(Photo: Professor Roberto de Mattei delivering his lecture, "Tu es Petrus: True Devotion to the Chair of Saint Peter," at the 2018 *Catholic Family News* Conference.)

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On Nov. 10, 2018, Professor Douglas Farrow published a long article on the website of the *Catholic World Report* entitled, "The Conversion of the Papacy and the Current Church Crisis," in which in a friendly manner he criticizes several theses which I proposed on the occasion of the *Catholic Family News* Conference in Deerfield, Illinois, on April 8, 2018, speaking on the theme, *Tu es Petrus: True Devotion to the Chair of St. Peter*.

Professor Farrow is a scholar whom I greatly esteem, and his criticisms deserve a brief reply from me, also because they stem from a concern we share in common: the serious situation into which the Church has been thrown under the pontificate of Pope Francis. A premise, however, is necessary: what is truly interesting is not discussing either my own personal opinions or those of Farrow, but rather to seek to clarify the true doctrine of the Church on the points we are discussing. As far as I am concerned, my point of reference seeks always to base itself upon the immutable Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

Visibility of the Church

The underlying problem is that of the visibility of the Church. Farrow seems convinced that only Jesus Christ, and not Peter as well, is the foundation of the Church. In his article we read:

> "The first difficulty lies in De Mattei's claim that 'the primacy of Peter constitutes the bedrock on which Jesus Christ instituted His Church, and on which She will remain solid until the end of time' – that, and his further claim that 'the fierce war' conducted by the devil against the Church is a war centered on the papacy. It seems to me that, though this appears to be drawn straight from *Pastor Aeternus*, it risks an exaggeration that mirrors, or is mirrored by, the false devotion we are both wanting to address; and that in its own way it hints at two churches, one visible and the other invisible. Jesus Christ, not Peter, is the stone that the builders rejected but that God has made the cornerstone, which is 'marvelous in our eyes' (Ps. 118:22f.; cf. Matt. 21:42). Both the visible and the

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> invisible dimensions of the Church are founded on Jesus, as Paul explicitly says, and with Him on the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20ff.; cf. Rev. 21:14).

Farrow, who would like to overcome the traditional categories of "visible Church" and "invisible Church," continues as follows:

> "The Church Jesus promised to build, considered in its temporal phase as the Church militant – temporal and eternal, militant and triumphant, are much better categories than visible and invisible when thinking about the Church – is built upon Himself and no other. It is not, in the most important and fundamental sense, built on the primacy of Peter, whether as a person or as the holder of an office and a vocation. The *petra* to which Jesus refers in Matt. 16:18 is certainly not Petros the man, as the Rosican element today would have it, nor even Petros the office-holder, as De Mattei would have it, nor yet the bare confession ('Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!'), as Protestants would have it. Rather, this *petra* is the divinely generated missionary dynamic of Peter confessing Christ in and for the whole apostolic college, as every holder of his office is bound to do. It is only in relation to the college that the primacy of Peter comes into play, and only because of its collective vocation and authority to confess Christ truly that the college itself matters. Jesus Himself remains both the bedrock of the Church and its architect.

This conception of a "dynamic mission" of Peter, interconnected with the concept of the Apostolic College, is the daughter of the Second Vatican Council more than the Catholic Tradition, but Farrow insists:

> "De Mattei claims that, 'like her Founder, the Church consists in a human element, visible and external, and a Divine element, spiritual and invisible.' But the divine element is not merely spiritual and invisible, nor is the human element merely visible and external. This is not true of Jesus Christ, Who is of one being with the Father, and cannot be true of the Church either, which 'by no weak analogy' may be compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word (LG 8). De Mattei comes to the conclusion that the pope 'is he in whom this visibility of the Church is concentrated and condensed.' Not so. The visibility of the Church, as much as the invisibility, is concentrated and condensed in its cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

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Farrow thus proposes a “Christological” reform of the Papacy, turning to Scripture and the Fathers “for a better vision of the Petrine ministry”: “I am not proposing a reform that is, in its own way, a down-grading of the papal office. I am proposing that the reform we need is in the direction of simplicity, transparency, and integrity.” In order to explain this task, he writes:

> “It is the responsibility of the pope to guard the faith and to protect the integrity of the sacraments, first in his own diocese – which pontiffs for far too long have not served in a direct or intimate way – and then through the exercise of oversight in the college of bishops and, occasionally, in ecumenical councils. It is not his responsibility to be pastor to the planet, which he can be only by selling his papal soul to the media devil. It is not his responsibility even to choose bishops, though he has the right to choose and depose bishops. His responsibility is to see that bishops who are ‘carried away with the error of lawless men and lose [their] own stability’ (2 Pet. 3:17) are disciplined effectively or else replaced, lest the unity of the Church in essential matters of faith and morals be compromised.”

For Farrow, “there are three ecclesial dimensions to which to attend, not two only: the evangelico-magisterial, the ontologico-sacramental, and the juridico-canonical.” The *evangelico-magisterial* papacy constitutes a “third way” between “the idolatry of the person” which Farrow attributes (correctly) to the fans of Pope Francis and “the idolatry of the office,” which he attributes (erroneously) to me. He believes that he finds this “third way” in an evangelico-magisterial mission of the Pope which minimizes the power of jurisdiction, which constitutes the essence of the Pope’s mission, in order to reduce the papacy to a pastoral and magisterial power of direction.

Peter is the Rock and Visible Head

However, according to the doctrine of the Church, proclaimed by the First Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (July 18, 1870), taught by Leo XIII in the encyclical *Satis Cognitum* (June 29, 1896) and reaffirmed by Pius XII in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (June 29, 1943), the unique Church of Christ has two components, one visible and one invisible. And if Jesus Christ is the primary foundation of the Church, visible and invisible, the Pope is, by Christ’s will, the secondary foundation, the “rock,” on which the visible Church is founded.

Pius XII teaches:

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> "…Our Redeemer governs His Mystical Body in a visible and normal way through His Vicar on earth. You know, Venerable Brethren, that after He had ruled the 'little flock' Himself during His mortal pilgrimage, Christ our Lord, when about to leave this world and return to the Father, entrusted to the Chief of the Apostles the visible government of the entire community He had founded. Since He was all wise, He could not leave the Body of the Church He had founded as a human society without a visible head. Nor against this may one argue that the primacy of jurisdiction established in the Church gives such a Mystical Body two heads. For Peter, in view of his primacy, is only Christ's Vicar; so that there is only one chief Head of this Body, namely Christ, Who never ceases Himself to guide the Church invisibly, though at the same time He rules it visibly, through him who is His representative on earth. After His glorious Ascension into Heaven, this Church rested not on Him alone, but on Peter, too, its visible foundation stone. **That Christ and His Vicar constitute one only Head is the solemn teaching of Our predecessor of immortal memory Boniface VIII in the Apostolic Letter *Unam Sanctam*; and his successors have never ceased to repeat the same.**" (*Mystici Corporis Christi*, n. 40, emphasis added)

It is precisely because he is the foundation of the Church that the Pope has a power not only of "direction" but of "jurisdiction," that is, of governance. In fact, as Leo XIII affirms in *Satis Cognitum*:

> "…**[B]y the will and command of God the Church rests upon St. Peter, just as a building rests on its foundation.** Now the proper nature of a foundation is to be a principle of cohesion for the various parts of the building. It must be the necessary condition of stability and strength. Remove it and the whole building falls. **It is consequently the office of St. Peter to support the Church, and to guard it in all its strength and indestructible unity.** How could he fulfill this office without the power of commanding, forbidding, and judging, which is properly called jurisdiction? It is only by this power of jurisdiction that nations and commonwealths are held together. **A primacy of honor and the shadowy right of giving advice and admonition, which is called direction, could never secure to any society of men unity or strength.** The words – 'and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18) – proclaim and establish the authority of which We speak." (n. 12, emphasis added)

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The Pope does not only have a pastoral and magisterial mission, but he has also received a fullness of jurisdiction, thanks to which he extends his supreme and universal governance to the entire Church. He is the universal bishop, with immediate and ordinary power not only over Rome, but over every single member of the faithful and over all the Pastors of the Church. “And as the Bishops,” adds Leo XIII, “each in his own district, command with real power not only individuals but the whole community, so the Roman Pontiffs, whose jurisdiction extends to the whole Christian commonwealth, must have all its parts, even taken collectively, subject and obedient to their authority” (*ibid*., n. 15). The office of Vicar of Christ embraces not only all Christians, but all men, called by vocation to become part of the flock of Peter, as John XXIII reiterates in his homily *Venerabiles Fratres* (Nov. 4, 1958).

Farrow seems to criticize the development of the Papacy which occurred in the second millennium of its history. His idea is that of returning to a vision of the Petrine ministry which adheres more to that of Scripture and the Fathers, or to the first centuries of the Church. He sees a line of continuity between the *Dictatus Papae* (1075), with which St. Gregory VII claimed the rights of the Church against the pretenses of the German Emperors, and the conception of the *Dictator Pope* incarnated by Pope Francis. Here he falls into an error typical of American liberal culture: equating pontifical sovereignty with a dictatorship. The Church is a monarchy, but monarchy, and above all the medieval monarchy, represents the antithesis of dictatorship. Whereas in modern dictatorships, as also in democratic regimes, the sovereignty of the one who creates the law is not limited by any superior authority, in traditional monarchy the sovereign, who is the source of civil law, is subject to both natural and divine law.

Monarchical Constitution of the Church

The Church, by the will of Christ, is a monarchy in which the Supreme Pontiff reigns and governs, and it cannot be transformed into a constitutional monarchy, in which the sovereign reigns but does not govern, limited to a role of pastoral guidance. A change in this governance would not touch merely the historical form but the divine essence of the Papacy. Not even the Pope may modify the constitution of the Church, of which he is the custodian and not the master, because the Pope is the secondary, not the primary, foundation of the Church. We do not need a “third way” between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, but a point of equilibrium between papolatry and Gallicanism, such as the German bishops found in their *Collective Declaration* of January-February 1875, fully approved by Pius IX. The full text of this *Declaration* may be found immediately following the Apostolic Letter *Mirabilis Illa Constantia* of Pius IX of March 4, 1875, in the Latin-English edition of the *Enchiridion* of Heinrich Denzinger, edited by Peter Hünermann. The bishops reaffirm that “the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Pope is a *potestas suprema, ordinaria, et immediata*

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(supreme, ordinary and immediate power) that was conferred on the Pope by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the person of St. Peter," but the Pope "is subject to divine laws and is bound by the directives given by Christ for His Church," so that "he cannot change the constitution given to the Church by her divine Founder."[1]

Farrow seems to have, moreover, a curious vision of the development of the continuity of the Church. In its 2000-year history, the Papacy has known a slow development, just like every organism that progresses and strengthens its rapport with the outside world. The Church, recalls the great canonist Cardinal Alfonso Maria Stickler (1910-2007), "was not founded by Christ as an institution, already rigidly and irrevocably constituted, but as a living organism, which – like the body, which is an image of the Church – would have to have a development, passing from the embryonic state, in which all of the essential characteristics of her being were present in seminal form, to a process of growth, according to external circumstances and a necessary adaptation to them, and also – not least of all – following the positive action of human free will."[2] The passage of growth from the Church of the first centuries to that of St. Gregory VII and Boniface VIII, the Church of the *Dictatus Papae* and of *Unam Sanctam,* was not an "involution" but a physiological development of the Church, which progresses in history because the true Tradition is progress and there is no true progress outside of the Tradition.

Crisis Stems from Modernism

The religious crisis of our time has doctrinal roots which date back to Modernism, but Farrow does not seem to understand this, because for him it "is a crisis of morals even before it is a crisis of doctrine or of ecclesial institutions." The Second Vatican Council, in its documents and its spirit, represents a moment of discontinuity with the homogeneous development of the Tradition precisely because it puts its roots down in modernist culture. And one cannot understand how Farrow, who would depart from the Medieval and Tridentine Church for the millennium of the Church of the Fathers, can deny the way in which the men of the Church have distanced themselves from the Tradition in the last 60 years.

Farrow sees a discontinuity between Pope Francis and his immediate predecessors, but he sees no such discontinuity between the pre-conciliar Church and Vatican II, between the ancient Roman Rite and the *Novus Ordo Missae*. The words of Philip Lawler in his book *Lost Shepherd* could sum up, I believe, Farrow's thought: "The Papacy of Francis has been a disaster for the Church."[3] I share this judgment. But if five years of the collective words, acts, and omissions of the pontificate of Pope Francis can be considered a catastrophe, is it not possible to express the same judgment on the collective words, acts, and omissions

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which stem from the Second Vatican Council? If a pontificate can be considered a disaster, may not a Council of the Church also be so considered, even if it is authentic and legitimate? I do not believe that we can fully comprehend what is happening today within the Church without tracing its roots back to the Second Vatican Council, of which Pope Francis is only the most recent fruit.

Like Farrow, I am also convinced that "we cannot go backward in history." I do not know if he is convinced, as I am, that although the present era is disastrous, it will be followed by an era of the authentic rebirth of the Church, as the Madonna announced at Fatima with the promise, "In the end, My Immaculate Heart will triumph." This coming era will also be that of the triumph of the Church, founded on Jesus Christ and His visible Vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff.

Translated by Giuseppe Pellegrino.

The articles and conferences by Professor Roberto de Mattei can all be found on https://www.patreon.com/lepantofoundation.

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Notes

[1] Denzinger, *Enchiridion* 43rd Latin-English Ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), nn. 3114, 3117 (pp. 618, 621).

[2] *Il mistero della Chiesa nel diritto canonico,* Paoline, Rome 1962, pp. 177-178.

[3] Lawler, *Lost Shepherd: How Pope Francis is Misleading His Flock* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2018, p. 190).