**THE FINAL CONFRONTATION**

*Father C. John McCloskey*

 “We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think that wide circles … of the Christian community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-Church, of the Gospel versus the anti-Gospel.

“We must be prepared to undergo great trials in the not-too-distant future; trials that will require us to be ready to give up even our lives, and a total gift of self to Christ and for Christ. Through your prayers and mine, it is possible to alleviate this tribulation, but it is no longer possible to avert it. . . .How many times has the renewal of the Church been brought about in blood! It will not be different this time.”
*– Bicentennial talk given in the United States by Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Kraków, Poland, now St John Paul II.*

 Well, how seriously should we take this? After all, the speaker was about to become one of the greatest popes in the history of the Church. In addition, he was a mystic and, yes, a prophet and truth-teller who suffered under Nazism and Communism, as well as in a certain sense also from Islam. (Recall that he was almost killed by a Muslim assassin, only to be saved by the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima, according to his own words.)

 Let me be clear: my musings on the words of John Paul are not meant to encourage you to sell your property, close the bank account, build a bomb shelter, and await the rapture. That is not the Catholic thing to do. But it’s hard not to “ponder these things in [our] hearts.” What exactly did the pope see or have revealed to him? Perhaps the best place to seek the answer is his writings, although we lack space to comb through them all here.

 We can also look around us at the remains of what was once called the Christian West, noting a host of behaviours and beliefs that seem custom-made to initiate and accelerate decline. For example, we find in the West depopulation, legal abortion, open homosexuality and same-sex “marriage,” epidemic levels of pornography use, declining marriage rates, and rising cohabitation rates.

 Politically, even supposedly tolerant and democratic states like our own are beginning to deny the religious liberty rights of families, businesses, and churches. In addition, we observe growing centralization of power in the hands of those unfavourable to any faith except the idolatry of health, wealth, and technology. They place their long-term hope in the possibility that science may one day arrest death. They watched too many *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* movies as children. Unfortunately, they may well go where many men have gone before – and not simply into outer space.

 This, surely, is the Anti-Church that St John Paul foresaw – in any event it is here, it is growing, and to a great extent it has already demolished Europe.

 What are we to do? First, of course, do not despair. As Catholics we live this life looking forward to the next. We can’t lose, for as St. Paul put it, for us death is gain, not something to fear.

 How then to confront and combat the Anti-Church? Imitate the lives of the first Christians! Consider this justly famous description of Christians in the anonymous Letter to Diognetus, written in 79 A.D.:

“For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country nor by language nor by the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. . . .They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring.

“They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. (2 Corinthians 10:3) They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20) They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all... they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evilly spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; (2 Corinthians 4:12) they are insulted and repay the insult with honour; they do good yet are punished as evil-doers.”

 If we live as the first Christians did, we too can confront and triumph over the Church of the evil Global Empires.