

Angelus Press Conference Report

It was a great honor and privilege to attend the 2017 Angelus Press Conference for Catholic Tradition held in Kansas City, Missouri (Oct. 13-15). Although it was my first time attending the annual event, Lord willing it will not be the last (many thanks to James Vogel, Editor-in-Chief of Angelus Press, for his gracious invitation and warm hospitality).

As longtime *CFN* readers will recall, Angelus Press - the publishing arm of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) - hosts an annual gathering of traditional Catholic clergy, religious, and lay faithful for a weekend of top-notch lectures and wholesome camaraderie. The eighth annual conference held this year was no exception. In fact, one might even say it was the most "historic" conference to date, considering its timing and theme:

"2017 marks the centenary of Our Lady's apparitions at Fatima. However, it also marks the anniversary of three diabolical revolutions against God, His divine order, and His Church. One cannot overstate the devastating impact these events have had in shaping our modern world. We see the terrible effects all around us: in our public institutions, our communities, our Church, and even our own homes. Almost nothing has been left untouched.

This October, Angelus Press once again brings together some of the best Catholic thinkers, speakers, and writers to consider this year's topic: FATIMA - Our Lady's Answer to Three Revolutions. Join us October 13-15th as we explore these three revolutions and how the message of Fatima can be seen as Heaven's response to these attacks. Learn what we can do to follow Our Lady and overcome these revolutionary influences in our lives while at the same time enjoying the company of other like-minded traditional Catholics."

Outstanding Lectures

The variety of topics and caliber of speakers were both outstanding. In addition to five Society priests and six scholarly laymen, conference attendees were blessed by the presence and wisdom of His Excellency Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, one of the four bishops consecrated by the Society's founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, in 1988. (I had the unexpected honor of sitting one person over from Bishop Tissier for the evening meal on Saturday and very much enjoyed our conversation.) While there is not sufficient time or space to offer in-depth analysis of each lecture, I would like to share highlights from some of the talks I was able to attend.

Is the Third Secret Entirely Revealed?

Perhaps the most exciting event of the weekend was the debate between Christopher Ferrara and Kevin Symonds over the question, **“Is the Third Secret Entirely Revealed?”** Those familiar with Mr. Ferrara’s extensive work on the subject will know that he, of course, took the “No” position while Mr. Symonds argued the contrary. The hour-long debate, which passed much too quickly, was moderated by Mr. Vogel, the conference emcee, and covered such disputed points as:

- The “Capovilla envelope” (so called after Archbishop Loris Capovilla, the personal secretary of Pope John XXIII, who wrote and signed a notation on the envelope), said to contain a one-page text pertaining to the Third Secret distinct from the four-page text released by the Vatican in 2000 (the apocalyptic vision involving “a Bishop dressed in White”).
- The excerpt of a letter written by Sister Lucia (dated May 12, 1982), quoted in *The Message of Fatima* (Vatican booklet released in 2000) and supposedly addressed to Pope John Paul II (no mention of him is found in the excised text).
- The dual readings of texts pertaining to the Third Secret by Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II (indicating the apparent existence of two distinct texts).
- The accuracy/consistency of testimony provided over the years by certain key eyewitnesses, including Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani and Archbishop Loris Capovilla.
- The relevance of new disclosures contained in the biography of Sister Lucia (*A Pathway Under the Gaze of Mary*) released in 2013 by the Carmel of Coimbra (the convent in which the seer lived for the last 57 years of her life)

The issues involved in this ongoing debate are a bit technical and perhaps confusing for those not familiar with all the fine details. A thorough and systematic presentation of the opposing arguments can be found in Christopher Ferrara’s [The Secret Still Hidden](#) (published in 2008) and Kevin Symond’s [On the Third Part of the Secret of Fatima](#) (published in 2017), respectively. For my part, I stand with Mr. Ferrara and Mother Angelica, who famously said on live television (May 16, 2001), “As for the Secret, well I happen to be one of those individuals who thinks we didn’t get the whole thing.”

(Update: The debate between Symonds and Ferrara continues in the blogosphere. *Catholic World Report* posted an [interview](#) with Symonds in which he claims to present a new finding favorable to his position. Ferrara has since responded to Symonds’ comments [here](#) and [here](#).)

Freemasonry: the anti-Church

The topic of Freemasonry, one of the three “diabolical revolutions” explored during the conference, was covered with precision and passion by two excellent speakers: Fr. Juan-Carlos Iscara, SSPX, a familiar conference favorite, and John Salza, who made his Angelus Press Conference debut. During his lecture entitled “**Freemasonry: the anti-Church,**” Fr. Iscara explained the historical origins and ideology of Freemasonry, focusing on its nature as *contra Église* (French, “counter Church”), that is, a society which not only labors against the Church but also presents itself as an alternative to the Church – one meant to supersede and replace the Church. “[Pope] Pius IX,” said Fr. Iscara, “defined it [Freemasonry] perhaps most accurately as ‘the synagogue of satan’ [Apoc. 2:9, 3:9; cf. Encyclical [Esti Multa](#), n. 28].”

Throughout his talk, Fr. Iscara described the essential characteristics of Freemasonry, including *rationalism* (political transformation of society through the power of human reason), *occultism* (spiritual transformation of man through “enlightenment”), and *esotericism* (secret knowledge transmitted only to an elite few through “initiation”). He also demonstrated Freemasonry’s historical and ideological roots in Protestantism, which itself “is in a certain sense ... a Judaic reaction” to the Catholic Faith. “The main point of Luther,” he explained, “is that Catholic theology, Christian theology, has been corrupted by the introduction of things that belong to the Classical tradition. He certainly was most upset by the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy, by the use of the terminology of Aristotelian philosophy, in the theology of St. Thomas [Aquinas]. And his idea was, therefore, to purge, to take away, all those things from Christian theology; to go to the roots of Christianity, and the roots of Christianity are in Judaism.”

Simply put, Luther rejected the organic development of Christian theology (incorporating Classical philosophy) during the age of the Church Fathers and advocated a return to a more so-called “pure” (Jewish) form of Christianity. As Fr. Iscara pointed out, early Freemasons such as Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654, German Lutheran) and Elias Ashmole (1617-1692, English Protestant) embraced a similar position, taking it even further by turning to such reactionary (anti-Christian) Jewish sources as the Talmud and Kabbalah for inspiration.

Ultimately, Fr. Iscara emphasized that Freemasonry is condemned, not only for its subversive efforts to destroy the Church, but more essentially for its false principles, especially *naturalism* (rejection of God’s supernatural revelation), *religious indifferentism* (false claim that all religions are equal), *moral relativism* (rejection of God’s law), and *deceitful secrecy* (intentions/obligations of the Lodge are kept hidden from members until

after initiation). He concluded by cautioning his audience to avoid two common pitfalls in regard to Freemasonry - (1) ignoring it as harmless and (2) seeing it as responsible for every evil in the world - and finally by exhorting us all to fight for the re-establishment of the Social Kingship of Christ. *Viva Cristo Rey!*

Is Freemasonry Still a Danger Today?

John Salza addressed the question “**Is Freemasonry Still a Danger Today?**” on a more personal level. As a former 32nd degree Mason, Mr. Salza shared how he was lured into “the synagogue of satan” (Apoc. 2:9, 3:9) as a young man fresh out of law school. Although the Lodge claims it never actively recruits, Mr. Salza was approached by a few senior colleagues and trusted friends of his family - fellow Catholics, no less! - who told him that joining the Freemasons, a harmless “fraternity,” would do wonders for his career. When he asked his parish priest at the time if it was okay for him to join, his pastor told him (while admitting ignorance on the subject) that it would be fine, as long as he understood the distinction between the Lodge and the Church. The priest’s answer should have been a resounding “*No!*” considering that Freemasonry has been solemnly condemned by the Church a total of 23 times by 12 different Popes, as Mr. Salza mentioned.

After being thoroughly vetted and scrutinized, which is standard practice in the recruitment process, Mr. Salza described how he was accepted as a candidate and officially “summoned” to receive the first degree of initiation. He was told numerous times by his recruiters that the only requirement to join was, “You have to believe in God,” without any further clarification. He came to discover firsthand, however, that the recruitment process is one of lies and deceit used by the Lodge to keep men in the dark about the true nature of Freemasonry until after they have been “initiated” (i.e. indoctrinated).

Arguably the most powerful component of Mr. Salza’s talk was his vivid description of the shocking initiation rituals employed for the first three degrees of Freemasonry. He emphasized more than once that every Mason has gone through what he described. The first degree ritual began, he explained, with the requirement to strip down to his underclothes, remove any/all sacramentals (e.g. his crucifix necklace and wedding ring), and submit to wearing a blindfold over his eyes and a noose around his neck. When he inquired about the reason for all this, he was told it would be explained later “in the Lodge.” He was then led, still blindfolded, into the Lodge meeting hall, where the initiated members were assembled, and felt the tip of a sharp metal instrument jab his chest on the left side (over his heart). This startling reception was accompanied by the ominous declaration, “As this is an instrument of torture to your flesh, so should the recollection of it be to your conscience should you *ever* presume to reveal the secrets of Freemasonry unlawfully.”

The second and third degree rituals, as Mr. Salza explained, contain such abominations as bowing down in idolatry to the letter “G” (representing the false god of Freemasonry – “Grand Architect of the Universe”), which hangs behind the chair of the “Worshipful Master” (i.e. President) in every Lodge meeting hall, and mockeries of the Catholic Faith. These blasphemies are accompanied by instruction in heretical doctrines, including the false claims that salvation comes through natural virtue and that all men, regardless of their religion, will rise from the dead to eternal life.

In short, Mr. Salza demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that Freemasonry is most definitely still a danger today.

Protestant Revolution and Catholic Reformation

Dr. John Rao, another longtime conference favorite, addressed the “**Protestant Revolution and Catholic Reformation**,” although in his opening remarks he invoked “speaker’s license” to reverse the order of those themes. He chose to discuss “Catholic Reformation” first because, as he explained, it is “something that is always needed, and something which was especially needed at the beginning of the 16th century [just prior to the Protestant Revolution].”

One reason why reform “was especially needed” by the early 1500s was due to an error known as *nominalism*, which emphasized the primacy of God’s *will* (as expressed by the Pope, in particular) to the near exclusion (if not explicit denigration) of human reason and free will. This error, Dr. Rao explained, was developed in reaction to an opposing emphasis on the natural abilities of man, a trend which became popular throughout the 14th and 15th centuries and tended to neglect man’s need for divine assistance. Attempts at reform prior to the time of Luther were heralded by such figures as St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510), but unfortunately they did not bear much fruit – not enough to prevent the quick spread of Luther’s revolt, at any rate.

Luther himself had been strongly influenced by nominalism, which helped lead him to his first major error known as *total depravity*: the belief that original sin completely destroyed, not just deeply wounded, human nature. In other words, *reason is useless* and *free will is an illusion* in our fallen state, according to Luther. He fully recognized he would have to mutilate Scripture in order, as he speciously claimed, “to make it say what it *wants* to say” – in reality, what *he* wants it to say. Ironically, after he unleashed doctrinal and moral chaos upon the Church and the world, he became concerned when he saw others even more radical than himself gaining support. Apparently, he was not too keen on the idea of sharing power in directing the revolution he began.

The Catholic response to Luther’s revolt was, essentially, a call to return to the truth that grace builds upon nature; that the natural order is still fundamentally good, albeit deeply wounded, due to original sin, and therefore in need of divine assistance. These and many other basic truths of the Faith were infallibly defined by the glorious Council of Trent (1545-1563), whose renewed emphasis on sound doctrine as the firm intellectual foundation for society was sorely needed.

In order to fully benefit from the riches of the lectures, I highly recommend purchasing a set of conference CDs available from [Angelus Press](#).

Spiritual Depth

While the excellent lectures enriched the minds of conference attendees, the beautiful liturgies and times of prayer enriched our souls. For example, Fr. Pierre Duverger, SSPX led us in reciting the Glorious Mysteries of the Holy Rosary after his Saturday morning Mass and offered a Fatima-related meditation as an introduction to each mystery:

- For the **Resurrection**, he recalled the initial dialogue between Lucia and Our Lady during the first apparition. “Where are you from?” asked Lucia, and Our Lady responded, “I am from Heaven.”
- For the **Ascension**, Fr. Duverger stressed that Our Lady came to Fatima to remind us of the basics of our catechism, including Purgatory, and the great purity needed in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven.
- He reminded us, in light of **Pentecost**, that through Baptism and Confirmation we receive the same Spirit of truth and love to defend the Faith with courage and charity.
- Fr. Duverger exhorted those present to ask for the grace of a holy death, the most important “meeting” of one’s life, while contemplating the **Assumption**.
- And finally, he directed us to ask for an increase in devotion to Our Lady through Her **Coronation**.

The spiritual summit of the conference was most certainly the Pontifical High Mass offered Sunday morning by His Excellency Bishop Tissier at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church (SSPX) located in downtown Kansas City. During his sermon, Bishop Tissier focused on Our Lord’s parable in the Gospel of “a king, who made a marriage for his son” (Matt. 22:2), explaining how it refers in a spiritual sense to holy Baptism, the “wedding garment” (Matt. 22:12) in which Christ clothes us when He unites Himself to our souls through Baptism. He exhorted all the faithful present to remember our baptismal vows to God, His precious gifts to us through the Sacrament, and our duty to fight against concupiscence with the help of God’s grace.

Genuine Camaraderie

No description of the conference experience would be complete without mention of the wonderful gift of simply being together with fellow traditional Catholics. The image of a refreshing oasis in a parched desert comes to mind, as well as the account of the infant Church found in the Book of Acts: “And they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ... And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart ... And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul ...” (Acts 2:42, 46; 4:32)

These verses capture quite well the essence of the conference: Education in the Catholic and Apostolic Faith; participation in Holy Mass, offered with great reverence in the traditional Latin Rite; prayer in common, especially the Holy Rosary; and sharing meals and camaraderie “with gladness and simplicity of heart.”

Without hesitation, I will absolutely plan to attend the 2018 Angelus Press Conference. Until then, may Our Lord and Our Lady continue to bless and protect both Angelus Press and the Society of St. Pius X. *Instaurare omnia in Christo!*