Editor's Note: Dr. Claudio Pierantoni has responded to Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer's criticism of the open letter objecting to the pagan ceremonies held in Rome. The bishop of Regensburg in Germany was initially among those clerics to speak out against the idolatry but then seemed to backtrack after the open letter appeared. CFN is pleased to reprint the full text of Dr. Pierantoni's response, which was first published by *LifeSiteNews* (reprinted with permission).

In addition to his vast knowledge, and unlike many European defenders of the idolatry, Professor Pierantoni has actually spent time in South America and has first-hand knowledge of what he speaks. He was born in Rome in 1965 and is married to a Chilean woman. He studied Classical Philology and then specialized in Patristics and the History of Christianity at the *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum*, earning a Ph.D. in the History of Christianity at the University of Rome (*La Sapienza*). He has served as a professor of History of the ancient Church and Patrology for the Faculty of Theology in Santiago, Chile. He then earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy at the Universidad de Los Andes (Santiago).

At present, Dr. Pierantoni teaches Medieval Philosophy at the University of Chile. His main lines of investigation are the Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the ancient Church, St. Augustine, the philosophical problem of Truth, and natural theology. – Brian M. McCall, Editor-in-Chief

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A Reflection on Bishop Voderholzer's Dissociation from the "Protest of Pope Francis's Sacrilegious Acts"

By Claudio Pierantoni, Ph.D.

In a statement originally signed by 100 Catholic scholars, priests and laity (now almost 200),[1] to protest against the idolatrous acts that took place in the Vatican, we referred to the criticisms or condemnations that had already come from seven prominent prelates, as for example, Card. Müller and Bishop Schneider. Among these, we mentioned Bishop Voderholzer of Regensburg, for a homily he gave on October 31 (Feast of St. Wolfgang) in which he criticized what was happening in the Vatican.[2] Once our statement was published (November 12), however, Bishop Voderholzer disassociated himself from it.[3] He did that, he said, especially because he disagreed with the statement's "reproaches, accusations, or even condemnations of the Holy Father."

First of all, we wish to note that he incorrectly affirms that we are "condemning" the Holy Father ("Verurteilungen des Heiligen Vaters"). This is absolutely not the case: we are

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protesting against and condemning certain specific actions objectively considered, and make no judgement of any person. We do say that such actions violate objectively the First Commandment, and are as such both sinful and scandalous, “independently from the subjective culpability, which only God can judge”. In consequence, we are asking all Catholic bishops to fraternally correct the Holy Father.

Thus, it is certainly true that we are protesting, and asking the Pope to repent of this sin and of the scandal that has been caused by these actions. More exactly, we are asking the bishops of the Catholic church, and therefore also Bishop Voderholzer, to fraternally correct Pope Francis in this aspect. This is not because we have already passed judgement on the Pope, but simply because he was *expressly* involved in these actions which took place in the Vatican—in the context, moreover, of inaugurating a synod of the Catholic church. His explicit involvement makes legitimate, and even obligatory, a fraternal correction of all involved. If these kinds of objective assumptions are not possible or licit, no kind of correction or human exhortation to repent of any sin would ever be possible. Accordingly, there is nothing wrong in itself in reproaching or asking someone to repent on the basis of an objective involvement of that person in a specific misdeed. Moreover, this is all the more applicable to certain categories of people in relation to others: to parents, for example, with respect to their children, to teachers with respect to their pupils; to the Pope with respect to bishops and all Christ’s faithful; and in fraternal reciprocity, to the bishops (and if necessary, to all competent Catholic faithful) with respect to the Pope.

Allowing that reproach and correction are not wrong in themselves, it would be necessary to establish that in this specific case, the reproach is wrong: **(a)** either because the facts themselves are innocent, **(b)** or because the person was not involved in the facts. But bishop Voderholzer makes none of these claims.

To start with, claim (a) is certainly untenable, on the basis of what Voderholzer himself stated in his own homily.

Thus we note that the bishop does not really give any reasons for his disassociation, but says simply that we are “missing the point” (“gehen an der Sache vorbei”) and that “this is not my way”. In his statement, he does make references to his own homily of October 31; but, all too significantly, he omits everything related to all the criticisms he had expressed against the actions that took place in the Vatican Gardens and Saint Peter’s Basilica which are the very object of our protest.

So, it will be good to remind the bishop at least of some of his own words, which we appreciated. We choose only two important remarks.[4]

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First, in his homily bishop Voderholzer asked whether it is the right thing to “carry into the realm of the Church pagan statues” without their being transformed into Christian symbols—as happened, for example, with the Oak of Thor that St. Boniface chopped down and carved into a cross. Bishop Voderholzer referred concretely to: “our case of the veneration of natural fertility in the form of the personified Mother Earth, the ‘Pachamama’.”

St Boniface’ example, of course, was far from an isolated case. It was common practice in the process of Christianization to destroy pagan idols, and, if possible, to transform the raw material into Christian symbols.

Secondly: with regard to the Pachamama statues, before which people prostrated themselves during the Oct. 4 ceremony in the Vatican Gardens at which Pope Francis was present in the lead-up to the Amazon Synod — the bishop stated that: “it was not apparent that the figures that we are talking about had undergone the transformation and purification – from a natural piety toward a Marian devotion in light of the history of salvation – as earlier Catholic missionaries had done it.”

Some comments. Although the first remark is expressed in the form of a question, it is clearly a rhetorical question: “was it right?”. “Of course not” is the natural answer. So much so, that in the very question it is assumed that these are “pagan statues”, that represent “personified Mother Earth, the Pachamama”. This being so, how can it be right to prostrate before the personified Mother Earth? The bodily gesture used, it should be emphasized, was *proskynesis,* which was often translated in Latin as ‘adoratio’ and its forms: *adoration*.

The bishop’s second remark also assumed that “it is not apparent that these figures had undergone the transformation and purification – from a natural piety toward a Marian devotion in light of the history of salvation.”

In other words, there was no hint, in the appearance of these figures, that they are now used in a different sense than the pagan one, for example, as representations of Mary. That said, given that in an image, especially if used in public prayer, the “appearance” is precisely the essential matter, it must be admitted that this action has all the appearance of a prostration to a pagan goddess. People are praying and prostrating around a “mandala” representative of the Amazonian land,[5] in the center of which is an out of scale image of a naked, pregnant woman, universal personification of fertility, not only in South America, but all over the planet.

Now, this is more than enough to explain the critical remarks of the bishop. Less understandable is the unwillingness of the bishop to stand by his own words and to be

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consistent. If he maintains that we are wrong in protesting against idolatry, then he must explain why he thinks so. Have the images suddenly ceased to be “representations of personified fertility”, as he himself had stated?[6] Has a hint emerged that this pagan personification has been fittingly reinterpreted, purified, “baptized” in any way, which he himself had deemed to be necessary? No, there is no hint of it, by his own admission. There were no indications of anything Christian and Catholic in the mandala around which the people prayed.

As we stated in the document, even if there was no idolatrous *intention* behind it – which we do not judge – the mere bodily gesture of prostrating oneself before something which, to all appearances, is a pagan personification of natural forces, is more than sufficient to produce an *objective* scandal.

Let us remember that the Christian martyrs of ancient and modern times rather died than even give the *appearance* of burning incense to the pagan gods, which they could have done in a merely external way, without the internal consent of their hearts.

In conclusion: if the bishop wished to refute us, he would be obliged to retract and correct what he himself earlier said. But he does not do that. He simply omits quoting his own original remarks, which support our criticism and protest objectively.

As to (b), the second possible claim, that there is no connection between these events and the Pope, the bishop does not make the claim, and of course it is even less tenable. In fact, these events took place inside the Vatican, in the context of a synod organized under the Pope, and were personally attended by the Pope. And here comes our most important reflection: we can see that Voderholzer certainly is an orthodox bishop, who felt it necessary to protest against this idolatry that took place within the Vatican. However, in his homily he did not relate the incident to the Pope. And when a statement came out, which did make that reference, he steps back, as if he were thinking: ‘I am against what the Pope is doing, but because he is the Pope, I cannot tell him; moreover, I must hasten to dissociate myself from people who do that’. Now we ask: what kind of assumption could lead a bishop to such an illogical conclusion?

Let us suggest that there are, roughly speaking, four kinds of bishops in the way they relate to the pope in doctrinal matters: one is the “progressive” bishop, who maintains positions more or less at variance with the traditional teaching of the Church’s faith; who, in the present pontificate, now feels much freer to express his views; the second is the more orthodox minded bishop, but who is also something of a political opportunist; he will not criticize the Pope out of simple fear of incurring some disadvantage to his ecclesiastical career.

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We know that Voderholzer does not belong to either of these two categories.

But there is also the sincerely orthodox minded bishop, who has the will to oppose heresy as such, but who unfortunately believes in an implicitly assumed doctrine according to which no reproach, no kind of fraternal correction is to be deemed appropriate, or even licit, if the one responsible for some bad behavior is the Pope. If anyone dares to make or to propose such a correction, the attempt is immediately and irrationally quashed as “an attack against the Pope”. Such an ingenuous doctrine, of course, has never existed in Catholic teaching: it is either a fruit of mere this-worldly human respect, or else a complete misconstruction of the doctrine of papal infallibility, when it is arbitrarily extended to anything and *everything* a pope happens to think or say or do.

Now, this false and dangerous doctrine is fervently and contagiously at work: it is, in the disastrous situation of the present pontificate, like a paralyzing virus, immobilizing irrationally a great many orthodox bishops, who could, and should help the pope with a just fraternal correction concerning many aspects of his recent action.

We fear that Bishop Voderholzer, who began well with an orthodox critique of these idolatrous acts, has now fallen a victim to this doctrinal illness, and is thereby losing a splendid opportunity to help the present Successor of Peter.[7]

But Voderholzer might very well change his course, and decide to inscribe himself in a fourth and best category of bishops: those who are neither heretics, nor time-serving opportunists, nor subscribers to a distorted doctrine of papal infallibility, but are so personally kindled with the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, leaving aside all kinds of human respect, they decide to speak a word of truth to Pope Francis, for the benefit of his own soul, and of the universal Church.

And the same counsel could also serve many other bishops, each lending a strong pastoral arm to help cure the present, dreadful wounds of Christ’s Bride upon earth.

One final observation: we are not urging bishop Voderholzer, or any other bishop, to sign our protest. We are simply asking them to truly help the Pope with their own fraternal correction, in the words that the Holy Spirit is certainly available to suggest to them.

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[1] https://www.contrarecentiasacrilegia.org.

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[2] https://www.bistum-regensburg.de/news/wolfgangspredigt-2019-7073. See Maike Hickson’s report: https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/german-bishop-criticizes-use-of-pachamama-statues-at-amazon-synod.

[3] https://www.kath.net/news/69724.

[4] See the whole report by Maike Hickson (link above, note 2).

[5] It is worth noting that, in the theological background of this Amazon synod, specifically in the famous *Instrumentum laboris* (“Working document”) that preceded it, the Amazonian land is itself granted a sacred status as “a particular source of God’s revelation”, and even an “epiphanic place” where “the caresses of God become manifest and incarnate in history” (my emphasis). See IL 19: “Thus territory is a theological place where faith is lived, and also a particular source of God’s revelation: epiphanic places where the reserve of life and wisdom for the planet is manifest, a life and wisdom that speaks of God. In the Amazon, the ‘caresses of God’ become manifest and become incarnate in history.”

[6] We will address this claim, or similar claims from other people, in another article.

[7] We make these comments also in light of the fact that other people, like Princess Gloria von Thurn und Taxis and Father Dreher, FSSP (among others) unfortunately followed his example. See https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/german-princess-withdraws-signature-from-statement-urging-pope-to-repent-for-pachamama-idolatry and http://www.kath.net/news/69762.

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