 Reading time: 6 min.

The so-called “Prophecies of Malachy” represent one of the most fascinating and controversial prophetic texts concerning the destiny of the Catholic Church and the world. Attributed to Malachy of Armagh, an Irish archbishop who lived in the 12th century, these predictions briefly describe, through enigmatic Latin mottos, the pontiffs from Celestine II up to the final pope, the mysterious “Peter the Second”. Although modern scholars consider them forgeries dating back to the late sixteenth century, the prophecies continue to spark debates, apocalyptic interpretations, and speculation about possible eschatological scenarios. Regardless of their authenticity, they nevertheless represent a strong call to spiritual vigilance and conscious waiting for the final judgment.

Malachy of Armagh. Biography of a “Boniface of Ireland”

Malachy (in Irish *Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair*, in Latin *Malachias*) was born around 1094 near Armagh, into a noble family. He received his intellectual formation from the learned Imhar O’Hagan and, despite his initial reluctance, was ordained a priest in 1119 by Archbishop Cellach. After a period of liturgical refinement at the monastery of Lismore, Malachy undertook intense pastoral activity that led him to hold positions of increasing responsibility. In 1123, as Abbot of Bangor, he initiated the restoration of sacramental discipline; in 1124, appointed Bishop of Down and Connor, he continued liturgical and pastoral reform; and in 1132, having become Archbishop of Armagh after difficult disputes with local usurpers, he liberated the primatial see of Ireland and promoted the diocesan structure sanctioned by the Synod of Ráth Breasail.

During his ministry, Malachy introduced significant reforms by adopting the Roman liturgy, replacing clan-based monastic inheritances with the diocesan structure prescribed by the Synod of Ráth Breasail (1111), and promoted individual confession, sacramental marriage, and confirmation.
For these reform efforts, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux compared him to Saint Boniface, the apostle of Germany.

Malachy made two journeys to Rome (1139 and 1148) to receive the metropolitan pallium for the new ecclesiastical provinces of Ireland, and on that occasion was appointed papal legate. Upon returning from his first journey, with the help of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, he founded the Cistercian abbey of Mellifont (1142), the first

of numerous Cistercian foundations on Irish soil. He died during a second journey towards Rome, on November 2, 1148, in Clairvaux, in the arms of Saint Bernard, who wrote his biography titled *“Vita Sancti Malachiae”* (Life of Saint Malachy).

In 1190, Pope Clement III officially canonized him, making him the first Irish saint proclaimed according to the formal procedure of the Roman Curia.

The “Prophecy of the Popes”: a text that appears four centuries later

Only in the 16th century was a collection of 112 mottos associated with this reforming archbishop, supposedly describing as many pontiffs: from Celestine II to the enigmatic “Peter the Second,” destined to witness the destruction of the “city of seven hills.”

The first publication of these prophecies, dating back to 1595, when the Benedictine monk Arnold Wion included them in his work *Lignum Vitae*, presenting them as a manuscript written by Malachy during his visit to Rome in 1139.

The prophecies consist of short, symbolic phrases intended to characterize each pope through references to their name, birthplace, coat of arms, or significant events of their pontificate. Below are the mottos attributed to the most recent pontiffs:

109 – **De medietate Lunae** (“From the half of the moon”)

Attributed to John Paul I, who reigned for only one month. He was elected on 26.08.1978, when the moon was in its last quarter (25.08.1978), and died on 28.09.1978, when the moon was in its first quarter (24.09.1978).

110 – **De labore solis** (“From the labour of the sun”)

Attributed to John Paul II, who led the Church for 26 years, the third-longest pontificate in history after Saint Peter (34-37 years) and Blessed Pius IX (more than 31 years). He was elected on 16.10.1978, shortly after a partial solar eclipse (02.10.1978), and died on 02.04.2005, a few days before an annular solar eclipse (08.04.2005).

111 – **Gloria olivae** (“Glory of the olive”)

Attributed to Benedict XVI (2005-2013). Cardinal Ratzinger, engaged in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, chose the name Benedict XVI in continuity with Benedict XV, a pope who worked for peace during World War I, as he himself explained in his first General Audience on April 27, 2005 (peace is symbolized by the olive branch brought by the dove to Noah at the end of the Flood). This symbolic connection was

further strengthened by the canonization in 2009 of Bernardo Tolomei (1272-1348), founder of the Benedictine congregation of Santa Maria di Monte Oliveto (Olivetan Monks).

112[a] – **In persecutione extrema Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae sedebit…**
This is not strictly a motto, but an introductory phrase. In the original 1595 edition, it appears as a separate line, suggesting the possibility of inserting additional popes between Benedict XVI and the prophesied "Peter the Second." This would contradict the interpretation that necessarily identifies Pope Francis as the last pontiff.

112[b] – **Petrus Secundus**
Refers to the last pope (the Church had Saint Peter as its first pontiff and will have another Peter as its last) who will guide the faithful in times of tribulation.
The entire paragraph of the prophecy reads:
*"In persecutione extrema Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae sedebit Petrus Secundus, qui pascet oves in multis tribulationibus; quibus transactis, Civitas septicollis diruetur, et Iudex tremendus judicabit populum suum. Amen." *
"During the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church, Peter the Second will sit, who will feed his sheep amidst many tribulations; when these things are finished, the city of seven hills [Rome] will be destroyed, and the terrible Judge will judge his people. Amen."
"Peter the Second" would thus be the last pontiff before the end of times, with a clear apocalyptic reference to the destruction of Rome and the final judgment.

Contemporary Speculations
In recent years, speculative interpretations have multiplied: some identify Pope Francis as the 112th and final pontiff, others suggest that he is a transitional pope leading to the true last pope, and some even predict 2027 as a possible date for the end of times.
This last hypothesis is based on a curious calculation: from the first papal election mentioned in the prophecy (Celestine II in 1143) until the first publication of the text (during the pontificate of Sixtus V, 1585-1590), about 442 years passed; following the same logic, adding another 442 years from the publication would lead to 2027.
These speculations, however, lack a scientific basis, as the original manuscript contains no explicit chronological references.

Contested Authenticity
Since the text's appearance, numerous historians have expressed doubts about its authenticity for several reasons:
– **absence of ancient manuscripts**: no copies datable before 1595 exist;
– **linguistic style:** the Latin used is typical of the 16th century, not the 12th;
– **retrospective accuracy:** the mottos referring to popes before the conclave of 1590 are surprisingly accurate, while those subsequent are much vaguer and easily adaptable to later events;
– **political purposes:** in an era of strong tensions between curial factions, such a prophetic list could have influenced the cardinal electors in the Conclave of 1590.

The Church's Position
Catholic doctrine teaches, as reported in the Catechism, that the destiny of the Church cannot be different from that of its Head, Jesus Christ. Paragraphs 675-677 describe "The Church's ultimate trial":

Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.
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 has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.
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. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven. God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world.

At the same time, official Catholic doctrine urges prudence, based on the very words of Jesus:
“Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” (Mt 24:11).
“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Mt 24:24).

The Church emphasizes, following the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 24:36), that the time of the end of the world cannot be known by humans, but only by God Himself. And the official Magisterium – The Catechism (no. 673-679) reiterates that no one can “read” the hour of Christ’s return.

The prophecies attributed to Saint Malachy have never received official approval from the Church. However, beyond their historical authenticity, they remind us of a fundamental truth of the Christian faith: the end of times will occur, as taught by Jesus.

For two thousand years, people have reflected on this eschatological event, often forgetting that the “end of times” for each individual coincides with the end of their own earthly existence. What does it matter if the end of our life coincides with the end of times? For many, it will not. What truly matters is authentically living the Christian life day by day, following the teachings of Christ and always being ready to account to the Creator and Redeemer for the talents received. Jesus’ warning remains ever relevant: “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on which day your Lord will come” (Mt 24:42).
In this light, the mystery of “Peter the Second” represents not so much a threat of ruin, but rather an invitation to constant conversion and trust in the divine plan of salvation.