

**Blessed ANTONIO ROSMINI**

**THE FIVE WOUNDS  
OF  
HOLY CHURCH**

**NGONG – 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

It is undoubtedly the most famous of Rosmini's books, written with great passion and love for the Church. It caused him immense personal damage, but he felt that the renewal of the Church was of such great urgency that he had to be prepared to suffer for it. Rosmini borrowed the image of the "crucified Church" from Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254).

Rosmini wrote it in 1832, but did not publish it, *"the time did not seem ripe"*. In 1846, a new Pope was elected, Pius IX *"who seems destined to renew our age and give the Church the impetus for a new, glorious stage of unimaginable development"*.

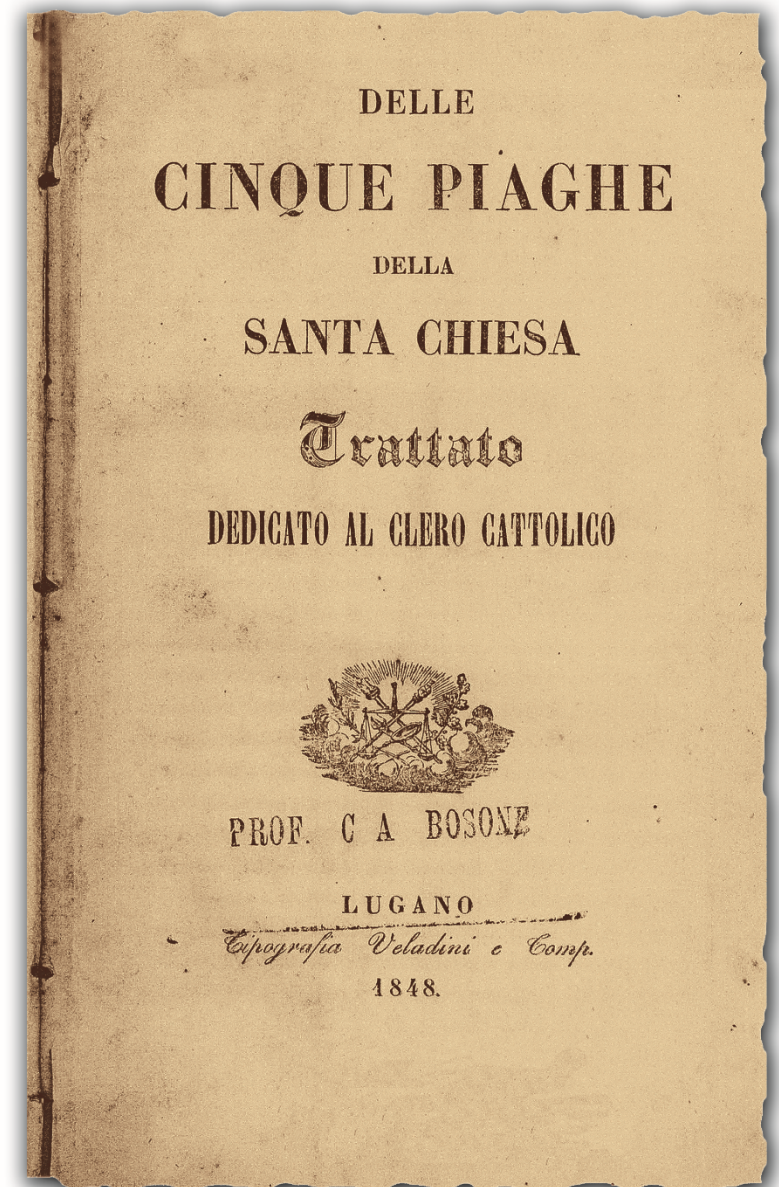
Rosmini published it in 1848 for a circle of friends *"who have shared my sorrow, and now look forward with me in hope"*.

Unfortunately, it was so successful that many printing firms published it in many cities in Italy and in Europe, without permission from the author. It had a brief life: it was condemned by the Church and placed in the Index of Forbidden Books in 1849, barely one year after its first publication.



With hind-sight we can say that the publication of the book in 1848 was a great mistake, given the agitated political situation in most of Europe. It was bound to raise fierce opposition from all quarters, but especially from the Austrian Government.

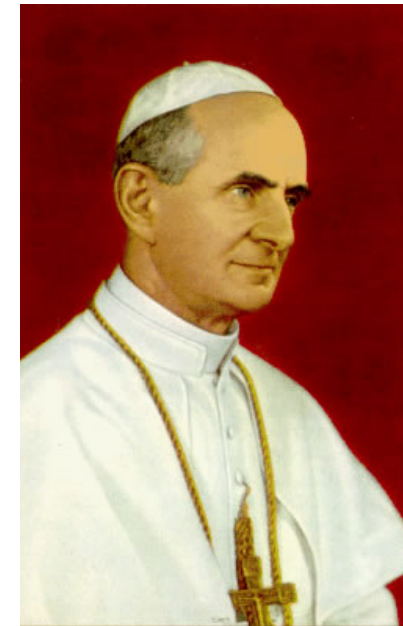
Austria, who was occupying most of North Italy, viewed Rosmini as “our most formidable enemy” and “the evil genie of Pius IX” (from a letter of the Austrian Ambassador in Rome, 1849). Rosmini was a subject of the Austrian Empire (Rovereto was under Austria at that time), but he did not hide his strong desire for the independence of Italy as a confederation of free Italian states.





The book was taken out of the Index just a few years before Vatican II. It was widely known to the Bishops who took part in it, and many of the ideas of the book found their way in the Documents of Vatican II.

Pope **Paul VI** called the Five Wounds of Holy Church ***“a prophetic book”***. It is the opinion of many that some of the Wounds are still waiting for a cure, and we may need perhaps a Vatican III to tackle more resolutely the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wounds; and even the First and Second Wounds are still very much open, although the Church of Vatican II has produced important documents towards “healing” them.



## The Five Wounds of the Church

1. The division between people and clergy at worship.
2. The insufficient education of the clergy.
3. Disunion amongst the Bishops.
4. The nomination of Bishops in the hands of civil government.
5. The enslavement of Church's goods (by the State and by the lack of poverty of the members of the Church).



## The First Wound:

The Wound in the left hand of holy Church: the division between people and clergy at public worship.

**Rosmini had a very lofty view of the dignity of the laity. The “faithful”, for Rosmini, are the clergy and the laity together, representing and forming in the Church the marvellous unity indicated by Christ when He said,**

***“Where two or three are gathered in my name, in agreement about everything they ask, there I am in their midst”.***

**Christ demands unity of minds and hearts, the clergy and the people acting together “as one man” as Scripture says of the ancient Israelites.**



**The early Christians, Apostles and believers, were “one in heart and mind”, they acted as one Body.**

**Why?**

**They believed the same truths, they took part fully, body and soul, in their liturgies, the Eucharist and the Sacraments.**

**Everyone understood what was being said and done.**



**JESUS came to save the whole person, body and spirit.**

The Gospel had to appeal to both elements of the human nature, to the mind and to the heart. The Apostles were indeed sent out to “preach”, to instruct people. But they did not found a school of philosophy, nor did they perform miracles simply to prove the truth of what they were saying, nor gave examples of great virtues to persuade their listeners.

If they had presented Christianity simply as wisdom, as truths to be believed, they would not have achieved much. Their appeal would have been greatly reduced.



*Christianity is not a philosophy, a set of doctrines, a matter for the mind only. There is much more to it. As a purely intellectual system it would have perished long ago!*

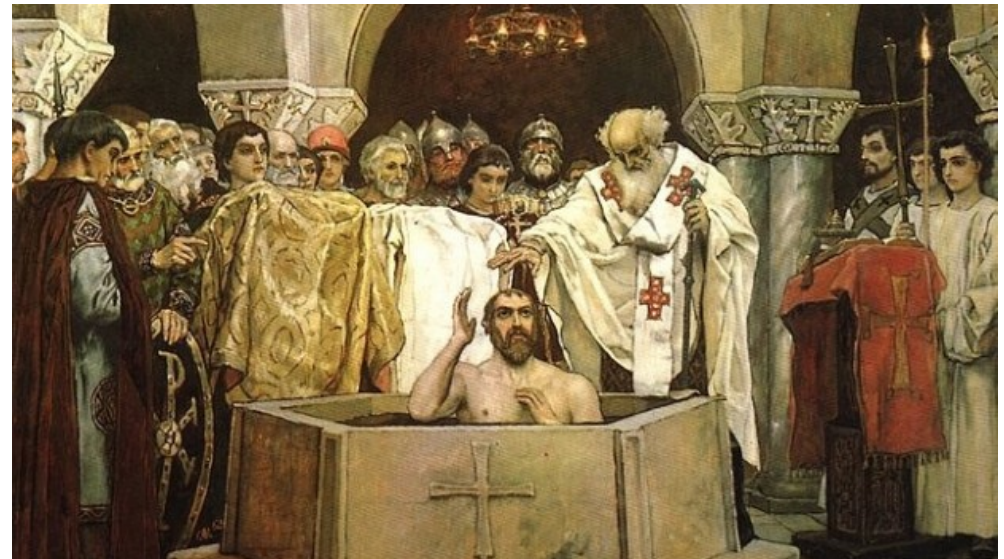


**JESUS'** command was, *“Go out into the whole world and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”*.

His command was to “speak” to the intellect by the way of preaching, and to regenerate the will, to touch the heart, to speak to feeling by “baptising”, by the Sacraments, by the acts of worship of the New Testament.

The Sacraments were the mysterious rites and powerful works with which the Apostles reformed the whole world.

*“The Sacraments were words and signs of God, creating a new soul, creating new life, new heavens and a new earth. The Apostles added to their preaching Catholic worship, which consists principally in the Sacrifice of Mass, the Sacraments, and the prayers in which these are expressed”*.



There is great divine power at work through Mass, Baptism, Marriage, Confession, and the other Sacraments. The divine power is manifested through the **words** which are said and through the **actions** which are done. The words speak to the mind, the actions move the heart.

Early Christians understood the words and knew the meaning of every gesture during worship. The priest and the people were truly one in what they said and in what they did.



What about today? Do we understand the meaning of words and actions when we take part in the Sacraments? Do our young people understand what Mass is all about? Do we understand what Confession is all about?



**Early Christians KNEW their faith, and understood the various “rituals” or actions at worship.**

**Yet, most of them, had no great learning, they came from ordinary Roman/Greek/Jewish households. How did they manage to know the deep theology of their faith?**

**We are amazed at the depth and difficulty of St. Paul’s letters: yet, he wrote them not to confuse his Christians. He knew that they would understand what he was writing because they had been instructed by him and by the others with him.**

**Early Christians had a real passion for biblical and theological knowledge, communicated to them by their leaders.**



*How confident are we about  
knowing and understanding our  
own faith?*



**The first wound of the Church is precisely the NON-PARTICIPATION of the faithful, the lack of understanding of what is going on during the great celebrations of the SACRAMENTS, especially of the MASS.**

**The faithful, instead of being totally immersed in what is going on, are like “statues”, present but cold, with no real interest and understanding. The priest is getting on with what he has to say and do, the people do their own things, with their minds elsewhere, perhaps saying their own private prayers.**

What is your feeling about the active participation of the people at Mass today? Is there true understanding and warm immersion in the sacred mysteries? Are we still far from the intense participation to the Sacraments of the early Christians?



At the time of Blessed Rosmini, **LATIN** was the language of the Mass and of the other Sacraments.

Latin was no longer spoken, it had been a “dead” language for many centuries. Priests understood it because of their training, but ordinary people did not. Hence the division, the non participation.

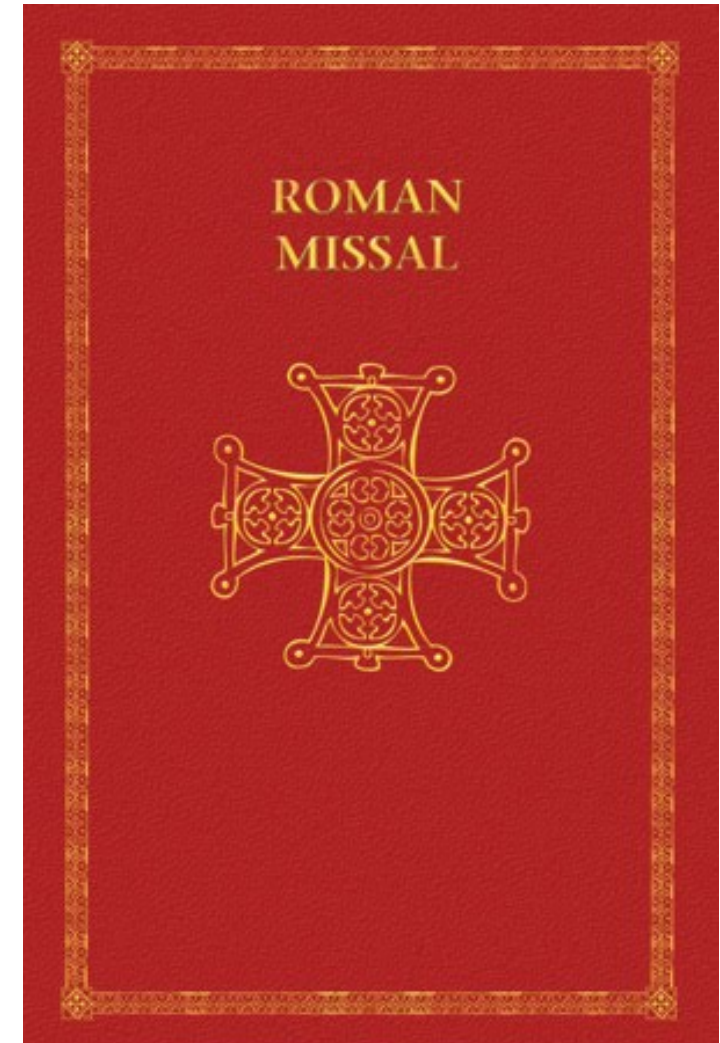
**Yet Rosmini did not call for the abolition of Latin and the use of the vernacular. He argued that modern languages lack the words appropriate for the high mysteries of the liturgy, moreover, they change all the time thus forcing a change of the language every few years, upsetting the people who become familiar with one form.**

He believed that the people could be helped to understand the Latin used for religious celebrations, perhaps by training them or by providing them with the Latin and its translation into the vernacular side by side. He himself wrote a booklet on the Mass with the Latin and Italian side by side.

It is difficult to know what Rosmini would say about the use of the vernacular in our liturgy. He would certainly obey, and rejoice for the increased participation of the people.

Would he be supportive of the Latin Mass today? His warning about the rapid change of modern languages and the need to revise them constantly and the difficulty of finding suitable “theological” words is still relevant, as we know from the troubled efforts to produce an adequate translation of the Mass into modern English.

He would be at one with the Church in allowing the Latin Mass when people ask for it. He stressed the “sacredness” and the special aura of mystery of the ancient language, quoting the widespread use of ancient, no longer spoken languages in other religions. He appreciated Latin as a unifying language of peoples of many nations, and the continuity with the long tradition of the Church that has used Latin for so many centuries.



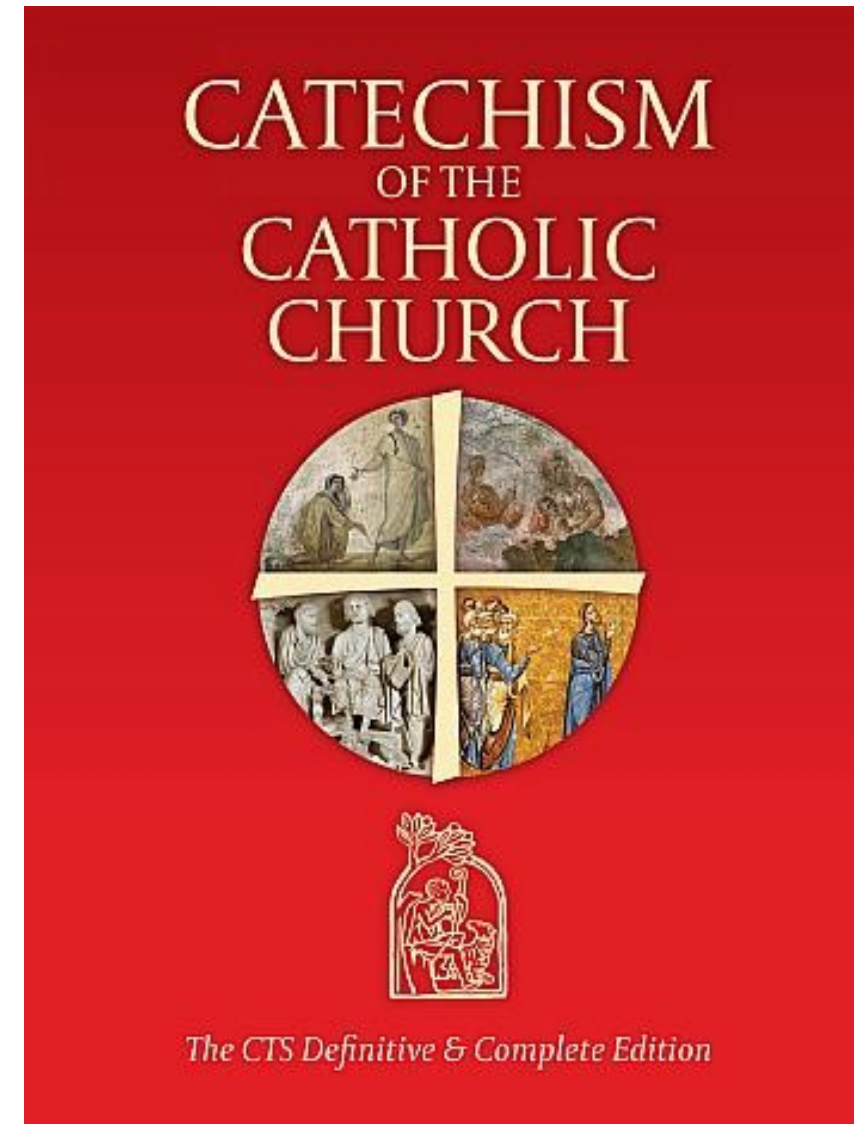


**The ignorance of Latin was only one aspect of the first wound. The other side of it, the most troublesome, was the ignorance of the faithful in matters of faith, Scripture, and doctrine.**

**How can people participate in the Sacraments without a sound knowledge of the theology, the words, and the signs used in the administration of the Sacraments, and of Mass in particular?**

Early Christians were eager to learn and know more about their faith. It is a well known fact that they managed to irritate the pagans in public places like the baths because they were always arguing about high theological points about the Trinity or about the divine nature or the personhood of JESUS.

**The Sacraments are the source of divine power in us, we need them to be transformed by God: but we must try to understand what is being done, and what is being said. We need to know them at a deeper and deeper level to reap all the benefits.**



The first wound was deep at the time of Blessed Rosmini, it is also very serious today, notwithstanding Vatican II and the introduction of the vernacular.

Blessed Rosmini recommended the way forward: let the priests educate the faithful, let the people of God know more and understand more of the great events and theology of our salvation.

But he felt that the first wound was the direct result of the second wound of the Church: the insufficient education of the priests and clergy in general. How can the people know if they are not given the means for knowing? And who can give them understanding but the very people who preside over the Sacraments?

Do we know more today about the Sacraments? And if not, why not? Who do we blame?

## The second wound

## The insufficient education of the clergy



**Only great people can form great people!** And great people were in plenty during the first 6 centuries of the life of the Church.

JESUS was the great formator: His disciples learned from Him, and they in turn formed great bishops and priests in the various churches in the east and in the west. Titus, Timothy, Luke, Mark were disciples of St Paul; St Irenaeus had been a disciple of St. Polycarp who had been a disciple of St. John, who had been a disciple of JESUS.

Great Bishops formed their priests who later became great Bishops themselves. St Augustine formed a great number of outstanding priests and bishops, and so did St. Athanasius, St. Ignatius, St. John Chrysostom and many others. The house of the bishop was “the seminary” he was their teacher by means of words and the example of a holy and learned life.

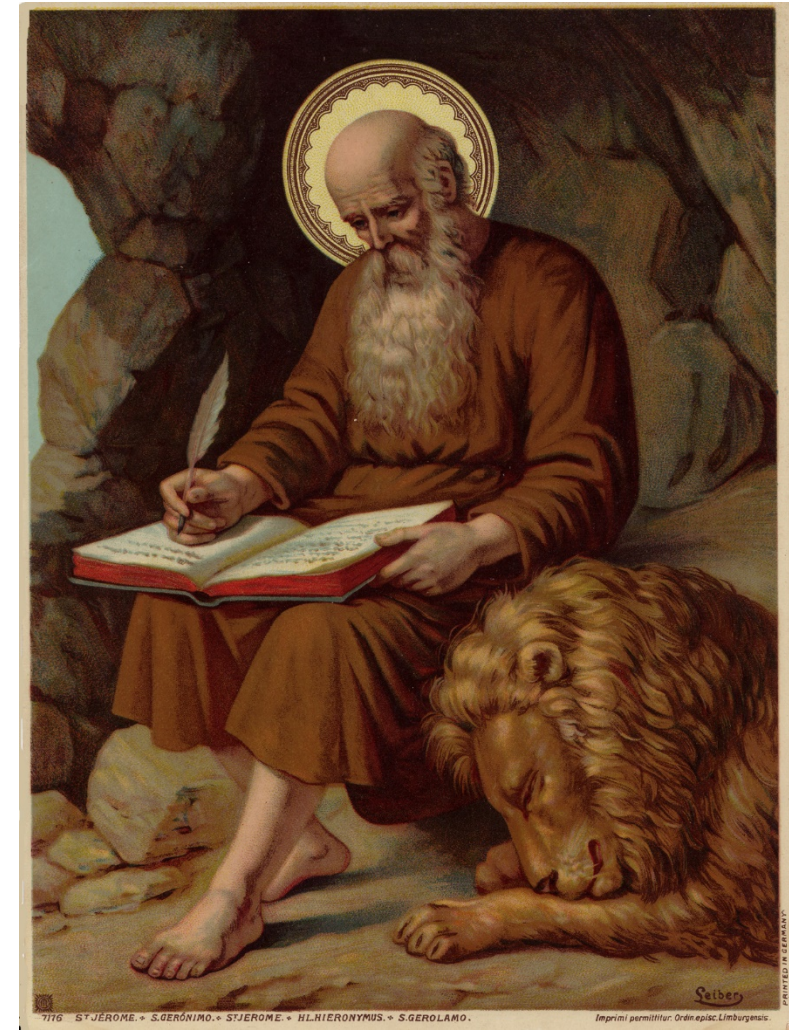


Early bishops and priests were very learned in Scripture and in theological matters. Most of them wrote beautiful commentaries: St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, Origen, Tertullian, etc. Their knowledge was true wisdom, moving their hearts towards loving God and neighbour. They combined learning with holiness. This is what they passed on to their disciples.

The Christian communities were also strong in the faith, being nourished by holy bishops and priests. JESUS was at the centre of their life, and they knew Him and they loved Him. From such powerful Christian “parishes” there came holy and learned vocations.

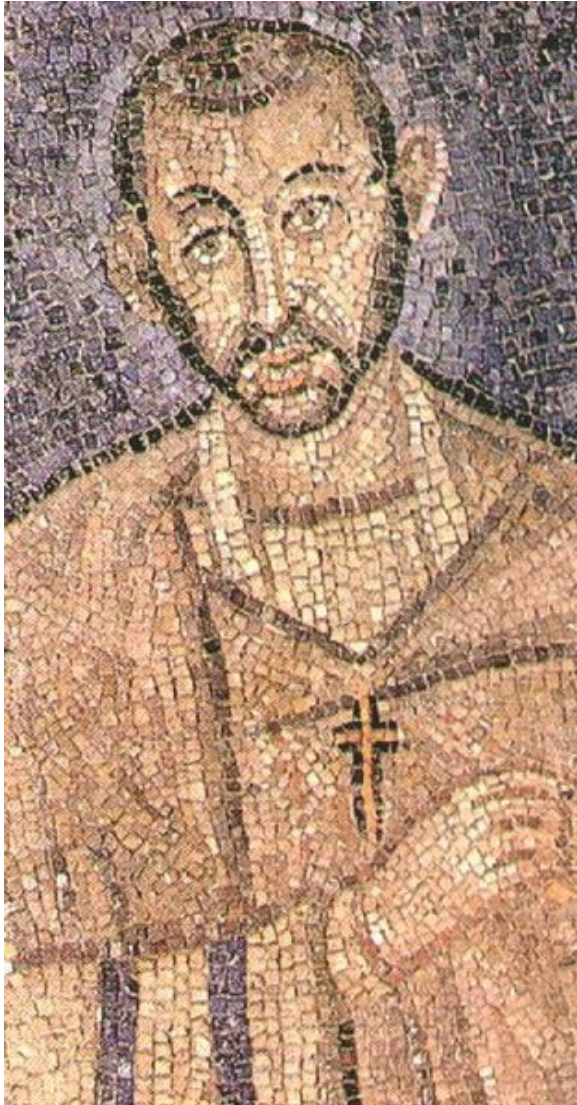
**Blessed Rosmini claims that our priests are weak or strong according to the communities to which they belong. Weak parishes will produce weak priests, who in turn will lead other parishes in a weak manner. By “weak” we mean very limited in their knowledge and in their faith.**

**Weak parishes = weak priests = weaker parishes =weaker priests etc.**



**St Jerome**





St Ambrose



St Augustine



St John Chrysostom

## **Why, after a glorious period of 6 centuries, did bishops and priests become weak in knowledge and in holiness of life?**

Rosmini produced a historical study, proving that the cause for such dramatic decline was the constant invasions of barbarian tribes who put to an end the mighty Roman Empire.

The barbarian kings, after destroying cities and murdering an endless number of innocent people, settled in the conquered lands of Europe, North Africa, and middle East, feared by everyone.

The people found protection in the Popes, bishops, and priests. The barbarian rulers, in order to control the population, bestowed titles and wealth on to the Popes and the Bishops.

The bishops became powerful, wealthy, and bound to their rulers; they became like princes, with their own army and their own fortresses.

It was at this stage that links with the people and the priests were broken. The priests, abandoned by their bishops in their spiritual needs, became corrupt, using the priesthood as a means of making money and of achieving some status in life.





## Barbarian Invasions



## Sack of Rome

**The Council of TRENT tried to stop the corruption of priests by creating “seminaries”, whereby vocations to the priesthood could live in a holy environment, with sound teaching and discipline of life.**

**Blessed Rosmini admitted that it was a great way forward. Unfortunately, the candidates to the priesthood had many books to learn but it was more “erudition” than wisdom. They learned their philosophy from manuals, and their theology from summaries of very abstract formulas. They were not “formed” but simply informed, and in a very scholastic way.**

**There was no heart, no real converting of what was being learned into a holy life. There was a dysfunction between learning and life.**

**The second wound, therefore, persisted: inferior textbooks and inferior teachers formed inferior priests. They were in no position to revive the liturgy of the Sacraments by making people know and understand the beautiful things that should have warmed the hearts of the faithful.**



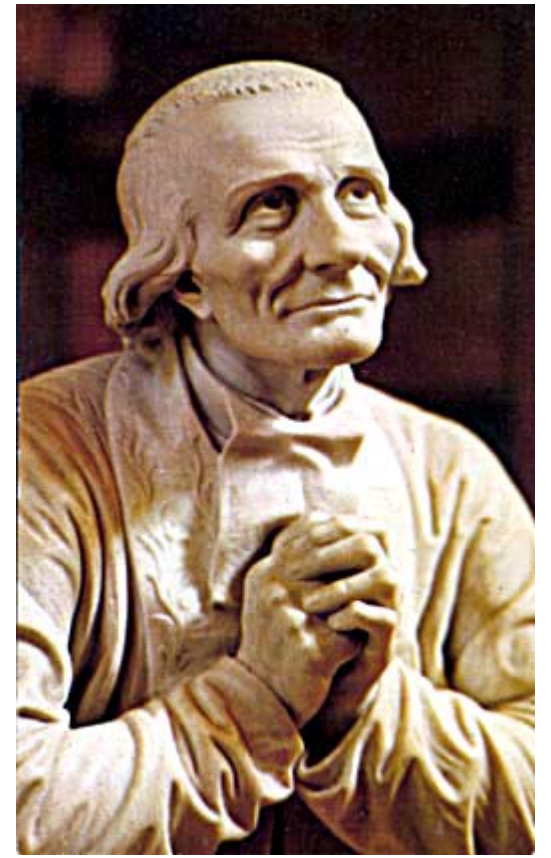


What are your views about the priests of today? Are they better educated? Does their life reflect the splendour of what they study? Is there holiness in all their learning? Is their education based on Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and on sound theology?

**“Only great people can form great people”: what does this say about education at parish or at catholic schools level?**

The healing of this wound can only be brought about by the Bishops. It is their duty to “form” their priests, to be the shepherds of both priests and lay people.

Unfortunately, said Rosmini, there is a third wound which is the most serious and the cause of the second wound, and this is the lack of unity among bishops. There is division and different positions among bishops, how can they possibly “form” holy and great priests?



**St John Marie Vianney**



## The third wound

### The lack of unity among the bishops of the Church

The early Church was one in mind and heart. The Lord had stressed unity, and especially unity among His disciples: “May they be one...”

Early bishops were one body governing the Church with Peter or his successor. They were one and insisted all the time about unity among Christians and Christian churches. “Collegiality” is the modern term to express that the Church is ruled by one body, pope and bishops together, for the sake of the unity willed by JESUS for His own Body the Church.

JESUS, before His passion and death, begged the Father to form his apostles into a perfect unity. Unity in the divine nature of the blessed Trinity is the source of unity within the Episcopate of the Church.

The Apostles guarded jealously their unity and the unity of their churches. Their **interior unity** was guaranteed by their communion of doctrines and sacraments; their **exterior unity** by the powerful links among the Apostles and their leader, Peter and later by their successors.

Although scattered throughout many nations, bishops were conscious of forming a single body of the highest authority. Their hearts and minds were dominated by this great concept of unity, and they used every possible means to bind themselves together. All maintained exactly the same faith, and love for each other.

How was this perfect unity achieved? Rosmini mentions “six golden links” that bound bishops together in perfect unity.



1- The bishops knew one another personally. Titus, Timothy, Polycarp, Ignatius, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus were bishops who knew personally many other holy bishops even before they became bishops. It was well known that the house of St. Augustine was the house where many future holy bishops were formed. These great bishops formed other great bishops and kept their profound ties of Christian love and friendship.

2 - The bishops, even the most isolated, were in constant correspondence, although they lacked the means of communication available to us. The letters of bishops were read reverently at public assemblies. The Apostles wrote letters to their churches, other bishops followed their examples: Clement, Ignatius, Soter, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, etc. Particularly moving are the letters written by Ignatius to various churches as he was taken to Rome for his martyrdom.



St Augustine

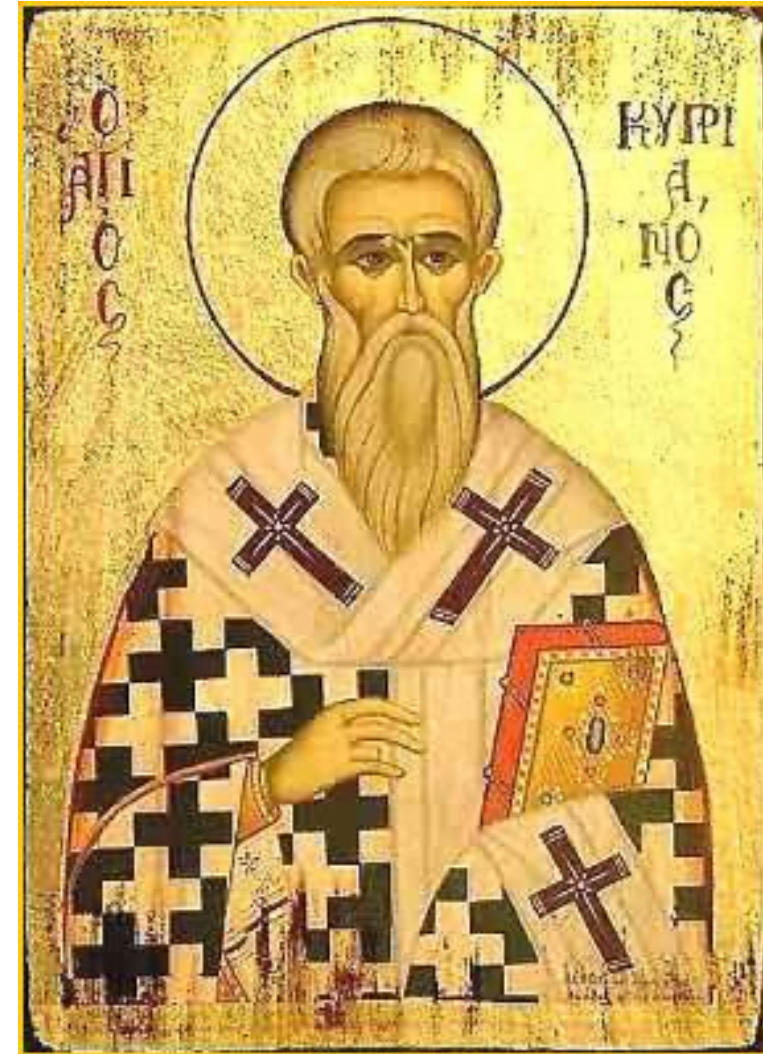


St. Polycarp



3- The bishops visited one another out of mutual charity, or from zeal for church affairs. Their devotion embraced the universal church even more than the particular church entrusted to them. They were conscious of being bishops of the Catholic Church, and they realised that one diocese cannot be separated from the entire body of the faithful. Each local Church embodied the totality of the reality which is the Church, but their bishops were aware of the fundamental necessity of being one with the other bishops and with the bishop of Rome.

4- Assemblies and Councils, especially provincial councils, were held frequently. Bishops of a province sought each other for advice, for clarifying doctrine, for finding common solutions. Bishops would consult regularly with their priests and with the people, giving them an account of their government. People's assent on all matters was valued so highly that if they rejected a bishop they were not forced to accept him and another suitable person was appointed in his place. St. Cyprian wrote to his priests, "At the beginning of my episcopacy I decided not to make any decision without your advice and the assent of the people".



St. Cyprian



**5- The metropolitan bishop had authority over the bishops of a province, while greater sees had several provinces and metropolitans subject to them. This arrangement provided for uniformity in doctrine and in practice and strengthened the bonds among churches and bishops.**

**6- The overall authority of the Pope which was the foundation rock of the unity of the universal Church.** In all their serious needs bishops and churches of the entire world appealed to him as to a father, judge, teacher, leader, centre and common source. Rome was seen as the great see where sound doctrine and the unity of the Church on earth could be found visibly in the successor of St. Peter. **The pope was the symbol of unity of the universal Church, and bishops made continuous pilgrimages to Rome to pray over the tomb of St. Peter and to report to the Pope.**

**This golden era of the Church came to end after six centuries.**

**The same destructive force that was responsible for the insufficient education of the clergy was also the cause of the progressive disunion among the bishops: the end of the Roman Empire and the sustained invasions of barbarian kings, with the establishment of the feudal system.**

**In the crumbling of the old systems, the bishops became the intermediaries between the people and the barbarian rulers and they were forced to enter the political arena acquiring in the process power, wealth, and privileges.**



Bishops become Princes



The “Christianisation” of Europe was the result of the presence and influence of bishops and clergy in public administration, but such involvement brought also evil consequences for the Church.

The bishops soon learned to love their new political status, and surrounded themselves with courtiers, armies, and all the externals that they envied in royal princes. They devised protocols, invented titles, built palaces, and generally, distanced themselves both from their lower clergy and from the people.

Avarice, hatred, disharmony, lust, licentiousness became widespread among them, having been made subservient to their rulers who guaranteed their position.

“They became slaves of men dressed in soft garments rather than free apostles of a naked Christ”.

The bishops’ political involvement and power was the cause of profound disunion among them.

Rosmini claims that the catholic faith might have been saved in some nations if the Church had been freed of the wealth that endangered it. *“But is it really possible to find an immensely wealthy clergy courageous enough to impoverish itself, or even with enough sense to understand that impoverishing the Church is to save her?”*

The Church longs for freedom not for wealth. Free from all political interference, and free from political involvement and wealth, the Bishops, poor and simple like the Apostles, would once again become a beacon of communion among themselves and ready to pursue with vigour the preaching of the Kingdom of God to all creatures.

But to achieve this political disentanglement the election of bishops must be a matter for the Church exclusively. It cannot be achieved unless the fourth wound of the Church is first healed.

**Pope and Bishops together: they should rule the Church. Is this the case today?**

**Do you feel that the bishops speak with one voice?**

**The Apostles felt responsible for the whole Church: they visited each other, wrote to other churches encouraging them or even taking them to task for failing to comply with the same faith, the same morality.**

**The rich churches constantly helped the poor ones.**

**Is there the same sense of universal responsibility or is each bishop looking after his own flock only, with little interest about all the other churches?**



## **The fourth wound**

### **The nomination of bishops left in the hands of civil governments**

For over a thousand years, and at the times of Rosmini, emperors, kings, and political rulers in Europe and world-wide had arrogated to themselves by force or had been given by the Church under duress the right to nominate bishops for the sees in their countries.

The Pope was simply demanded to or reserved to himself the right to “confirm” their nominations.

This is the “wound” Rosmini is highlighting in this chapter, but in presenting it and in giving a most painful historical account of the way a “free” Church became enslaved to civil governments, he also suggests that the Church ought to go back to the practice of the early Church when **bishops were elected by the clergy and the people.**

It was this second issue that fired up people’s and theologians’ thinking right up to our own times, and that became the pretext for the condemnation of the book.

For Rosmini, the clergy and the people had a “divine” right to elect their shepherd.

He was asked by the Pope, Pius IX, to clarify this theological point which seemed to declare “invalid” elections of bishops who had been nominated by rulers only, with the approval of the Pope. Other bishops and theologians made the same request, and Rosmini obliged by publishing three letters written to Canon Giuseppe Gatti.

He distinguishes between “**divine constitutive right**” and “**divine moral right**”. The right clergy and people have in the elections of bishops is “divine moral right” only and the violation of this right does not cause “invalidity”; the Pope has indeed the authority to by-pass this right of clergy and people if pressed by other serious considerations.



Pope Pius IX

## What about today?

Most civil governments have, thankfully, surrendered the “privilege” of electing their own bishops, recognising the freedom of the Church in such important matter; we say “most” because we are aware that State interference has not ceased everywhere, see China, Cuba, and States with a totalitarian regime.

But, what about the “divine moral right” of clergy and people to elect their bishops?

**Chinese priests appointed  
by the regime**





**But even in western countries, there are a number of issues about the rights of the Church: the right to have our own schools and our own teachers, the right to give children for adoption or fostering to couples who are Catholic, etc.**

**In Islamic countries, often Catholics are denied very basic rights, like carrying a Bible in their case, the building of churches, the opening of Catholic schools, etc.**

**The Church does not want “privileges” but that which is just, and freedom to evangelize.**

**What are your views?**



History shows as an undeniable fact that in the greatest Churches founded by the Apostles, in the churches of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Ephesus, Caesarea, Heraclea, Corinth, Thessalonica, Carthage and others, the people took an active part for many centuries in the ordinary choice of bishops.

A bishop without the support and approval of the people was considered an unlawful usurper.

**This tradition remained secure and universal during the first six centuries of the Church. The invasions of barbarian armies which brought to an end the old Roman Empire caused dramatic changes in the Church especially in her status as a poor but free Mother of all her subjects. The new barbarian rulers favoured the Church with wealth and power while at the same time enslaving her through the bishops who became progressively political princes subjected to the authority of the rulers.**

**But all the efforts to safeguard this fundamental principle of freedom for the Church produced little results before determined and powerful kings and princes bent on accumulating all authority and dominion on themselves.**

They spoke initially of “royal assent” to the ordination of bishops, then they considered bishops as their subjects and their properties as properties of the king.

It happened often that at the death of a bishop the king would not appoint a new bishop for a long period so that he may enrich himself with all the revenues of the dead bishop’s properties.

It often happened that the king would offer the office of bishop to the highest bidder.





This was the situation at the time of Rosmini. He makes a powerful case inviting kings and emperors to give up their ill-gotten privilege to nominate bishops.

He reasons with them and argues that it is in their best interest to let the Church of God free to choose her bishops. He lists four fundamental principles in the election of bishops which, he argues, can be properly fulfilled by the Church, never by the State:

**“The best person available should be chosen as bishop”:** who is in the better position to judge the qualities required of a bishop, the Shepherd of his flock, who leads his people in the way of holiness by sound doctrine and moral up-righteousness?

**“The priest chosen should be known, loved and wanted by those whom he has to govern”:** the church’s desire to have as father and pastor the priest it feels more at home with is good and reasonable. But if rulers nominate the bishops, the people’s wishes are rarely listened to.

**“The priest chosen as bishop should have been enrolled for a lengthy period amongst the clergy of the diocese he is to govern, and not be sent there as a stranger from a distant country”:** it is in the best interest of the local church that the person who is going to be the father of all is known to all. Rulers follow favouritism and personal interest, not the interest of the people.

**“Generally speaking, only the moral body or moral person concerned is capable of judging what is best for itself”:** the Church is a spiritual and moral reality, and her interest and mission differ widely from the preoccupations of civil governments. The Church knows what is best for her, and the Christian people know what is in their best interest in matters related to their salvation.

Finally, Rosmini, after giving his full approval to the maxim established by Leo the Great, **“The person governing all should be chosen by all”**.

## ROSMINI sums up the duties and rights of the people of God in the election of their bishop:

To bear witness to the virtue and suitability of the bishop they are to receive.

They have the right to make known defects as Cyprian says, “so that in the people’s presence good and evil may be discerned”.

To express their desire and request for the bishop whose virtues they witness to. The bishops of Alexandria in supporting the election of St. Athanasius maintained that he became bishop when “the entire crowd, together with the whole assembly of the catholic church, united as one body and soul, cried out and shouted for Athanasius as bishop of the church. They publicly begged this of Christ, and beseeched us for it for many days and nights, neither leaving the church nor allowing us to leave it. We ourselves, this city, and the whole of the province are witnesses of the fact”.

To refuse a bishop who has been chosen, provided the refusal is the work of the majority or the more reliable part of those belonging to the diocese. St. Celestine prescribes that “no bishop shall be given to people unwilling to receive him”. This is a kind of veto recognised by the Church as a right belonging to Christian people.



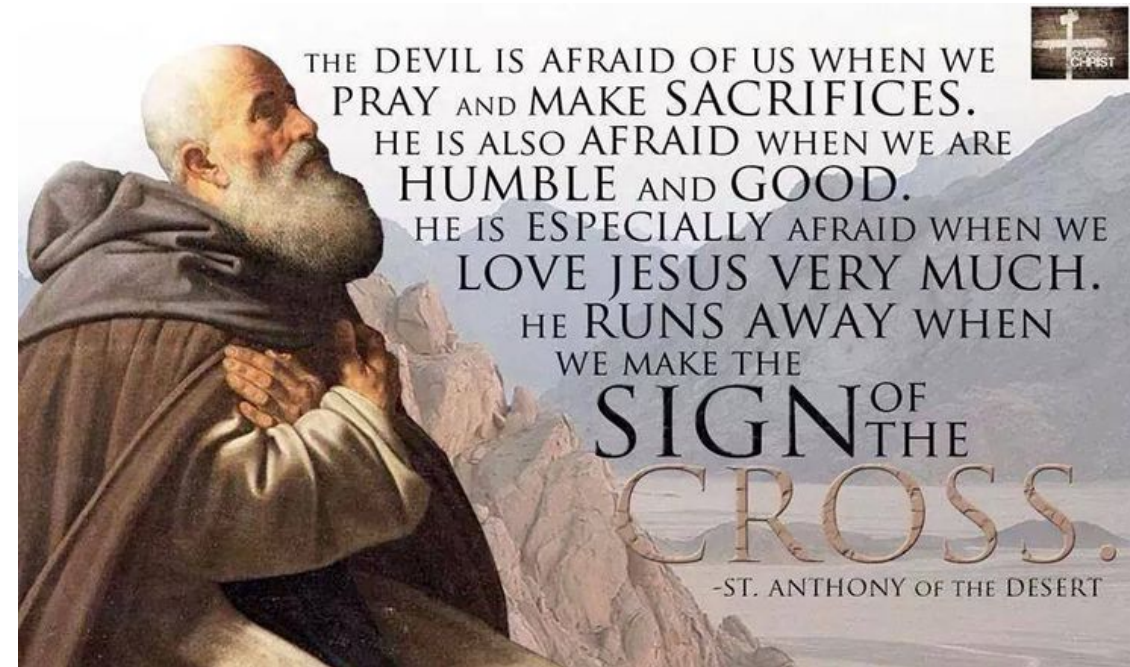
## The fifth wound

### Enslavement of the wealth of the Church

Even from a cursory reading of the pages of the fifth wound it is clear that Rosmini's vision of the Church is that of the Spouse of Christ embracing the same poverty of her Bridegroom, who said, *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head"*.

Rosmini asks that popes, bishops, and priests embrace evangelical poverty, as it was the case in the early Church.

*"The profession of poverty was for long the glory of the priestly ministry; the majority of men called to the priesthood abandoned their possessions or gave them away to the poor... The outstretched hands of the poor, of widows, lepers, slaves, pilgrims and the destitute became vaults where the Church could deposit her treasures without fear of theft"*.



Two are the lines followed by Blessed Rosmini:

1. In the long history of the Church and at the time of Rosmini, Kings and Emperors often felt that they could take over properties and wealth belonging to the Church. Henry VIII did it, many French Kings did it, and the Austrian Emperors as well. Rosmini fought against this periodic robbing of the Church by civil powers.
2. The Church, called by JESUS to poverty, had become rich and no longer able to imitate the lifestyle of JESUS and of the early communities. Rosmini called for real poverty of bishops and clergy.

The early Church was poor, but free. Her evangelical poverty was safeguarded by seven maxims which regulated the acquisition, administration and use of material goods. Rosmini explains these ancient maxims with a passionate plea that the Church of his time, the Church of our time, may embrace them once again if she is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

**The first requirement was that all offerings to the Church had to be “spontaneous”.**

Christ obliged the faithful to maintain those working for the gospel, but He appealed to the faithful’s free acceptance of His gospel, and to their moral response. St. Paul, although acknowledging that he had the moral right “to food and drink” for preaching the gospel, seldom used it preferring to work hard for his food and the food of his own companions.

Moreover, the obligation that Christ imposed on the faithful of maintaining the clergy did **not extend beyond the strict needs of the preachers of the gospel**, *“Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they may provide”*.

This maxim is stressed by Tertullian at the beginning of the third century, ***“Each one who can, puts aside some money monthly, or when he decides. No one is forced; all give spontaneously. These funds are the investments of piety”***.

**Spontaneity only ceased when the offerings were enforced by sanctions imposed by the secular arm.**



**The second maxim** protecting the Church from corruption was that goods should be possessed, administered and dispensed in common. Initially the faithful brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Distribution was made to each as any had need. We can only admire the love and union between the believers, and wonder at the common life amongst clergy and faithful.

This requirement was preserved for a long time. The bishop, as successor of the Apostles, normally distributed each month what was necessary for the maintenance of the clergy who worked for the gospel in their dioceses.

The funds came from church possessions; no one had anything of his own.

The third, precious maxim was that the clergy should use church goods only for the strict needs of their maintenance; the remainder was to be applied to pious works, especially in alms for the poor.

Christ founded the apostolate on poverty, and on abandonment to Providence, He himself was the perfect example.

Hence in the finest period of the Church, entering the ranks of the clergy was equivalent to a profession of evangelical poverty.

The profession of poverty was for long the glory of the priestly ministry; the majority of men called to the priesthood abandoned their possessions or gave them away to the poor.

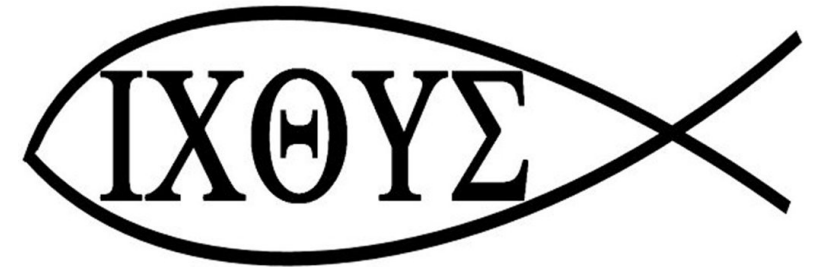
These men never used the wealth of the Church for their own benefit as though it belonged to them, but accepted it in trust for the poor.

The **fourth** requirement governing Church goods and safeguarding the integrity of the clergy was that ecclesiastical wealth used for pious, charitable purposes, should also be assigned to fixed, determined works to prevent arbitrariness and self-interest from interfering with the management of the goods.

In the early Church resources were allotted to definite purposes according to a fourfold division: **for the support of the bishop, the clergy, the poor, and for the upkeep of church buildings and cult.**

*"It is certain – says Rosmini – that the best remedy against the corruption accompanying riches was the establishment of laws at various Councils regulating the precise uses to which they could be applied".*

The corruption and ruin of many ancient monasteries is to be attributed to the lack of precise purposes to direct the great riches possessed by religious houses. As a result, abbots and other superiors controlling finances spent the income as they pleased.



IΧΘΥΣ (*ich-thys*)

Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ  
(I-sous Chri-stos, The-ou Yi-os, So-ter)

**Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior**

OrthodoxChristianityToday.org



**The fifth requirement safeguarding the Church from the danger of riches was “a generous spirit, prompt to give, slow to receive”.**

The great rule fixed in human hearts was Christ's noble words, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”. Bishops considered money and administration a burden, to be borne only for motives of charity.

St. Ambrose refused legacies and donations if he knew that poor relatives of the donor would suffer as a result. St. Augustine had to defend himself against the accusation, “**Bishop Augustine gives with total generosity, but takes nothing**”.

What a glorious accusation, says Rosmini!



**The sixth requirement compelled the Church to make public the administration of all her possessions.**

In the early Church bishops consulted the clergy and the people on all matters, including the use of the wealth of the Church. Moreover, the priests and deacons in charge of the administration had to be approved by the whole church, according to Apostolic tradition.

St John Chrysostom was not afraid to give an account of his administration of church income: **“We are ready to inform you of our administration”**. The same spirit and practice animated all early bishops.

The people who make the offering should also be aware of what is being carried out. Rosmini suggests that the people should be involved from the beginning, from selecting the special works to which funds are to be allocated to receiving a full account of the way money have been handled.

**The seventh and last requirement is that the Church should administer her goods watchfully and carefully.**

**What the Church owns belongs to God and to the poor, and she has to give a strict account to God of how she has administered God's possessions. It is true, says Rosmini, that through the centuries the voracious rapacity of rulers and States have robbed the Church of so much of her possessions.**

**But, perhaps, much squandering of her wealth has been caused by churchmen who have used it for their own selfish purposes and as though it belonged to them. Rosmini adds,**

***“If we consider what the Church has received during the centuries of her existence, and how much has been lost through lack of serious, careful administration, we can only imagine where the Church would be now if her possessions had always been wisely administered”.***



In modern times, the social teaching of the Church has certainly awoken consciences everywhere.

From the Rerum Novarum, to the Mater et Magistra, to the Pacem in Terris, to the Populorum Progressio the Church has spoken most eloquently in favour of the poor, the oppressed, the economically disadvantaged of the world.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has been the strongest defender and a mother to the sick, the marginalised, the rejected.

Of all human institutions, is there any that can be compared to the Church in her dedication and commitment to the poor throughout her long history?



Pope Leo XIII

**And yet, Rosmini's plea that the Church herself needs to make an examination of conscience and assess herself against the seven maxims that helped her in ancient times to live according to the evangelical poverty willed for her by the divine Founder, sounds very true and relevant, today as in his own time.**

**The documents of Vatican II speak about evangelical poverty when they deal with the religious life. For Rosmini, however, evangelical poverty is a characteristic, a quality, a requirement of the whole Church.**

**It is the Church that has to be poor, and the seven maxims should become working guidelines for the whole Church.**



**St Francis marries lady  
Poverty**