

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE TIME'S IDEOLOGIES ON FATHER KOLBE'S APOSTOLIC LANGUAGE AND STRATEGY

## I. CHURCH LIFE IN THE LIBERAL STATE

### 1. Global Facts and Data

The historical period that begins in France during 1789 with the cycle of liberal revolutions until the beginning of the 1914-1918 Great War is a dramatic time. The de-Christianization of society and the separation of the Church from public life are registered here. Certain significant facts emerge during this time:

- The Church is identified with the old society therefore it must be eliminated. The new State self determines itself as the defender of man's freedom and free association, but it actually excludes the Church and its institution from these liberties. The most persecuted institutions are those that are the most bothersome, like the religious institutes, which are paradoxically denied freedom of association.

- In this situation, many Christian movements emerge that may be inserted in all sectors of the Church's life, thus giving life to the birth of new ecclesial institutions and of many "new institutes" that escape State control. Persecution urges many Christians to insert themselves within the life of society and in the same organisms of the State to become a "presence" or a transforming leaven. The foundation of numerous Catholic lay associations should be read with this meaning, such that in the 1800's it was called "the century of Catholic associations".

### 2. A specific basic problem: the Liberal State and the Church

The liberal State definitely proposes itself in the various Western countries during the 30's of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with the triumph of the revolutions in the various western countries.

The liberal evolution imposes a new type of State and spreads its myths of progress and freedom; therefore it modifies the social way of life and the relations between the State and the Church. Since the French Revolution, many ecclesial institutions were suppressed.

The Popes at the time, from Gregory XVI (1831-1846) to Leo XIII (1878-1903) condemn this adulating view of the State in various documents, from the *Mirari vos* (1832) to the *Graves de communi* (1901).

In its various versions, the liberal State generally demonstrates a declared hostility towards the Church and towards any ecclesial manifestation, in particular the religious institutes. From the 30's of the 1800's, the liberal State has won on all fronts; it has managed to totally destroy religious orders that still survived. The dissolution of the religious Institutes determined the enclosing of the material goods of the ecclesial axis, "the closing of Church, in its sacristies", the secularization of the institution of marriage, the introduction of divorce, the laity of cemeteries and of any expression of civic life of the citizens, the abolition of religious teaching in schools, etc... With time, the Church would attempt to come to a pact with the State through the Concordats, wherever it manages to do so. Jurists would later reconstruct, based on the texts of the Concordats, ecclesiastic law. Yet often the concordats are denounced by the State.

The Church and religious persons are judged by the liberal laity, not only as “enemies of light” as during the times of Illuminism, but are also considered responsible for the regression and the underdevelopment of human conscience and accused of fomenting superstition, considered an expression of Christian faith contrary to reason. The caricatures of ecclesial and religious persons that appear in the newspapers of the time depict them in a grotesque manner, often as the expressions of perfidy and evil that exploits the faithful person’s good faith.

Using all mean, the people’s hate is sown and soon its fruits would be reaped, fires in churches and convents as in Spain with the “*matanzas*” of friars during the years 1834, 1835, 1836, then repeated during the 1870’s, at the beginning of the 1900’s and during the 1936-1939 Civil War. Similar events occur in other countries such as France in 1848 and in 1870.

### **3. Decadence of many ecclesial institutions**

One should not point one’s finger out at the liberal State as the only and supreme responsible of this state of affairs. Many orders were lying in a state of somnolence and internal decadence. Goya, in his *Caprichos* depicts us as so many friars leaving the habit and joining the “macabre” dance of the new society. Often, orders are dissolved because of internal problems, the loss of personal charisma leads to the loss of their ultimate finality. The Popes, from Pius VII, had taken various measures to reform the orders even before the suppression of the State, but these juridical measures often only managed to prolong their lives.

Older orders, however, found the strength to resurrect and to animate vast ecclesial movements of renewal. The orders that re-emerged owe their rebirth to their own elder members. Thus, to mention but a few cases, the new regular canonicals, the Benedictines and the Dominicans owe in part their rebirth to laity or to priests such as Dom Gréa (+1917), Dom Guéranger and Father Lacordaire, restorers of these three orders; Father Bresciani, a of the Camillans in the Lombard-Venetian Region. Only the nostalgic memory of a glorious past maintained in titles or lay honorific “orders” remains of certain noteworthy ancient Orders, pure archeology and anachronism.

### **4. Do movements, foundations, ecclesial communities of renewal emerge during this period?**

We feel that the answer must be affirmative. There were ecclesial initiatives and movements certainly not programmed by the hierarchical vertices of the Church. Often, we find forms born “casually” and in circumstances hostile to the Church, like during the French Revolution. The protagonists belong to all the states of Christian life: bishops, priests, elderly religious persons, laypersons, men and women. These Christians are a momentous answer to the various needs of those times. This ecclesial re-awakening could also be called, in a general sense, “an ecclesial movement of renewal” and of missionary proposal. The declination of this vast “movement” is varied and rich, according to the places.

The liberal State tried in every way to control and censure the life of the Church. Often it managed to do this with regards to the forms, but it will never be able to control the creative force of the Holy Spirit. The aversive laws oblige even Christians to sharpen their imagination! Often, religious persons and priests are forced into exile: this was a way that

Providence used to give birth, in the Church, to movements of various types, to carry on the mission in a neo-pagan world.

### **5. Their traces characteristic of the Christian experience**

In this summarily described environment, ecclesial ferment is formed, circumstances appear, events occur that flow into a vast ecclesial movement of renewal in the various fields of life, diversified according to the situations, this movement would give place to a series of foundations tied often to the specific charisma of a person or a community of persons, meeting in the name of Christ. Around this person, or them, fraternities and companies of friends are formed, which give origin, later, to vaster movements and works. The Christian experience that arises from this would considerably mark the Church during these last two centuries. In them we can find some roots and styles of Christian life that are similar and that are transmitted to the new generations. These experiences characterize the spirituality and the “devotio” of the contemporary Church.

### **6. Mention of the Christian experiences of movements during the Eight hundreds and the beginning of the Nine hundreds**

First of all, we can see that the founders of these movements preferred the authors of traditional Christian spirituality. In the libraries of the founders one can find Saint Bernard, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Catherine of Siena, Kempis, the master Saint John of Avila, the exercises of Saint Ignatius, the ‘600 Jesuit Father Rodriguez, Father Palma, Saint Theresa of Avila, the Dominican Father Luis de Granada, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Vincent de’ Paoli, Saint Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori, the authors of the French priestly school during the ‘600 (Oriol, Berulle), the lives of saints committed to charity.

These Christian experiences place at the forefront the presence of the Immaculate Virgin, the centrality of the Mystery of the Pierced Heart of Christ on the Cross from where the new life of the Spirit emerges for redeemed humanity, the centrality of Christ the King, the force of the Holy Spirit. Dedication to the practice of charity, merciful works and missionary activities are the consequences of this experience of grace. We are not dealing with private devotions, but with ontological participation in the Mystery of Christ from which emerge the beginnings of ecclesial and social action. The charisms of the founders of these movements, aggregations and companies of Christians, and Christian experience that comes from these, determine their foundation and configure their ecclesial physiognomy and their Christian spirituality.

### *Concluding*

A series of political, economic, social and religious upsets that would modify European and world society and that would weight heavily on the life of the Church would occur, starting at the time of the French Revolution. This history of deep change is more acute in the anti-Christian sense. The triumph of rationalistic illuminist ideology brought to the French Revolution, became more acute during the Revolution and was consolidated during the liberal era that emerged from this. After, other revolutions with very different characteristics would dominate the scene during the 1800’s and 1900’s; each one is presented with its own and characteristic ideology and a specific proposal of liberation and salvation, that often can go back to a common philosophical matrix.

The revolution of spirits, as the French Revolution is often called, during the revolutionary cycle and in the middle of convulsions that gave birth to a new society. We had already decisively entered a process of de-Christianization and of denying the Christian Event. The personal God of Revelation had been abandoned for the god of philosophers, for *deism* of providence (United States Declaration of Independence) and for the *Supreme Being* (French Declaration of the Rights of man and the citizen).

At the same time, the First Industrial and demographic Revolution, with all the well-known social consequences, accelerated progress. The various mechanisms were changing European and American social life: the city begins to take over the countryside, machines, artisans. "Revolution's progress with its machinery, its wars and the secularization of goods creates *pauperism* and a large mass of disinherited. The social unbalances incite the attention of the first socio-economic reformers...". The new ideas are imposed with the spreading of the press, of books and newspapers that go out on the roads of Europe, like Napoleon's armies.

"The rational influence has made the State autarchic, autocratic, has confirmed the self-foundation of the absolute State: the State is a power that falls into the hands of who takes it. This is the logic behind the assertion that reason is the measure of all things: man is the measure of the being. Thus ideology substituted the Christian religious fact".

The liberal State, emerging from the French Revolution, decided to put into practice the inheritance received from Illuminism: uproot the Christian experience from the life of persons and of society. The Church is only tolerated as a "cult" under State control. A national Church governed by good bishops and by good parish priests is the most that is accepted. Any reality that may escape State control, such as religious life and ecclesial corporations too tightly linked to the Pope's authority, are not recognized. The State feels as if it were the owner of everything.

## II. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE AND THE CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES

Father Kolbe lived during a period when ideological, political and ethnic conflicts had reached extremes so uniquely dramatic in history.

Father Kolbe did not only live in Europe, in his Polish homeland, meeting point for the interests of the Western powers and Russia and which, finally, occupied it, dividing it up; he lived through the full consequences of the First World War; he had to cross through a Central Europe prostrated by the First World War: from Rome to Poland passing through Germany. Of course, he saw the Republic of Weimar, the birth of Nazism, as a reaction to the world's economic crisis and not only as a contestation and refusal of the conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles; an attentive observer of the time's events, he saw States being formed, born around a table and as a consequence of the treaties from the First World War: the Czechoslovakian Republic, Yugoslavia; he was a witness to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the mirages of Russia, the revolutionary risings and civil wars in Spain and those smoldering in Greece, just to recall some. Father Kolbe did not only live through the problematics of the 900's in Central Europe. He crossed Russia with its immense territories, to the ultimate Asian confine, traveling towards Japan in the Trans-Siberian, during long and painful trips and at the same time full of opportunities to observe the new Soviet Empire. He founded a mission in Japan, which was a military and commercial power then, capable of making America as well as Europe fear; he visited India, then at the apex of its colonial dependence on Great Britain. In a word, this Franciscan brother had an almost rare opportunity to observe the countries that would dominate the scene during the 1900's. We must recall that this period, from the First World War to the end of the Second World War (period during which Father Kolbe received his human and religious formation and during which he began his apostolic activity), would build the foundations for the history following the Second

World War, which gave rise to a new world where the antagonism between countries created the loss of immense amounts of energy and even often created the premises for humanity's self-destruction, thus threatening the "end" of history.

During the last years of his life, Father Kolbe touches two of the most destructive totalitarian experiences during the Twentieth Century: Nazism and Communist Marxism. In the quoted text, Diner describes: «The Nazis destroyed merely to destroy. In the extreme case of the Holocaust, they turned to work, in any case, to simulate a sort of practical objective. The crimes of Stalinism do not hold up to the confrontation with the blood baths of human beings created by the Nazis. The Nazis built true corpse industries». Diner underlines that the crimes committed by Nazi Germany were against *others*, while the crimes of the Soviet regime were committed against its own *population*.

These are but some of the events that the Franciscan Kolbe sees. Do his writings reflect these situations? How does he judge these ideologies? Did he perceive the gravity of the moment and the ideological source that brought to these facts? Certainly Father Kolbe is not a philosopher or a political student, but being attentive to the realities of the time, he offers some judgment on these ideologies and on the facts he sees throughout his writings. He gives more emphasis to some, while he seems to ignore others. The fact is that he too would become the victim of one of these, among the most atrocious ideologies, and therefore a Christian martyr in this.

In Father Kolbe's Writings one sees the great soul of a Marian apostle and apostolic charity: he was particularly sensitive to the time's problems, where the ideologies became evermore marked as in complete opposition and hostile to the Christian Event and thereby to the Church. He founded the Militia of the Immaculate (M.I.) in 1917 for the conversion of the *enemies* of the Church and in particular the Masons.

Which are these ideologies? Liberalism (with the laity of some of its expressions), Socialism (scientific and revolutionary), Bolshevik-Communist and Nazi totalitarianism. To these currents of thoughts one must add the fact and the ideology of the Masonry, which often finds itself as a transversal current in other ideologies and which divides itself organizationally in various obediences, often in mutual contraposition. While these currents of thought do not cover the entire cultural world of the time, they are representative of it and find a certain affirmation in Maximilian Kolbe's experience, according to what we may glean from his writings and his life.

## **I. Liberalism**

Liberalism, in the philosophical sense, asserts the full and absolute autonomy of human reason in philosophical research and in the ethical-religious field. This is none other than the continuation of Illuminist thinking. Rationalism, which intrinsically characterizes liberalism, in fact constitutes the predominant note in modern thinking, reaching its apex in Illuminism and joins the various, if different, philosophical systems that blossom between the 1800's and the 1900's. Not recognizing any other authority apart from man, the measure of everything, liberalism does not recognize any teaching, tradition or external reference point; The Church's Magisterium and the Christian dogma are therefore unreasonable. It believes that it is impossible for human reason to achieve the knowledge of absolute truth (according to what is asserted by Kantian criticism): therefore, religions are all the same and man is free to indifferently follow any of these or none of these.

In the economic field, this mentality translates into wild and individualistic capitalism. Liberalism is the dominant ideology in 1800's Europe, until the First World War; politically, it promotes the separation between Church and State, separatism that is

achieved in various nations in different ways, up to the point of being able to talk about various separatism: pure, mixed and hostile.

## 2 Scientific Socialism or Marxist Communism

The father of socialism is Karl Marx (1818-1883), who with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) publishes the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) in London. On the utopistic lines – practically conservative and pro-middle class – Marx prefers political action. His thinking is centered on historical and dialectic materialism. Religion, for Marx, is the people's opium, the projection of humanity's needs, which is not useful in resolving the evils that afflict it. The entire history of humanity is read in the economic and materialistic sense, the only true one to understand reality, according to Marx. Therefore, morals, religion, philosophical, juridical and political ideas absolutely and exclusively on economic productivity, therefore changing according to the variation of this. The Marxist dialectic is intrinsically revolutionary. The revolution will change the present state of things and from the capitalistic society will change to a Communist one, putting an end of exploitation and alienation suffered by the proletariat.

Marx did not stop at theory and, coherent with his will to begin a scientific-real socialism, he constituted the *International Workers Association (or First International)*, in London in 1864. Disbanded in 1872 (but officially only in 1876), following the demise of the revolutionary communards of Paris (1872), it once again was revived in 1889 under the name of *Second International*, lead by the German socio-democratic movement. In 1917, the Second International was dissolved and in tsarist Russia, the Bolshevik revolution began, lead ideologically and politically by Vladimir Ilic Ulianov, also known as Lenin (1870-1924), who can ideally be placed in full fidelity to Marxism. The Third International (1919) lead by the Russian Bolshevik Party, would adopt the Marxist-Leninist lines, which, in Italy, would be followed by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party (1921).

## 3. Totalitarianisms

With the term totalitarianism we mean that ideology that, having reached power, proposes an absolute concept of the State, master and absolute legislator of all economic, socio-political, ethic and religious living of its members. Totalitarianism achieves a total subordination of persons to the will of the regime on the intellectual and practical level, rising to autarchic and "self-deification" powers. The philosophical basis of this ideology is the Hegelian concept of the State as the incarnation and historical realization of the divine Spirit (Idea or Reason) that imposes its Law over individuals, who exist only as citizens of the State. In the XX Century, two tragically emblematic forms of totalitarianism arose: on one hand, *Bolshevism* or *Soviet Communism* and on the other, German *National Socialism* or *Nazism*, where also *fascism* may be found along with other forms.

### 3.1. Communist Totalitarianism

This has its roots not only in the historical and dialectic materialism of Marx but also in the *Bolshevik* (majority) interpretation of Marxism, sustained by Lenin. According to Lenin, the people are not capable of beginning the revolution; instead they may be

initiated and led by the class of intellectuals that understand Marxism and may thus form the proletarian conscience. This elite is the Revolutionary Party.

For Lenin, this revolutionary action must lead to dictatorship of the proletariat, whose ethics must be placed at the service of class battle, without sparing the adversaries any violence. They soon went from theory to practice; in 1917 Lenin's Party managed to attain power through a coup d'état, consolidated in 1922 through two hard repressions against Menshevik, liberal social Democratic, Catholic adversaries. The preceding juridical system was declared fallen, too bourgeois and the Bolshevik Political Police, CEKA (later called GPU, NKVD and KGB) was instituted, with vast powers to search, arrest, try, condemn as well as execute death sentences. Forced collectivization of goods was also instituted.

When Lenin died (1924) the leadership of the Bolshevik empire went into the hands of Iosif Vissarionovich Dzugashvili (1879-1953), also called *Stalin*, who continued the reign of terror like his predecessor, not only against external enemies, but also against those within the Communist Party. An example of this is the Great Terror during 1936-38, when many economic, political and militant party heads were executed. The concentration camps for anti-Bolshevik detainees (the infamous *Gulags*), already instituted by Lenin, multiplied. And since 1939, Bolshevik Russia annexed the Eastern Polish Territories and the Balkan Republics, implanting even there the policy of terror: deportation and execution of nationalists, bourgeoisie, anti-Bolsheviks.

### 3.2. German National Socialist Totalitarianism

Even *fascist* and *nazi* totalitarianism finds its ideological foundation in the idea of the Hegelian nation understood and presented as a defense against the socialist movements and Soviet Bolshevism.

Nationalism, or nationalistic ideology, in the modern sense, is therefore characterized by the absolute exaltation of one's nation, justifying the battle and even the elimination of those who deny the assertion of one's nation and opening the door to wars and violence. Presented as a reaction to liberal ideologies, this is one of the main reasons for the beginning of the First World War.

After various political and economic crises and the deep lack of satisfaction and the humiliation suffered by the vanquished countries, the nationalistic ideology is further reinforced in post-war Europe, reaching and taking on totalitarian connotations in some nations, with the formation of true dictatorships.

In 1920, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) arises in Germany, a transformation of the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (DAP), Hitler being one of its members since 1919. He gives the new party a program composed of 24 points, taking on the presidency in 1921 and creating the assault squads (SA) to eliminate the social democratic enemies. The NSDAP, rapidly growing, wins the elections in 1932 and taking control of the Nation the following year.

The doctrine of the new movement is based on the following points: absolute exaltation of the German race, anti-Semitism, economic national solidarity, defense of the bourgeoisie, anti-socialism. The central theory in Hitler's thinking is enclosed in the concepts of *Volk, Blut, Boden* (People, Blood, Territory), as vehicles of a strongly nationalistic and racist mentality, contrary to all those who are not part of the German Aryan race: Jews, gypsies, handicapped persons... Hitler finds a vast consensus in Germany during the twenties and thirties, in a Germany humiliated by the defeat in the preceding conflict, suffering from economic problems and worried about socialist and Bolshevik expansion. Once having reached power, National Socialism shows its highly anti-Semitic and totalitarian face even more openly, activating (especially through the

infamous SS) repressions against Jews and enemies (real or not) of the party. In 1933, a concordat is ratified between the Holy See and the National Socialist State. Through this juridical instrument, the ecclesiastic hierarchy hopes that it has guaranteed being able to freely exercise its activities in the Third Reich Germany, which however continued to violate the signed pacts, taking on the total monopoly of youth education, the press and social life, controlling the preaching of the priests from the Catholic Church. In 1937, Pius XI promulgates the Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (drafted by Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pius XII), where he condemns the idolatry characteristic and neo-paganism of the Nazi ideology. But Nazism continues on its path of violence. In 1939, the Second World War begins, during which serious crimes against humanity are perpetrated by the Nazis as well as by the Communists, children of the same totalitarian ideology. In 1945, the war ends with the heavy defeat of Nazi Germany. Hitler and other Nazi heads choose to commit suicide, while the others that are captured are condemned to death or to imprisonment during the Nuremberg Trials of 1946. Europe is divided up among the pro-United States Allies and the Soviet Union.

#### **4. Father Kolbe and the ideologies of his times**

Father Kolbe's objective, with his pastoral activities (prayer, sacrifice, press, preaching, mission...) is the sanctification and salvation of souls through the Consecration to the Immaculate, who he worships as the Mediatrix of all graces. Saint Maximilian is a strenuous asserter of the doctrine – so dear to the Franciscan school and to the Marian spirituality of Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort – of Marian mediation: spreading the knowledge, the love and the worship of the Immaculate achieves the *Christification* (therefore the sanctification) of souls, in the most rapid and beautiful way.

To realize these ends, he founds, with another six brothers, the Militia of the Immaculate (M.I.) in October 1917. Following the arrogant anti-clericalism and anti-Christianity of certain Masonic demonstrations in Rome, young brother Maximilian Kolbe plans the project of founding a militia of the Immaculate against the Church's enemies, especially the Masons – as he himself asserts, committing himself to their conversion and therefore for the sanctification and salvation of all human kind.

##### **4. 1. Kolbe and Liberalism**

While liberalism is asserting itself – in a more or less obvious manner – a proud and absolutely autonomy of man towards the truths of faith and morals taught by the Roman Church as revealed by God, Father Kolbe instead asserts that happiness, the true realization of man, lies only in God and, therefore, happiness must be based on truth. Man is able to know the truth and also the existence of God the Creator.

##### **4. 2. Kolbe and Marxist Socialism or Communism**

Father Kolbe asserts that Marxist Socialism spreads atheism and materialism and restricts man's life to the earthly sphere, denying that there is a reality beyond death. While preaching liberty, equality and fraternity, in reality it denies private property, does not suppress social imbalances, rather creates deeper ones between capitalists and the proletariat, Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks. It denies the noble aspirations of human nature – which is free and able to aspire for infinite goods, the transcendent, God – takes



away from man the most precious item, that is to say faith, and generates tyranny by the dictatorial government (Bolshevik or Communist) over the citizens.

In November of 1936, the Polish Social Communist press begins a campaign (even with threats) against the *Niepokalanów*. Father Maximillian asserts that at *Niepokalanów* (in Polish this means the *property of the Immaculate*) *true life in common* reigns, founded not on hate and violence but on mutual love. *Niepokalanów* is a true family, where God is Father, the Immaculate is Mother, Jesus Christ the older Brother and the friars are not *companions, but brothers*.

### 4.3. Kolbe and National Socialism

There are no articles in Father Kolbe's writings that refer to Nazi ideology. It is interesting to note that in a letter dated April 6<sup>th</sup> 1939, addressed to General Marshal E. Smigly-Rydz, Chief of the Polish Army, Father Kolbe asserts that he gathered a sum of money – fruit of sacrifices and renunciations but the brothers of *Niepokalanów* – to contribute to the needs of the Polish troops. In September of the same year, the Second World War breaks out and the German troops invade Poland. *Niepokalanów* is bombed and invaded by the Nazis that ransack it. Towards the middle of September 1939, Father Maximillian is arrested and deported. He suffers hunger, cold humiliations, but always distinguishing himself throughout for his serenity and loving acceptance of these crosses: he offers all this to the Immaculate for the conversion and sanctification of souls, because he is convinced that the real *Niepokalanów* must reign in the soul, first of all.

From February to May 1941, Father Kolbe is a prisoner in the Pawiak Prison of Warsaw. It has been told that once a German section head, seeing the friar wearing the religious habit with the rosary and the Cross, slapped him with rage. In May of the same year he was transferred to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he suffered harsh treatment (forced labor, beatings, whippings, hunger...) just because he was a Catholic priest. Despite all this, he would comfort other prisoners, pray, catechize, listen to confessions and bear witness that, in word and deed, love creates while hate destroys.

## 5. Kolbe and Freemasonry

### 5.1. Impression of the Masonic «procession» in Rome in 1917

The evening of October 17<sup>th</sup> 1917, in one of the cells of the College of the Friars Minor Conventual, on Via San Teodoro in Rome, seven young brothers (Father Kolbe among these), with the consent of the rector Father Stefano Ignudi, founded the *Militia of the Immaculate*. During that first reunion the M.I. program was decided, the purpose being *“the conversion of every person living in sin, heresy, schism and especially Freemasonry, and the growth in holiness of persons, under the sponsorship of the B. V. M. Immaculate”*.

Father Kolbe was able to recognize and therefore judge Freemasonry through his Italian experience. This knowledge determined the foundation of the *Militia of the Immaculate*.

It is a well-known fact that the *Masonic* procession deeply impressed the young Polish friar: *“During the years preceding the war, in the capital of Christianity, in Rome, the Masonic Mafia, repeatedly disapproved by the Pontiff, would parade flauntingly. They did not even give up waving a black banner with the effigy of Saint Michael the Archangel,*

defeated by Lucifer, throughout the streets of the city during the celebrations in honor of Giordano Bruno. The Masonic emblems were brought up under the windows of the Vatican even. [...] Such mortal hate towards the Church of Christ and towards her Vicar on earth was not just a children's game by deviated individuals, but a systematic action deriving from the principle of Freemasonry: «To destroy any religion, especially Catholicism». Spread in the most diverse ways and in a more or less evident way throughout the world, the cells of this Mafia aim at this purpose. Also, they use a whole range of associations with the most varied names and purposes, which however, under their influence, spread religious indifference and weaken morality”.

Freemasonry in Italy has a very precise history: already at the beginning of the 1700's it was transplanted by English citizens into Italy, precisely in Florence, from where it quickly spread to other Italian cities, spreading its deistic-humanitarian ideas, its levels and its initial legend of Hiram; soon also the Templar-occult Freemasonry of French matrix arrived. In 1805 in Milan, the first Supreme Council of the ancient Scottish Rite and accepted in Italy. After the favorable parenthesis of the Napoleonic Era, Italian Freemasonry returned to clandestinity during the Restoration. There were lodges disguised as cultural and academic clubs. The Masons were active in the uprisings of '48 and '49 and during the entire Risorgimento. Anti-clericalism became characteristic of Italian Freemasonry and became even stronger after 1860, with the unity of Italy and with the taking of Rome in 1870. Anti-Masonic meetings were held on one hand and anti-clerical ones on the other.

In this context of anti-clericalism we can frame the gesture of the Masonic procession that Saint Maximilian witnessed. This was not the first time the masons, to express their hostility to the Church and to the Clergy, especially the Holy See, and to demonstrate their way of intending their own lay religiosity, used the figure of the devil. Examples of this are the *Hymn to Satan* by Giosuè Carducci, dated 1863, and the poem *Lucifer* by Mario Rapisardi. Even the Masonic parade for the inauguration of the monument to Giordano Bruno in 1889, then desired by the Grand Master of the Orient in Italy Ettore Ferrari, was opened with two banners with effigies of Satan. In 1895 at Palazzo Borghese at Rome, where the Grand Orient of Italy had its see since 1893, the Borghese family's agent, visiting the building, found in a closed Loge room, where on the wall a great red and black wall-tapestry depicting Lucifer dominated the room. Also, the house chapel was reduced to a sewer.

## **5.2. Masonic ideology according to Kolbe**

Father Kolbe demonstrates his ideas on Masonry in a conference written shortly before transferring the editing department of the *Rycerz Niepokalanej* from Krakow to the Convent at Grodno, therefore before October 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 1922. He refers to the pontifical Magisterium on Masonry, from Clement XII (1738) up to Leo XIII (1884). He presents the Masonry as a sort of sect that does not only aim at the fall of the Apostolic See, but that is also committed to corrupting customs and conspiring in the various political upheavals.

### **5.2.1. Naturalism**

According to Father Kolbe, the philosophical principles of Freemasonry clearly appear in the program, and that is to say the denial of the supernatural and therefore the liquidation of all religious expressions, like the Church: *"The tendency towards this purpose is evident at every step. The art, the literature and the periodicals, the theaters,*

the movies, the education of youths and legislation are moving rapidly towards the elimination of the supernatural world and the satisfaction of the pleasures of the flesh”.

Fr. Kolbe takes up what Leo XIII had already asserted in the Encyclical *Humanum genus* dated April 20<sup>th</sup> 1884: “[...] Now, the Masonic sect produces fruits that are pernicious and of the bitterest savor. For, from what we have above most clearly shown, that which is their ultimate purpose forces itself into view – namely, the utter overthrow of that whole religious and political order which the Christian teaching has produced, and the substitution of a new state of things in accordance with their ideas, of which the foundations and laws shall be drawn from mere naturalism. [...] Now, the fundamental doctrine of the naturalists, which they sufficiently make known by their very name, is that human nature and human reason ought in all things be mistress and sovereign”. On the theme of Masonic naturalism, Father Kolbe is also close to the Masonology of the Jesuit Father Grüber, de *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

### 5.2.2. Masonry and simonism in Kolbe’s thinking. Was he contrary to Jews?

Certain rather harsh expressions made by Father Kolbe should be placed within the socio-cultural context of the period. Miccoli states that between the end of the 1800’s and the beginning of the 1900’s, “politically organized anti-Semitism” emerges in Europe, where even some Catholics got involved. These are hard years for the Church, fought against by the various liberal political regimes in Europe and in Latin America. The press of the time, even the Catholic one, willingly believes that the Jews are the soul and the mind of many of these hostile lay positions against the Church. Miccoli and even Martina underline the fact that during this period anti-Jewish hostility takes on a double face that tends to continuously differentiate itself. There is the traditional anti-Semitism of Christian matrix, which reproaches the Jews for not having welcomed the New Testament revelation and laments the vast Jewish influx in the social and economic fields, and an anti-Semitism that would become evermore strongly racial and ethnic and is hostile to Jews inasmuch as they are Jews and, therefore, does not really care about the religious motivations. This is precisely what the Nazi anti-Semitism would be.

This is the socio-cultural environment Father Kolbe writes and works in. His opinions were largely shared by many Catholics of his time. He was not an anti-Semitic at all and his anti-Zionism can be placed in the offshoot of many Catholics of his time and in the Christian secular tradition; he was thinking about certain economically powerful Jews, not very religious and very materialistic who, according to the common opinion of many then, strongly influenced the political and economic life of the nation. However, Father Kolbe repudiated the attitudes of racist anti-Semitism.

In January 1926, he wrote in *Rycerz Niepokalanej* that “the Masons are nothing but an organized band of fanatical Jews, who aim at destroying the Catholic Church”. In October of 1926, he underlines this thesis quoting as source a paper titled the “Protocols of the Wisemen of Zion”, which at the time was said to have been written by a group of Jews by some. This document, which appeared during the first years of the 1900’s but probably composed at the end of the 1800’s, today is believed to be the work of the Tsarist secret police for anti-Semitic purposes. In his article, Father Kolbe believed that these *Wisemen of Zion* “were the true heads of the Freemasonry” and the pages in *Rycerz* refer to them. He quotes an excerpt from the *Protocols* where one reads: «Who or what is capable of making an invisible force crumble? Our strength is exactly this. External Freemasonry is used to hide the purposes of this force, whose plan of action and even where they are found will always remain unknown to the people». Father Kolbe answers these assertions by saying these words to the *Wisemen of Zion*: “[...] I believe that we are capable of making you fall

and we will make you fall. [...] We are an army, whose leader knows each one of you, has observed and observes each of your actions, listens to all your words, rather... not even your thoughts can evade his attention. [...] Do you know the name of our Leader? It is the *Immaculate*, the refuge of sinners, but also the killer of the infernal serpent. [...] But listen, our leader, the Immaculate, asks for mercy for you, the prolonging of your life, that you may have the possibility of going back into yourselves". In this text, we can see Father Kolbe's desire to call this "handful of Jews" to conversion, who, even with all their gold treasures, remain "the dust of the earth".

Kolbe reiterates that the Immaculate loves the Masons and obtains time from God that they may save themselves: therefore even the militia of the Immaculate must love the Masons (and especially the heads) praying for their conversion. In fact for this reason, Father Kolbe asks the members of the Militia of the Immaculate to recite the rosary, possibly together, during the month of October, and adds: "[...] And to whose advantage? To the advantage of our poor unhappy Masonic brothers, so much more unhappy because they do not realize they are on the path of perdition, nonetheless they are brothers, since Jesus did not exclude them from participating in the merits of His Passion".

Father Kolbe does not limit himself to exhorting the knights of the Immaculate and the other readers of *Rycerz Niepokalanej* to pray for the Masons, but he even states the intention they must have in making this Marian prayer: "Dear readers, do not believe that the best intention is not that they [the Masons] convert as soon as possible, rather enroll in the Militia of the Immaculate and, with the desire to repair the evil done till now, with greater fervor, following the example of Saint Paul after the conversion, they begin the work of salvation of souls?"

### 5.2.3. "Our poor unhappy Masonic brothers"

In an article in *Rycerz Niepokalanej* in September 1926, Father Kolbe comments on the International Masonic Congress that took place the preceding month at Bucharest, "with the participation of the representatives of the Masonic organizations from the United States, Poland, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Romania". He quotes long excerpts from the *Protocol of the Wisemen of Zion* (no. 11 and 15), where Zionist hate for the *goyim* (non-Jews) is obvious, attracted to the Masonic lodges like pawns in the hands of the *Wisemen*, who were aiming at world power. In this article, Father Kolbe speaks to the 'goyim' Masons and to the *Wisemen of Zion*: "Mister Masons, you who recently during the Congress of Bucharest, were happy about the fact that the Masonry is developing, reflect and sincerely say if it isn't better to serve the Creator of internal peace, in joyous love, rather than obeying the orders of a cruel Jewish group, mysterious and pitiless, never known, and that hates you? And to you the small handful of Jews, «the knowledgeable ones of Zion», who have [...] consciously provoked so many disgraces, while preparing even others, to you I ask this question: what advantages will you glean from this? [...] Wouldn't it be better if even you, the Polish Masons, deviated by a group of Jews, and you, the heads of the Jews, who have allowed yourselves to be seduced by Satan, the enemy of humanity, wouldn't it be better if you too sincerely turned towards God, recognized the Savior Jesus Christ, fell in love with the Immaculate and, under Her banners, conquered souls for Her?... Or do you prefer being a part of the head of that serpent that circles the world and of which was said: «He will crush your head» [Gen 3:15]? While you are still alive there is still time, but soon it may be too late!!!"

Father Kolbe's Masonic preoccupations are truly dated and reflect the mentality of the time, even if many facts of hostility and persecution against the Church and Christianity could explain the attitude and the language. In fact in the same article, he writes that, in reference to the International Masonic Congress of Budapest, "during this

year's congress we have noted that, among other things, *freemasonry is taking on a particularly important role in Poland, where the Masonic lodge has eminent members from the actual government*. Even in other states, freemasonry is developing rather favorably". In a letter from 1939, he writes the same thing: "[...] *Also, freemasonry is spread mainly among the most influential persons and manages in a systematic but subtle way almost all of the activity against the Church. Here and there we may find the same Jews dancing around the golden calf. The M.I. tries to convert all those that are in need of conversion, in the first place the freemasonry, and therefore of sanctifying each individual person that are living today and that will live in the future in any time and place*". Also during the same year, in the magazine *Kalendar Rycerza Niepokalanej*, he laments the spreading of Communist atheism, whose origins, according to him, "*can be tranquilly located in the criminal mafia «Freemasonry»*". *The hand that manages all this towards a clear and determined purpose, its own egotistic purpose, is «international Zionism»*". As proof of this, he bases himself on the *Protocols of the Wisemen of Zion*, however pointing out that even among the Jews there are "good people". We must emphasize that Saint Maximilian is not against Semitism. He distinguishes the Jewish people from some Jews ("handful of Jews") who for many are tied to the Masonic lodges. In a letter from Nagasaki to the brothers of Niepokalanów, he shows his thoughts: "*Speaking of Jews, I would be very careful of not casually inciting or not greatly deepening readers' hate towards them, who are often already so ill-disposed and at times even hostile towards them. In general, I would focus more attention on the development of Polish commerce and industry, rather than rant against the Jews. Evidently, cases of bad faith will occur among them, then we will need to proceed with greater energy, without ever forgetting, however, that our main purpose is always the conversion and the sanctification of souls, which means conquering them for the Immaculate, love for any soul, including the Jews, the Mason, the heretics, etc...*"

Father Kolbe's apostolic zeal for the conversion of masons often has surprising and even ingenuous aspects. Fr. Giuseppe M. Pal, co-founder of the Militia of the Immaculate, tells an episode that occurred during his studies in Rome with Father Kolbe: "[...] Another day he asked me to accompany him to the Palazzo Verde of the Freemasonry in Rome, to convert the Grand Master of the Italian Freemasonry and the other masons. And having assured him that if the Fr. Rector should give his permission, I would accompany him: immediately after lunch, he went to Fr. Ignudi and told him of his intentions. Having returned to me while I was waiting for him in the College courtyard, a little confused and resigned, he told me that the Fr. Rector told him that the time was not right and that perhaps it would be better to pray for the masons. He instantly made me pray for the conversion of the masons". Other witnesses at the canonical trials attest to his apostolate for masons, towards obtaining their conversion.

At the apostolic trial in Padua, Father Alfonso Orlini, General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual from 1924-1930, giving the following testimony regarding Father Kolbe and the M.I.: "The idea of the Militia of the Immaculate was conceived and matured by him in Rome, to face the aversion and the insults that the Masonic sects threw against the Church and the Pope. [...] The ideal matured very slowly: at first he thought about a Pious Union for prayer and suffering in the climate of the Immaculate (a traditional devotion of our Order). [...] The nature of this Pious Union is devotional, mainly aimed at the conversion of the masons: with the tactic of attracting rather than being hostile to the enemy: 'In nuce' lies the following development. This purpose may also be seen in the prayer: 'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us that turn to you, and in particular for the masons'. And the masons truly did convert: he would give them the Medal and then many would confess. The apostolate towards masons and pagans began in Poland..." Fr. Orlandini continued.

Father Kolbe's zeal for the conversion of masons obviously encounters numerous difficulties, as he recognizes in a letter from 1928 from Niepokalanów to his fellow brother Fr. Stryczny, "because even the annoyances seem to have grown since the masonry seemed to wish that Rycerz were established further away from Warsaw". The same was emphasized in a letter to his mother dated 23-3-1938. The chronicles of Niepokalanów for 19-3-1938 report the following news: "The Guardian Father, with feelings of thanks for the Immaculate, announced to the brothers during dinner that a hostile attack against Niepokalanów had been victoriously turned away and other attempts by the freemasonry had been unveiled". We do not know what sort of "attacks" these Masonic ones were. In 1962, one of the texts at the canonization trial for Father Kolbe, the priest Valeriano Meystzowiez declared the following about the editorial activity of Father Kolbe: "His publications were often the aim of Masonic-inspiration press". Fr. Antonio Ricciardi, General Postulator of the Order of the Friars Minor Conventual, author of the first Italian language biography on Father Kolbe (1947) writes the following: "Niepokalanów has had external enemies of all types: it had to face opposition, jealousy, boycotting, lethal assaults, finally victorious thanks to the protection of the Immaculate and the prudence of the Founder and the spirit of sacrifice of the members. The external enemies, being the biased, the masons, the a-Catholics and the anti-clerical acted with diabolical and perfidious hostility, especially when Niepokalanów, to evade their strategies, published the "Maly Dziennik" in other words "The Little Journal". With his decisively Catholic program, with the anti-Masonic spirit of the M.I., it was natural for "The Little Journal" to incite the anger of the enemies, who recurred to every form of boycotting to stop its success and make it fail".

In conclusion: In Father Kolbe's writings, the themes dear to the anti-mason authors of the 1800's and early 1900's do not appear, such as Satanism, Masonic occultism, symbolism, etc... which often would reach rather discussible and certainly less serious positions. Instead, Father Kolbe underlines two aspects essential to the Masonic ideology for him: 1) philosophical and moral naturalism, and 2) international Zionism. Unfortunately as the basis for this second judgment, he relies on the trustworthiness of a libel such as the *Protocols of the Wiseman of Zion*. Father Maximillian does not exclude aspects tied to a certain type of "Satanism", especially in the refusal of the dogma and in the exaltation of free naturalistic thinking, also leaning on personal memories of the Roman demonstrations of certain anti-clerical and Masonic groups that carried banners with the effigy of Lucifer. Father Kolbe also knew very well the pontifical documents on Freemasonry, such as the Encyclical *Humanum genus* and the Augustinian vision of the two cities – presented by the Leonine Encyclical – which he uses as a source to judge freemasonry. In the light of the ecclesial magisterium, he judges freemasonry a source of evils and an ideological position in opposition to the Christian Event.

The answer to the open or masked anti-clerical attack is however always very clear and is contained in the Statute of the Militia.

Also, in Father Maximillian, the consciousness of having to use the press (and then the radio, but also the emerging movie technology, etc...) to be incisive against the mentalities of the growing dominant anti-Catholic cultural currents is very evident.

### III. SOME CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT A HISTORICAL ECCLESIAL PERSON

At the end of my considerations on the history and events of Saint Maximillian Kolbe, I would like to give a few keys to the reading that this ecclesial figure offer us; they

will help us to better understand the characteristic presence of Father Kolbe in the Church and the meaning of his specific holiness.

According to the words of Saint Paul, the Church of Christ is founded on "apostles and prophets" (Eph 1:20), that is on the hierarchy and on charisms, or better yet on objective and subjective charisms, on the objective and subjective holiness: the Church receives grace from the Spirit (objective holiness in the hierarchy, in the sacraments) as a guarantee of victory against the powers of hell. This grace guarantees the Church the continuity of its divine mission, until the end of times. However, in no way does it dispense from following a personal subjective holiness. Rather, all that is institutional and objective exists only in function of this holiness of life. However the contrary is also true. If it is true that the sanctification of the Church's members is the purpose of its institution, it is also true that this purpose is achieved in the Church, which was created for the world. The Church is the Body of Christ. In it, each member is called to grow and to reach "unity in the faith... attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), since "to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph 4:7; cf Rom. 12:3-6).

Holiness, subjectively intended, writes von Balthasar, is identified therefore with love, practicing love, each member of the Church will live for the Church community itself: "By this we have learnt what love is: Christ having given His life for us! Therefore, we too must use our lives for our brothers. Christ sanctifies himself only "so that they too maybe sanctified in truth". "Charity does not look for its own interests".

However, it is not left up to the individual Christian to project the way to give himself to the entire community and living the style of one's own holiness. This is the Mystery of each single Christian vocation, that is to say the calling to realizing it in the particular state of each one's Christian life. The Spirit is the one that distributes charisms and the ministries within the Church, with a mysterious freedom. In the mission each one receives, the form of holiness that God requires of each one is rooted. The duty of each vocation and mission is identified with the sanctity accessible to him. As a consequence, holiness is something essentially social, and in this sense, taken away from individual choice. As von Balthasar precisely underlines, God has a particular idea for each Christian and assigns a precise place to each one in the ecclesial community. Therefore, the holiness each one is called to is not the observance of a general law, anonymous and equal for all, nor the carrying out of an individual project. It is the free realization of the plan of love conceived by God, who bears in mind freedom, rather gives it. Each one becomes himself, to the measure that he realizes the plan of God and conforms to his own being, body, and soul and spirit, to His design. For this, Christian perfection and human fullness coincide and form holiness.

The consequences of what we have said are evident: the vocation to holiness is neither univocal nor uniform, it is varied. The saints are gifts from God to His Church. Therefore, in the area of vocation to holiness, there are not only a great variety of personal tonalities, but also different forms. Certainly there is a fundamental vocation to holiness, the same for all Christians, starting from the founding grace-fact of Baptism. Starting from this foundation there is also the vocation to a particular, differentiated holiness, which is why God, for the good and the edification of the Church, gives to a single Christian special graces that help him grow into a particular life of holiness. Saints often have a clear knowledge of their own vocation-mission; this can especially be seen in the Founders.

Another aspect should be underlined, the one with reference to holiness as grace and not as an individual ethical project. Balthasar distinguishes between two types sanctity in the Church: he says that in the Body of Christ there are missions and ways of holiness that tend more from the Head from the Body, and others that from the Head tend more towards the Body, even if Head and members all make up one Body, even if Christ and the Church live upon the sole, unique grace and the holiness of Christ and of God. Within this

unity, a certain polarity exists, which manifests itself precisely in the field of polarized holiness. There are missions that fall upon the Church like heavenly lightning, because they must manifest the one and unrepeatable will of God towards the Church itself. They come from God and the Church embraces them and fully places them in its own holiness. The great figures of saints have a clearly prophetic mission in founding. They are always at the origin of the great movements of ecclesial renewal, in periods of traumatic crises in the life of the Church and of society. This first type is a holiness that from the Head tends towards the Body. There is also a second type of holiness that, contrarily, grows within the Church, like the Church's gift to its Head. This becomes a model for all Christians. These forms of holiness emerge from the Church, and are the fruits of its fertile grace. The Church presents them to God as new. Most of the Church's canonized saints come into this category. Balthasar writes that in the canonization of the first type of holiness it is more the Church obeying the Lord, while in the canonization of the second type of saints it is more the Lord that condescends the just desire of the Church. Both these types of saints live in the same holiness of God. However, the first type is a stronger presence in the Church. They are the milestones of holiness, which God places on the Church's path, a sort of exemplification of the Gospel, valid for today and for the centuries to come. One thing is certain, the history of holiness always demonstrates its total gratuity. But since it is more important, Balthasar underlines, for the Church to second God's wishes and not vice versa, it is also more important for her to attentively look for and embrace those saints that He clearly, without a shadow of a doubt, sends to it a great number of saints, make their message its own, as well as impetrate and allow for the possibility of more of these divine ambassadors through its own general holiness, rather than canonizing them, by its choosing. I leave up to each of you the job of judging the meaning of Saint Maximilian Kolbe as a grace given by God to the Church and to the world, in a particularly tragic and confused moment; he most surely is a prophecy, a miracle (supernatural sign) and a page of the Gospel of Christ for all; in this sense, we are invited, following the indication of the Didache "to look at the faces of saints and to learn from the speeches".

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