

On Speculative Theology and Eschatology

Please understand that my writings about the future are speculative eschatology, based on study and interpretation, not based on knowledge that is absolute or certain.

The Infallible

The truths of the Catholic Faith are found in Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium; these are the three pillars of truth in the Catholic Church. Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are Divine Revelation; they are the Sacred Deposit of Faith. The Magisterium teaches only from Tradition and Scripture; all truths taught by the Magisterium must be found, explicitly or implicitly, in Tradition or Scripture. Everything taught by Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium, explicitly or implicitly, is the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The faithful are required to believe not only the explicit teachings of the Magisterium, but also everything taught, explicitly or implicitly, by Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as the implicit teachings of the Magisterium. If anyone believes only the explicit teachings of the Magisterium, and not also all that is implied by those teachings, and not also all the teachings of Tradition and Scripture (as well as these can be understood in the absence of a magisterial teaching on any particular point), such a one as this has departed from the true Catholic Faith. Consider the ten commandments and all the teachings of the Old Testament. These have been binding from ancient times, long before the Magisterium ever existed. Consider the commandment of Christ: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also must you love one another.” (Jn 13:34). If anyone refuses to follow that commandment, or any other teaching of Sacred Scripture, until and unless the Magisterium teaches the same, he is refusing to worship and obey Christ. So the teaching of the Church is everything taught by Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as the teachings of the Magisterium, and not the magisterial teachings alone.

How does the Church teach? The Church teaches the faithful through Tradition, and through Scripture, and through the Magisterium. All that Sacred Tradition teaches is entirely infallible. All that Sacred Scripture teaches is entirely infallible. Anything and everything asserted by Sacred Tradition or by Sacred Scripture is certainly true. The Magisterium teaches infallibly in any of three ways: solemn definitions of a Pope, solemn definitions of an Ecumenical Council, and through the Universal Magisterium (when the body of bishops dispersed through the world, and the Pope, are in agreement on one position definitively to be held). At all other times, the Magisterium teaches non-infallibly.

The Catholic Faith needs the infallible teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium. Without these infallible teachings, the faithful would be easily led astray into falsehoods of every kind. The infallibility of these teachings is based upon the ultimate source of these teachings: God. For God is entirely infallible in all that He says and does and is. All infallibility is of God. There is no infallibility apart from God. When Tradition or Scripture or Magisterium teaches infallibly, it is truly God who is teaching. But not every aspect of the Catholic Faith is infallible.

The Non-infallible

Whenever the Magisterium teaches short of the conditions required for any of the three ways by which the Magisterium teaches infallibly, then the Magisterium teaches non-

infallibly. Apart from solemn definitions of the Pope, solemn definitions of an Ecumenical Council, and teachings of the Universal Magisterium, the Magisterium teaches non-infallibly and non-irreformably. The non-infallible teachings of the Magisterium are subject to a limited possibility of error, not to so great an extent that the faithful would be led away from the path of salvation, but not to so little an extent that only trivial errors would be possible. The term non-infallible means that there is a limited possibility of error. This limit is guaranteed by the work of the Holy Spirit within all authentic expressions of the Magisterium.

Any of the non-infallible teachings of the Magisterium may contain errors on particular points; some of the non-infallible teachings of the Magisterium do contain errors on particular points. When the teaching of the Pope falls short of the criteria for Papal Infallibility taught by the First Vatican Council, and reiterated by the Second Vatican Council, then his teaching is non-infallible and subject to a limited possibility of error. Some of the official teachings of the Popes, in official papal teaching documents such as encyclicals, contain some errors. Whenever the teaching of any Ecumenical Council falls short of the criteria for a solemn definition (which criteria must be similar to that for Papal Infallibility, except that it is the body of Bishops led by the Pope which teaches), then that teaching is non-infallible and subject to a limited possibility of error. Some of the official teachings of Ecumenical Council are non-infallible and may contain some errors. When the body of Bishops teaches apart from the Pope, or when a group of Bishops teaches, or when a local Bishop teaches, they exercise the Magisterium and yet their teaching is non-infallible and subject to a limited possibility of error.

Only the Magisterium teaches infallibly. Only the Magisterium teaches non-infallibly. The Magisterium teaches either infallibly or non-infallibly. No authentic expression of the Magisterium is fallible. However, apart from the teachings of Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium, all teachings and assertions are fallible; no matter how reliable or correct such a teaching may seem or may be, it is neither infallible nor non-infallible, but is properly called fallible.

The Fallible

Whenever a Pope teaches during his papacy, but as a private theologian, then his teaching is fallible, because he is not exercising the Magisterium at all, neither infallibly, nor non-infallibly. When the Pope teaches or makes an assertion, even on a matter of faith or morals, but not as an act of the Magisterium, such as in a sermon, or a lecture, or a book of private theology, then his teachings and assertions are fallible. No Pope, from Peter the first Pope to whomever will be the last Pope before the Return of Christ, no Pope at all is personally infallible. Any valid Pope is able to teach infallibly, but this true doctrine of Papal Infallibility does not guarantee the personal opinions or private theology of that same man, even while he is in office as the Roman Pontiff.

Here is a well-known example of a theological error made by Pope John XXII in his personal opinion:

“In the last years of John’s pontificate there arose a dogmatic conflict about the Beatific Vision, which was brought on by himself, and which his enemies made use of to discredit him. Before his elevation to the Holy See, he had written a work on this question, in which he stated that the souls of the blessed departed do not see God until after the Last Judgment. After becoming pope, he advanced the same teaching in his sermons. In this

he met with strong opposition, many theologians, who adhered to the usual opinion that the blessed departed did see God before the Resurrection of the Body and the Last Judgment, even calling his view heretical. A great commotion was aroused in the University of Paris when the General of the Minorites and a Dominican tried to disseminate there the pope's view. Pope John wrote to King Philip IV on the matter (November, 1333), and emphasized the fact that, as long as the Holy See had not given a decision, the theologians enjoyed perfect freedom in this matter. In December, 1333, the theologians at Paris, after a consultation on the question, decided in favor of the doctrine that the souls of the blessed departed saw God immediately after death or after their complete purification; at the same time they pointed out that the pope had given no decision on this question but only advanced his personal opinion, and now petitioned the pope to confirm their decision. John appointed a commission at Avignon to study the writings of the Fathers, and to discuss further the disputed question. In a consistory held on 3 January, 1334, the pope explicitly declared that he had never meant to teach aught contrary to Holy Scripture or the rule of faith and in fact had not intended to give any decision whatever. Before his death he withdrew his former opinion, and declared his belief that souls separated from their bodies enjoyed in heaven the Beatific Vision."¹

The Pope taught, in a number of sermons while he was Pope, and in a book written prior to becoming Pope, an erroneous theological opinion. Some theologians then also taught this error. In my view, the Pope is never permitted by God to fall into heresy, even in his personal opinions. But this point of doctrine was not yet taught definitively by the Magisterium, and so it was not an heretical error. A subsequent Pope, Benedict XII, then defined as a required belief of faith that all the souls in Heaven have the Beatific Vision of God as soon as they enter Heaven, not only after the general Resurrection. This teaching of Pope Benedict XII is infallible, either under Papal Infallibility or under the Universal Magisterium (since it is now universally taught by the Pope and the Bishops), or both. But the personal opinion of Pope John XXII, and any personal opinion of any Pope, erroneous or correct, is fallible. The ordinary teaching of any Pope, as an act of the Magisterium, not as a personal opinion, but also not as an infallible solemn definition, is non-infallible. The Pope can teach infallibly (no possibility of error), or non-infallibly (limited possibility of error), or fallibly (the usual possibility of error of any believer, except not to the extent of heresy).

Individual Bishops and groups of local Bishops cannot teach infallibly. The teaching of any Bishop, as an act of the Magisterium, is non-infallible. The teaching of any Bishop, apart from an exercise of the authentic ordinary Magisterium, is fallible. All personal opinions and private theology of any Bishop or group of Bishops is fallible. Just as a Pope is fallible in his personal opinions and writings, so also is each and every Bishop or group of Bishops.

Currently, some Bishops teach that Catholics must vote for whichever candidate has the better position on abortion, while other Bishops teach that the Catholic voter may take into account other issues, and may sometimes vote for the candidate who has the worse position on abortion. These disparate teachings are being presented to the faithful by various Bishops, not as theological opinion, but as acts of the ordinary non-infallible Magisterium. But these disparate teachings are irreconcilable. Therefore, in this case, some of the Bishops are teaching error under the non-infallible Magisterium. The ordinary Magisterium is non-infallible and subject to a real possibility of error; such errors are not limited to what is merely trivial, but they also cannot reach to such an extent as to lead the faithful away from the path of salvation.

From time to time, one Bishop or a few Bishops will go astray from the teachings of the Church to the extent of heresy. But when this occurs, these Bishops are no longer in communion with the Pope and the body of Bishops, and so their teachings are not at all an exercise of the authentic ordinary non-infallible Magisterium. Thus the non-infallible Magisterium never errs to the extent of heresy, even when exercised authentically by an individual Bishop. All heretical teachings are necessarily not an exercise of the Magisterium. Any Bishop who commits formal heresy is thereby excommunicated, and so he can no longer exercise the authentic non-infallible Magisterium at all. Even if a Bishop teaches material heresy without realizing that it is heresy (i.e. material but not formal heresy), this teaching is not an act of the Magisterium. The Bishop is not thereby excommunicated (since it is not formal heresy), but the teaching is not of the Magisterium.

Priests, deacons, and religious can never exercise the Magisterium, neither infallibly, nor non-infallibly. Only a person validly ordained to the Episcopal degree can possibly exercise the Magisterium. Theologians, no matter how great their credentials, their acclaim, or their learning, can never exercise the Magisterium. Even a Pope or Bishop, if he is writing as a private theologian, does not exercise the Magisterium. Lay persons, no matter how holy and blessed by God they may be, cannot exercise the Magisterium. All non-Bishops are unable to exercise the Magisterium and unable to teach either infallibly or non-infallibly. All non-Bishops can only teach fallibly.

The Necessity of All Three

Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II each published books as private theologians during their respective papacies. They each found it good to write and teach fallibly, even though each man knew that he had the ability to teach infallibly, or to teach non-infallibly. Both these holy Popes found it good to teach by means of theological opinion, even while knowing that their opinion was fallible, and even though they could have chosen to teach infallibly. This is a lesson for all the faithful. The Catholic Faith does not consist solely in what is infallible, nor even solely in what is infallible and what is non-infallible together. The Catholic Faith consists in the infallible, the non-infallible, and the fallible, all working together as we imitate and follow Christ, sincerely but imperfectly.

Consider the infallible solemn definitions of doctrine by Popes and Ecumenical Councils. These teachings are infallible and are required beliefs. To obstinately doubt or reject any of these teachings is heresy. Yet our understanding of these teachings is fallible. Our understanding of any of the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium is fallible. Our application of the teachings of the Faith to our lives is fallible. If we omit or reject all that is fallible, then we would have to omit or reject our own understanding and application of every teaching, and then we would no longer be disciples of Christ at all. You cannot be a believing practicing Catholic without all three: the infallible, the non-infallible, the fallible.

Some Catholics are uncomfortable with the idea that not everything in the Catholic Faith is infallible. They imagine that all teachings of the Magisterium are infallible. They don't understand that the ordinary teachings of the Magisterium are non-infallible. They consider that it is better to believe only what the Magisterium explicitly states, and to ignore the teachings of Tradition and Scripture because their understanding of Tradition and Scripture is fallible. They fail to realize that their understanding of magisterial teachings is also fallible. If they were to carry this process of rejecting all that is fallible to its logical conclusion, they

would have to reject their own fallible use of reason and their own fallible understanding of all that the Magisterium teaches, leaving them bereft of both faith and reason.

Are you uncomfortable with the idea that some teachings are non-infallible, that the teaching of priests, religious, and theologians is fallible, and that any person's understanding of even an infallible teaching is fallible? Get comfortable with it, or live with that discomfort. You are unable to believe and practice the Catholic Faith without all three: the infallible, the non-infallible, and the fallible. If you begin by rejecting all that is fallible, you will end by rejecting even what is infallible. Then you will have no faith at all.

Only when we enter Heaven, and so have the beatific vision of God immediately and forever, only then will everything that we believe be known with absolute certitude. In this life, we live by faith and reason, and so what we believe is subject to possible error. Even so, we are able to follow Christ and to reach Heaven, for God is loving and merciful.

The Fallibility of Theology

Theology is distinct from the Magisterium. When the Pope or the Bishops teach as an exercise of the Magisterium, they are not writing theology, they are teaching with authority. They may well use ideas and terminology found in Catholic theology; they may well draw upon various theological works. But theology itself is never an act of the Magisterium. When the Pope publishes a book of theology, or gives a series of lectures of theology, he is acting as a private theologian, not in his official capacity as Pope. As a result, his theology, and the theology of any Bishop, is fallible, since it is not an act of the Magisterium.

Roman Catholic theology seeks to find and express the truths found, explicitly and implicitly, in Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium. Not every truth of the Faith has been taught by the Magisterium. Many truths of the Faith are found in Tradition and Scripture, but not found in any explicit statement by the Magisterium. Many of the truths of the Faith are implicit in Tradition and Scripture, and so a prayerful yet fallible interpretation is needed in order to discern these truths.

Even the teachings of the Magisterium include both explicit teachings and implicit teachings; the Magisterium teaches, but these teachings imply various conclusions that are not explicitly stated. The teachings of the Magisterium must always be interpreted and understood in the light of the teachings of Tradition and Scripture and past teachings of the Magisterium. This interpretation and understanding of any explicit teaching of the Magisterium in the light of other teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium results in implicit teachings.

For example, the Magisterium teaches that lying is intrinsically evil and always immoral. The Magisterium need not issue a teaching for every type or instance of lying, such as lying with this intention, or lying in that circumstance. The teaching that lying is intrinsically evil implies that it is always immoral, in any circumstance, with any intention. In another example, the Magisterium teaches that direct and voluntary abortion is intrinsically evil and always gravely immoral. This teaching implies that direct abortion is intrinsically evil and always gravely immoral, even for the purpose of saving the life of the mother. This teaching also implies that the faithful should oppose abortion by the way that they vote, that they should support and help women who have a troubled pregnancy (even if conceived outside of marriage), and that they should argue against abortion and try to change the minds and hearts of those who favor abortion. The Magisterium does not tell the faithful in every case

exactly what to do and say. The faithful must draw conclusions, both about implied teachings and about how to live according to these teachings. Thus the teachings of the Magisterium include both what is explicitly taught and what is implied by that teaching. And the same is true of the teachings of Tradition and Scripture.

Roman Catholic theology can be divided into areas according to the object of its consideration. The teaching of the Church is on faith and morals. Moral theology considers the teachings on morals; and dogmatic theology considers the teachings on faith. The term speculative theology is used when theology seeks the truths implicit in the Sacred Deposit of Faith (Tradition and Scripture), but not taught by the Magisterium; this type of theology considers ideas that are not required beliefs.

All theology is fallible, but not all theology is speculative. When theology presents the clear teachings of the Magisterium, or the clear teachings of Tradition or Scripture, then that theology is not speculative.

[John]

{13:34} I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also must you love one another.

The faithful have always been required to believe and practice this commandment, even before any magisterial documents were written referring to it. In the early Church, and for many centuries, the Magisterium had very few documents, and very few definitive decisions on doctrine. The faithful mainly lived by Tradition and Scripture. And yet the early Church fathers often condemned certain persons by name as heretics for departing from the clear teaching of Tradition or Scripture on important matters of faith or morals. Therefore, required beliefs are not limited to explicit teachings from the Magisterium, but also include the clear teachings of Tradition and Scripture. All the faithful are required to believe, not only the teachings of the Magisterium, but also the teachings of Tradition and Scripture. And so, when theology teaches from the clear teachings of Tradition, or Scripture, or Magisterium on faith or morals, this theology is fallible, but not speculative. When any member of the faithful attempts to understand a teaching of Tradition, Scripture, or the Magisterium, his understanding is fallible, but not speculative.

When theology considers the truths plainly taught by Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, it is still not an act of the Magisterium; therefore, all theology is fallible. Suppose that a theologian writes about the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, after quoting the dogma itself, he necessarily makes a series of assertions about the dogma, the different ways that it might be understood and expressed, its relationship to other teachings and to our own lives, and all of these assertions are fallible. But these assertions are not properly called speculative, because they are assertions about a clearly taught doctrine of the faith.

When the Pope or the Bishops teach as an act of the Magisterium, they are not writing theology; they are teaching authoritatively. Theological assertions are not acts of the Magisterium, and acts of the Magisterium are not mere theological assertions.

Speculative Theology

Theology is speculative when it seeks truths found implicitly in Tradition or Scripture, and not yet taught by the Magisterium. Speculative theology considers open questions, not yet answered by the Magisterium, and not clear from Tradition and Scripture. However, if the

teaching of Tradition or of Scripture is explicit, even in the absence of a particular statement from the Magisterium, theology on that point is not speculative.

Even when a teaching is a required belief, some related questions may remain speculative. For example, it is a dogma of faith and a required belief that the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary preserved her from original sin. But it is an open question as to whether her conception occurred in a miraculous and virginal manner, as I believe, or in the usual manner of natural marital relations.

Some of the faithful think that theology should do nothing other than explain what the Magisterium teaches. But this idea is based on a misunderstanding of the Catholic Faith. All the faithful are called to seek truth within Tradition and Scripture, as well as within the teachings of the Magisterium. The Catholic Faith is not merely the teachings of the Magisterium, but also the teachings of Tradition and Scripture, even when these have not been explicitly stated by the Magisterium. All the faithful must develop, and rely partly upon, speculative theology and pious opinion in order to understand the Faith and in order to apply that understanding to their own lives.

Some of the faithful have a low opinion of speculative theology (and even of all theology). This is partly the fault of the many theologians who have used the discipline of theology in order to undermine and contradict the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium. But the discipline of theology is indispensable to the Church, despite being fallible and speculative. Some of the faithful think that they can live by faith without reason, or by the teachings of the Magisterium alone, without any speculative theology or pious opinion.

This idea of faith without reason has been rejected by the Magisterium. The First Vatican Council definitively taught that both faith and reason work together to establish the foundations of the Catholic Faith and to develop and illuminate its teachings.

“Not only can faith and reason never be at odds with one another but they mutually support each other, for on the one hand right reason established the foundations of the faith and, illuminated by its light, develops the science of divine things; on the other hand, faith delivers reason from errors and protects it and furnishes it with knowledge of many kinds.”²

The idea of faith without reason was also refuted at length in the encyclical of Pope John Paul II called ‘Faith and Reason’ (Latin: *Fides et Ratio*). Several quotes from this encyclical, with commentary, follow.

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).”³

Although reason is fallible, reason is also essential in the search for truth and in the contemplation of truth.

“The Bishop of Hippo succeeded in producing the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology, embracing currents of thought both Greek and Latin. In him too the great unity

of knowledge, grounded in the thought of the Bible, was both confirmed and sustained by a depth of speculative thinking. The synthesis devised by Saint Augustine remained for centuries the most exalted form of philosophical and theological speculation known to the West.”⁴

The Pope uses the example of the philosophy and theology of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, to show that speculative thinking is important to the Church and to the Catholic Faith. Theological speculation is not to be despised or rejected merely because it is fallible. Philosophy uses reason to consider questions similar to those considered by theology. Theology and philosophy use faith and reason in order to seek the truths of God and Creation.

“Other modes of latent fideism appear in the scant consideration accorded to speculative theology, and in disdain for the classical philosophy from which the terms of both the understanding of faith and the actual formulation of dogma have been drawn.”⁵

The term fideism is from the Latin word for faith (*fides*), and so fideism can also be called faith-ism. This latent fideism rejects reason (along with philosophy and speculative theology), and claims to live the Catholic Faith by faith alone; it is called latent because it is hidden, and often implied but not stated. Notice that the Pope specifically criticizes those who would give little or no consideration to speculative theology; he points out that the understanding of dogma and the formulation of dogma (infallible teachings of the Church) often depend upon philosophy and speculative theology for terminology, and for the distinctions and insights implied by that terminology. Doctrines often develop in the Church, first as pious opinion and speculative theology, then as non-infallible doctrine, and next perhaps even as infallibly taught dogma. And so dogma and doctrine often arise from what begins as speculative opinion.

“Theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of Revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative enquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.”⁶

The *auditus fidei* is the hearing of faith, and the *intellectus fidei* is the understanding of faith. Theology listens to Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, with faith, and then responds with faith. But reason is used in both understanding what is heard and in expressing that understanding.

“Speculative dogmatic theology thus presupposes and implies a philosophy of the human being, the world and, more radically, of being, which has objective truth as its foundation.”⁷

Pope John Paul II considers the speculative nature of theology to apply even to dogmatic theology, such that theology may begin with a dogma (which is not at all speculative), and then go on to speculate about its further implications and about related truths. The use of reason, by means of philosophy, accompanies this speculative theology. And so, what is expressed in speculative theology is not merely a repetition of the dogma that Magisterium

has explicitly stated. Rather, new insights are sought and expressed, which seek the whole truth about God and Creation using both faith and reason.

“We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises.”⁸

Again, the teaching of Pope John Paul II plainly rejects the idea that any and all speculative thinking is useless, or dangerous, or unnecessary to the belief and practice of the Faith.

“In concluding this Encyclical Letter, my thoughts turn particularly to theologians, encouraging them to pay special attention to the philosophical implications of the word of God and to be sure to reflect in their work all the speculative and practical breadth of the science of theology. I wish to thank them for their service to the Church.”⁹

The Pope specifically instructed theologians to be certain to include in their work both speculative theology and philosophy (the application of reason to ideas about God and Creation). The idea of faith without reason, or the idea of theology without any speculation, is contrary to this instruction to theologians from the Pope. If anyone says that theologians should not use both faith and reason, or that they should not engage in speculative theology, he contradicts this instruction from the Roman Pontiff to all theologians.

Therefore, speculative theology, and the use of reason along with faith, is not to be rejected by theologians, nor by the faithful.

Writing Theology

Theology can be written using a number of different approaches.

One approach is to survey the entire history of the writings of the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church on the topic in question. The theologian then draws conclusions based on these sources. This approach is useful, but also has weaknesses. The approach sometimes errs by assuming that the majority opinion throughout history is the correct opinion, ignoring any development of doctrine that may be taking place, or ignoring theological works outside of the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints. Sometimes a Saint writing many centuries ago will express an incorrect position on a matter of faith or morals, because he or she lacked the knowledge of subsequent teachings of the Magisterium, or of subsequent development of doctrine within the body of the faithful.

A variation of this approach merely surveys the history of magisterial documents on the topic in question. This approach can err by ignoring the sources of Tradition and Scripture, or by misinterpreting the magisterial documents in question. All the teachings of the Magisterium are from Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, and must be understood in the light of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. Magisterial teachings do not stand on their own. Also, both approaches tend to limit faith and reason to an interpretation of a limited set of written sources. What is lacking is a prayerful and grace-led search for new insights into Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium, so as to use and yet transcend any set of written sources. A mere legalistic interpretation of magisterial written statements does not result in an understanding of the true Gospel.

Another approach is to attempt to prove each and every point offered by a theological work by means of quotes and citations. The problem here is that nothing is treated as a part of the Catholic Faith unless it is written and quoted. Again, a prayerful and grace-filled search for new insights into the Catholic Faith is lacking. In truth, the Sacred Deposit of Faith (Tradition and Scripture) is lived by all the faithful, so much so that, if all the written sources disappeared from the world, nothing of the Faith would truly be lost because all the truths of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium are lived by the faithful, by the entire body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit. And there are many mysteries within the Faith that are beyond expression in human language and beyond complete comprehension by the human mind. And so limiting theology to what can be proved by pedantic citation is a severe limit indeed.

A better approach is first to live the Faith. The theologian must be a believing and practicing Catholic Christian, who understands the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium by living them in prayer, self-denial, and works of mercy. In this way, he understands the living Tradition by being immersed in it; he understands the words of Scripture by putting those words into action; he understands the teachings of the Magisterium by disobeying the world in order to obey the Church. Subsequently, the theologian can then write theology that relies upon a prayerful consideration of written sources (from Fathers, Doctors, and Saints, as well as many other holy persons with less acclaim), and of Sacred Scripture, and of magisterial documents, but which also relies upon an experience of living the faith that is beyond words. In this way, the theologian can write from Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture without always having to cite a written source.

Thus, good theology will not always have a footnote for every paragraph, or a proof from a magisterial document for every assertion. And good theology will not always agree with the majority opinion, or with the most common conservative view, or with the most common liberal view. Instead good theology seeks any and all of the truths found within with the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, including those truths that are implicit, those truths that are not widely-known or widely-accepted, those truths that are widely contradicted by the world and by worldly Christians, and those truths that have previously lain hidden within the rich Deposit of Faith. Good theology includes some speculation, which seeks new and even surprising insights into this same Sacred Deposit of Faith. If the search is sincere, the reader will be edified not only by the theological conclusions, but by participating in the prayerful search itself. And so good theology necessarily relies upon both faith and reason, upon both the definitive teachings of the Faith and a prayerful understanding of truths not yet definitively taught. Thus there is a speculative aspect to all good Roman Catholic theology.

The Role of Eschatology

Eschatology is a field within theology that considers the future of the Church and the world, and especially the time period of the tribulation prior to the Return of Christ. Certain truths, which are both taught by Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium and considered by eschatology, are essential to the Catholic Faith. Among these are the truths that the Church will pass through a time of suffering (the tribulation), that Christ will Return (the Second Coming), and that the dead will be raised (the general Resurrection).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains teachings on Eschatology:

“Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers.... The Antichrist’s deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment.... The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection.”¹⁰

Christ himself gave an eschatological discourse. He taught about the future of the Church, about the tribulation, about his Return, and about the Resurrection. This discourse is found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The Epistles of the New Testament also contain various eschatological teachings, which mention the future sufferings of the Church, the Return of Christ, and the general Resurrection. Many of the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church, throughout its entire history, have written eschatology. Therefore, eschatology is an important and even an essential part of the Gospel message and the Catholic Faith. Whoever completely rejects all eschatology rejects the teaching of Christ and His Church.

Pope Paul VI spoke on the importance of eschatology at the Special World Conference on Futures Research (1973). While some of the faithful have a low regard for any writings in the field of eschatology, the Pope urged the children of the Church to study eschatology as a way to prepare themselves for their own final meeting with the Creator:

“We are aware of the general theme of the Conference: the study of man and his future ... this time you have addressed yourselves to the values which man, as a rational being, bears within himself and which he strives to bring to full realization. In this field the Church, as the bearer of a transcendent and revealed doctrine, certainly has something to say. She already possesses a science concerning future and final realities, the science of eschatology, and she continually urges her children to study the sublime truths which it embodies, so that they may prepare themselves for the final and decisive meeting with the Creator.”¹¹

Notice that the Pope describes eschatology as “a science concerning future and final realities.” It is a science in the broader sense of the word, a field of study and knowledge. Now eschatology, more so than many other areas of theology, is generally speculative. Yet the Pope refers to eschatology as a science, and the Church continually urges her children to study the sublime truths which eschatology embodies. Therefore, if anyone claims that eschatology is foolish or dangerous, or that it does not embody truths, or that it is not a field of knowledge, or that we should never study the future of the Church and the world, then he is contradicted by these words of Pope Paul VI, as well as by Christ’s own words in His eschatological discourse. If anyone rejects eschatology on the basis that it is fallible, or on the basis that it is speculative, then he has gone astray from the teaching of the Church. For though eschatology is fallible and generally speculative, it is not to be rejected as a field. Even the definitive teachings of the Catholic Faith cannot be understood, taught, and lived, without fallible reason, nor without speculative theology and pious opinion.

The Speculative Nature of Eschatology

Apart from those few teachings within eschatology that are required beliefs of the Catholic Faith, eschatology is generally speculative. These theological considerations and conclusions about the future are pious opinion based upon study and interpretation. Even if a predicted eschatological event occurs when and as expected, so that everyone agrees that

this particular point of eschatology was correct, it remains in the realm of speculative theology, not dogma or doctrine. And if a set of eschatological conclusions about future dates and events is not entirely correct, but contains some correct and some incorrect points, no one should be surprised or upset.

Now although it is speculative, eschatology is not guesswork. And although it is opinion, eschatology is not baseless. Good Roman Catholic eschatology is based on the prayerful study and interpretation of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, and even on reliable sources of private revelation. The conclusions reached by this study are not baseless guesses, but they are fallible opinion, not articles of faith. In so far as any conclusion or any work of eschatology is speculative theology, the faithful are free to disagree or to ignore those particular conclusions and any particular work. However, they are not free to claim that eschatology as a whole is foolish, or harmful, or to be disregarded, because Christ himself gave an eschatological discourse and because the Church urges all of her children to learn from the science of eschatology.

Although the science of eschatology is fallible and generally speculative, eschatology does seek and can find truths: about future and final realities, and even about the timing and order of future events. Nothing is speculative to God. He knows the entire future, including all future dates and events. Now the future may seem conditional to us in this life; and in some sense for us it is conditional, based on our response or failure to respond to grace, based on our free will decisions. But it would be contrary to the required beliefs of the Catholic Faith to claim that God is not all-knowing, or that He is not so all-powerful as to be able to know the entire future. For even our future free will decisions and all our future prayers and responses to grace are known by God. The entire future, every event and its time and order in every detail, is known by God with absolute certainty. As a result, speculative eschatology is not a vain pursuit; truths about the future can be known, and these truths are from God, through Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, and even through some private revelations.

But some persons claim that only God can have knowledge of future events and dates. To the contrary, all the faithful in Heaven, even the very least souls, have the Beatific Vision of God. As a result, they too can know some truths about future dates and events with certainty (even though they do not know the entire future all at once, as God does). The Virgin Mary has spoken in many different true private revelations about the future, including the mention of certain dates, and the timing and order of certain events. And many Saints, throughout the history of the Church, have taught the faithful about the future of the Church. Therefore, not only God, and not only the Blessed in Heaven, but even we mere weak and mortal sinners here on earth can seek and find true knowledge about the plan of God for the future of the Church and the world.

Although eschatology is generally speculative, it is not without limits imposed by both faith and reason. The theologian is obliged to refrain from any opinions or speculations within eschatology that would conflict with any definitive teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium. For example, he cannot conclude that the Church will be completely destroyed by the tribulation, or that the Church will depart from the true Faith, because this conflicts with the teaching that the Church is indefectible. He cannot conclude that a future valid Pope will become evil, teach heresy, and then lead astray the Church, for much the same reason. But as long as any eschatology is compatible with the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, then these speculations are a good and useful search for truth about the future of the Church and the world.

The reader should expect that any work of eschatology will contain some errors, because eschatology is fallible and speculative. Therefore, if a few errors are found within any work of eschatology, no one would be justified in concluding that the entire work is incorrect, or worthless, or dangerous. Some of the faithful have taken the view that a few errors in a work of eschatology justify its condemnation. Some would even go so far as to condemn any work of theology on any topic, if it contains a few errors. In effect, such persons are unjustly judging against all that is fallible. (But they themselves are fallible, and therefore they are condemning themselves; Romans 2:1.) All works of theology are fallible and may contain errors. All good theology includes some prayerful speculative opinion. Within a set of works by any theologian, no matter how holy or how learned, there are bound to be a number of errors.

The faithful can avoid being harmed by these errors by giving Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium its proper place above all theology and above pious opinion. And they can avoid being harmed by these errors by reading the works of numerous different theologians, from the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church, to humble present-day theologians. By having numerous sources upon which to rely, they then avoid any misunderstandings due to any possible errors in any single theologian's work. Finally, perhaps the best way for the faithful to make use of theology, including speculative theology, is to read and to consider any work prayerfully, in cooperation with God's grace, while being led by both faith and reason.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote a work called the *Summa Theologica*. Even now, hundreds of years later, this work remains one of the preeminent works of Catholic theology in the history of the Church. The work contains numerous theological assertions on faith and morals, which explain the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium. The work also contains numerous speculative theological assertions, based on both faith and reason. A number of non-Christian philosophical works played a major role in the development of St. Thomas' theology. The *Summa Theologica* is still today a good example to theologians on how to approach theology.

Yet this work contains a number of substantial errors, as well as some lesser errors. One of the substantial errors is the following statement: "If the soul of the Blessed Virgin had never incurred the stain of original sin, this would be derogatory to the dignity of Christ, by reason of His being the universal Saviour of all."¹² This error was not a heresy at the time that St. Thomas wrote it, since the Magisterium had not yet decided the question of the Immaculate Conception. But currently this error is a heresy. It is an article of faith and a required belief that the soul of the Blessed Virgin had never incurred the stain of original sin. Yet despite this serious theological error, and some other lesser errors, the entire work is not rejected by the Church, but rather continues to hold a venerable place as an insightful work of theology, despite its fallibility.

The Usefulness of Eschatology

For the Christians of every generation, eschatology is useful for a number of reasons.

First, eschatology includes the teachings of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium on the Return of Christ and on the general Resurrection. These future events are articles of faith, which give us hope that the sinful secular world will not be victorious in the end, but that Christ and Christianity will be the ultimate victors in the course of human history. These teachings

of eschatology give us a firm faith that Christ will return, and will set all things in proper order, and will grant to us a resurrection like His own glorious Resurrection. For the hope of eternal life is ultimately not the life of the disembodied soul in Heaven, but finally of the soul united with its now glorified body, so that the whole human person lives forever, with the Beatific Vision of God.

Second, eschatology includes the teachings of the Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium on the tribulation, a time of suffering through which the Church on earth must pass, in order to arrive at the glory of the Return of Christ and of the general Resurrection. For Christ himself first suffered so that He might enter into His glory. And the Church, as the bride of Christ, also must suffer a type of Passion and Crucifixion, in imitation of the Passion and Crucifixion of her Lord. This teaching of eschatology is useful to every generation, since, in addition to the tribulation itself, the Church and her members suffer, just as Christ suffered, in every generation. By knowing that the Church must suffer the tribulation, the faithful can relate the sufferings of every life and of every generation to that greater suffering of the Church at the tribulation, and to that greatest suffering of Christ in salvation history. For by considering the future of the Church, we consider anew the past of the Church, and the beginning of the Church during the Ministry and Passion of Christ.

Third, by speculating on the possible sufferings and glories of the Church in the future, not only at the tribulation and the Return of Christ, but at any time in the future, the faithful are moved to consider their own possible future sufferings and glories in Christ. For the sufferings of any life are a small reflection of the sufferings of the Church as a whole, which are then a great reflection of the one true sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Thus, by speculating on all of the possible events in the future, along the path to the Return of Christ for the general judgment and general Resurrection, the faithful are moved to consider also all of the possible events in their own future, along the path to their own particular judgment by God upon their death.

Fourth, by prayerfully considering the entire future path of the Church, through suffering unto glory, the faithful can avoid falling into despair due to the sinfulness found in the world and among many Christians. For they will consider that the Church's path, despite sin and suffering, progresses inexorably, through the tribulation, to the Return of Christ, and finally to the glory of the general Resurrection.

Fifth, knowledge of the future path of the Church gained through the science of eschatology assists the faithful in recognizing and rejecting false claims of private revelation. Such claimed private revelations often misuse the science of eschatology, making claims about the future that are false and even contrary to the teachings of the Faith. For example, some false private revelations claim that a future validly elected Pope will become an antipope, or will become a heretic and lead astray the entire Church, or will even become the Antichrist. All these false claims are easily refuted by a study of Catholic eschatology along with a proper understanding of Catholic doctrine about the Pope and the Church.

Therefore, even when eschatology is speculative, but especially when that speculation is closely related to those few future events which are not themselves speculative (the tribulation, the Return of Christ, the general Resurrection), the faithful can be edified and can increase in their imitation of Christ by means of a prayerful consideration of eschatology.

But there is one more important consideration. The Christians of the generations that will suffer through the tribulation benefit in a special way from the knowledge sought by speculative eschatology. Now theologians often consider the tribulation to be divided into two parts, called the lesser and greater tribulation, or called the first and second parts of the tribulation. The Christians of those two periods of time can derive a special benefit from speculative eschatology. Even though the science of eschatology is generally speculative and fallible, some beneficial knowledge can be obtained from eschatology. This knowledge does not have absolute certitude, but neither does most of the knowledge used by every human person in their daily life. If we were to reject all knowledge that is fallible, we would be unable to function in daily life and so be unable to follow Christ. There are particular benefits from this knowledge for those Christians living in the time period of the first or second parts of the tribulation.

First, the knowledge that the tribulation is soon to occur assists these Christians in preparing for the part of the tribulation of their lifetime. Second, knowing some particular events within that part of the tribulation assists these Christians in knowing what types of preparations to make. Third, knowing the order of events, or the time frame, or the dates of those events assists these Christians in making the proper preparations at the proper time. The events of each part of the tribulation are very severe, and so these preparations (both spiritual and temporal) are very useful.

Fourth, knowing the greater course of events, i.e. that each part of the tribulation has a place within the larger plan of God, and that those events lead to the Return of Christ and the victory of the Faith, assists these Christians in persevering through the very severe afflictions of the tribulation during their lifetime. Fifth, this knowledge of future dates and events is a sign to the unbelievers, for, after seeing that the depth of understanding of the Catholic Christian Faith reaches even to some limited knowledge of the future, many of them will next seek the higher teachings within that same Faith. Sixth, in cases of particular errors pertaining to imminent events of the tribulation, the spiritual preparations are still useful, even if the timing given for one event or another is mistaken.

Seventh, it is the will of God to give the faithful of each generation knowledge of His plan for their near future. And the will of God is never useless or superfluous or harmful or foolish or dispensable.

[Acts of the Apostles]

{2:14} But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and he spoke to them: “Men of Judea, and all those who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and incline your ears to my words.

{2:15} For these men are not inebriated, as you suppose, for it is the third hour of the day.

{2:16} But this is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel:

{2:17} ‘And this shall be: in the last days, says the Lord, I will pour out, from my Spirit, upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And your youths shall see visions, and your elders shall dream dreams.

{2:18} And certainly, upon my men and women servants in those days, I will pour out from my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

{2:19} And I will bestow wonders in heaven above, and signs on earth below: blood and fire and the vapor of smoke.

{2:20} The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and manifest day of the Lord arrives.

{2:21} And this shall be: whoever shall invoke the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ”

If it were not the will of God for His children to know His plan for their future, then He would not pour out these particular gifts of the Holy Spirit in the last days.

Speculative Dates in Eschatology

In the history of Catholic eschatology, many Saints, Blesseds, priests, religious, and holy men and women wrote about the future of the Church. Some wrote based on private revelation to themselves; others wrote (as I do) based on study and interpretation. Many of these persons gave some chronological information as part of their eschatological writings. As the centuries have passed, the understanding of the future found within Catholic eschatology has increased.

St. Irenaeus (2nd century A.D.) gave the length of time that the Antichrist will persecute and try to destroy the Church as three years and six months, based on his interpretation of the Book of Daniel (Daniel 9:27):

“And then he points out the time that his tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight, they who offer a pure sacrifice unto God: ‘And in the midst of the week,’ he says, ‘the sacrifice and the libation shall be taken away, and the abomination of desolation [shall be brought] into the temple: even unto the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete.’ Now three years and six months constitute the half-week.”¹³

St. Irenaeus is discussing the last of the 70 weeks of years in Daniel chapter 9. That last week of years is the time of the reign of the Antichrist:

[Daniel]

{9:27} But he will confirm a covenant with many for one week of years; and for half of the week of years, victim and sacrifice will nearly cease; but there will be in the temple the abomination of desolation. And the desolation will continue even to the consummation and the end.”

A week of years is seven years, and so St. Irenaeus concludes that the one half week is one half of seven years, i.e. three years and six months. Thus, the Antichrist’s reign is seven years, but he spends only the last half of that reign attempting to destroy the Church by means of the abomination of desolation.

St. Caesar of Arles (469-543) divides the tribulation into two parts. Notice that he places the Antichrist’s reign in the second part of the tribulation.

“When the entire world ... shall have been a prey to the greatest miseries and trials, then the provinces shall be succored by a prince who had been exiled in his youth, and who shall recover the crown of the lilies. This Pope shall have with him, the Great Monarch, a most virtuous man, who shall be a scion of the holy race of the French kings. This Great Monarch will assist the Pope in the reformation of the whole earth.... after some considerable time fervor shall cool, iniquity shall abound, and moral corruption shall become worse than ever, which shall bring upon mankind the last and worst persecution of Antichrist and the end of the world.”¹⁴

St. Caesar describes the order of events as follows: first, a time of the greatest miseries and trials (the first part of the tribulation), followed by the peaceful and holy reign of the great Catholic monarch and the Angelic Shepherd (a holy Pope). (The crown of the lilies is the crown of Charlemagne, who was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III.) Then after the reign of the great monarch, the world gradually slips into greater and greater iniquity. Next another set of sufferings occurs, which is the second part of the tribulation, including the seven year reign of the Antichrist (the last week of years in Daniel 9:27).

So the order of events is: (a) the first part of the tribulation, (b) the peaceful and holy reign of the great monarch, (c) a long time of decreased fervor and increased iniquity, (d) the second part of the tribulation (including the Antichrist).

Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) gives a specific date and a range of years. She also states that other dates were revealed to her:

“In the center of Hell I saw a dark and horrible-looking abyss, and into this Lucifer was cast, after being first strongly secured with chains; thick clouds of sulphurous black smoke arose from it's fearful depths and enveloped his fearful form in the dismal folds, thus effectually concealing him from every beholder. God Himself had decreed this; and I was likewise told, if I remember right, that he will be unchained for a time fifty or sixty years before the year of Christ 2000. The dates of many other events were pointed out to me which I do not now remember, but a certain number of demons are to be let loose much earlier than Lucifer, in order to tempt men, and to serve as instruments of divine vengeance.”

Even though she could not recall every date, some specific dates were revealed by God to her. Therefore, God does will that some specific dates of some future events be known in advance. It could not possibly be immoral to seek knowledge of future dates, for if it were, then God would not have given some dates (thus encouraging immorality). As for the time period of 50 or 60 years before the year 2000, the 1940s saw the most horrific war yet in human history, World War 2, and the end of the 1950s saw a sharp increase in immorality and in false ideas about rights and freedoms. Since then, morals have continued their abominable decline throughout the world. So the dates and description given to Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich were correct.

This next prophecy has been taught by several holy persons, including Abbot Werdin d'Otrante in the 13th century, by Saint Bridget of Sweden in the 14th century, and by Venerable Magdalene Porzat in the 19th century:

“The nations will be in wars for four years and a great part of the world will be destroyed. All the sects will vanish. The capital of the world will fall. The Pope will go over the sea carrying the sign of redemption on his forehead, and after the victory of the Pope and the Great Monarch peace will reign on earth. The Pope will cross the sea in a year when the Feast of St. George (April 23rd) falls on Good Friday, and St. Mark's feast (April 25th) falls on Easter Sunday, and the feast of St. Anthony (June 13th) falls on Pentecost and the feast of St. John the Baptist (June 24th) falls on Corpus Christi.”¹⁵

This particular timing of celebrations in the liturgical calendar took place in the year 1943, but will not occur again until 2038. So when the first part of the tribulation begins to unfold in the 2010s (in my chronology), then it will be clear that 2038 is the year referred to by the

above prophecy. Notice that this predicted date will become known once the tribulation begins (or as soon as the timing for the start of the tribulation is known). And what Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich received in private revelation supports the idea that the tribulation begins not long after the year 2000. Thus, as the time for the tribulation draws near, particular dates can be known, which before could not be known.

At La Salette, the Virgin Mary gave some dates, some lengths of time, and an order for future events. First, she summarizes the first part of the tribulation:

“God will permit the old serpent to place divisions among rulers, in all societies and in all families; physical and moral pains will be suffered; God will abandon men to themselves, and will send chastisements which will follow one after another for more than thirty-five years.”¹⁶

She even gives the length of time of the first part of the tribulation, as ‘more than 35 years.’ My interpretation as to why she says ‘more than,’ rather than giving the exact length, is that she includes a preparatory period of time when sufferings gradually increase (and so there is no clear starting point to the preparatory time) along with the period of the first part of the tribulation (which has a sharp starting point: the Warning). So the exact number of years is not stated because the preparatory time period sees a gradual increase in sufferings and a continued decrease in morals, before the tribulation itself begins. In my view, the ‘more than 35 years’ ends in early 2040; this fits with the date of 2038 because, after the war of the great monarch, there is another set of sufferings lasting a brief time.

Later, Mary describes the worst afflictions at the end of the first part of the tribulation, and the subsequent time of peace and holiness:

“At the first stroke of His lightning sword, the mountains and the whole of nature will tremble with terror, because the disorders and the crimes of men pierce the vault of the heavens. Paris will be burned and Marseilles engulfed; several great cities will be shaken and engulfed by earthquakes: it will be believed that all is lost: only homicides will be seen, only the noise of weapons and blasphemies will be heard. The just will suffer much; their prayers, their penances and their tears will climb even up to heaven and all the people of God will ask for forgiveness and mercy, and will ask for my help and my intercession. Then Jesus Christ by an act of His justice and of His great mercy for the just, will command to His angels that all His enemies be put to death. All at once the persecutors of the Church of Jesus Christ and all men devoted to sin will perish, and the earth will become like a desert. Then peace, the reconciliation of God with men will be made; Jesus Christ will be served, adored and glorified; charity will flower everywhere. The new kings will be the right arm of the holy Church, which will be strong, humble, pious, poor, zealous and imitator of the virtues of Jesus Christ. The Gospel will be preached everywhere and men will make great progress in the faith, because there will be unity among the workers of Jesus Christ and because men will live in the fear of God.”¹⁷

There is an order to the events that she describes: the first part of the tribulation begins, and then the afflictions increase in severity, but the last events are the most severe; next a time of peace and holiness begins. The Virgin Mary gives the length of that time of peace:

“This peace among men will not be long; 25 years of abundant harvests will make them forget that the sins of men are the cause of all the pains which come upon the earth.”¹⁸

This is the length of that time of peace described by St. Caesar of Arles. Then, after a considerable time of decreasing fervor and increasing iniquity, the second part of the tribulation begins. At La Salette, the Virgin Mary described a set of events in the second part of the tribulation, which includes the Antichrist’s rise to power and his reign. Mary describes these events over a number of different paragraphs. In two places, she gives specific dates, one date related to the Antichrist’s rise to power, and the other for the start of his reign:

“In the year 1864, Lucifer with a great number of demons will be unleashed from hell; they will abolish the faith little by little and even in persons consecrated to God; they will blind them in such a way that barring a particular grace these persons will take on the spirit of these bad angels: several religious houses will lose the faith entirely and will lose many souls.”¹⁹

“In the year 1865, the abomination will be seen in holy places; in convents, the flowers of the Church will be decayed and the demon will make himself as the king of hearts. May those who are at the head of religious communities keep themselves on guard for persons whom they must receive, because the demon will use of all his malice in order to introduce into religious orders persons devoted to sin, for disorders and the love of carnal pleasures will be spread by all the earth.”²⁰

The Antichrist rises to power with the help of fallen angels; otherwise, he would fail to conquer the world, just as all previous attempts to conquer the world had failed. And so the first date refers to the rise of the Antichrist to world power. The second date refers to the abomination of desolation, which begins at the start of his reign.

The abomination is a perverse imitation of the Eucharist, which the Antichrist later (about halfway through his reign) attempts to use to destroy the Church. For it is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the true Eucharist, and the sacrifice of the Mass, and the continual worldwide adoration of Christ in the Eucharist, which prevents the Antichrist from rising to world power until that time. Consider this passage from St. Paul’s Epistle:

[2 Thessalonians 2]

{2:1} But we ask you, brothers, concerning the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ and of our gathering to him,

{2:2} that you not be readily disturbed or terrified in your minds, by any spirit, or word, or epistle, supposedly sent from us, claiming that the day of the Lord is close by.

{2:3} Let no one deceive you in any way. For this cannot be, unless the apostasy will have arrived first, and the man of sin will have been revealed, the son of perdition,

{2:4} who is an adversary to, and who is lifted up above, all that is called God or that is worshipped, so much so that he sits in the temple of God, presenting himself as if he were God.

{2:5} Do you not recall that, when I was still with you, I told you these things?

{2:6} And now you know what it is that holds him back, so that he may be revealed in his own time.

{2:7} For the mystery of iniquity is already at work. And only one now holds back, and will continue to hold back, until he is taken from our midst.

{2:8} And then that iniquitous one shall be revealed, the one whom the Lord Jesus shall bring to ruin with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy at the brightness of his return:
{2:9} him whose advent is accompanied by the works of Satan, with every kind of power and signs and false miracles,
{2:10} and with every seduction of iniquity, toward those who are perishing because they have not accepted the love of truth, so that they may be saved.

Who is the 'only one' who can hold back, and continue to hold back, the arrival of the Antichrist? Of course, only Jesus Christ could do so. And yet Paul also says 'you know what it is that holds him back'. Paul speaks first as if about an object ('what it is'), and next as if about a person ('he is taken from our midst'). Thus Paul is referring to the Eucharist, which is the Person of Jesus Christ under the appearance of the objects of bread and wine. When the Eucharist is taken from the midst of the Church, partly because of increasing immorality and declining fervor among Catholics, and partly because of the sinfulness and hostility of the world, then the abomination of desolation will begin to take its place, and the reign of the Antichrist can begin.

Now both Sacred Scripture and true private revelation require interpretation. These dates of 1864 and 1865 given at La Salette, if understood to refer to the Christian calendar, do not make sense. The Antichrist did not rise to power in the 1800s, and the tribulation did not occur at that time. And Christ himself told us that the abomination would occur during the worst part of the tribulation:

[Matthew]

{24:15} Therefore, when you will have seen the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, may he who reads understand,
{24:16} then those who are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains.
{24:17} And whoever is on the roof, let him not descend to take anything from his house.
{24:18} And whoever is in the field, let him not turn back to take his tunic.
{24:19} So then, woe to those who are pregnant or nursing in those days.
{24:20} But pray that your flight may not be in winter, or on the Sabbath.
{24:21} For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until the present, and such as will not be.
{24:22} And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days shall be shortened.
{24:23} Then if anyone will have said to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'he is there,' do not be willing to believe it.
{24:24} For there will arise false Christs and false prophets. And they will produce great signs and wonders, so much so as to lead into error even the elect (if this could be).
{24:25} Behold, I have warned you beforehand.

Notice that Jesus associates the abomination with 'false Christs and false prophets,' the worst of which must of course be the Antichrist and the false prophet who assists him. But since the Antichrist did not arise in the 1800s, we must seek the proper interpretation of those dates given by the Virgin Mary.

My interpretation is that they refer to dates in the Islamic calendar. This calendar is used to give the dates for a number of reasons. First, Mary gives prophecy that requires interpretation, so that her words do not supercede the words of Sacred Scripture. Second, she uses the Islamic calendar because the Islamic calendar will be used during the first part of the tribulation, in the lands occupied by the Arab/Muslims when they conquer Europe

(Daniel 8:3-4). Third, she uses the Islamic calendar because a calendar similar to the Islamic calendar will be used in the distant future by secular society during the second part of the tribulation (because that society will utterly reject all that is of true religion, including the Jewish and Christian calendars). The dates 1864 and 1865 in the Islamic calendar correspond to the dates 2430 and 2431 in the Christian (Gregorian) calendar. Therefore, based on this interpretation of dates given by the Virgin Mary, the Antichrist rises to power in 2430 A.D. with the help of the fallen angels, and he begins his seven year reign in 2431 A.D., when the abomination of desolation also begins.

Now despite this need for interpretation, it is true that the Virgin Mary gave dates, as well as lengths of time and an order of events, within her prophecies at La Salette. So if anyone says that no future dates can be known, or no dates should be sought (as if it were sinful or evil to seek this particular type of knowledge of God's plan for the future), they are contradicted by the words and example of the Virgin Mary. However, because private revelation is subject to interpretation (including interpretation of dates), this knowledge is fallible and speculative. But if anyone says that what is fallible and speculative should be rejected, then they contradict the teaching of the Church on the role of reason (which is fallible) along with faith, and on the value of speculative theology, philosophy, and eschatology.

Sacred Scripture can also be interpreted so as to arrive at specific dates. Although Sacred Scripture is entirely inspired and entirely inerrant, any particular theologian's interpretation is fallible, and, wherever the meaning of the text is not plain or the Magisterium does not have a definitive teaching, that interpretation is also speculative. Consider the 70 weeks of years in the prophecy of Daniel. My interpretation of Daniel 9 gives the same date for the Antichrist's reign as does the secret of La Salette.

[Daniel]

{9:20} And while I was still speaking and praying and confessing my sins, and the sins of my people, Israel, and offering my prayers in the sight of my God, on behalf of the holy mountain of my God,

{9:21} as I was still speaking in prayer, behold, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly, touched me at the time of the evening sacrifice.

{9:22} And he instructed me, and he spoke to me and said, "Now, Daniel, I have come forth to teach you and to help you understand.

{9:23} At the beginning of your prayers, the message came forth, yet I have come to explain it to you because you are a man who is seeking. Therefore, you must pay close attention to the message and understand the vision.

{9:24} Seventy weeks of years are concentrated on your people and on your holy city, so that transgression shall be finished, and sin shall reach an end, and iniquity shall be wiped away, and so that everlasting justice shall be brought in, and vision and prophecy shall be fulfilled, and the Saint of saints shall be anointed.

{9:25} Therefore, know and take heed: from the going forth of the word to build up Jerusalem again, until the Christ leader, there will be seven weeks of years, and sixty-two weeks of years; and the wide path will be built again, and the walls, in a time of anguish.

{9:26} And after sixty-two weeks of years, the Christ leader will be slain. And the people who have denied him will not be his. And the people, when their leader arrives, will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will be devastation, and, after the end of the war, the desolation will be set up.

{9:27} But he will confirm a covenant with many for one week of years; and for half of the week of years, victim and sacrifice will nearly cease; but there will be in the temple the

abomination of desolation. And the desolation will continue even to the consummation and the end.”

I interpret the going forth of the world to build up Jerusalem again to refer to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. So if 1948 is the first year of the first week of years (a week of years is a set of seven years), then the last week of years, which is the reign of the Antichrist, is from 2431 to 2437. This date of 2431 for the start of the Antichrist's reign is the same date given by my interpretation of the secrets of La Salette.

Notice that this interpretation was not possible until some time after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. Before that date, it could not be known when those 70 weeks would begin; and soon after that date, we could not be certain if Israel would be founded successfully. So, as the time for the tribulation draws nearer, certain dates can be known, which before could not be known. Also, notice that this interpretation of Scripture depends also upon an interpretation of an event in recent history; since the date is not derived from Sacred Scripture alone, the interpretation is fallible and speculative (but not without value).

In verse 25, I interpret this arrival of a Christ leader (a Christ-like leader) to refer to the great Catholic monarch, a person mentioned repeatedly in Catholic prophecy throughout the history of the Church. So if year one is 1948, and there are 7 weeks of years (i.e. 49 years) until this leader arrives, then he must have arrived in 1996, which is year 49 (year 1 plus 48 gives us year 49; so 1948 [year 1] plus 48 gives us 1996).

This great Catholic monarch is often said to be the last holy Roman emperor. Now the last holy Roman emperor so far was Francis II; shortly before he relinquished his role as Roman emperor, he became the first emperor of the Austrian empire (taking the name Francis I). But following this line of succession brings us to the current heir to that title, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, who was born on June 21 of 1997. He must therefore have been conceived in 1996 (or he would have been too premature to have survived). This information places his arrival in 1996, and exactly fits my interpretation of Daniel chapter 9.

St. Cataldus of Tarentino (c. 500) gives the age of the great Catholic monarch at the time of the end of his wars: “The Great Monarch will be in war until he is 40 years of age.” Now if the great Catholic monarch will be in war until his 40th year, and if he was born in 1997, then his war (which frees Europe from occupation by the Arab/Muslim extremists) will end in 2037. And this fits with the date of 2038 from the prophecy about the Pope crossing the sea after a victory by the great Catholic monarch, in a war that lasted 4 years. So that war will last from about 2033/2034 to 2037.

Notice that as the tribulation approaches, by combining an interpretation of Sacred Scripture with an interpretation of prophecies from Saints, Blesseds, and reliable private revelation (such as La Salette), we can know certain dates. Even though these dates are based upon study and interpretation, and so are fallible and speculative, the knowledge obtained is not unreliable. For most knowledge in human life, and even most knowledge concerning the specific application of the teachings of the Catholic Faith to the particular circumstances in our lives, is fallible and to some extent speculative.

My Work in Eschatology

The development of eschatology within the Catholic Faith has occurred over the entire length of Church history. Many verses in both the Old and New Testaments have an

eschatological level of meaning. Christ gave an eschatological discourse. The Epistles also contain some eschatological teachings. And the last book of the New Testament is a book of eschatology: the Book of Revelation. Many of the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church have written eschatology, even from the earliest days of the Church until the present time. And the many true apparitions of the Virgin Mary, in various places throughout the world, at various times in history, even more so in the recent past, have often presented messages to the faithful about the future. Whoever rejects the whole of eschatology rejects the Catholic Christian Faith.

However, the science of eschatology is presently at a turning point. Some theologians have attempted to discard the vast majority of the work done in eschatology over the centuries. Some claim that all of the eschatological passages in the Bible refer to past events. Some claim that no future event called the tribulation will ever occur, as if the sufferings of the tribulation were nothing other than the ordinary sufferings of every generation. Some claim that the vast majority of Marian apparitions are false; and concerning those which they admit are true, they do not allow for any eschatological truths. There have been attempts, sometimes systematic and sometimes haphazard, to reinterpret eschatology such that no knowledge of the future is possible at all. Such attempts openly contradict the teaching of Christ in His eschatological discourse, and the teaching of the Saints throughout the history of the Church, and the words of the Virgin Mary in various true private revelations. They are attempting to nullify or repudiate all past work in eschatology, and to bring an end to all further development in eschatology, thereby turning it aside from its ancient progression towards ever greater knowledge of the plan of God for the future.

To the contrary, my work in eschatology attempts to assist in bringing this historical development of the science of eschatology to a new level of understanding. I believe that the Virgin Mary herself has instigated this imminent leap of eschatology to a new and substantial level of advancement. Her intention to do so is indicated by the increase in her apparitions in the past generation or so, and by her repeated messages in those apparitions about the future of the Church. Some of these messages, such as those at La Salette, give specific information about the future which can be used to determine dates, lengths of time, and the order of events. Her messages at Garabandal and Medjugorje similarly speak about the future, not merely to exhort us to holiness, but also to present information, which, though it requires interpretation in the light of Tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, nevertheless does inform us, more so than ever before in the history of the Church, about the future of the Church. And why does she undertake this plan? I believe that it is because the first part of the tribulation is very near. (As I write this in late April of 2009, I believe that the tribulation will begin with the Warning on Good Friday of 2010.)

My work in eschatology attempts to present, to all the faithful, a comprehensive outline of the future of the Church, especially concerning the first and second parts of the tribulation, including the order of the major events, and the dates, time frames, or lengths of time for those events. My work attempts to bring together various Catholic eschatological sources (Marian apparitions, writings of Saints, interpretation of Scripture) and to construct a comprehensive overview of the time period from the start of the first part of the tribulation, to the second part of the tribulation and the Return of Christ, and even beyond. Many sources in Catholic eschatology will describe some future events, or will occasionally mention a date, a time frame (e.g. a range of years), or a length of time. My work uniquely attempts to present a comprehensive description of the major eschatological events with their order and timing. This goal has not been accomplished previously in eschatology.

Whether or not I have accomplished this goal is a matter of legitimate disagreement among the faithful. At this point in time, before the tribulation has begun, and even before the Warning, Consolation, and Miracle have occurred (which will strengthen the faithful in preparation for the tribulation), any faithful and reasonable Catholic might doubt that my eschatology is a generally correct description of God's plan for the future of the Church and the world. And my work in eschatology is not yet complete.

However, if anyone is absolutely certain that my eschatology is generally incorrect, then he is in effect claiming that his own understanding of eschatology is neither fallible nor speculative. For he cannot be certain that my many assertions about the future are on the whole wrong unless he has some knowledge of his own about the future. And he cannot be absolutely certain unless his own understanding is absolute. So I have no objection if anyone decides that, in their opinion, my eschatology is not generally correct. But when some persons put forward this claim as if it were absolutely certain, then they go astray from what is faithful and reasonable.

Perhaps the most difficult timing to establish in advance is the start of the tribulation. I've had to correct my thinking on this point repeatedly. If I am correct that the Miracle will be on May 13th, 2010, and that the first of the Seven Seals in the Book of Revelation, World War 3, occupies most of the 2010s, a number of other dates become much more firmly established. For example, once we know the date for the start of the first part of the tribulation, we can know the date given for the Pope (the Angelic Shepherd) crossing the sea after the victory in war of the great Catholic monarch. I believe that the tribulation begins in 2010, and so the only date that fits that prophecy is 2038 A.D. Once the tribulation begins, it will be more clear if the heir to the holy Roman empire and the Austrian empire, the heir conceived in 1996 and born in 1997, is the great monarch, as I have said. And this information then supports the date for the end of his war, at 40 years of age, in 2037. It would also give substantial support to my interpretation of the 70 weeks of years of Daniel, which is the source of my date of 1996/1997 for the arrival of the great monarch. And as a result, the dates for the reign of the Antichrist in the last week of years (2431 to 2437) would also be more firmly established.

But even if the tribulation begins to unfold much as I have written, and even though this would lend greater support to the subsequent dates and events in my eschatology, my work in eschatology remains fallible and speculative. I do not expect every date and event that I describe to be 100% correct. I only write what I believe is true, but I know that I am fallible.

Past Errors and Changes in my Eschatology

My eschatology is not the result of any private revelation to myself. I have never received any kind of private revelation whatsoever. My work in eschatology is the result of study and interpretation, and the knowledge thereby obtained is fallible.

I began to write eschatology in the mid 1990s. At that time, I thought that the tribulation would begin in the late 1990s. As I continued to study and write eschatology, my level of understanding in that subject area increased, and as a result my description and chronology of future events changed and improved. Over time, my understanding of God's plan for the future has become more detailed, with more dates and with more specifics about the timing and order of events. An increase in understanding, resulting in corrections, changes, and improvements to that understanding, is the natural result of continued study and thought in any subject area, including theology, philosophy, and any of the sciences. Although some

persons will point to these past errors and changes in my eschatology as if it were proof of unreliability, the opposite is true. Everyone should expect that a sincere search for knowledge in any subject area will naturally result in a series of changes and corrections over time, which will improve the reliability and accuracy of that knowledge.

I previously discussed this topic of errors in my eschatology. I plainly stated that my work is fallible, and that I don't expect my predictions of future events to be 100% correct. For example, in the first edition of my book, 'The Bible and the Future,' (later editions of this same book were titled as 'The Bible and the Future of the World'), I stated:

"Holy Scripture can never be wrong, but my interpretations of God's Holy Scripture may contain misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and outright errors."²¹

Each subsequent edition also had similar expressions indicating the fallibility of my work in eschatology. The seventh edition contained, not only the above quote from the first edition, but also this passage:

"I expect that, when these events unfold, the actual events will be more complex than I have been able to discern in advance. Even so, I have always written only the things that I believe to be true. But I am fallible and this book is fallible. The reader should consider that the words of Scripture are completely infallible, but that any individual's interpretation of Scripture is fallible."²²

This passage was then followed by a subsection, titled 'Errors in my Original Predictions,' containing the following words:

"Over the course of time, through study and prayer, I have come to a better and better understanding of the meaning of Scripture for the future. Therefore, my predictions have changed to a significant extent over the years. Over the course of these several editions, I have changed the dates for some of the predicted events described in this book. In some cases, the dates have become more specific, as my understanding has improved. In a few cases, some of the dates have changed from the earliest editions.... Are there any other errors in this book? There could be. I cannot be certain about all the details of every prediction that I have made based on Scripture, nor can I be certain exactly how such events will unfold. I am certain about the major events, and the order of events, and now I am also certain about when these will occur. But, despite my own fallibility and possible misunderstandings, everything truly predicted by Sacred Scripture will be fulfilled in its proper time. I am fallible, but the Bible is infallible. So take my predictions with a grain of salt, but no salt need be added to the infallible Word of God, Sacred Scripture."

Then in the Afterword of the same edition, I had this to say:

"How certain am I of these predictions? I am very certain of all the major predicted events and of the overall timeline. I am certain of the specific dates and also of the general timing of these events. I am somewhat less certain about the exact details of each event.... Although my predictions have developed and changed over time, presently, with this seventh edition of my book, I am firmly convinced that my understanding of the future is generally accurate and correct. However, no one should be upset or surprised if

some of the details of some of my predictions are occasionally in error. I wrote these predictions because I believe that they are true. I have not written anything that I believe to be false or even doubtful. But I must admit that I am fallible and that some of these predictions might possibly contain some errors. The words of Sacred infallible Scripture, and the meaning of those words, are entirely without error. But my interpretation of Scripture could contain some mistakes.”²³

In the Author’s Foreword of the first edition of my book ‘The Secrets of Medjugorje and Garabandal Revealed,’ I wrote the following:

“I only write what I sincerely and firmly believe to be true. But I am fallible, so the future may be somewhat different than what I have written. I know that this book may be controversial, especially among devotees of Medjugorje and Garabandal. But I am firmly convinced that this is the correct understanding of the secrets. Some of the details may turn out to be different than I describe, but the overall set of events, their order and timing, is, to my mind, certainly correct. Even so, this is mere human knowledge, since I have never received any private revelation myself. So take these words with a grain or two of salt.”²⁴

So I always presented my work in eschatology as fallible, and as subject to error, correction, and revision. However, some readers did not take these words to heart. This is partly my fault, since I should have been clearer on this point, and I should have been less certain of my own conclusions. And so, I am now in the process of revising my eschatology books to add a statement at the start of each chapter to advise the reader that my work in eschatology is fallible and speculative, based on study and interpretation, not based on knowledge that is absolute or certain.

The Date of the Warning

For a long time, I was firmly convinced that the Warning of Garabandal would occur on Good Friday of 2009. This date was based on the date of May 13th, 2010 (Ascension Thursday) for the Miracle of Garabandal. The Warning calls everyone in the world to repentance from sin, and so it must occur on Good Friday, the day when forgiveness from sin, and the graces needed to repent from sin, were obtained for us by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If the Warning and the Miracle did not occur on dates that coincided with important liturgical celebrations in the Church, then many persons would be led away from the Catholic Church by these astounding events.

Now formerly I preferred Good Friday of 2009 for the Warning, over Good Friday of 2010, because there are a number of events that occur as a result of the Warning, but before the tribulation itself begins, which I understand from my study in eschatology. This includes an upheaval in the Arab/Muslim nations of the Middle East and northern Africa which puts extremists in control of those nations, and which thereby prepares for World War 3 (a Muslim invasion of Europe), which is the first of the Seven Seals of the tribulation. I considered that there would not be enough time, if the Warning and Miracle occurred only just over a month apart, for these events. So the date of Good Friday 2009 for the Warning was a reasonable conclusion. But this was not the correct date. I now conclude that these events (the Warning, the Miracle, the upheaval in the Middle East, and the start of World War 3) all occur in a relatively short period of time in 2010. I believe that World War 3 will begin in 2010, and will continue until it gradually winds down in the late 2010s.

The prophecies at Medjugorje and those at Garabandal both state that a Permanent Miraculous Sign will be placed at each location, at Medjugorje after the event of the third secret, and at Garabandal after the Miracle of Garabandal. This agreement indicates that the Miracle of Garabandal and the third secret of Medjugorje are the same event. And since there are other important Marian apparitions beside these two, this implies that there will be Permanent Miraculous Signs at other sites of apparitions as well. Now the Virgin Mary gave us some hints concerning the date of the Miracle of Garabandal, as to when it would occur. It still seems to me that the date of May 13th, Ascension Thursday, 2010 is correct for this event of the Miracle. Even after my date for the Warning was proved wrong, a number of my readers said that they still find the date for the Miracle to be solid (and I agree).

So if the date of Ascension Thursday, 2010 is correct for the Miracle, and since the Warning, a universal call to repentance, must coincide with Good Friday, the source of all grace for repentance, then the Warning would have to occur on Good Friday, April 2, of 2010. So this date is my new conclusion as to the date for the Warning. Previously, I made the mistake of being overconfident of my date for the Warning (April 10, 2009), and of not being clear that this date, and all the dates that I give, are fallible and speculative. And although I was firmly convinced in my own mind, I should have stated the date with less objective certitude. Now in some ways I am more certain of this date for the Warning, but let me be absolutely clear: No matter how certain I am in my own conclusions as to the description or date of a future event, my work in eschatology is fallible and speculative. I've always stated this fallibility. But from now on I will be more clear on this point.

The Benefits of a Comprehensive Eschatology

My work in eschatology attempts a comprehensive outline, with many specific descriptions and dates, of God's plan for the future. This type of comprehensive eschatology seeks an understanding of God's plan for the Church and the world such that each event is understood in terms of the whole plan. The relationship of each event to numerous other events within the plan is presented. The timing of each event, if not by the exact month or year, then within a certain range of years, and within the proper order of events, often will reveal more meaning than if the event is considered by itself.

Example: The Warning considered by itself is an event whereby God shows people the sins on their conscience. But consider that the Warning takes place shortly before the sufferings of the first part of the tribulation begin. Now we can understand that the Warning is intended by God to strengthen the faithful for the tribulation. The Warning obviously strengthens the soul through repentance from sin. The Miracle of Garabandal is subsequent to the Warning, and is also just prior to the first afflictions of the tribulation, and includes healing for the body. So now we can understand that the Warning and the Miracle both strengthen the human person, first in soul, then in body. But there is another event, the second secret of Medjugorje, which also occurs in this time period. Putting this event in its proper time and order reveals that this event must also strengthen us for the tribulation. Since the human person is soul, spirit, and body (1 Thess 5:23), the second secret must therefore strengthen the spirit in preparation for the tribulation. (The term 'spirit' here refers to the close cooperation of body and soul.) Notice how the timing and order of these events helps to reveal their full meaning in God's plan.

Example: The Three Days of Darkness is an event prophesied by many Saints, Blesseds, and holy men and women. These descriptions of this event usually include an intense

darkness of supernatural cause, which cannot be overcome by electricity or fire or any natural light source, as well as the deaths of about two thirds of the human race worldwide. This event is a punishment from God for sin. But we can attain to a deeper understanding of this event if we consider its timing and order relative to the other events of the tribulation. The Three Days of Darkness is the last event of the first part of the tribulation; subsequently, there is a time of great peace. We can therefore conclude that the severe sufferings of the Three Days of Darkness are necessary because much of humanity will continue to commit mortal sins, despite the previous sufferings of the first part of the tribulation. We can also conclude that the killing of so many persons was largely due to a refusal to repent, and was necessary to give the world the subsequent brief time of peace and holiness. We can also compare this last event of the first part of the tribulation to the last events of the second part of the tribulation, and draw similar conclusions about the second part of the tribulation.

The above are only a couple of examples of how a consideration of the chronology of future events within the overall plan of God, in addition to the nature of the events themselves, assists us in understanding God's plan for the Church and the world more profoundly. It remains to be seen whether or not I've accomplished, to a substantial extent, this my goal of setting forth a comprehensive eschatology, including the description, timing, and order of the events.

-
- ¹ Kirsch, Johann Peter. "Pope John XXII." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 8. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08431a.htm>
- ² First Vatican Council, *On Faith and Reason*.
- ³ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, first paragraph (not numbered).
- ⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 40.
- ⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 55.
- ⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 65.
- ⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 66.
- ⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 83.
- ⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Fides and Ratio*, n. 105.
- ¹⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 675-677.
- ¹¹ Address Pope Paul VI to the Special World Conference on Futures Research, 27 September 1973.
- ¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 27, A. 2.
- ¹³ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter XXV, n. 4.
- ¹⁴ Edward Connor, *Prophecy for Today*, p. 30.
- ¹⁵ Edward Connor, *Prophecy for Today*, p. 33.
- ¹⁶ *Le Secret de Melanie*, paragraph n. 5.
- ¹⁷ *Le Secret de Melanie*, paragraph n. 20.
- ¹⁸ *Le Secret de Melanie*, paragraph n. 21.
- ¹⁹ *Le Secret de Melanie*, paragraph n. 11.
- ²⁰ *Le Secret de Melanie*, paragraph n. 18.
- ²¹ Conte, *The Bible and the Future*, first edition, Author's Foreword.
- ²² Conte, *The Bible and the Future*, seventh edition, Author's Foreword.
- ²³ Conte, *The Bible and the Future*, seventh edition, Afterword.
- ²⁴ Conte, *The Secrets of Medjugorje and Garabandal Revealed*, Author's Foreword.