

# Desacralisation as the Sanctification of the Church

Rosmini's diagnosis of the plagues of the Church and their topicality

by Kurt Appel

## Abstract

In the first part of the essay, the author examines the five plagues of the Church that were presented by the great Catholic intellectual Antonio Rosmini in 1848 in a text entitled *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa*. The text was very influential for Italian Catholicism in the 20th century. According to Rosmini, the five plagues are: the separation of the people from the clergy in the public cult, the insufficient education of the clergy, the discord amongst the bishops, the handover of the appointment of bishops to the power of laymen, and the serving of economic power and ecclesiastical goods. The author argues that the plagues formulated by Rosmini are not simply a diagnosis of the unsatisfying state of Catholicism but also refer to the question of the sacred and the holy. Holiness is to be linked to the unpronounceable Tetragrammaton YHWH, designating something inaccessible to human power. Rosmini, conscious of the power mechanisms of society and their totalitarian grasp, imagined a lovingly devoted Church to have the task of renouncing earthly regimes of power, thereby remembering its evangelical origins. The author shows that each of the plagues designates a critique of Church's claim to worldly power. In the second part, he examines a conception of holiness in which the holy designates the individual as oscillating between two subjects, its own and that of Jesus, the latter marking a radical opening of the subject and the abundance of the name of God. It is betrayed when the Church becomes an institutional space of sacralised power detached from the profane world. In the third part, the author introduces four new plagues of the Church: 1. the exclusion of laymen from responsibility for the Church, 2. the claim to moral superiority as a legitimisation of sacralised power, 3. sexual abuse and 4. clericalism as patriarchal power and the exclusion of women from responsibility in the Church. While these contemporary plagues indicate a self-centred and power-conscious understanding of sacrality inadequate to the biblical concept of holiness, Pope Francis's notion is rooted in the latter. The Pope thereby shares Rosmini's notion of holiness, a notion that is decisive for the future of the Catholic Church.

## Keywords:

Antonio Rosmini, Five Plagues of the Church, Holiness, Clericalism, Pope Francis, Women in Priesthood