

Billot – II

December 28, 2013

It is not only by the names of the seven Churches of Asia (cf. “Comments”#) but also by the contents of the seven Letters addressed to them (Apoc. II and III) that Cardinal Billot establishes the connection between the Letters and seven main periods of Church history. Especially interesting in this respect is the Letter to the church of Sardis (Apoc. III, 1–6) which would correspond to our own Age, the fifth, the Age of Apostasy. After evoking the wealth, luxury and material prosperity associated with Croesus, famous ruler of Sardis, Billot writes:–

“As one might expect, this church seems to be in a state of spiritual decline. Apostasy and falling away are on all sides, but while the majority of souls abandon religion, there are a few who remain faithful to Christ. The angel says, *‘Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.’* But: *‘Thou hast the name of being alive: and thou art dead!’* The name (but not the reality) of life, knowledge, freedom, civilization, progress; and thou art dead, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, because the light of life, which is Our Lord Jesus Christ, has been rejected. Hence the bishop of Sardis is told, *‘Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die.’* And he is above all recommended to cleave unflinchingly to all the traditions of the holy Apostles, without in the least way departing from the meaning they held for the Church Fathers, with the excuse or under the appearance of a deeper understanding: *‘Have in mind therefore what thou hast received and heard: and observe, and do penance.’* So much for the Fifth Age. But what follows is a little more rejoicing.” And the Cardinal goes on to the Sixth and Seventh Ages.

Readers who have never read the first six verses of *Apocalypse* III in connection with our own times should be interested to

do so. The connection is remarkable, and not co-incidental.

It is remarkable because "*Strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die*" corresponds exactly to the Counter-reformation saving Catholicism from Protestantism, to the anti-liberal Popes saving what remained of the Church from the French Revolution, to Archbishop Lefebvre (and others) rescuing Tradition from Vatican II, and now to a Resistance battling to save what can be saved from his Society collapsing into liberalism. Surely Catholics may take heart from this perspective, that their long and seemingly hopeless rearguard action comes from a distant past and does fit into an ultimately triumphant future. That is why we were given the book of the *Apocalypse*.

Nor is the connection co-incidental. Our Lord promised his Apostles (Jn. XVI, 12–14) that his Spirit, the Holy Ghost, would be with them and with their successors down the ages to reveal to them what they would only then need to know. It was only when the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) was ravaging Germany that the Venerable Holzhauser was given his understanding of the Seven Ages hidden within the Letters to the seven churches of Asia. Similarly it was only when the Russian Revolution was just about to break out that we needed Our Lady to assure us at Fatima that in the end her Immaculate Heart would triumph. True, the Church is right now being eclipsed (see on the Internet the film-clips of the public Mass celebrated recently in Brazil by the churchman in white), but there is still no need or justification for us to become liberals.

Kyrie eleison.