

# Pacts of the Catacombs

Understanding the Pact of the Catacombs is integral to understanding the subversion that went on behind the scenes at the Second Vatican Council. It helps explain why so many prelates were swept along with the revolutionary forces that caused the radical changes to the Church's belief and life. It also gives an insight into the ideology that motivates Pope Francis.

## Original Pact

Three weeks before the closing of Vatican II, on 16th November, 1965, forty-two Bishops gathered near Rome under the Basilica of Sts Nereus and Achilleus, in the Catacombs of Domitilla. Together, they offered Mass and signed a document known as the "Pact of the Catacombs" which called for a 'new social order' starting within the Catholic Church.

Impetus for the pact came from Dom Helder Camara,<sup>1</sup> who was himself inspired by the work of Joseph Cardijn, founder of the JOC<sup>2</sup> [Young Workers Union.] Camara wrote to his Brazilian conferees suggesting that two Masses be held, one of them in Cardijn's parish, and a document signed by attendees committing themselves to a life of radical evangelical simplicity. One Mass was to be offered for "workers" and the other was to be for "the poor."

The two Masses ended up being held on two successive evenings, October 16th and 17th. The Mass "for the poor" was held in the Catacombs and was celebrated by Bishop Charles-Marie Himmer, who had ties with both Joseph Cardijn and the "Group for the Poor" at Vatican II.<sup>3</sup> The second Mass "for workers" was held the next night at the church of St Michael Archangel in the Roman suburb of Pietralata. There, the gathered bishops adopted a second document, the Pietralata Message, the contents of which have remained obscure.<sup>4</sup>

About forty bishops signed the Pact that night, pledging to divest themselves of pomp, including rich vestments as well as their personal wealth and they committed to using international bodies, specifically the United Nations, to achieve economic reform. Over time almost 500 clerics signed the Pact.

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<sup>1</sup> See separate file on Helder Camara

<sup>2</sup> <https://pactofthecatacombs.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pactofthecatacombs.com/the-mass-2/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://pactofthecatacombs.com/>

The document stated that “...the collegiality of the bishops finds its greatest evangelical significance in meeting the challenges faced by the human masses, who suffer the effects of physical, cultural and moral misery...” and promised to be “open to all, whatever their religion”.

The 1968 CELAM Conference in Medellin was said to be greatly influenced by the Pact,<sup>5</sup> and by the novel ideas that had been spread by Joseph Cardijn.<sup>6</sup>

Pope John XXIII promoted the theme of “a church for the poor” as being something novel (for the Church has always cared for the poor) and this theme was taken up by Pope Paul VI. Two months prior to the first Pact event, Paul visited the Catacombs, saying,

“Here Christendom deepened its roots in poverty, and in condemning the powers inflicting unjust suffering and bloody persecution: here the Church was deprived of all human power, it was poor, humble, pious, suppressed, heroic. Here the primacy of the Spirit was confirmed about which the Gospel speaks.”<sup>7</sup>

## Modern Pact



SOURCE: *Vatican News*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.rk-kerkplein.org/home/themas/samenleving/duurzaamheid/dom-helder-camara.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://australiancardijninstitute.org/cardijns-triumph-the-world-congress-on-lay-apostolate-1951/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.schoenstatt.org/en/francis/2019/10/catacomb-pact-for-our-common-home/>

Another meeting in the Domitilla Catacombs was held during the Pan-Amazon Synod in Rome in October of 2019. This time, up to 250 people, including forty bishops, were present and a new Pact entitled, “The Catacomb Pact for our Common Home”, was signed. This new document reiterated the basic sentiments of the earlier one.

Its theme was consistent with that of the Synod, “New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology” and the Pact specifically introducing itself as being “For a Church with an Amazonian face”.

Mass was offered by Cardinal Claudio Hummes, the General Relator for the Synod, who said that “... this is truly holy ground” and that the Church “must always return to its roots here and in Jerusalem”.<sup>8</sup> Hummes wore a stole that had belonged to Archbishop Camara and after the Mass, symbolically passed it onto the progressive Austrian Bishop Erwin Krautler, who works in Amazonia.<sup>9</sup>

Present at the Mass were laity including women religious and representatives of the Pan-Amazon region. The new Pact, like its predecessor, promotes ecumenism, a “preferential option for the poor” and the rejection of Catholicism’s sacrality. Additionally, the text of the original Pact was distributed to 450 delegates at the Synod in an attempt to emphasise its agenda.<sup>10</sup>

The 2019 Pact contained references to the words and themes of Pope Francis, particularly as found in *Laudato Si*, including rhetoric reminiscent of the heretical Teilhard de Chardin. It must be noted that previous Popes, such as John Paul II and Benedict XVI as quoted in *Laudato Si* were themselves impressed with the ideas of de Chardin.<sup>11</sup>

When news of the new Pact was made public, the radical Cardinal Walter Kasper told the media that Francis’ “...program is to a high degree what the Catacomb Pact was.” Although the Pact “was forgotten ... now he brings it back.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Pope Francis has worked for the agenda of the Pact since he was first elected. In March 2013, he told media representatives, “How much I wish for a poor Church for the poor.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-10/a-group-of-synod-fathers-renews-the-pact-of-the-catacombs.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.traditioninaction.org/RevolutionPhotos/A857-Cata.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <https://melbournecatholic.org/news/journalist-christopher-white-shares-scenes-of-the-synod-of-bishops>

<sup>11</sup> eg the “altar of the world” see

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html#\\_ftnref167](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#_ftnref167)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/secret-catacombs-pact-emerges-after-50-years-and-francis-gives-it-new-life>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.schoenstatt.org/en/francis/2019/10/catacomb-pact-for-our-common-home/>

It was lauded by pro-Bergoglian media: Massimo Faggioli said that “With Pope Francis, you cannot ignore the Catacomb Pact. It’s a key to understanding him, so it’s no mystery that it has come back to us today.”<sup>14</sup>

The last surviving attendee from the original Pact who was still alive in 2019 was the Italian Bishop Luigi Bettazzi. (He has since died.) At the time, Bishop Bettazzi said that “...God with his grace gave us a pope like Francis, who without having signed the pact, already led this kind of life and had experience of a simple church, a poor church, a church very close to the poor. The remembrance of the pact has been revived thanks to the atmosphere Pope Francis has indicated for the whole church to follow.”<sup>15</sup>

In November 2015, Rome’s Pontifical Urban University held a one-day seminar on the 1965 Catacombs Pact to discuss its significance.<sup>16</sup> Among the many speakers were Bishop Bettazzi as well as another original attendee, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray.

## Intentions

While many of the sentiments contained in the documents seem honourable at first glance, beneath them lies a radical attempt at changing the nature of the Catholic Church - one with its roots in the Marxist rejection of hierarchy and sacrality. The Pacts are steeped in the language and ideology of Liberation Theology, the Catholic-inspired Marxism that has been prevalent in Latin America since the 1970’s.

The original document specifically called for the elimination of titles such as “Monsignor” and “Eminence”, suggesting that these advance a form of elitism. However, for Catholics, these titles point to the God-ordered hierarchy and beauty of the priesthood and apostolic succession. No layperson is demeaned by the use of such titles, rather the intent is to glorify God and acknowledge His grace flowing through the Sacraments which only the priesthood and episcopacy can provide. In a similar way, the call for a rejection of the use of precious metals for sacred objects does not indicate a rejection of attachment to worldly riches. Instead, it displays a lack of reverence for the things of God, for the Liturgy and for the Real Presence. Catholics have always tried to reserve their best for the things of God and the use of precious metals reflects that desire.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/secret-catacombs-pact-emerges-after-50-years-and-francis-gives-it-new-life>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.catholicregister.org/faith/item/21273-back-to-the-catacombs-new-emphasis-placed-on-bishops-simplicity-pact>

<sup>16</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200806161816/https://www.mosaicodipace.it/mosaico/a/42226.html>

## Signatories

While only a few of the 2019 signatories are known (Cardinal Walter Kaspar, Pope Francis, +Erwin Krautler, Cardinal Claudio Hummes and Fr Oscare Beozzo (a biographer of Helder Camara), the names of 34 of the original signatories are known<sup>17</sup>, although it isn't clear if all of these men signed in the Catacombs after Mass in 1965. They include Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, who presented the Pact to Pope Paul VI. Cardinal Etchegaray was a notable later signatory as was Oscar Romero.

### Signatories to the 1965 Pact

- Msgr. Charles M. Himmer, Bishop of Tournai, Belgium
- Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil
- Dom Antonio Fragoso, Bishop of Crateus, Brazil
- Dom Francisco Austregésilo de Mesquita Filho, Bishop of Afogados de Ingazeira, Brazil
- Dom Joao Batista de Mota e Albuquerque, Archbishop of Vitoria, Brazil
- Dom Luiz Fernández, Auxiliary Bishop of Vitoria, Brazil
- Dom Jorge Marcos de Oliveira, Bishop of De Santo André, Brazil
- Dom Henrique Golland Trindade O.F.M., Archbishop of Botucatu, Brazil
- Dom José M. Pires, Archbishop of Paraiba, Brazil
- Dom Cándido Padín, Bishop of Lorena, Brazil
- Msgr. Georges Mercier, Bishop of Laghouat, Sahara, Africa
- Msgr. Hakim, Melkite Bishop of Nazareth, Israel
- Msgr. Haddad, auxiliary Melkite Bishop of Beirut, Lebanon
- Msgr. Gérard Mario Coderre, Bishop of Saint Jean, Quebec, Canada
- Msgr. Rafael González, Auxiliary Bishop of Valencia, Spain
- Msgr. Julius Angerhausen, Auxiliary Bishop of Essen, Germany
- Msgr. Guy Marie Riobé, Bishop of Orléans, France
- Msgr. Gerard M. Huyghe, Bishop of Arras, France
- Msgr. Adrien Gand, Auxiliary Bishop of Lille, France
- Msgr. Luigi Betazzi, Auxiliary Bishop of Bologna, Italy
- Msgr. Bernard Yago, Archbishop of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Africa
- Msgr. Joseph Blomjous, Bishop of Mwanza, Tanzania, Africa (of Dutch origin)
- Msgr. Charles Joseph de Melckebeke CICM (expelled from China and then living in Singapore, Apostolic Visitor of the Chinese Catholics outside China, Belgian origin)
- Msgr. Manuel Larraín, Bishop of Talva, Chile, President of CELAM
- Msgr. Marcos G. McGrath, Bishop of Santiago de Veraguas, Panama, Secretary of CELAM
- Msgr. Leonidas Proaño, Bishop of Ríobamba, Ecuador
- Msgr. Alberto Devoto, Bishop of Goya, Argentina
- Msgr. Vicente F. Zazpe, Archbishop of Sta. Fe, Argentina
- Msgr. J. José Iriarte, Bishop of Reconquista, Argentina
- Msgr. Alfredo Viola, Bishop of Salta, Uruguay
- Msgr. Tulio Botero Salazar, Archbishop of Medellín, Colombia
- Msgr. Raúl Zambrano, Bishop of Facatativá, Colombia
- Dom Sergio Méndez Arceo
- Dom Samuel Ruíz from México

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<sup>17</sup> <https://pactofthecatacombs.com/signatories/>