues that a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas if God does exist, they stand to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity in Heaven) and avoid infinite losses (an eternity in Hell).

As we will see in this letter, Pope Francis talks about three stages (experienced by Pascal) in getting to know God and deepening our faith. 1. Reason, which makes us know that God exists; 2. Revelation, or grace, which makes us know that this God is Trinity, and that Jesus, Son of God, became man to save us (for Pascal, this revelation came one night in November 1654, which he called the "night of fire", after which he believed everything that the Holy Roman Catholic Church teaches); 3. The heart, or charity, which makes us commune intimately with God through the love of our brothers and sisters in humanity. Here are some extracts from this letter (Most of the quotations in this letter are taken from the book "Pensées."):

by Pope Francis

The grandeur and misery of man. This paradox is central to the thought and enduring message of Blaise Pascal, born four centuries ago, on June 19, 1623 in Clermont in central France. From childhood, Pascal devoted his life to the pursuit of truth. By the use of reason, he sought its traces in the fields of mathematics, geometry, physics and philosophy, making remarkable discoveries and attaining great fame even at an early age. Yet he was not content with those achievements. In a century of great advances in many fields of science, accompanied by a growing spirit of philosophical and religious scepticism, Blaise Pascal proved to be a tireless seeker of truth, a "restless" spirit, open to ever new and greater horizons.



Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

I believe that it is fitting to describe Pascal as a man marked by a fundamental attitude of awe and openness to all reality. Openness to other dimensions of knowledge and life, openness to others, openness to society. For example, in 1661 he developed, in Paris, the first public transport system in history, the "five-penny coaches". If I mention this at the beginning of this Letter, it is to make clear that neither his conversion to Christ, which began with the "night of fire" on November 23, 1654, nor his masterful intellectual defence of the Christian faith, made him any less a man of his time. He continued to be concerned with the questions that troubled his age and with the material needs of all the members of the society in which he lived.

This openness to the world around him kept him concerned for others, even in his final illness at only thirty-nine years of age. At this, the last stage of his earthly pilgrimage, he is reported to have said: "If the physicians tell the truth, and God grants that I recover from this sickness, I am resolved to have no other work or occupation for the rest of my life except to serve the poor." It is moving to realize that in the last days of his life, so great a genius as Blaise Pascal saw

nothing more pressing than the need to devote his energies to works of mercy: "The sole object of Scripture is charity."

I am pleased that on this, the fourth centenary of his birth, God's providence grants me this opportunity to pay homage to Pascal, and to recall those aspects of his life and thought that I deem helpful to encourage Christians in our day, and their contemporaries of good will, in the pursuit of authentic happiness. For "all people seek to be happy. This is true without exception, whatever the different means they employ. All tend to the same goal." Four centuries after his birth, Pascal remains our travelling companion, accompanying our quest for true happiness and, through the gift of faith, our humble and joyful recognition of the crucified and risen Lord.

A man in love with Christ, who speaks to everyone

His monumental Pensées, some of whose individual aphorisms remain famous, cannot really be understood unless we realize that Jesus Christ and sacred Scripture are both their centre and the key to their understanding. For if Pascal proposed to speak of man and God, it was because he had arrived at the certainty that "not only do we know God solely through Jesus Christ, but we know ourselves solely through Jesus Christ. We do not know life and death except through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we understand neither our life nor our death, neither God nor ourselves. Hence without the Scriptures, which speak solely of Jesus Christ, we know nothing and we see only darkness."

Clearly, Pascal was concerned to make people realize that "God and truth are inseparable", yet he also knew that belief is possible only by the grace of God, embraced by a heart that is free. Through faith he had personally encountered "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, not the God of the philosophers and the learned," and had acknowledged Jesus Christ as "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). For this reason, I would suggest that everyone who wishes to persevere in seeking truth – a never-ending task in this life – should listen to Blaise Pascal, a man of prodigious intelligence who insisted that apart from the aspiration to love, no truth is worthwhile. "We make truth itself into an idol, for truth apart from charity is not God, but His image; it is an idol which must in no way be loved or worshipped."

The tragedy of this life is that we at times fail to see clearly, and as a result, we choose poorly. For we cannot savour the joy of the Gospel unless "the Holy Spirit fills us with His power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride." What is more, "without the wisdom of discernment, we can become prey to every passing trend." That is why an appreciation of the living faith of Blaise Pascal, who sought to demonstrate that the Christian religion is "venerable because it truly knows man" and "lovable because it promises true good," can help us make our way through the shadows and sorrows of this world.

An outstanding scientific mind

When his mother died in 1626, Blaise Pascal was three years old. His father, Étienne, a well-known jurist, was also renowned for his notable scientific gifts, particularly in the fields of mathematics and geometry. Choosing to provide personally for the education of his three children, Jacqueline, Blaise and Gilberte, he moved to Paris in 1632. Very quickly, Blaise showed exceptional intelligence and persistence in seeking truth… One day his father found Blaise studying geometry and suddenly realized that, without knowing that the same theorems could be found in books under other names, Blaise, at age twelve, entirely on his own, by drawing figures on the ground, had demonstrated the first 32 propositions of Euclid. Gilberte (Blaise's sister) recalled that their father was "astounded at the depth and the power of his intellect."

In the years that followed, Blaise Pascal worked intensely to make his immense talent bear fruit. At seventeen, he was in communication with the most learned men of his time. In quick succession came his discoveries and his publications. In 1642, at the age of nineteen, he invented an arithmetic machine, the ancestor of our modern computers.

Many of Pascal's writings are steeped in the language of philosophy. This is especially true of his Pensées, the collection of fragments, published posthumously, that are his notes and sketches for a philosophy inspired by a theological concern. Scholars have attempted, with varying results, to restore the collection's original form and unity. Pascal's passionate love for Christ and for serving the poor, which I mentioned earlier, were not so much the sign of a disconnect in the mind of this bold disciple, as of a deeper growth towards evangelical radicalism, a progression, aided by grace, towards the living truth of the Lord. Pascal, who possessed the supernatural certitude of faith and considered it fully compatible with reason while infinitely surpassing the latter, sought as much as possible to engage in dialogue with those who did not share his faith. For "to those who do not have faith, we cannot give it except by reasoning, as we wait for God to give it to them by moving their heart." Here we see a completely respectful and patient form of evangelization that our generation would do well to imitate.

Limits of the human condition

Pascal's philosophy, ever paradoxical, is grounded in an approach as simple as it is lucid: it seeks to attain to "reality illumined by reason." He starts by observing that man is in some way a stranger to ▶

himself, at once great and wretched. Great by virtue of his reason and his ability to master his passions, but great too "in that he acknowledges himself wretched." Indeed, man aspires to something other than satisfying or resisting his instincts, "for what is nature to animals, we call wretchedness in man."

An intolerable disproportion exists between, on the one hand, our limitless desire for happiness and knowledge of truth, and, on the other, our limited reason and physical frailty, which ultimately ends in death. Pascal's strength is also his relentless realism: "It does not take great intelligence to realize that here below there is no true and solid satisfaction, that all our pleasures are but vanity, that our ills are infinite, and that death, which threatens us constantly, will infallibly set before us, in a few years, the dread alternative of being annihilated or of being unhappy for all eternity. Nothing is more real than that, nor more frightening. We can act as bravely as we like: this is the end that awaits the finest life in the world."

In this tragic condition, surely an individual cannot retreat into himself, for his wretchedness and the uncertainty of his destiny prove unbearable to him. As a result, he needs to distract himself. Pascal readily acknowledges this: "Hence it is that men so greatly love noise and commotion." For if a person does not divert himself from his condition—and we know very well how to divert ourselves by work, forms of leisure, relationships in family or among friends, but also, alas, by the vices to which certain passions lead—his humanity experiences "its nothingness, its abandonment, its insufficiency, its dependence, its powerlessness, its emptiness. [And there emerge] from the depths of his soul ennui, melancholy, sadness, chagrin, spite, despair." Diversion fails to satisfy, much less fulfil, our great desire for life and happiness. This is something that all of us know quite well.

At this point, Pascal sets forth his great argument. "What is it, then, that this longing and this feeling of helplessness cry out to us, if not that man once enjoyed a true happiness, of which there now remains but an empty trace that he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things he lacks what he cannot obtain from those he has. Yet none of these can provide it, for this infinite abyss cannot be bridged except by an infinite and immutable object, which is God Himself."

Pascal goes on to argue that if there is a God, and if man has received a divine revelation—as a number of religions profess—and if that revelation is true, it must contain the answer we await in order to resolve the contradictions that cause us such anguish. "The greatness and wretchedness of man are so evident that the true religion must necessarily teach us both that there is in man a great principle of grandeur and a great principle of wretchedness. It must also account for these astonishing contradictions."

From his study of the great religions, Pascal concludes that, "no thought and no ascetic-mystical practice can offer a way of redemption," unless by "the higher criterion of truth found in the illumination of grace." "It is in vain," Pascal writes, imagining what the true God might tell us, "that you seek in yourselves the remedy for your miseries. All your intelligence could only attain the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will find either truth or goodness. The philosophers promised it to you and they were unable to deliver. They know neither what is your true good, nor your veritable state."

After applying his extraordinary intelligence to the study of the human condition, the sacred Scriptures and the Church's tradition, Pascal now presents himself with childlike simplicity as a humble witness of the Gospel. As a Christian, he wishes to speak of Jesus Christ to those who have hastily concluded that there is no solid reason to believe in the truths of Christianity. For his part, he knows from experience that the content of divine revelation is not only not opposed to the demands of reason, but offers the amazing response that no philosophy could ever attain on its own.

Conversion: the "night of fire"

On November 23, 1654, Pascal had a powerful experience that even now is referred to as his "night of fire." This mystical experience, which caused him to weep tears of joy, was so intense and so decisive for him that he recorded it on a piece of paper, precisely dated, the "Memorial", which he inserted in the lining of his coat, only to be discovered after his death. While it is impossible to know the exact nature of what took place in Pascal's soul that night, it seems to have been an encounter which he himself acknowledged as analogous to the encounter, fundamental for the whole history of revelation and salvation, that Moses experienced in the presence of the burning bush (cf. Ex 3).

The term "FIRE", which Pascal placed as the heading of the "Memorial", invites us, relatively speaking, to make this comparison. The parallel would seem to be indicated by Pascal himself who, immediately after the evocation of fire, repeated the appellation that the Lord gave Himself in the presence of Moses —"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6.15)—and then added: "not of the philosophers and the sages. Certainty. Certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ."

Our God is indeed joy, and Blaise Pascal testifies to this before the whole Church and before all those who seek God. "This is not the abstract God or the cosmic God. No. This is the God of a person, of a call, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who is certitude, who is sentiment, who is joy." The encounter that night, which confirmed for Pascal

the "grandeur of the human soul", overwhelmed him with that same lively and fathomless joy: "Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy."

And that divine joy became for him an occasion of confession and prayer: "Jesus Christ. I separated myself from Him. I fled Him, denied Him, crucified Him. May I never be separated from Him." Pascal's experience of the love of God, who in Jesus Christ personally shared in our history and ceaselessly shares in our life, set Pascal on the path of profound conversion, a life of charity and thus the "complete and sweet renunciation" of the "old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts" (Eph 4:22).

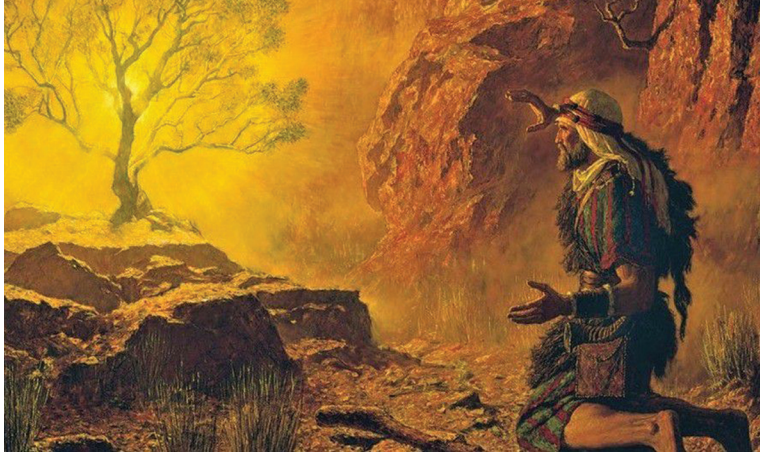
Certainly, prior to the night of November 23, 1654, Pascal "never doubted the existence of God. He also knew that God is the supreme good… What he lacked and longed for was not knowledge but power; not truth, but strength." That strength was now bestowed on him by grace, and he felt himself drawn with certitude and joy to Jesus Christ: "We know God only through Jesus Christ. Without this Mediator, all communication with God is taken away." To discover Jesus Christ is to discover the Saviour and Liberator whom I need: "This God is nothing other than the Redeemer of our miseries. Thus we can only really know God by knowing our iniquities." As with every authentic conversion, the conversion of Blaise Pascal took place in humility, which delivers us "from our narrowness and self-absorption."

The vast and restless intelligence of Blaise Pascal, brimming with peace and joy at the revelation of Jesus Christ, invites us, following "the order of the heart," to advance towards the brightness of "these heavenly lights." For if our God is a "hidden God" (cf. Is 45:15), it is because He "willed to conceal Himself" in such a way that our reason, illumined by grace, will never stop seeking to find Him. Hence, it is by the illumination of grace that we come to know him. Yet our human freedom must be open to this, and indeed Jesus comforts us with these words: "You would not seek Me if you had not found Me".

Faith and reason

While faith is reasonable, it remains a gift of God and may not be imposed. "We do not prove that we should be loved by setting out the reasons why; that would be ridiculous," Pascal tells us with his subtle humour, comparing human love and the way that God beckons us. Like human love, "which proposes but never imposes – the love of God never imposes itself." Jesus bore witness to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37), but "refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke out against it." That is why "there is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those disposed otherwise."

Pascal goes on to say that "faith differs from proof. One is human, while the other is God's gift." Hence, it is impossible to believe "unless God inclines the heart." Although faith is of a higher order than reason, it does not follow that faith is opposed to reason; rather, faith infinitely surpasses reason. In reading Pascal's work, we do not first encounter reason that clarifies faith, but a Christian of great logical rigour accounting for an order, graciously established by God, which transcends reason: "The infinite distance between bodies and minds represents the infinitely more infinite distance between minds and charity, for the latter is supernatural."



Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3)

Reason and the heart

Neither the operations of geometry nor philosophical reasoning permit us, of themselves, to arrive at a "very clear view" of the world or of ourselves. Those enmeshed in the details of their calculations do not benefit from the view of the whole that enables us to "see all the principles." That is the task of the "spirit of finesse" which Pascal extols, for in attempting to grasp reality, "one must immediately take things in at a single glance."

This intuitive vision has to do with what Pascal calls the "heart". "We know the truth not only by reason but even more by the heart; it is by the latter that we come to know the first principles, and it is in vain that reasoning, which has no part in it, tries to refute them." Divinely revealed truths—such as the fact that the God who created us is love, that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that He became incarnate in Jesus Christ, who died and rose for our salvation—are not demonstrable by reason. They can only be known by the certitude of faith, and then pass immediately from the spiritual heart to the rational mind, which acknowledges their truth and can explicate them in turn. "This is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are blessed indeed and rightly convinced."

Pascal never grew resigned to the fact that some men and women not only do not know Jesus Christ, but disdain, out of laziness or due to their passions, to take the Gospel seriously. For in Jesus Christ their very lives are at stake. "The immortality of the soul ▶

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▶ is so important to us, something that touches us so deeply, that we need to have lost all feeling to be unconcerned with knowing what is at stake… And that is why, among those who are not convinced about this, I would distinguish clearly between those who make every effort to investigate it, and those who go about their lives without being concerned about it or thinking of it"

We know very well that often we attempt to flee death, or to overcome it, thinking that we can "banish the thought of our finite existence" or "remove its power and dispel fear. But Christian faith is not a way of exorcizing the fear of death; rather, it helps us to face death. Sooner or later, we will all pass through that door… The true light that illumines the mystery of death comes from the resurrection of Christ." Only God's grace enables the human heart to know God and to live a life of charity. This led an important commentator on Pascal in our own day to write that "thought does not become Christian unless it attains to that which Jesus Christ brought about, which is charity."

As I noted earlier, Blaise Pascal, at the conclusion of a life that was brief yet extraordinarily rich and fruitful, set the love of his brothers and sisters above all else. He felt and knew that he was a member of one body, for "God, having made the heaven and the earth which are not conscious of the happiness of their existence, wished to create beings who would know that happiness and constitute a body of thinking members." Pascal, as a lay Christian, savoured the joy of the Gospel, with which the Spirit wishes to heal and make fruitful "every aspect of humanity" and to bring "all men and women together at table in God's Kingdom."

When, in 1659, he composed his magnificent Prayer to Ask of God the Proper Use of Sickness, Pascal was a man at peace, no longer engaged in controversies or even apologetics. Gravely ill and at the point of dying, he asked to receive Holy Communion, but that was not immediately possible. So he asked his sister, "sSince I cannot communicate in the head [Jesus Christ], I would like to communicate in the members." He "greatly desired to die in the company of the poor." It was said of Pascal, shortly after he took his last breath on August 19, 1662, that "he died with the simplicity of a child." After receiving the sacraments, his last words were: "May God never abandon me."

May the brilliant work of Blaise Pascal and the example of his life, so profoundly immersed in Jesus Christ, help us to persevere to the end on the path of truth, conversion and charity. For this life passes away in a moment: "Everlasting joy in return for a single day's effort on earth." ❖

Pope Francis



"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus."

Blaise Pascal