

## Christ or superstition: when Faith is reduced to images, signs and fair apocalypses

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A thirsty people... but misguided, false religiosity

In the streets of our cities, in small towns, in forgotten peripheries, popular Catholicism breathes. Mass processions, little cards in pockets, lit candles, rosaries hanging in the rearview mirror. All of this can be beautiful and legitimate when it leads to Christ.

The problem is when it becomes **superstitious refuge** to evade the demanding Gospel.

Today we are witnessing an alarming phenomenon: crowds running after supposed Marian apparitions never recognized by the Church; Catholics who become obsessed with apocalyptic messages spread on social networks by fairground prophets; faithful who believe more in “images that cry” than in the **Living word of the Gospel**.

Is that really Christianity? Or is it a childish return to the paganism of amulets?

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The Church was never “a museum of images”

Originally, Christians did not use images. His only strength was testimony. The fish, the anchor, the Good Shepherd: simple symbols in catacombs. It was only after the Constantinian peace that Christian art flourished in mosaics and icons. And when some wanted to destroy them for fear of idolatry, he **II Council of Nicaea (787)** he clarified: images can be venerated, but **worship only God**.

The Church, therefore, never taught to idolize images. He always understood them as pedagogy, as a window to the Mystery. The problem is not in the image itself, but in the heart that clings to the form and forgets the substance.

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Appearances: sign or distraction

Mary has appeared in history, and the Church has prudently recognized some of these irruptions: Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima. Always in contexts of crisis, always with a message that refers to Christ.

**Mary never preached to herself.**

But in parallel, hundreds of false or dubious apparitions emerged, used by sectarian groups to manipulate the people. Today supposed messages from heaven proliferate on the Internet, loaded with fears and apocalyptic visions. Thus a is generated **paranoid catholicism**, obsessed with the end of the world and blind to the concrete suffering of his next-door neighbor.

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#### The drama of false religiosity

Here is the necessary complaint:

- Catholics seeking **talisman and miracle**, but they do not practice justice or mercy.
- Preachers who sell “blessed rosaries” as if they were safe from misfortune.
- Shepherds who remain silent in the face of political and social corruption, but multiply processions so as not to make anyone uncomfortable.
- A domesticated Faith, turned into a spectacle, that entertains but does not transform.

That's not Christianity. That is **idolatry disguised as devotion**.

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#### The measure of Faith: love of neighbor

Christ made it clear: “**I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink**” (Mt 25,35). The final judgment will not be about how many rosaries we pray or how many apparitions we make pilgrimages to, but about how much we love the little ones.

Authentic religiosity is not measured in miraculous images or prophecies of catastrophe, but in **shared bread, justice sought, wounds bandaged, tears accompanied**. The true Christian is not the one who collects little cards, but the one who transforms society with concrete gestures of love.

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#### Prophets of fear vs. disciples of service

Today there are many supposed prophets who see signs of the Apocalypse in every climate catastrophe, in every technological advance, in every political crisis. They are merchants of fear. They feed an anxious and apocalyptic Catholicism that neither evangelizes nor builds, it only paralyzes.

The authentic disciple, on the other hand, does not flee from the world, he transforms it. He does not lock himself in chapels waiting for miracles, but **he goes out to meet the poor, the sick, the marginalized**.

**There is Christ, not in the statue that supposedly “opens and closes its eyes”.**

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#### Purify popular religiosity

Popular religiosity is a treasure when it is well oriented. It is the way in which the simple express their Faith. But it needs constant purification:

- Remember that Mary never eclipses Christ, she always leads to Him.
- Teach that images are symbols, not amulets.

- Encourage devotion to be expressed in works of charity.
- Unmask manipulators who profit from false appearances or scary speeches.

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#### A prophetic Church or a folkloric Church

The dilemma is clear: either we recover the centrality of Christ and the fire of the Gospel, or we become a folkloric Church, full of processions and little cards, but empty of conversion.

#### **A Church that entertains crowds, but does not change history.**

And that would be the worst betrayal: to be content with superficial religiosity while the world burns with injustice, war and hunger.

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#### Conclusion: return to the heart of the Gospel

The Christian who does not play for others does not follow Christ, he follows a mirage. The only image that truly saves is that of the **Christ alive in today's crucified**: the poor, the discarded, the migrants, the forgotten sick.

Everything else –spectacular apparitions, visions of the end of the world, crying images– is, at best, distraction. And at worst, **dangerous idolatry**.

The path is clear and demanding: less superstition, more Gospel. Less fear, more justice. Less empty devotions, more love for your neighbor.

**Because whoever seeks God in apocalyptic signs and not in the brother who suffers, has already lost him.**

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Source: <https://catolic.ar/cristo-o-supersticion-falsa-religiosidad/>

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**Popular religiosity, images and apparitions: between the treasure of Faith and the risk of superstition**

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Popular religiosity: Christianity was not born surrounded by images

The first Christians lived in hiding. In the catacombs there were no processions or miraculous statues, but sober signs: the fish, the anchor, the Good Shepherd.

His strength was not in objects, but in the **coherence of life until martyrdom**.

With Constantinian peace, faith was expressed in art and beauty. Then came the iconoclastic crisis and the **II Council of Nicaea (787)**, who distinguished veneration from adoration.

A clear teaching: **the images are pedagogical, not magical**.

The Church never thought of them as talismans. Whoever uses them like this distorts tradition.

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Popular religiosity: a treasure that needs purification

He **Second Vatican Council** he recognized the value of popular expressions (SC 13), as long as they lead to Christ.

In Latin America, the **Puebla Document (1979)** he spoke of “a privileged way in which the people receive the Gospel” (n. 444). But he also denounced the dangers: magical reductionism, superstition, manipulation (nn. 458-459).

In continuity,  **Aparecida (2007)** he described popular religiosity as “a precious treasure of the Church” (n. 258), but made it clear that it needs to be continually evangelized.

In other words: popular religiosity **it is not eliminated or despised**, but **yes it is corrected and purified**.

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Mary and the apparitions: never in the center

The Catechism (n. 67) teaches that private revelations are not necessary for faith. They can help, but never replace the Gospel.

Saint John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* he insisted: Mary does not announce herself, but leads Christ (n. 24). His word in Cana —“Do what He tells you” (Jn 2:5)— remains the criterion.

The recognized apparitions (Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fátima) always refer to prayer, penance, justice. False apparitions, on the other hand, create a climate of morbid curiosity and fear.

Today apocalyptic messages attributed to the Virgin proliferate on networks, which contradict the Gospel and generate **catholicism of fear**.

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Current deviations: a superstitious Catholicism

In many places in Latin America and Europe we are witnessing a growing phenomenon:

- Images that “cry blood” and draw gullible crowds.
- Groups that sell rosaries or prints as “guarantee of miracles”.
- Preachers who see the end of the world in every world crisis and frighten the faithful.
- Communities that reduce the Faith to processions, but that are indifferent to the hunger of the neighbors.

That's superstition, not Christianity. And the most serious thing is that many times these practices are not corrected, but tolerated by those who should guide God's people.

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The guilty omission of the pastors

Here is the deepest wound: **bishops and pastors**.

- The Code of Canon Law (c. 386) indicates that bishops have the duty to announce the Gospel in its entirety and ensure correct doctrine.
- The Second Vatican Council (*Christus Dominus*, n. 12) affirms that it is up to them to discern and correct deviations in the piety of the faithful.

**However, in many cases silence reigns. Why?**

- **For fear of losing popularity.** They prefer a crowd in procession to mature communities, even if those crowds live a magical Faith.
- **For convenience.** Letting superstition run is easier than evangelizing with patience.
- **By political calculation.** Processions and devotions guarantee social presence and economic support.

So, instead of shepherds leading, we sometimes have **religious officials who administer folklore**. And that omission is guilty, because the people are exposed to manipulators.

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The definitive criterion: charity

Saint Paul summed it up: “Even if I have all faith, if I have no charity, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).

Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 201), reaffirms that Faith is measured in charity and the option for the poor. And in *Fratelli Tutti* remember that authentic spirituality is service and brotherhood, not evasion or fear.

The final judgment of **Matthew 25** it is final: faith is played in feeding, drinking, visiting the sick and the prisoner. Everything else —images, devotions, apparitions— is valid only to the extent that it leads us to that concrete love.

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Purify to save the Faith

What to do then?

- Train the people of God in the **centrality of Christ**.
- Preach that images are **signs**, not amulets.
- Integrate popular religiosity with liturgy and catechesis.
- Unmask those who manipulate with false apparitions or apocalyptic messages.
- Demand that pastors exercise their mission of discernment, even if it is unpopular.

True popular religiosity does not disappear when it is purified, on the contrary: it becomes more fruitful, because it returns to the source of the Gospel.

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Conclusion: between the Gospel and superstition

The Church today has a historical dilemma:

- Or he dares to purify popular religiosity and returns Christ to the center, even if that bothers comfortable sectors
- Or it resigns itself to becoming a religion of processions and magical devotions, incapable of transforming society.

Bishops and pastors have a serious responsibility: to remain silent is to let the people be carried away by superstition. And whoever should guide and does not, betrays his mission.

Because the only image that really saves is that of the **Living Christ in the suffering brother**. Everything else —spectacular apparitions, statue tears, apocalyptic visions— is accessory.

The future of the Faith depends on a courageous return to the heart of the Gospel: less superstition, more charity; less fear, more justice; less comfortable silences of pastors, more prophecy.

Source: <https://catolic.ar/religiosidad-popular-supersticion-cristo-centro/>