

**Question:** Is it true that on account of its recent scandals and infiltration by the freemasons, “*the Church has failed us?*”

**Answer:** In answer, while it is incorrect to affirm that “*the Church*” *has failed us*, the same may not be said of *its members*. This is a pivotal distinction, as Christ promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his “*Church*”: “*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Mt. 16:18-19).

One can no more claim that *the Church* has failed us on account of its sinful members than one can claim that *the family* has failed us on account of its sinful or dysfunctional members; one cannot blame that which Christ instituted (the former, *the sacramental Church* or the latter, *the domestic church*) on account of the sins or failures of its members. Anyone who does so, disparagingly minimizes the true nature of the Church, which is far greater than its *members*, as it is guided by its *head* who is none other than Christ himself (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:27). Indeed, Paul tells us that “*the Church is the pillar and foundation of truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15) and John adds that “*the Spirit of truth*” *guides it to all the truth* (Jn. 16:13).

Let us recall that *the Church* is not a mere juridic corporation, but a divine institution by God himself for which Christ shed his most precious Blood and of which he constituted himself the head; it is a union of human beings who are united by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by participation of and in the same Sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the Bishop of Rome. Therefore, despite the past 2,000 years of Church persecutions, and of the sinfulness and scandals of its members, Jesus Christ’s guarantee that it will *never* be conquered remains intact.

To further emphasize this important point, consider that Christ expressly established *his Church* to be the vehicle of his continuing mission in the world. He promised to remain present in his Church for all time, and he lovingly guides it through the presence of the Holy Spirit. To ensure the success of this mission, Christ gave his Church the ability to teach, govern and sanctify with his own authority. Furthermore, the Apostles appointed successors to ensure that the Gospel would continue to be handed on faithfully as “*the lasting source of all life for the Church*” (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 20; cf. also CCC, 860). The source and guarantee of this Church authority is Christ’s continuing presence in his Church: “*I am with you always, to the close of the age*” (Mt. 28:20), and this authority is enduring (Mt. 16:18).

The teaching authority granted by Christ to the apostles and their successors, i.e., the Pope and Bishops, is an integral part of her mission that cannot “*fail*” the people or be “*taken over*” or “*usurped*” by Satan as some claim. While the Church has been, is and will be

persecuted by diabolical forces, one cannot conclude that it will be “*destroyed*” or it will “*fail*” the people, despite the numerous failures of *its members* that include both hierarchy and laity. Such an affirmation leads the faithful away from the teaching authority Jesus conferred upon the Apostles and that is perpetuated in the episcopal office *until the end of time*. Even before he instituted the Sacraments, Jesus alluded to the enduring nature of this teaching authority despite the lack of virtue in those who exercise it: “*Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice’*” (Mt. 23.1-3). Today Christ’s teaching authority consists of the Magisterial teachings of the Pope and Bishops and bears with it the promise of Christ: “*He who hears you, hears me; he who rejects you rejects me, he who rejects me, rejects Him who sent me*” (Lk. 10. 16).

Therefore, a seer who would claim that he or she needs to ignore the Magisterium in order to find the truth is contrary to the “*divine and catholic faith*”<sup>1</sup> that has been handed on to us by the Apostles. Indeed, the teaching of the Magisterium is the prime, God-given means of finding the truth. Nor could one claim conscientious freedom to interpret Sacred Scripture as the voices in one’s head might dictate whilst contradicting the Church.

In any field of knowledge, conscientious freedom belongs only to a properly qualified professor teaching in his own field. Indeed, one is not properly qualified to interpret Sacred Scripture or private revelation if they do not use the correct method of working in this field. A science professor who prefers to go back to medieval scientific methods would be mocked by his peers. Now in Catholic theology, the correct method pertaining to revelation is to study the sources of revelation while leaving the final word of judgment up to the Church. One who does not follow this method is not qualified. The Church affirms: “*The task of authoritatively interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on [Scripture or Tradition], has been entrusted exclusively to the living Magisterium of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ*” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 10). Vatican II also stated, “*The bishops, when they are teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to the divine and catholic truth... The religious assent of the will and intellect is to be given in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Pontiff even when he is not speaking ex cathedra”.*<sup>2</sup>

Also significant are the qualities of a “true Church”, which Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger addressed in the declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, such as *the apostolic succession (the episcopacy) and a valid Eucharist*. In order to attain full Communion with the three divine Persons, there must also be present the qualities of *proclaiming the Gospel truth, announcing conversion to Jesus Christ and adherence to the*

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<sup>1</sup> CCC, 2089.

<sup>2</sup> Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I, vol. II, op. cit., pp. cap. II-IV, pp. 869.

*Church through Baptism and the other Sacraments.* Last but not least, in order to enjoy full Communion with the Catholic Church there must also be present *the doctrine of the primacy of Peter.*<sup>3</sup>

As for your mention of *the freemasons infiltrating the Church*, it would do you well to bear in mind that “the Church” has formally *condemned* all ties with the Freemasons! In point of fact, eight popes before Pope John Paul II have issued pronouncements condemning Freemasons or those activities and principles identified with Freemasonry: Popes Clement XII, Benedict XIV, Pius VII, Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, Pius IX and Leo XIII have condemned Freemasonry and its principles. Both the 1917 (art. 2335) and 1983 (art. 1374) Code of Canon

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<sup>3</sup> “*The Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: ‘This is the single Church of Christ... which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care (cf. Jn 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule her (cf. Mt 28:18ff.), erected for all ages as ‘the pillar and mainstay of the truth’ (1 Tim 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in [subsistit in] the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him’. With the expression subsistit in, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that ‘outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth’, that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. But with respect to these, it needs to be stated that ‘they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church’.*

*Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. The Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches. Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.*

*On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church. Baptism in fact tends per se toward the full development of life in Christ, through the integral profession of faith, the Eucharist, and full communion in the Church...*

*Therefore, these separated Churches and communities as such, though we believe they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church. The lack of unity among Christians is certainly a wound for the Church; not in the sense that she is deprived of her unity, but ‘in that it hinders the complete fulfilment of her universality in history’” ...*

*The Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom, must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Dominus Iesus, art. 16, 17, 22, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger; declaration approved by Pope John Paul II and published on August 6, 2000).*

Law have imposed the penalties of excommunication and interdict on Catholics who become Freemasons. One must bear in mind that most newcomers to Freemasonry are for the most part oblivious to the ultimate goal of the society. In his encyclical *Humanum Genus* Pope Leo XII stated that the unsuspecting newcomers to the secret society are most likely unaware of their ultimate goals and should not be considered partners in the criminal acts perpetrated by Freemasonry.

However, after the Vatican II Council some clerics questioned the Church's condemnation of Freemasonry because the 1983 code condemned all ties with “*an association which plots against the church,*” without specific mention of Freemasonry. Because the revised Code of Canon Law is not explicit on this point, some drew the mistaken conclusion that the Church's prohibition of Freemasonry had been dropped. As a result of this confusion, shortly before the 1983 code was promulgated, none other than Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Pope Benedict XVI) issued an official statement indicating that *the penalty was still in force*. This statement was dated November 26, 1983 and may be found in *Origins* 13/27 (Nov. 15, 1983), 450. This statement from the Vatican's Doctrinal Congregation is as follows:

*“The question has been raised whether the church's position on Masonic associations has been altered, especially since no explicit mention is made of them in the new Code of Canon Law, as there was in the old code. This sacred congregation is able to reply that the circumstance is to be attributed to a criterion adopted in drafting. This criterion was observed also in regard to other associations which were likewise passed over in silence, because they were included in broader categories. The church's negative position on Masonic associations therefore remains unaltered, since their principles have always been regarded as irreconcilable with the church's doctrine. Hence joining them remains prohibited by the church. Catholics enrolled in Masonic associations are involved in serious sin and may not approach Holy Communion. Local ecclesiastical authorities do not have the faculty to pronounce a diminution of the above-mentioned judgment, in accordance with the intention of this congregation's declaration delivered Feb. 17, 1981”* (AAS 73 [1981] pp. 240-241).

So, if indeed there are Freemasons within the Church, as the exorcist of Rome Fr. Gabriel Amorth and others assert, this does not mean that “the Church” has been overrun by freemasons, for remember, Christ has given us the guarantee that the Church will not ever be conquered. Such false seers who claim that we should not listen to the Pope or its leaders because they have apostatized, follow the path of schism. Those who follow such false seers resemble headless chickens running in circles in pursuit of the latest sensational utterance of a self-acclaimed seer. Not surprisingly, history has shown that more often than not those who trump papal and

episcopal teaching authority reflect the “anti-papalism” of the “Fratricelli” movement of 1296<sup>4</sup> and of the “Free Spirit” movement of 1312.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The *Fratricelli*, also known as the *Spirituals*, were a sectarian movement within the Franciscan order that, among other things, denied that Pope John XXII was really pope and asserted that his decrees were invalid. The *Fratricelli* were condemned by Pope Boniface VIII in 1296.

<sup>5</sup> The Free Spirit movement assumed various expressions that were more or less radical, and which are exemplified within half a century of Joachim of Flores’ death, when the Spiritual Franciscan Gerard of Borgo San Donnino published an introduction to Joachim’s works, thereby distorting Joachim’s teachings. In this publication Gerard of Borgo suggests, among other things, that the contemplative Franciscan monks would replace the hierarchy of priests, thereby eliminating the need for priests, and empowering the laity in this life to receive the grace of Christ without the need of the Sacraments. The “Free Spirit” movement was condemned by the Council of Vienne in 1312.