

VACANT SEE

## End of a pontificate marked by a 'paradigm shift'

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The pontificate of the first Jesuit Pope in history has drawn to a close: All Christians will now pray for the soul of the late Pope during the traditional nine days of mourning. Almost twelve years have passed since that late afternoon of 13 March 2013, when Francis appeared before the crowded square and greeted everyone with a simple "good evening". These have been years in which the "paradigm shift" began with the

accelerator at full throttle, but also with the handbrake on, given the presence of a silent but vigilant Benedict XVI.

**This interplay of forces was clearly in evidence** during the Synod on the family, held in Rome, and that gave birth to the well-known post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in which those who wanted to introduce obvious elements of rupture had to be content with diverting them into the notes. Then came the dubia of four cardinals - Caffarra, Burke, Brandmüller, Meisner - which never received a response, a sign that the Pope wanted to go his own way without justifying his actions, not even to those who are more closely united to the Pope in the government of the universal Church by virtue of their appointment as Cardinals. The first line, however, was a desperate attempt to show a supposed "continuity" between the German and Argentinean Popes, which led to the embarrassment of the case of Monsignor Dario Edoardo Viganò, who was forced to manipulate Benedict XVI's response to the request for a text of approval of Pope Francis' theology, presented in a collection of eleven small volumes published by the Vatican Publishing House.

**Next came the Synod on the Amazon**, with its very clear attempt to make priestly celibacy optional, which was thwarted by the timely publication of the book *From the Depths of Our Hearts* by Benedict XVI and Cardinal Robert Sarah; then the social encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, a burden that will not be easy to bear, since they diverge on many points from the teachings of Catholic social doctrine.

**A new Synod on Synodality was to seal the "synodal conversion" of the Church**, with positions of openness on hot topics such as the blessing of same-sex couples, the female diaconate, the exercise of authority in the Church; aspects that provoked a new wave of dubia from five Cardinals - Burke, Brandmüller, Sarah, Zen, Sandoval. 2021 was the year of *Traditionis Custodes*, which wiped the slate clean of Pope Benedict's other motu proprio, *Summorum Pontificum*, and revealed a blindness full of malice towards the living cells of the Church. It was a blow to the heart of many Catholics, whether they followed the old rite or not, but also to Ratzinger himself, who had dedicated his life to this difficult and essential internal reconciliation of the Church.

**With Ratzinger's death there was a collapse:** Cardinal Ladaria was dismissed, and the appointment of Fernández to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith further accelerated the internal dissolution of Catholicism, which reached an unprecedented crisis with the publication of the declaration *Fiducia supplicans*. This and other appointments were made by men who were utterly devoid of any sense of the Church, largely ideologised and characterised to the core by what Pope Benedict had called 'the

hermeneutic of rupture'. And, in many cases, by moral behaviour that would prove to be anything but upright.

**As if that weren't enough**, the figure of the Pope himself has been left in tatters by these years of pontificate. From the first "timid" interview with Eugenio Scalfari, a pontificate began that took place in the media arena, following its rules and expectations, up to the media seal of a pontificate that ended with Francis' last two public appearances, except for the fleeting and "silent" appearances in wheelchairs in the last few days, on Fabio Fazio's Italian television programme and at the Sanremo Music Festival. *Intelligenti pauca*.

**The Successor of the Apostle Peter**, who lives to confirm the faith of his brothers and sisters with his open and thoughtful words, has become omnipresent in the media: "official" interviews on the plane on his return from apostolic journeys and other less official ones, regular appearances on television programmes, documentaries and even messages on TikTok. Eternal salvation, moral and sacramental life, the person of Jesus Christ thrown into the public square with approximate expressions, incomplete teachings, misleading statements. As when Pope Francis invented that "all religions are a way to reach God", without any further clarification, thus nullifying with these few words the truth that there is only salvation in Jesus Christ.

**This media "omnipresence" led to the inevitable consequence** of any overexposure: the Pope's word has become one among many, perhaps a little more authoritative because of his seniority and moral prestige, but nothing more. What the public reads or hears is no longer considered to be the word of the Successor of Peter, who still today makes the power of the Word of the Lord resound, but the opinion of a man who is lost in the cacophony of many other voices.

**If the Pope no longer speaks to teach the truth of Jesus Christ**, but to express himself extemporaneously on the most varied subjects of the moment, then the meaning of the office which God Himself entrusted to him at the time of his acceptance is diluted in the eyes of the people, until it is hidden behind the simple man who holds that office. The Pope "must not proclaim his own ideas, but must constantly commit himself and the Church to obedience to the Word of God, in the face of all attempts at adaptation and dilution, as well as in the face of all opportunism. This is what Benedict XVI had said in his installation sermon from the Roman Cathedra: Francis has done just the opposite. The appropriate mourning for the death of the Pope must not hypocritically erase this bitter reality. For the good of the Church.

**With this media overexposure of Francis**, is the Church perhaps now perceived as

closer to today's man? The dramatic truth is something else, and we must have the courage to recognise it: it is not "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), but that image of the Church which remains after the "facelift" of mass media criteria, more like a modest spiritual and humanitarian organisation, useful to the fake fashion system in which it meekly functions. The pontificate of Francis, who has made the denunciation of worldliness his hobbyhorse, has in fact accelerated the self-secularisation of the Church to an unprecedented degree. Let us pray that the new pontiff will be empowered by the strength of truth to bring about a decisive change of course.