

“The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against the Church”

[Editor’s Note: the following account can be found in the September-October 2008 issue of *Inside the Vatican* magazine.]

Fr. Bernard O’Connor, a Canadian priest currently working in the Vatican’s Congregation for Eastern Churches, encountered members of the production crew filming the movie *Angels and Demons* (from the novel by Dan Brown of *The Da Vinci Code* fame) slated for release in 2009. He found one of the major producers in a foul mood. Seeking to use one of the Roman basilicas to film what amounts to be a blasphemy, they were incredulous that the Holy See turned them down. Supposing Fr. O’Connor to be another tourist (at the time he was dressed in “civvies”), the production official vented his spleen at the Vatican with this tirade:

“The wretched Church is against us yet again and is making problems. There are some of us who are friends with Dan Brown. Like most of us, he often says that he would do anything to demolish that detestable institution, the Catholic Church... Within a generation there will be no more Catholic Church, at least not in Western Europe. And really the media deserves to take much of the credit for its demise. We see the same success now happening everywhere, even across North America. The public is finally getting our message: the Catholic Church must be weakened and eventually it must disappear from the earth. It is humanity’s chief enemy. This

has always been the case. Look at this pathetic Pope and his predecessor. Both have tried frantically to reverse the trend. But their efforts faced doom because we are too strong.

And we have radio, television, Hollywood, the music and video industries, along with just about every newspaper which exists, all saying the same thing. It is more than many of us would have dared to hope just a few years back. It is a kind of revolution, and the colleges and universities, as well as the young; are on our side, too. Everywhere you turn the Church has become reduced to ruins. And ruins are all that should be left!”

The above should not really surprise us. If Our Lord Himself told us that *the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church* then He obviously knew that they **would try to prevail**. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; **and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away,** and

betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s charity will grow cold. (Mt. 24: 9-12) Today the media and many of the world’s elite screech at the Vicar of Christ in the same manner that Satan screeched at Christ: *What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?* (Mk. 1: 24) From within the bosom of the Church Herself, many of Her



St. John Bosco’s Dream

members say to him what many early disciples told Our Lord when He gave the Bread of Life Discourse: *This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?* (Jn. 6: 60) The results would be identical. *After this many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him.* (Jn. 6: 66) All of this can be summed up in the words of Pope John Paul II. *We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-church, the Gospel vs. the antigospel. This confrontation lies within the plans of divine providence. It is a trial which the whole Church must take up.*

Notice that the Holy Father says that *this lies within the plans of divine providence.* Our Lord told His followers that they must expect this: *Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.* (Mt. 10:34) Following Christ means that we're in a war with the Prince of this World. It has been so since the beginnings of salvation history. *Through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.* (Wis 2:24) In the two Biblical accounts of the temptation and fall of our first parents in the Old Testament and the victory of Christ in the desert in the New, we see the two great stages of salvation history: the victory of the demon over Adam, and the defeat of the demon by the new Adam, Jesus. As Fr. Livio Fanzaga (Italy's "Radio Priest") states: *After the sin of Adam, humanity fell under the power of the evil one, who became the prince of darkness. Christ enters into the house of the powerful and binds him, in order to take back that which is His. With His death on the cross, Christ obtains the definitive victory over the power of darkness.*

Secondly, *it is a trial the whole Church must take up.* We're in a war in which the sought after prize is not territory, resources or oil fields, but us ourselves. In this struggle man is the most sought after prize. It's the only way that Satan can fight Almighty God, by trying to entice us into his kingdom. As St. Peter tells us, *Be sober; be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to*

devour. Resist him, firm in your faith. (1 Pt 5:8). It must be very clear that we are the prize of this competition. This is why we cannot remain indifferent or as spectators. Yet this message often falls on deaf ears. We don't like controversy. We prefer peace. We prefer to see religion as an exclusively consoling experience. Many of us are ready to excuse moral disorder instead of fighting it. Heaven is promised to everyone, while silence veils the possibility of eternal damnation. Fr. John Corapi touched on this when commenting on the last election. *Actions have consequences, and I am sure God has duly noted what our priorities are in the US of A. Economic matters would seem to take precedence over moral matters; money more important than life itself to most people (I guess they don't consider almost 50,000,000 innocent children murdered by abortion part of life). Now we shall see what the fruit of such a tree will be.*

The militant character of the Christian life is forgotten, but Satan doesn't forget. No Christian, until Jesus returns to earth, will be able to consider himself or herself on leave.

But Satan, like the movie producer above, just doesn't want to acknowledge who he's up against and that the final outcome is decided. It was decided on a weekend in the year 30 AD and is called the Paschal Mystery. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, *With His death on the cross, Christ obtains the definitive victory over the power of darkness.* (CCC 1708) When someone says that the "abortion battle is lost", remind them the Culture of Death has lost: because Christ will come again.

St. John Bosco had a famous dream where he saw this final conflict between the Church and Satan (the picture of which is on the front page.) He saw the barque of Peter, with the Pope at the helm, in the midst of a titanic battle. The enemies of the Church blazing away on all sides. The Pope is hit, falls and dies. (Not an assassination attempt) The Church's enemies send out a great victory shout: they think they've won. But a new Pope is elected and he takes his place at the helm and steers the Church (barque) to victory

between the columns of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Mother.

We see in this dream the means of victory: the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Mother. When enough of us are on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament and daily praying the rosary, then we will see the tide of battle turn. We have failed in recent times to transmit the Faith as a way of living. The Catholic embrace of the Culture of Death bears that out. Instead of being discouraged we should take up the challenge. Look who's on our side.

The movie producer quoted above certainly doesn't know his history. Does he really think that the media, Hollywood, the academia

(pseudo) will succeed where everyone else failed? The Roman emperors failed to destroy the Church. The divisions which emerged in Christianity failed to destroy it. Napoleon kidnapped and imprisoned the Pope. The Pope returned to Rome while Napoleon wound up on a small island in the South Atlantic. Stalin boasted that he would one day turn St. Peter's in Rome into a stable for his horses. He's gone. The Church always buries its undertaker. Why? Because Christ promised. We are called upon to fight the good battle to preserve the Faith and so inherit the Kingdom of God. And remember, Christ is always with us. ✠