

## “POPES AND ANTI-POPES”: LATERAN III AND THE QUEST FOR UNITY

On the surface, it was a magnificent period of growth throughout Europe—the age of magnificent Cathedrals, with their flying buttresses and vast expanses of stained glass. In France, **Notre-Dame de Paris** was begun in 1163 A.D., while St. Bernard of Clairvaux inspired the building of Cistercian abbeys, especially in the Burgundy region of France. In England, the famed Canterbury Cathedral was taking shape. But just beneath the surface, trouble loomed. **Two men** had laid claims to the papacy— or more accurately, one pope and one anti-pope. The **schism** lasted **twenty years** and there was need to bring about **healing** and **clarity** amidst tense relations between the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (“red-beard”) and the papacy. The separation of Church and State, so enshrined in our American ethos (and frequently misunderstood!), was absent in 12th century Europe.

By 1178 A.D. divided loyalties in the Church could no longer be ignored. The Church needed healing. Recognizing the need for an ecumenical Council, **Pope Alexander** acted decisively “so that according to the custom of the ancient fathers, the good should be sought and confirmed by many, and that with the cooperation of the grace of the Holy Spirit, by the efforts of all, there should be carried out what was required for the correction of abuses and the establishment of what was pleasing to God.” The Council convened in Rome on March 5, 1179, with some **300 bishops** in attendance. No time was wasted in admonishing the Cardinals— **Canon 1** decreed for future conclaves, “that person shall be held as Roman pontiff who has been chosen and received by the **two thirds**.” Sometimes, a crisis leads to greater clarity. That very provision remains in force 842 years later!

With respect to bishops, Canon 3 decreed: “no one should be chosen bishop unless he has already reached the **age of thirty**, been born in **lawful wedlock** and also is shown to be worthy by his **life and learning**.” Today’s minimal age is 35, though typically new bishops are named in their early to mid-fifties. This was aimed at preventing inexperienced men from being named bishops through nepotism or other forms of favoritism. The Council decreed (Canon 4) that when visiting territories within their dioceses, Archbishops “are not to bring with them more than forty or **fifty horses** or other mounts...” J As peculiar as that sounds to modern ears, the idea behind it was simple. Your office is **not for show**; you are pastors, so act like it! But it was not only to clerics that the ire of the Council was turned. The Knights Templar and Hospitallers (medieval brotherhoods) were **exceeding** their authority, ignoring bishops and causing scandal.

Interestingly, **cathedral churches** were singled out as places of **learning**. Canon 18 decreed that “in order that the opportunity of learning to read and progress in study is not withdrawn from poor children who cannot be helped by the support of their parents, in **every cathedral** church a **master is to be assigned** some proper benefice so that he may **teach** the **clerics** of that church and the **poor** scholars.” In the 12th century, these Catholic schools were precursors to Catholic universities. While sadly our Cathedral School closed in 1977, thousands of children were the beneficiaries of a first-rate Catholic education since 1855. My commitment to **Catholic education** is even stronger, having witnessed our schools’ tireless efforts to offer in-person learning during the pandemic. Catholic school enrollment is surely on the rise.

The medieval practice of **usury** was abominable, wreaking tremendous harm to the poor. Usury refers to charging unlawful and excessive rates of interest on loans. Lateran III declared: “**notorious usurers** should not be admitted to communion of the altar or receive Christian burial

if they die in this sin.” It was not merely issues of Church discipline the Council addressed. It also attacked a heresy rampant in Medieval France known as **Catharism**. Deriving from the Greek *Katharoi*, (i.e. ‘pure ones’), its **dualistic** philosophy rejected the traditional Trinity, reflecting a belief that the universe was ruled by **dual gods** in conflict: a good, kind, and loving god who created the spiritual realm, and an evil god who had created the material, earthly world. Itinerant preachers in the forests of southern France spoke eloquently and many were attracted to its **black and white** answers to life’s big questions. The Cathars showed **disdain** for clergy, believing that priests **did not** act as mediators of Jesus Christ in their ministry.

Such disdain doesn’t materialize out of thin air– it was an extreme **counter reaction** to clerical misconduct. Canon 11 of Lateran III condemned both clerics who had mistresses and those clerics guilty of “unnatural vice.” **Penalties** ranged from loss of ecclesiastical office to outright excommunication. Clearly, the specter of a corrupt clergy demanded serious measures. Even in such brief treatments of Church councils, it is possible to glean **relevant lessons** for today. The faithful laity deserve a **clergy** they can **trust** and to whom they look for spiritual guidance. *Parce Domine*– “Spare (us), O Lord” of any anti-popes! Rather, we strive for unity in the Church. Today’s divisions are troubling, especially among our own shepherds. Let us pray for and **encourage our bishops** in their ministry of unity, needed now more than ever. (To be continued)

- To **mask** or **not** to mask? Please know that it is imperative that we as Catholics **show respect** for the various **choices** each of us makes concerning the Covid-Delta variant. People who choose to **mask** at Mass are **most welcome** here. Showing mutual respect is the best way we can live our Catholic faith.
- Among the shrines still on my “to visit” list is the Basilica of **Our Lady of Guadalupe** in Mexico City. Last week, Mexico observed the **200th anniversary** of the signing of the **Treaty of Córdoba**, granting independence from Spain, while also assuring a privileged place for the Catholic Church. Mexico has a rich and complex history, including many challenges to the Catholic faith and internal struggles. Let us pray for our neighbors to the south.
- Summer’s fading quickly! Calling all families for religious education. Please visit the parish website with a [link to register](#) for Wednesday evening R.E. classes beginning on September 15. For those interested in exploring more about the Catholic faith, please consider signing up for RCIA.
- Ouch! Due to our preferred vendor’s availability, our **Ice Cream Social** tentatively planned for Sunday, September 12 **cannot** occur as hoped. It will be **worth the wait** at a future date! I am still urging your participation in Synod Small Groups.
- More than **90** incidents of **vandalism** to Catholic churches across 28 states have occurred since May 2020. These include arson, **desecration** of statues, and the presence of **anti-Catholic** graffiti.
- Next weekend is our annual **mission appeal**. Sadly, Fr. Mansuetus Setonga from **Tanzania** is unable to travel due to the pandemic. Instead, we will share his notes, asking for your support.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector