St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE PRESENT AGE, CONSIDERED AS PROBABLY THE LAST OF THE WORLD

La época presente

From the Spanish of the Colección de opúsculos, vol. III (Barcelona, 1860)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from *La época presente considerada como probablemente la última del mundo, según los datos que sobre esta nos suministran las santas Escrituras, los santos Padres y expositores de aquellas*, in the *Colección de opúsculos* of Claret, vol. III (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1860). The translation is complete.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

The Present Age Considered as Probably the Last of the World, according to the Evidence Given Us on This by the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers and Their Expositors

The Horrified Man

Don Felipe and Don José.

Don Felipe. What is this, Don José? What is the matter with you? How is it you are so sad, so thoughtful, so…

Don José. So horrified, you were going to say, were you not?… And how can you expect me not to be, Don Felipe? Can anyone help being horrified, if he gives the least thought to the state the world is in?… Above all, can anyone help it who has kept, as I have kept by God's mercy, the religious feelings instilled in him in childhood, and who can compare the world of then with the world of today?… Ah, my friend! Do you not see how impiety, which in our happy and unforgettable youth went about like a shamefaced beggar \[*como vergonzante*, like the "shamefaced poor" who were ashamed to beg openly\], not daring to show itself in public, now walks abroad in our day with its head held high, as queen and mistress of the whole earth, after boldly spreading everywhere? Ah! Now one sees and hears on every side nothing but iniquities and scandals such as were never seen or heard before!… Faith has almost disappeared;… charity has grown entirely cold;… in matters of religion one sees nothing now but lukewarmness and indifferentism;… selfishness, the love of pleasures, of luxury, of vanity, covetousness: they have invaded everything, they rule everything, they corrupt everything!… Hence so many injustices, so many outrages, so many crimes, which we ought rather to weep over than to recount. There were such things before too, who could deny it? But besides their being neither so atrocious nor so frequent, one could see in every province and kingdom, and above all in our Spain, certain customs and virtues truly worthy of patriarchal times, or rather of the times of the primitive Church. Today everything good, or almost everything, has disappeared; and evil, taking on colossal proportions, has spread and goes on spreading with astonishing speed. By means of steamships, railways, and electric telegraphs on land and under the sea, distances have in great part disappeared and are disappearing altogether, and the whole world is on the way to becoming as it were a single city. I see well, and I shall not be the one to deny it, that with these admirable inventions trade and the arts have prospered very greatly \[*muy mucho*, an emphatic doubling, "very much indeed"\] and are on the way to prospering still more; but what we gain on one side we lose on the other, and there is no doubt that what we have already lost was far preferable to what we have gained and may gain. Here, on this subject, is what I remember reading in one of the works of the justly celebrated Chateaubriand: "Civilization," he says, "has risen to its highest point; but it is a material civilization, barren, which can produce nothing, because life can be given only by means of morality, and peoples are created only by the roads of heaven; the iron roads \[*caminos de hierro*, railways\] will only lead us more swiftly to the abyss."

Virtues and good customs, as we see and as I have already said, if they have not disappeared altogether, are disappearing with the same speed with which vices spread. The reason is plain: vices, like a contagion, cling very easily to the masses, while virtues, with their natural timidity, shrink back, hide themselves, and die

with the individual. The passion for travel is the order of the day \[*está á la órden del dia*\], and because travelling is so easy, man, from the stay-at-home he was, turns into a cosmopolitan. And since every traveller who is not well rooted in his beliefs and in sound morals is so easily perverted by the scandals he stumbles on at every step, hence comes that immorality which so shamelessly threatens to put an end to every feeling of honour, of uprightness and of religion.

I too was fond of travelling, and made not a few journeys to many different countries, especially since steam carries us instantly from one to another, however far apart they may be. To this I owe the experience that lets me compare the old customs with the new, judge them, and see how far all the nations have fallen from their traditional and honourable moderation of life. Yes, and no one can doubt it any longer: immorality, with all its foulness and devastating ravages, keeps overflowing in a horrifying way, and grows so fast from moment to moment that from one journey to the next it is hard to recognize the same people in the same town… This, my friend, is what makes me so thoughtful and keeps me so horrified. It is not so much for what it is in itself, as for seeing that this heap of iniquities is infallibly going to exhaust, as in the days of Noah, the patience of God himself. And though God will not again flood the earth with a deluge of water, having pledged his word,[1] the day is not far off when with a deluge of fire he will reduce it to ashes…

Don Felipe. You are very right, Don José, to be appalled and horrified at seeing and considering the deep corruption and boundless effrontery with which people live nowadays. In view of it I cannot but tell you that I share your own feelings \[*abundo en los propios sentimientos de V.*\] in thinking that the world, as it is today, cannot last long. Nor are we alone, you and I, in believing so; for this very thing is strongly drawing the attention of all thinkers and true scholars, not only Christians, Greek and Latin, but also pagans, Jews and others.

It is true that Christians refrain from fixing the last day and the last hour of the world, out of respect for those words of the Saviour: *Of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven.*… (Mark 13:32). Nevertheless there is no lack of authors of great weight and authority who, with reasons of congruity that are not to be despised, strive to prove that this world must end at about six thousand years, more or less, from its creation.[2] Here are some of these reasons that come to my memory, and which, as I say, do not seem to me negligible.

First reason. The world, they say, was created in six days; therefore its existence ought not to last beyond six thousand years, because a thousand years in God's sight are as one day (Ps 89 \[90\]:4; 2 Pet 3:8). Moreover in Genesis, that is, the book in which Moses tells us of the creation of the world, the Hebrew letter *aleph*, which as a numeral means a thousand, is found six times. So God created heaven and earth "at six alephs", that is, to last six thousand years, as Cornelius a Lapide says. And as on the sixth day God ceased from creating and rested on the seventh, the sabbath, so too the world will cease to exist at six thousand years. Then the general resurrection will take place, and for the good will begin the sabbath of happiness in which they will be told to rest from their labours, as we read in the Apocalypse (Rev 14:13).

Second reason. The law that God has given man is divided into the natural law, the written law, and the law of grace. The first, which runs from the creation of Adam to the circumcision of Abraham, lasted two thousand years; the second, from the circumcision of Abraham to the birth of the Messiah, also lasted two thousand years. Two thousand years therefore belong likewise to the law of grace, of which, counting from the birth of Jesus Christ, we have already gone through 1859. Little is now wanting, then, to complete the two thousand whose length, more or less, seems probably to be marked out for the law of grace.

From what we read in the holy Scriptures it is also clearly deduced that this last period of time will last no longer than the two before it. The Prophets call it *the last time*; Saint John, *the last hour* (1 John 2:18); Saint Paul, *the end of the ages* (1 Cor 10:11); Saint Peter says, *The end of all things is at hand* (1 Pet 4:7); and Saint James announces that *the coming of the Lord is at hand* (Jas 5:8).

Third reason. The world is old; it will soon be decrepit, and then it will run swiftly to its death. Here is how Saint Cyprian, speaking of the infirmities of the world, already concludes by foretelling its end: "This is the sentence passed upon the world; this is the law laid down by God himself: that all things that are born should have their setting; that the strong should grow weak; that the great should be diminished; and that, when they are sick and wasted, they should perish. And it is no wonder that this happens to particular things, when the whole world undergoes the same. The end of the world is already near;… turn, then, your minds and your hearts to God with a holy fear."[3]

Fourth reason. In support of the same comes the authority of the holy Fathers, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Justin and Saint Hilary; of Victorinus, Lactantius and others; of various gentile authors such as Hystaspes, Hermes Trismegistus and others; and of many rabbis or Hebrew teachers. Among them Rabbi Moses of Gerona, a man of great authority among the Hebrews, foretells the same; Rabbi Isaac says likewise; and Rabbi Elias, held to be the oracle of his time, says in his Talmud, vol. IV, treatise 55: *The world will last six thousand years, and after this time it will be destroyed, or will not be as it has been until now.*[4] This number, however, is to be taken geometrically and morally, that is, more or less.

In this last millennium in which we live, the days, according to the sacred Scriptures, will be shortened rather than lengthened; for in their words the last days will be cut short so that the elect who are and will be on the earth may not perish (Matt 24:22). Moreover, the Saints who are already in heaven do not cease to ask God for the resurrection of their bodies, that these may be glorified with their souls (Rev 6:10). Finally, Cornelius a Lapide, alluding to the words, *As a fig tree, shaken by a strong wind, lets fall its unripe figs* (Rev 6:13), and using that same comparison by which Saint John explains the breaking up of nature, affirms that just as early figs fall before their time and unripe because of the strong wind they are exposed to, so it will happen to this world. Because of the many and great iniquities of men, God will put an end to it before the time it would last by its own nature, and before the time its inhabitants expect, as he already did with the flood in the time of Noah.

From what I have said so far you may infer, my friend, that you and I agree in believing that the world is moving, perhaps with giant strides, towards its end, which is more or less near, but certain. We must therefore look on it with the disdain it deserves, which Saint John so urged in his first epistle, chapter 2: "Do not love the world," he said to the faithful, "nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but of the world. And the world passes away, and its concupiscence with it. But he who does the will of God abides for ever. Little children, it is the last hour (or age of the world); and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many have become antichrists; by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from among us (from the Church), but they were not of us (of the number of the true faithful); for if they had been of us, they would surely have continued with us in the faith; but they left the Church, that it might be plain that not all are of us" (1 John 2:15–19).

The Signs

Don José. What do you think, Don Felipe, of the signs which, it is said, will go before the end of the world and make it known?

Don Felipe. There is no doubt that there will be such signs, my friend; for so the prophet Joel assures us (Joel 2:30–31), and Saint John in the Apocalypse, and Jesus Christ himself in his holy Gospel. Many of them are about to be fulfilled, and not a few others either have been fulfilled already or are being fulfilled.

One sign will be the preaching of the Gospel over all the earth: "And this Gospel of the kingdom of God will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt

24:14). And by this time the Gospel has been preached everywhere.

“There will be wars.” How many wars have there not been in this century, which seems the century of wars?

“There will be famines.” There have been these too, and worse and more general ones threaten us.

“There will be earthquakes.” Those that have taken place these some years past have been many and horrifying.

“There will be plagues and diseases” (Matt 24:7; Luke 21:11). How many of both have there not been in what we have had of this century so far?… There is the deadly smallpox, the black vomit \[yellow fever\], the cholera morbus that has gone and is going through all the nations… and so on and so on.

All this we have seen or are seeing and experiencing; and even with so many warnings from heaven, or rather scourges with which God chastises us without staying his hand \[*sin levantar mano*, literally “without lifting his hand”, i.e. without pause\], we do not see the impious and obstinate sinners turn to him. On the contrary, they blaspheme him and go on in their impenitence, as Saint John said in the Apocalypse: “They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and did not repent of their deeds” (Rev 16:11). Have we not also seen them, during such terrible calamities, give themselves up to criminal amusements, to brutal and scandalous feasting, and to the indulgence of the vilest passions, in spite of their dejection and the little calm and scant strength left them?… Such wicked and irrational conduct we can and must consider as another of the signs foretold by Jesus Christ: “As it was,” he says, “in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man; for as in the days before the flood men went on eating and drinking like beasts, marrying and giving in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not think of the flood until they saw it begun and it swept them all away, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:37–39). While Noah, by God’s command, was building the ark to save himself from the waters in which the whole earth was to be drowned, those who saw it never ceased to make him the butt of their jeers and sarcasms, calling him a visionary and a simpleton. They saw, yes, the vapours and clouds gather and thicken extraordinarily over their heads, but they took it for a natural effect of the weather. They saw the reptiles, the wild beasts, the birds and the rest come from every side to shut themselves in the ark; and though they wondered at it, they did not for that reason cease to amuse themselves and throw themselves into every kind of excess. The same will happen, as we have said, at the end of time. The earth will quake horribly, throwing down mountains and destroying cities… and men will regard it as a mere effect of subterranean fires, of electricity, and so on. There will be pestilences that will decimate, or rather wipe out, whole peoples… and it will be coldly said that this comes from people’s want of cleanliness, or from the air, or from the apathy of rulers, the ignorance of doctors, and so on. The drought or want of water that will parch the trees, plants and grass, and will finish off the animals one after another or all at once, will be looked on as an extraordinary effect, if you like, of the irregularity of the seasons. Bad weather will cause a thousand unknown diseases; the sky will show its anger with blasting thunderbolts and horrisonous thunder, with hail and unaccustomed meteors; and it will be said that all this is nothing but a new and chance combination of the elements, and so on and so on… And with it all, and in spite of it all, the impious will go on amusing and delighting themselves, as the Saviour himself prophesied. Such senseless and provoking conduct will kindle and rouse the whole wrath of an almighty God \[*la ira toda de todo un Dios*, literally “the whole wrath of a whole God”\], who, to make an end of that froward race, will cause fire to fall from heaven to devour and consume them and all their works, as Saint Peter says: “The day of the Lord will come like a thief (that is, suddenly and at the hour least expected), and then the heavens will pass away with a terrible roar, the elements will be dissolved with the heat of the fire, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Since all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in holiness of life and godliness of conduct, waiting for and hastening eagerly towards the coming of the day of the Lord, the day on which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with the heat of the fire? But according to his promises we wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which justice dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you

wait for these things, be zealous to be found by the Lord without spot, blameless and at peace (with God and with your neighbours)… You therefore, brethren, being forewarned, be on your guard, lest you fall from your own steadfastness, carried away by the error of the senseless" (2 Pet 3:10–17).

The Apostasy

One of the chief and clearest signs of the end of the world will be the apostasy, that is, the almost general abandonment of the faith. "When the Son of Man comes, do you think he will find faith on earth?" These are the words of Jesus Christ himself, quoted by Saint Luke (Luke 18:8).[1] Saint Paul in his first letter to his beloved Timothy says: "In the last times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error and to doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1). And in his second to the Thessalonians he assures them that "it (the day of the Lord) will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3). This one whom the Apostle calls the *man of sin*, Saint John calls *Antichrist*, that is, the opponent of Christ, who denies and turns away from Christ, from his doctrine and his Sacraments. And so he says: "Every spirit that divides or severs Jesus (whether by denying him his divinity or his humanity, or by rejecting his doctrine, his Sacraments and the rest) is not of God; and this is the Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he is coming, and now he is already in the world (through heretics, abettors of heresies, and so on)" (1 John 4:3). "So now many have become antichrists; by which we know that it is the last hour (or age of the world)" (1 John 2:18).

Some expositors are of the opinion that the Antichrist will be a personal, real and true being, with many followers. Others say that he will be a moral body made up of a multitude of men animated by one same spirit, all of them abounding in vices and sins. In the Apocalypse Saint John presents the Antichrist to us perfect and complete in that beast with seven heads and ten horns. The horns signify its power of attack and defence, and the heads represent seven false religions which, like the seven heads on one and the same beast, will form only one body animated by one same spirit.

Saint Paul in his second to the Thessalonians says: "The mystery of iniquity is already at work (the Antichrist); only he who now holds firm, let him hold on, until he is taken out of the way (or until that which now restrains him has disappeared, namely the faith, the charity and the prayers of so many good souls as there still are)" (2 Thess 2:7). Meanwhile, as when one wants to put up a building one gathers a store of every kind of material; or when one wants to build a great ship one first collects much timber, prepares all the pieces beforehand, and at last the hour comes to put the finishing touch to it: so we stand with regard to the Antichrist. The ground and the materials are already being prepared; the pieces that are to compose him are already being made ready; indifferentism, rationalism and sensualism are already being cast and set solid; insubordination, independence, rebellion, communism, injustice, tyranny, cruelty and death are already being cut to shape!… Many of these pieces, which are to make up the infernal machine of the Antichrist, are already perfectly wrought, and work or begin to function by themselves through the spoken word, the pen and the dagger… There are so many newspapers of the day that neither respect themselves nor respect anything; there are the obscene novels and that endless number of modern productions that overturn and corrupt everything; there is, finally, the inexpressibly perverse conduct of a great many Christians, truly unworthy of the name!…

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[2] Gen 9:11–15.

[3] *Against Heresies* V.28.3.

[4] St Cyprian, *To Demetrianus* 3–5 (paraphrased and abridged).

[5] Moses of Gerona is Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nachmanides, 1194–c. 1270). *Tanna debe Eliyahu*. *Divine Institutes* VII.14–18.

[1] The source gives "Luke 17:8"; the words are Luke 18:8.

The Holy Bible: Chapter 9 of the Apocalypse

Don Felipe. Do you think, Don José, that you understand what you are reading?

Don José. And how am I to understand it, unless someone explains it to me? So he begged Don Felipe to take a seat beside him. The passage of Scripture he was reading was chapter 9 of the Apocalypse; and Don Felipe, taking up the word, said to him: I am going to explain to you the mystery and meaning of that chapter, and for this I shall make use of the expositors Bellarmine, Alcázar and others. We shall proceed part by part, that is, verse by verse, to avoid all confusion.

Verse 1. "…and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and the key of the shaft of the abyss was given to him."

This fallen star is LUTHER. For a time he shone like one of those stars that instruct many in justice, and he was on the way to shining for all eternity (Dan 12:3), if, being as he was a priest, a doctor, a professor and a preacher, he had gone on exercising that ministry with equal zeal. But this star fell upon the earth, that is, into a heresy most fruitful in fatal and disastrous results for the earth… *And the key of the shaft of the abyss was given to him.* This key is the freedom of private examination \[*libertad de exámen*, the Protestant principle of private interpretation of Scripture\] with which that heresiarch opened the shaft; and out of it came and are coming his followers, who will be the soldiers of their leader the Antichrist.

Verse 2. "And he opened the shaft of the abyss; and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke of the shaft."

The shaft of the abyss is hell; and as soon as Luther opened its door there came out of it the thickest and most pestilential smoke of errors and heresies, with which he has darkened, accidentally, the Sun of justice, who is Jesus Christ, by obscuring his dignity, his divinity, his doctrine and his Sacraments. He has likewise darkened the Moon, that is, the Church, with unheard-of calumnies and with the errors he has laid to her charge. He has darkened and infected, finally, the air, so that in the world, in a certain way, no other air is breathed than that which came out of the abyss since Luther opened its door.

Verse 3. "And from the smoke of the shaft came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them like the power that the scorpions of the earth have."

These locusts are Luther's followers. They are compared to locusts, first, because as locusts devour what is green, so these strive and toil to devour the true faith and the other virtues; secondly, because like locusts they leap from one point to another, from one error to another and to yet other errors; thirdly, because as locusts are very big-bellied and their whole concern is to eat, even if it lays everything waste, so the Lutherans, since their whole God is their belly (Phil 3:19), are great lovers of eating and drinking well, as Luther was. From their feasting, in them and in him, there results an unbridled love of sensual pleasures, chiefly the abominable vice of lust, a vice to which they sacrifice everything, even if they must lay waste for it the countries in which they unhappily are found.

The power given to these locusts is like that of scorpions, that is, very guileful and extremely pernicious. Nevertheless they were commanded not to harm the grass, that is, the faithful whose faith and charity are tender and delicate; nor any green thing, that is, the faithful who are flourishing in faith and charity; nor any tree, that is, holy and exalted prelates (Rev 9:4). Of all these the prophet David said: "Much peace have they who love your law, and for them there is no stumbling or scandal" (Ps 118 \[119\]:165). No, for these scandal has no power; it serves only for those who have not the seal of God on their foreheads (v. 4), that is, who have not the true faith and charity. These the locusts have power to harm, and they easily make them fall into heresy. Fruit that has a worm at its heart falls to the ground when a strong wind blows; not so the fruit that has no worm, for however hard the wind blows, it stays firm until it is picked by hand. So are the good: the locusts may persecute them, martyr them, take their lives, but they will not succeed in making them fall into

error or heresy, for they will remain constant to their last breath in faith and charity.

Verse 5. "And they were charged not to kill them, but to torment them for five months; and the torment they cause is like that of the scorpion when it stings a man."

Five months, then, is to be the length of the power given them to torment; and these five months correspond exactly to the *hundred and fifty days* during which the waters of the flood covered the earth (Gen 7:24). All the wicked were drowned in those waters, and only the just were saved in Noah's ark. What happened then with the waters will happen with errors before the second coming of the Son of Man. The errors of Luther (for though there are errors of other heresiarchs too, all are considered consequences of his) will flood and cover the earth, drowning the wicked; the just, however, will be saved within the true Church, which is the ark or bark of Saint Peter, prefigured by that of Noah.

Verse 6. "And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die, and death will flee from them."

We are already seeing it now; what, then, will happen in those days!… Men stung or bitten by the locusts, that is, by the heretics, become so impatient, wrathful and frenzied that they often wish for death, and, lacking patience to wait for its coming, procure it for themselves by suicide. Here is the reason for so many thousands of horrible suicides counted each year, principally in the countries infected by Protestantism. These unfortunates imitate the scorpion, which, when it finds itself hard pressed, drives its own sting into itself and dies.

Verse 7. "And the shapes of the locusts were like horses equipped for battle; on their heads they had what seemed crowns of gold, and their faces were like the faces of men."

These locusts are like horses equipped for battle. The Lutheran Protestants and other heretics want Catholics to tolerate their errors, to suffer and keep silent without opposing in any way their falsehoods and insidious pretensions. They themselves, however, are like horses always ready to make war on all who oppose or do not consent to their errors and vices. They neigh, and never cease to foam with rage, looking for the moment when they may treacherously attack Catholics and commit among them the most barbarous excesses and cruelties. Witness the histories of England and other countries.

"On their heads they had what seemed crowns." These crowned locusts signify the intolerant pride of heretics, who, while they want to make an end of all authority, set themselves up as dukes, princes, kings… Luther himself, with his usual vanity and pride, styled himself Duke of Saxony. Their system is to destroy true kings and to make themselves kings, flattering the people with as many crowns as it has children, that is, with popular or universal sovereignty. Hence licence, not liberty; hence the much-pawed-over and ever-invisible equality; hence communism, and so on and so on. The crowns were not of gold, but like that metal, to signify that their sovereignty, and the sovereignty they promise, is only an imitation of the true one; and that all their humanity, that is, the PHILANTHROPY they cackle about so much \[*que tanto cacarean*, literally "that they cluck about so", as a hen over its egg\], far from being true philanthropy, is so only in name and appearance; for in reality it is not and cannot be anything but cold and criminal SELFISHNESS!

"And the faces of the locusts were like the faces of men." Heretics make a pretence of much goodness, much benevolence, much interest in the welfare of the peoples; but they bite terribly, for *their teeth are like lions' teeth*, as we shall see in the next verse. Speaking of them the prophet David says: "They have sharpened their viper tongues; the venom of asps is under their lips" (Ps 139 \[140\]:4).

Some naturalists say that the tongue of serpents is very long and sharp, and ends in three points. Such, says Cornelius a Lapide, is the tongue of the detractor, who with its three points wounds himself, wounds the one who listens to him, and those of whom he speaks ill. Such too is the tongue of heretics, who with their triple dart likewise open three wounds. They drive the first into the worship of God, of the Virgin and of the Saints,

diminishing it as far as they possibly can. They drive the second into the Church, speaking ill of her and ridiculing her Sacraments, rites and ceremonies. They drive the third, finally and by preference, into the Pope and the other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, directing against them calumnies, mockery and ridiculous fables, *ut facilius penetrent in aures et in corda*, "so as to penetrate," says Bellarmine, "and slip more easily into the ears and hearts" of the unwary, thus inoculating them with the deadly venom of asps that they have under their lips.

Verse 8. "And they had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth."

To have hair like women's signifies four things. First, that heretics are effeminate and lustful. Second, that they are weak, feeble and cowardly, after the condition of women, in all that they have plotted and done, and are and will be plotting and doing, against the Church. But let them know, if they do not know it already, that all they say, do and plot to destroy her will be useless, because it is written that the gates of hell (which they are) shall not prevail against her (Matt 16:18). Third, this womanish head of hair signifies heresy itself, which, if it did not appear well combed and adorned with ribbons, pomades and scented waters, would disgust and horrify all who looked at it. Fourth and lastly, it indicates, according to Saint Jerome, that all heretics have always made use of women to spread their errors.

Verse 9. "And they wore breastplates, or cuirasses, like breastplates of iron; and the noise of their wings was like the thunder of chariots drawn by many horses running into battle."

The breastplates of iron signify their hardened and obstinate hearts, which are so to such a high degree that, even when they are convinced to the point of not knowing what more to answer, they prefer to remain and die in their errors rather than be converted. The noise of their wings signifies their heedlessness and their determined will to listen neither to reasons nor to the counsels of others, nor even to the voice of their own conscience; and so, blinded and without a guide, they face up to everything and trample over everything with inconceivable audacity and rashness.

Verse 10. "And they had tails like those of scorpions, and in their tails stings with power to hurt men for five months."

These tails signify that, although with their words and gilded systems heretics flatter the passions and offer every kind of pleasure, because they are, as the Apostle says, declared *enemies of the cross of Christ* (Phil 3:18), these pleasures and delights nevertheless have their tail, and a tail like a scorpion's, which wounds terribly, however much they may wish to hide or deny it, in this world and the next. Like scorpions they harm themselves as much as or more than those into whom they manage to drive the sting of heresy.

The space of *five months*, which is mentioned here again, although it corresponds exactly, as we said at verse 5, to the *hundred and fifty days* that the earth remained under water in the flood, is not to be taken arithmetically, but takes in the whole time up to the second and last coming of the Son of Man.

Verse 11. "And they had over them as king the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, in Greek Apollyon, and in Latin *Exterminans*, that is, the Exterminator."

Natural history and experience teach us that, while bees have their king, locusts do not. The wise Solomon says this of them too: "The locusts have no king, and they always go in swarms" (Prov 30:27). The heretic locusts do the same. They neither have nor want a king among men, but a republic, equality, communism and so on; and yet each one wants to be king, as the crowned locusts signify, as we explained at verse 7. But though it is true that they want no human king, they nevertheless have over them, as Saint John assures us, and acknowledge as their king, an angel of the abyss whose name is *Exterminator*; and this name suits all of them, individually and collectively.

"In fact," says Bellarmine, "the heretics, for example Luther and his progeny, have spread through heaven, through earth, through purgatory and through hell, to exterminate in them all they can. And, as far as lies

with them, they have robbed God of the Trinity; Jesus Christ of his divinity and humanity; the Saints of their beatitude; the Angels and all those in heaven of worship and veneration. On earth and in the Church they have exterminated a great part of sacred Scripture; almost all the Sacraments; all the traditions, the priesthood, the sacrifice, vows, fasts, feasts, altars, churches, relics, crosses, images, all the monuments of piety, the ecclesiastical laws, discipline and all order. They have exterminated the obedience of peoples to their princes, and the power of princes over their peoples. Finally they have exterminated all modesty, all shame, all virtue and spirit, and all the comeliness and beauty of the house of God. And they have even tried with their diabolical system to exterminate the pains and the very existence of purgatory and hell." Yes: all this they have in great part exterminated, or tried to exterminate, like good satellites of the angel Exterminator, to whose orders and inspirations they show themselves so docile, and with whom they have struck up such close familiarity; as Luther already boasted, frankly and shamelessly confessing that Satan was very familiar with him and suggested to him all he was to do.

Verse 12. "The one woe has passed; but behold, two woes more are coming after this."

This woe that has just passed is the heresy of Luther with all its many ramifications: not that it is yet dead in these, and above all in its consequences, which will last, as we said, to the end of the world; but in itself, that is, in its principles. For its mission may now be considered finished, since it has already exterminated all it was given to exterminate. Protestantism is nowadays looked on as a real absurdity. Protestants in good faith are converted to Catholicism, and those in bad faith go over to Rationalism, Communism and the rest, all of them more or less immediate consequences of the bastard and now degenerate heresy that Luther brought forth \[*abortó*, literally "miscarried", "aborted"\].

Verses 13 and 14. "…And I heard a voice… saying…: Loose the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." (The river Euphrates flows through the midst of Babylon, the symbol of the devil's kingdom.)

Verse 15. "And the four angels were loosed…" (This is the second woe.)

These are four evil angels, arch-demons, who will be loosed when the Antichrist comes, and will preside, instead of Lucifer, over the four corners of the earth to harm men. At the time of the Saviour's passion and death they were bound by divine command; that is, the power they had before was curtailed and limited, and there remained only other, lesser demons in the air, and even among us, to tempt us, now with interior suggestions, now by means of external objects, so that we may live with caution and vigilance, and have occasions of merit through the victories we shall always win if we will; for God is faithful, and never allows the temptation to be greater than the grace he gives us to overcome it (1 Cor 10:13). So it was and so it will always be; but at the end of the world victory will become harder, because the demons will be given the same freedom they had at the beginning, and even greater, says Tirinus.

These four demons, once the earth is cleared of everything good, and faith, the Sacraments, and the good works and virtues of very many of the faithful are exterminated, will redouble their efforts as far as they can to bring iniquity to its summit and make it reach its apogee, perfecting to this end, if that is possible, the means invented by the Exterminator and already put into practice by Luther and his followers.

The first has the mission of kindling and promoting, sparing no means or effort, the love of sensual pleasures. He knows perfectly, and will have in his hand, all the springs for bewitching each of the senses. To the sight he will present pleasing, curious and lascivious objects; he will charm the ear with soft and harmonious music and songs, with indecorous and indecent conversations, tales and jokes; to the smell he will procure its pleasures by means of essences and perfumes; to the taste he will furnish its own with succulent dishes and spirituous drinks; but touch will be the sense he will above all take pains to satisfy, by means of the most cynical impurity, which will be the predominant vice. And could we not say that this arch-demon is already loosed, and has pitched his camp \[*ha sentado sus reales*, literally "has set up his royal quarters"\] in all the cities of the world, multiplying in them brothels and other places of prostitution?… All of these are so many

temples of the devil; and all Christians who have the misfortune to cross their threshold and go into them will easily forget the way to the house of the Lord, preferring to the heavenly sweetness that he promises them the brutal and voluptuous delights with which the devil bewitches them. With this foul but gilded bait the devil is already now catching many souls; so that this age, which is called the age of enlightenment, it seems would more properly be called the age of shameless pleasures!… But this is for now, and for a short time. The day of the Lord will come, and come soon, a day on which each of those unhappy and seduced souls will hear that voice from heaven saying: "As much as she glorified herself and lived in delights, so much torment and mourning give her" (Rev 18:7).

The second arch-demon, also loosed already, as it seems, has the task of fostering the love of riches, suggesting to men a thousand and a thousand schemes to acquire them, without stopping to ask whether the means are lawful or not; for, however bad they may be, he tells them, the end excuses and sanctifies them. Hence so many injustices, thefts and swindles, so much bad faith in contracts, so many lawsuits, so many bankruptcies, usuries and a thousand other wickednesses committed everywhere nowadays. What follows from this? That since it is not possible to serve God and riches at the same time, *non potestis Deo servire et mammonae* (Matt 6:24), men, instead of consecrating their hearts to God as they ought, have them attached to riches, and with them they are lost, which is just what the demon of covetousness so longs for.

The third arch-demon, newly loosed, has the mission of promoting pride and the independence of reason, emancipated from all subjection and obedience. He suggests to each man what he suggested to Pharaoh when Moses and Aaron declared to him what the Lord God said: "Who is this Lord, that I should hear his voice?… I do not know such a Lord" (Exod 5:2). That is precisely what the proud answer when the will of God is made known and declared to them by the mouth of the Church or of her ministers. "I believe nothing," each of them adds, "but what I grasp with my senses and understand with my reason, which is my God…" Ruled by the demon of pride, and extremely perverse, these men come to be worse than the demons themselves; for the demons *believe and tremble*, says Saint James (Jas 2:19), while these neither tremble at anything, nor believe anything, nor respect anything, shamelessly mocking at everything!… The truths of faith, however, do not cease to exist because these men cease to believe them, for they are entirely independent of their belief; and, much as it may grieve these unhappy men, they will not fail to find out in their time that the same God whose truths they despise and whose hand they do not fear will hurl at them the thunderbolts of his indignation, casting them all into the eternal abysses.

The fourth arch-demon, finally, has the mission of suggesting and fostering the independence of the will, so that it submits to no law or precept, and each does what most pleases and suits him. "Why has God commanded you this?" he said long ago to Eve (Gen 3:1). And "Why," he says and repeats now to each and every one, "why should you abstain from this, from this pleasure, from this amusement, from this…? Go ahead; do not be afraid; nothing will happen to you…" With this malign suggestion men lose the fear of God, and with it respect for and obedience to divine and human laws. As they live without fear, they live also without love either of God or of neighbour; and so, throwing themselves into the greatest impieties, they do not shrink from committing the greatest atrocities, the greatest and most iniquitous excesses.

With these four powerful elements of destruction, combined and handled by arch-demons as cunning as they are active and diligent, among people so well disposed and prepared to second their infernal plans, they will make such great progress on the roads of destruction and perdition that, with very few exceptions, all the faithful will in a short time lose faith and charity. Then will be fulfilled the almost general apostasy of which the Apostle speaks in his second to the Thessalonians: "It (the day of the LORD) will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (the Antichrist), who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God (religion or worship)… His coming is by the working of Satan, with all power, with lying signs and wonders, and with all the seduction of iniquity for those who are perishing, because they did not receive and love the truth so as to be saved. Therefore God will send them, or

will allow to work in them, the deceit of error, so that they believe the lie" (2 Thess 2:3–11).[1]

The third woe… after the four arch-demons comes the infernal dragon to help them and complete the work: "Woe to the earth and to the sea! For the devil has come down to you full of fury, knowing that he has but a short time" (Rev 12:12). "And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring or lineage, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the confession of Jesus Christ. And he stood upon the sand of the sea" (Rev 12:17–18).[2]

[1] 2 Thess 2:3–11, abridged. The source misprints the reference as "chapter 1".

[2] The source gives "Apoc. 11:12" (a slip); the words are Rev 12:12.

The Four Beasts of Daniel

Don José. Since you have been so kind, Don Felipe, as to explain chapter 9 of the Apocalypse to me so fully, I should be grateful if you would be so good as to explain to me likewise chapter 7 of the prophecy of Daniel, who in that chapter speaks of four beasts that seem to me rather enigmatic.

Don Felipe. As I am always ready to oblige you, I shall at once and with very great pleasure give you the explanation you desire and ask for. Let us go straight into the matter, then, and proceed likewise verse by verse, for greater clarity.

Verse 3. "And four great beasts, different from one another, came up out of the sea."

To understand this passage of chapter 7 of Daniel, we must bear in mind what the same Prophet relates in chapter 2. The statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, he says there, was made of four different metals, gold, silver, bronze and iron; and these four metals signified as many kingdoms, which were to follow one another, and did in fact follow one another, as that Prophet foretold and explained to the King. Here he now speaks to us of four great beasts, and these too signify four kingdoms: not in their material part, like the metals, but in their form or spiritual part, which is religion. That is why these four kingdoms, or religions (all of them false), are figured by four beasts, which enjoy animal or animate life, unlike the metals, which do not live but only exist. By this time the fulfilment of this second prophecy, concerning the four false religions, has been completed. For though it is true that since the time of Daniel there have been many more, it is no less true that all of them come down, by their identity and likeness, to four principal ones, really different from one another, like the beasts of the vision. These religions are Idolatry, Islam, false Christianity and Rationalism. All are false, and they are perfectly figured by fierce and rapacious beasts, because, far from giving worship and honour to the Divinity as they ought, they snatch both from him as far as they can.

The Prophet says that these beasts came up or out of the sea; and Saint Jerome observes that here by the name of sea we are to understand the world, which, like the sea, heaves and seethes with bitter and furious waves, a figure of the pride that lifts men up to the clouds only to hurl them next into the lowest depths of the abyss. From the passions, and chiefly from pride, all the false religions were born; and when, like swollen and raging waves, they cease to batter the Bark of the fisherman of Galilee without being able to sink it, they will dash themselves one after another against the rock or firm stone on which the wise Man built his House (Matt 7:24).

Verse 4. "The first was like a lioness, and had eagle's wings; as I looked, behold, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on its feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it."

In this first beast Idolatry was figured; and its form of a lioness gives us to understand the extreme lust of idolaters. For the lioness is so lascivious, they say, that she is not content with the male of her own species

but also has relations with the hyena and even with the pard, from which comes the leopard.[1] Only by reading the histories and Saint Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 1:18–32) can one form some idea of the pitch that lust had reached among the idolaters. The idolaters are also figured in the lioness because, as she becomes even fiercer than the lion, especially when her cubs are taken from her, she represents the rage and cruelty with which they persecuted the Christians, who took from them, or diminished, the number of worshippers of their false divinities.

The beast's two wings were ignorance of the true God and the fable by which they invented so many gods. With these two wings it hovered successively over the whole earth before the coming of the Messiah. But when the gentiles or idolaters were called to the faith, God sent them the Apostles, who by the preaching of the Gospel took its wings from the beast; that is, they dispelled the general ignorance and put the truth in place of the ridiculous fables of Paganism. With this the multitude ceased to be a beast; it believed, and was given a man's heart with which to love God and neighbour.

Verse 5. "And I saw another beast, like a bear, which stood at its side; and it had in its mouth three rows of teeth, and they said to it: Arise, devour much flesh."

This second beast signifies Islam, or Mahometanism. A great many gentiles had already been converted when this false and monstrous religion arose and set itself beside the unconverted idolaters, to make them its own and hinder them from becoming Christians. It is represented to us under the form of a bear, a form which symbolizes quite exactly and vividly what the Mahometans are. The bear is extremely greedy for honey, an image by its sweetness of the pleasures of the flesh; and it is well known that the Mahometans procure these for themselves as much as or more than the most lascivious animals, permitting them and saying to each of their brutish followers: *devour much flesh!*… The bear of the vision had, says the Prophet, three rows of teeth to eat with; and to keep itself alive Mahometanism also has three: fiction, force and licence. Without them it would long ago have disappeared from the face of the earth.

Verse 6. "After this I looked, and behold, another beast like a leopard, and it had on its back four wings like a bird's; and this beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it."

The leopard has an ugly head, but it is a beast of beautiful colour and handsome appearance. It is fond of wine, cunning, rapacious, cruel, and so proud that it despises all the other animals. With all these qualities it comes to be a complete figure of false Christianity. Like the leopard, false Christianity is ugly in the head but has a pleasing outward show. Cunning, pride, rapacity and cruelty are proper to its followers, who are, besides, extremely fond of eating and drinking well. The beast had four wings, and with them false Christianity flew and spread to the four corners of the earth. It also had four heads, and each of them has its meaning.

The first signifies heresy, embracing in itself all the heresies there have been since the founding of true Christianity. The second is schism, which has devoured Greece, Armenia, Georgia, Palestine, Egypt, Russia and Asia. The third is hypocrisy, of which Saint Paul already spoke in his first to Timothy, saying to him: "In the last times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and to diabolical teachings, or doctrines of demons, who with hypocrisy will utter impostures, and will have their conscience seared (or blackened with crimes)" (1 Tim 4:1–2). And in the second he said to him: "But understand this, that in the last days perilous times will come; for men will arise who are lovers of themselves, or self-satisfied, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, wicked, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, dissolute, fierce, inhuman, traitors, froward, puffed up, and lovers of pleasure rather than of God; showing, yes, an appearance of piety or religion, but denying its power or virtue. Avoid such people" (2 Tim 3:1–5).

The fourth head is libertinism, that is, sensualism. Though it is the fourth, it must be considered the first and principal, for to it the others owed their existence, and through it they managed to survive. It is the most

smiling of all and the most full of beauties, with which it holds the unwary sons of Adam fascinated. With its flattering words and sweet wiles it grows familiar with men, Christian or not Christian. Among Catholics it suggests maxims that are not only foreign but contrary to those of Jesus Christ, and severely condemned in his holy Gospel; but it knows so well how to gloss them over that it manages to pass them off among Catholics as indifferent and even necessary, treating as prejudiced, ignorant and fanatical all who refuse to accept them. The result is that in many Catholics one no longer sees that faith by which the just man lives (Rom 1:17), but a dead faith, or, if you like, a mere faith of dry leaves \[*fe de hojarasca*, "leaf-litter faith", all show and no substance\], without any of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are, according to the Apostle, "charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, continence and chastity" (Gal 5:22–23). What is worse and more grievous, however, is that instead of these precious fruits one sees in many of them only the works of the flesh, which, according to the same Apostle, are: "adultery, uncleanness, immodesty, lust, idolatry (avarice), witchcraft, enmities, quarrels, jealousies, angers, brawls, dissensions, heresies, envies, murders, drunkenness, gluttony and the like; of which I forewarn you, as I have said before, that those who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19–21).

These Christians believe, it is true, the principal mysteries of Catholicism; but their faith is a barren faith, adjusted to their vanities and their sensuality. In their heart there lives and reigns not the spirit of Jesus Christ but that of the world and of "all that is in the world, which is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

For the instruction and undeceiving of these unhappy people, we must warn them with the Apostle that he who has not the spirit of Christ is not Christ's (Rom 8:9), and that to be his they must have crucified the flesh with all its vices and concupiscences (Gal 5:24). How far, then, from being true Christians are those who will not mortify themselves in anything or for anything; who, slaves of vanity, live only to see and be seen; and who, victims of pride, are victims also of the devil, who, as Job says, "is king over all the children of pride!" (Job 41:25 \[41:34\]). Instead of the good wheat they might have been in the fertile fields of the Church, they have turned into that accursed cockle which the enemy (the devil) sowed in the field of the householder. The Lord now permits it to be kept and to grow among the good wheat; but at harvest time he will say to the reapers (the Angels): "Gather first the cockle and bind it in bundles to burn it; but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt 13:30).

Verse 7. "…And behold, a fourth beast, terrible and wonderful and exceedingly strong; it had great iron teeth; it ate and broke in pieces, and what was left it trampled with its feet; but it was not like the other beasts that I had seen before, and it had ten horns."

This fourth beast, with its iron teeth and its ten horns, represents to us to the life Rationalism; and since this is a thing of the mind, no definite form or figure is given to the beast. But considering its effects, it is said to be terrible, wonderful and exceedingly strong; and so is Rationalism. The beast's iron teeth signify that with its errors Rationalism will break off and devour as many holy and sacred practices of Catholicism as it can; and what it cannot devour or annihilate it will trample on, that is, despise and ridicule, treating as fools and dupes all who practise the true Religion. Those who make up this beast acknowledge no God but their own reason, nor any worship but their whims, their enjoyments, their vices and iniquities. In this last they resemble those who make up the other beasts; but such is its ferocity and cruelty that on account of it the beast is unlike all the rest. The ten horns with which it is armed signify that it will exercise its power or empire over the whole earth, but will rule chiefly in ten kingdoms or nations. As this fourth beast is to be the most monstrous and fierce of the four, it will go on increasing its bulk or volume with the worst that there is and will be in the world until its end.

Verse 8. "I was considering the horns, when behold, another, smaller horn sprang up among them, and as soon as it appeared three of the first horns were plucked up; and in this little horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great or boastful things."

This little horn of the fourth beast signifies Communism. It is called little because it will be made up chiefly of the lower or common people \[*el menudo ó bajo pueblo*\]. Its eyes like those of a man are mentioned very aptly, for they give us to understand that the populace, greedy for riches, will fix its eyes on those of the powerful in order to snatch them away.

In three kingdoms Communism will grow so strong that they will tear the Government from them and seize it; this is what the three plucked-up horns signify. The mouth of the horn spoke great things; and the communist people \[*la gente comunera*\] will utter haughty and insulting words, especially when it sees that its undertakings have turned out to its liking, and in some places have surpassed its hopes.

Verse 11. "I was watching because of the noise of the haughty words that came from that little horn (or from Communism); but I saw that the beast had been slain, and its body thrown to burn in the fire."

Verse 12. "And that from the other beasts too dominion had been taken away, and the span of their life fixed for a time and a time."

Verse 13. "I was watching, then, in the night vision, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one who seemed the Son of Man (Jesus Christ), and he came to the Ancient of Days, and they presented him before him."

Verse 14. "And he gave him dominion and glory and kingdom; and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken from him, and his kingdom is indestructible."

The Four Beasts Joined in One

Don Felipe. You have now seen, Don José, what those four beasts mean that the prophet Daniel saw. I am now going to show you the agreement between that Prophet's vision and Saint John's, the latter uniting in a single beast what Daniel set forth by means of four. The Evangelist says:

"I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, which had seven heads and ten horns, and on its horns ten diadems, and on its heads names of blasphemy. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and its feet like a bear's, and its mouth like a lioness's. And the dragon (Lucifer) gave it his strength and his great power" (Rev 13:1–2).

This monstrous beast is the Antichrist. Saint John says that its body or form is like the leopard's, because of those who make it up most are Christians, either apostates or very wicked ones; its feet like a bear's, because they go about plagued with the same vices as the Mahometans; and its mouth, finally, like a lioness's, because they are voracious and cruel like the idolaters, and speak and follow the same errors, professing the idolatry of Reason, or of the Self: EGOLATRY.

It seems needless to point out to you that all we are saying of one beast and of four we are taking, and it must be taken, in a metaphorical sense. For just as David says: "Man, when he was in honour, did not understand; he has been compared to senseless beasts and become like them" (Ps 48 \[49\]:13 \[12\]), so we say that the men we are speaking of have become like the leopard, the bear and the lioness in their habits or vices. Though they have the look of men, their works are those of wild beasts rather than of men, and of the worst of beasts. The evil beast that Jacob believed had devoured his beloved Joseph (Gen 37:20, 33) was none other than the envy and malice of his brothers.

Those wicked and most evil men, then, personified in the beast with seven heads and ten horns, will utter and spread, by word and by writing, by means of the freedom of the press, sarcasms and blasphemies against God, against the Virgin and against the Saints; against heaven, against the church and holy things. "And they will think themselves able to change the times (of the solemnities) and the laws (or ceremonies)" (Dan 7:25). They will wage open, cruel and unceasing war on the true faithful, and many of these will fall under the

sharp dagger that their murderous hands will brandish. Not a few will surrender and give way to the fear those men inspire in them, worshipping the beast; but these will be only those *whose names are not written in the book of life* (Rev 13:8). For though it is true that they are called faithful, they are not so in their heart, in which lives and feeds the worm of unfaithfulness. And so, worm-eaten like fruit, as we said above, all those will fall to the ground, that is, into apostasy, at the first gust of the wind of persecution, who nourish in themselves the worm of love of pleasures, of comforts, of honour, of life, and the worm of lukewarmness which draws them back and away from prayer, from the Sacraments, and from the other means of salvation that God unceasingly provides them.

It would be another matter if they sought in everything and before everything and always, as they ought, the kingdom of God and his justice (Matt 6:33), so as to reach it. For then, however many and great their tribulations and dangers, God would deliver them from both; because it is written that "many are the tribulations of the just, but the Lord will deliver them from them all" (Ps 33 \[34\]:20 \[19\]). "He will cry to me, says God, and I will hear him kindly; I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him and fill him with glory" (Ps 90 \[91\]:15). So God deals with those who are faithful to him; and so, above all, he will deal with them when the last days come, the days of the great tribulation, greater than any there has been in the world since its beginning; days that will be cut short, so that those who are to be saved may not be lost (Matt 24:21–22).

The greatest danger, however, in my way of thinking, will not come from the beast with seven heads and ten horns, that is, from the corrupt and corrupting multitude, but from another beast of which Saint John speaks: "And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and it had two horns like a lamb's, but its speech was like the dragon's" (Rev 13:11). Saint Irenaeus calls this second beast the *hyperaspistes*, or shield-bearer, of the Antichrist, that is, of the beast with seven heads. It has precisely two horns of a lamb, the type of meekness, to give us to understand that the wicked crowd that will form the body of this second beast will present a pleasing and gentle look. Some by reason of their state, others by kinship, others by friendship, will say to the faithful what his friends said to Eleazar, who, moved by a false and cruel compassion for him, urged him to show himself compliant with the orders of the tyrant who wanted to force him to break the laws of his fathers (2 Macc 6:21).[1] As the faith of all those wretches will be a sleeping faith, or rather a dead one, and as they will have entirely forgotten Christ and the maxims of his Gospel, all their maxims, all their thoughts, all their affections and desires will be carnal, worldly, earthly, as the origin of the second beast indicates.

This beast, approving in practice the infernal conduct of the first, will counsel everyone, publicly and privately, to accommodate themselves to the circumstances of the times for the sake of peace (a false and accursed peace! In such cases Jesus Christ wants not peace but war, and he himself said that he brought us war \[Matt 10:34\]); that for the sake of peace they should take on their hands and their foreheads the mark of the beast, that is, declare themselves for it. Many will do so, apostatizing like cowards; but the faithful who are well instructed in their duties will answer with courage and daring what Saint Peter and Saint John answered the rulers, elders and scribes: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than him, judge for yourselves" (Acts 4:19).

This second beast, in short, will know how to join the goodness and meekness of the lamb with the speech of the dragon (Lucifer), so as to obtain craftily and treacherously that all the faithful give outward signs of respect and submission to its orders, however iniquitous they may be, if only out of fear of its sharp horns, that is, of the false prophets of whom Jesus Christ speaks to us, and who will lead many astray (Matt 24:11).

The last times, as is evident and as Saint Paul assures us, will be very perilous (2 Tim 3:1); and Jesus Christ says that the greatest of persecutions will take place then. Before, in fact, the faithful had to fight with one beast only, and they could count on the comfort and help of many who encouraged them and strengthened them for martyrdom. But then they will have to fight with two beasts, the second worse than the first; and

instead of finding someone to comfort and encourage them, they will find only seducers who will drag them into evil! Happy the man who does not let himself be led astray by words, nor overcome by threats! For if he perseveres to the end, *he will be saved* (Matt 24:13).

Saint John says that this second beast "will cause all men, small and great, rich and poor, free and slaves, to have a mark or seal on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except him who has the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of its name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding, then, reckon the number of the beast; for its number is the one formed by the letters of a man's name; and the number of the beast is six hundred and sixty-six (666)" (Rev 13:16–18). The expositors have laboured hard to explain this name, and here is how they reason. The numbers the Greeks use (Saint John wrote the Apocalypse in their language) are nothing but their own letters. These numeral letters, joined and combined with one another, must form some word, since they are letters. Therefore the word which, made up of Greek letters, gives the number 666 must in its turn express a name, and that will be precisely the name, or character, or proper mark of the beast, that is, of the Antichrist. One of these combinations gives exactly the Greek word *Arnoume* or *Arnouma*, which corresponds and is equivalent to the Latin *Abrenuntio* and the Spanish *Reniego*, "I renounce", "I deny".[2]

So, then, just as, to pass from the power of Satan to that of Jesus Christ and become his child, the Christian says in Baptism, *Abrenuntio Satanae*, "I renounce Satan", so, to apostatize, to go over to the party of emancipation, of independence, of the Antichrist, he will utter the same *Abrenuntio* in the opposite sense, saying these horrible words: "I renounce the Creator of heaven and earth, and his law; I renounce Jesus Christ, his doctrine and his Sacraments…" It is precisely in this formal apostasy from the Catholic religion once professed that the *solvere Iesum*, the "severing of Jesus", of which Saint John speaks elsewhere (1 John 4:3), consists. The sacred Text says that the apostates will bear the name or mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands, to denote the publicity and effrontery with which they will profess Antichristianity. The hands and the forehead are what is most visible and public in man, and at the same time they are the two most expressive symbols, the first of his way of acting, the second of his way of thinking. Once the bonds of faith, hope and charity are broken, and the hands and the forehead are unbound from Jesus, from truth and eternal wisdom, there is no doubt that thoughts and actions will be left in an extreme and scandalous liberty, unfitting and unworthy of children of God and even of rational beings, and worthy and proper only of senseless brutes and wild beasts: *Homo cum in honore esset non intellexit; comparatus est iumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis* (Ps 48 \[49\]:13 \[12\]).

With the name or number of the beast Saint John ends chapter 13; and then in verse 7 of the next he says that he heard an Angel crying out with a loud voice: "Fear the Lord and give him honour, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." This is the supreme and tremendous hour in which every human creature will appear, willing or unwilling, before the tribunal of the supreme and terrible Judge, and in which he will publicly give to each according to his works (Matt 16:27).

Verse 9. "…If anyone worships the beast and its image, and receives the mark on his forehead or on his hand,

Verse 10. "he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the sight of the Angels and Saints and in the presence of the Lamb.

Verse 11. "And the smoke of their torments shall go up for ever and ever, and they shall have no rest day or night, those who worshipped the beast and its image, nor anyone who received the badge of its name.

Verse 12. "Here will be seen the fruit of the patience of the Saints, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." And with a short time of suffering they escape eternal torments.

Verse 13. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (that is, for the cause of the Lord, or in his friendship and grace). Henceforth, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (Rev 14).[3]

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[4] *Natural History* VIII.17.

[1] The source gives "2 Macc 6:91" (a slip); the verse is 2 Macc 6:21.

[2] *Against Heresies* V.30.1–3.

[3] Rev 14:9–13.

The Call

Don José. In view of what you have just shown me with such wealth of evidence and no less clearness, after thanking you for it, I cannot but confirm myself in what we already agreed at the beginning of our talk: that the world is rushing on, and perhaps already stands at the edge of the abyss into which it will fall and disappear at the first breath of God's just indignation, or as soon as his angry hand, weary of holding it up, lets it go. It is truly horrifying to think of it!… But more horrifying still is to see how men give themselves up to a guilty drowsiness and criminal dissipation, instead of watching and praying so as not to enter or fall into temptation (Matt 26:41), as temptations and dangers grow thicker and more frequent, while the not distant and tremendous days of the great and most perilous tribulation draw near!!!… Trusting in the mercy of God and in the infinite merits of our adorable Redeemer, rooted as we are in the divine faith that we happily profess, I fear nothing for myself and my family from the seductions and persecutions of the Antichrist and his deluded forerunners or followers. But it grieves me and tears my heart to see already in our day that, though God wants to save us all, and Christians above all (1 Tim 2:4), there are so very many who let themselves be led astray by flattering suggestions, frivolous pretexts, deceitful theories and criminal pleasures. Do you not think, Don Felipe, that this is something to weep over, especially when seen from the point of view I have just mentioned?

Don Felipe. Indeed I do!… Your heart is torn at seeing it, and mine faints merely at thinking of it… That all that God has done and does for man should be made useless through man's own fault!… How much goodness on his side!… How much wickedness on ours!!!

God is our Lord, our Redeemer, our Father. He has created us and keeps us in being; he has redeemed us and has prepared an eternal happiness for us. Without the gift of creation we should not be; without that of preservation we should cease to be; without that of redemption we should be lost; without that of glorification, all that would be of no use to us. We are God's by right of creation and preservation; we are heirs of God by the grace the Father did us in sending us his Only-begotten; we are co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17) by the grace the Son did us in dying for us, and by the grace the Holy Spirit did us in sanctifying us to save us. We belong to the Father, we belong to the Son, we belong to the Holy Spirit; for whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Rom 14:8), who is one in essence and three in persons. In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Without him, without his grace, without his help, we can do nothing (John 15:5), we can say nothing, and we cannot even form a thought, because all our sufficiency, all our ability to think, speak and act, comes to us from God: *ex Deo est* (2 Cor 3:5).

And yet, though he has so many rights over us, though we are his by so many titles, though we can do nothing without him, most men live as if they owed him nothing; as if they had nothing to fear from his justice; as if they had nothing to hope from his goodness. Meanwhile the Lord, who is patient because he is eternal, says Tertullian,[1] does not and will not fail in his promises. He gives each one what belongs to him and is enough for him to work out his salvation, for he wills the salvation of all. He allows man to choose and to say and do whatever he thinks fit and wishes, because he created him free. But with the day of death the day of reckoning will come; and then man will acknowledge, willing or not, the authority of him whom he

would not acknowledge in life, and will receive from his just and indignant hand the kind and weight of punishment he has deserved!…

To enter into possession of the inheritance that Jesus Christ merited for himself and for us, it is needful, indispensable, necessary to obey God and the Church founded by him: this is the condition without which there is no salvation possible. “If you would enter into life (eternal), keep the commandments” (Matt 19:17). “If anyone will come after me,” the same Saviour had said before, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24). These last words need some explanation, and here are the three things we must note in them.

First. To deny oneself, mortifying and thwarting the three concupiscences of the world and the vices that proceed from them and drag us along if we give them free rein \[*si les soltamos la rienda*, “if we slacken the rein”\]. To deny oneself, then, is to curb the love of and inclination to sensual delights, the greed for riches and empty honour, and inner pride, correcting and mortifying one’s way of thinking and one’s own will, every presumption and every disordered appetite for distinctions, dignities and regard.

To deny oneself, says Origen, is to turn one’s desires, imaginings, wishes and concupiscences upside down, conforming oneself in everything to the will of God.[2] Do your sight, your hearing and your taste suggest to you, for example, that you see, hear and taste curious things, detractions and dainties, and take delight in them? Deny your senses those things you know to be forbidden, and tell them, saying to yourself: “I will not see, nor hear, nor taste anything but what the law of God allows me; for it is God I want to content and please, not my senses and my carnal appetites.” Concupiscence is like a tender and capricious child who lets himself be guided and led, not by reason, which he does not yet have, but by the demands of his senses and instincts. Perhaps he asks for a knife with which he might thoughtlessly hurt himself; but his mother, who is and must be all his reason and his guide, refuses it to him, or takes it out of his hands if he has managed to get hold of it. A man must do the same with his concupiscences, appetites and senses, refusing them or taking from them whatever can harm or injure him.

Second. For each to take up his cross. Since Jesus Christ carried his cross and died on it for us, it is very just and reasonable that each of us should take his own cross, suffering and dying in imitation of the Saviour and for love of him. The cross was the instrument of Jesus’ death, and the cross we are to carry must be the instrument of the death of our attachment to the things of this world. What kills the threefold concupiscence that wars in our members (Rom 7:23), that is what we must embrace and carry; not for a while, not for a day, but every day until death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8). Our cross has, and must have, four arms \[*cuatro ángulos*, literally “four corners”\]: first, poverty, either actual or in affection, that is, either real or at least of spirit; second, contempt, inner and outer, that is, of oneself and from others; third, pain, in all its kinds and causes; fourth, the grief the just man feels at seeing the sins his neighbours commit, according to the saying: *Peccata proximorum frixorium sunt sanctorum*, “the sins of their neighbours are the frying-pan of the saints.”

This grief or sorrow for the sins of others is so acceptable and pleasing to God that already in the Old Testament he commanded the prophet Ezekiel to mark with a sign of eternal salvation those who lamented the sins of the people: “Go through the midst of the city of Jerusalem,” he said to him, “and mark with the letter *tau* (which is a cross, +) the foreheads of the men who sigh and grieve over all the abominations committed in its midst” (Ezek 9:4). From this Cornelius a Lapide concludes that the cross is the mark of the saints and the elect, while voluptuousness (more proper to brutes than to men) is the mark of the impious and the reprobate: *Crux ergo est character sanctorum et electorum, voluptas vero est character impiorum et reproborum.* The cross, then, and the name or number of the beast of which we spoke above: here are the two signs or marks that form the distinctive badge or character of the good and the wicked, and at the same time the presage of the fate that awaits each.

Third. To follow Christ, imitating his virtues and putting into practice the examples of self-denial and mortification he gives us in carrying his own cross. For he has resolved not to acknowledge as disciples, nor admit to his company, those who do not make up their minds to imitate him, as he declares, telling us: *Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:27), nor is worthy of me (Matt 10:38) or of being with me.

Who, then, says Saint John Chrysostom, will not resolve to follow Christ the Son of God with determination? "You will not be," he tells us, "the first or the only ones to carry the cross and to suffer, even if it be martyrdom or death. I, your God, your King and Master, will go before you. I ask only that you follow; with this well understood, that besides the example to encourage you, I will give you strength so that you do not faint in following me, and may obtain the rest and the crown I have promised you, so that you may reach the goal I have set for you…"[3] Whoever wants to be saved, then, by truly following Jesus Christ must try, cooperating with the graces that he gives him, to be firm and constant in patience, in humility, in modesty and the other virtues in all the occurrences of life, never losing sight of Jesus, and thinking how he behaved in identical or similar cases.

To encourage and decide all men all the more to embrace his doctrine and follow his examples, here are three most effective reasons that he himself gives us, which leave the understanding entirely convinced and the will resolved.

1. "Whoever would save his soul (by acting against me) will lose it; but whoever loses his soul (for love of me) will find it" (Matt 16:25).

As if he said: The salvation of your soul, your eternal life, lies in denying yourselves, in carrying your cross, and in following me even to the point of losing for this cause, if need be, your temporal life, as I lost mine; and whoever loses it in this way certainly will not have lost it, for I will give it back to him bettered and eternal, and with it all the rest, honour, riches, friends and so on. For all these things, in fact, left or lost for love of him, he promises and assures us a hundredfold already in this life, and in the other, life eternal (Matt 19:29; Mark 10:30). Who, then, we may well repeat with Saint John Chrysostom, who will not resolve to follow Christ the Son of God with determination?… What does it matter that one risks losing for a time what one loves most, when one is sure of recovering it with increase, if not in this life then in the other? The farmer gladly deprives himself of the wheat he has safe in his granaries; he casts it on the earth and sows it with the probable hope of the harvest. With how much greater reason, then, ought the Christian to consent, should the case arise, to be deprived of his life, honours, riches and the rest, encouraged by the certain hope of obtaining eternal life and the riches of heaven?…

2. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul? Or what exchange can a man give to ransom it once it is lost?" (Matt 16:26).

As if he said: If instead of following me you give in to the suggestions of the infernal dragon and follow the maxims of worldly people, imitating their examples, despising my precepts and putting off my call, your soul will be lost infallibly and for ever!… And then what will it profit you to have obtained and enjoyed all they promised you and procured for you? What profit will those sensual delights and pleasures, those treasures, those honours and distinctions that you so long for and so pride yourselves on, bring to your unhappy soul then?… And to your body, which in its day will also go to burn with it, what good will those enjoyments and delights be that you now procure for it so eagerly?… Ah! They will be no comfort at all either to it or to your soul; rather they will be recalled to the soul to increase its rage and despair. "Remember," it was said to the rich glutton \[*rico Epulon*, the traditional Spanish name for the rich man of the parable, from Latin *epulo*, "feaster"\], "that you received good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus, on the contrary, evil things; and so he is now comforted and you are tormented" (Luke 16:25). "Everything passed away like a shadow," sinners say in hell, "and everything vanished like a shadow (Wis 5:9); the only reality left us, and which does not

pass, is a sharp, intense, eternal suffering!…"

Quite other and entirely different will be the lot of the just, because "they will live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord, and the Most High has care of them. Therefore they will receive from the hand of the Lord the kingdom of glory and a shining crown. He will protect them with his right hand, and with his holy arm he will defend them" (Wis 5:16–17). What a contrast between the reward of the elect and the punishment of the reprobate!… Who, then, let us repeat for the third time with Saint John Chrysostom, who will not resolve to follow Christ the Son of God with determination?

3. "The Son of Man is to come clothed in the glory of his Father and accompanied by his Angels to judge men; and then he will give to each according to his works" (Matt 16:27).

As if he said: With the standard of the cross in my hand I will come to judge the world;[4] and that same standard, which will remind the good, for their comfort, of the instrument with which I led them to victory and saved them, will remind the wicked, for their shame, of the ensign they deserted to follow Lucifer's and be lost with him. My cross will serve as the touchstone to recognize the true faithful and separate them from the false. Those who have embraced it with love, and carried theirs with constancy after me, I will set at my right hand as blessed of my Father and worthy to possess my kingdom. But those who neither followed me nor carried theirs, and looked on mine as a scandal, like the Jews, and as folly, like the pagans (1 Cor 1:23), I will place at my left hand, to curse them at once and cast them for ever into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41), whose side they followed…

This third and last reason that Jesus Christ puts forward must be for us the most powerful and effective spur to practise self-denial, to carry our own cross, however heavy it may seem or be, and to follow him in the practice of the virtues, even the most heroic. To encourage us to it, here is what he seems to be saying to us all, with the voice and tone of a Father and a Lord: "Come, my faithful and my children, deny yourselves; take up your cross with pleasure and joy; follow me promptly and steadfastly; for for these arduous and heroic works of yours I will praise, bless and reward you on the day of judgment before the whole world, taking you into my company to enjoy my glory. But those who shunned self-denial, who carried their cross with murmuring, repugnance and impatience, and who, far from following me, went after their concupiscences and followed the prince of darkness, these unhappy ones I cannot but declare unworthy to dwell with me in my kingdom, and hurl against them the thunderbolts of my just indignation, casting them for ever and ever into the devouring abyss of hell!…"

What an alternative, Don José! Either a happiness without end or measure, or an immeasurable and endless unhappiness!… In this there is no middle way. Eternity on both sides, but on the one an eternity of delights, on the other one of torments!… In the one, glory; in the other, hell!!!…

Don José. All this is truly worthy of our most serious reflection, Don Felipe, and fit at the same time to decide us to take, today and from today on, the road that the Saviour marked out for us all and himself followed. Today, I say, and from today on, because the day of the particular reckoning is drawing near for each of us, and that of the UNIVERSAL RECKONING, it seems, is not far off!!!… Would that all who aspire to the salvation of their souls might meditate on both these truths with the deliberation and preference they deserve! And would that all those who care little or nothing for the salvation of their own might likewise keep them before them and meditate on them!!!

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[1] Tertullian, *On Patience* 2–3, on God's patience.

[2] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* XII.24, on Matt 16:24, paraphrased.

[3] St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 55, on Matt 16:24–28, freely paraphrased.

[4] Matt 24:30.

Sequence

A Spanish verse paraphrase of the Dies irae, *given here line for line in plain English.*

The Sibyl and David say\ That on that day of wrath\ The great machine of the world\ Will be turned into ash.

How great will be the fear\ When Christ, with the badge\ Of judge, comes to take a strict\ Account of our life!

A terrible trumpet,\ Which will be heard\ Through all the world, will summon the dead\ To stand before the Throne.

Nature, filled\ With dread, and death itself,\ Will see how, to be judged,\ Every man rises again.

A Book will be brought forth\ In which will be seen written,\ To judge them all,\ The lives of every mortal.

Then, as the Judge takes his seat,\ The most hidden thing will be laid\ Open to sight, and there will be no guilty one\ On whom justice is not done.

What shall I do then, wretch that I am?\ Who will there be to plead for me,\ When at the supreme judgment\ The just man scarcely breathes?

King of tremendous majesty,\ You who give eternal life\ Freely, save me,\ Fount of divine pity.

Merciful Jesus, do not forget\ That for me was your coming\ Into the world; and so, that I\ Should lose you, do not allow.

In seeking me you grew weary;\ You suffered the ignominy\ Of the cross to redeem me:\ Let not your labours be in vain.

Just Judge of vengeance,\ Remit my faults\ Before that tremendous day\ Of your judgment comes.

I groan and weep as one accused,\ And I am ashamed at the sight\ Of my sins: my God,\ Pardon him who entreats you.

You who heard the Good Thief,\ And pardoned Mary (the Sinner),[1]\ In them you gave to me\ A firm and fixed hope.

My prayers are not worthy\ To obtain pardon;\ Deliver me from the eternal fire\ By your infinite goodness.

Place me among the chosen,\ Take me from the doomed,\ Setting me at your right hand,\ Where every good is found.

When the cursed are cast\ Into those unending flames,\ Call me with the blessed\ Of your Father, my Glory.

Humble and prostrate I beg you,\ My heart crushed\ Like ash, that I may obtain\ My good and my last end.

Mournful that day\ When man, who lay\ Turned to dust, rises again\ To have his life judged.

Pardon man, my God:\ Merciful Jesus, may the souls\ Obtain peace and rest,\ To go and enjoy the sight of you.\ Amen.

End of The Present Age.

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[1] *La Pecadora*. *Qui Mariam absolvisti*.