

LENTEN REFLECTION

The Father of Lies...

AND THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH



A woodcut from an old missal showing the temptation of Jesus by the devil

■ BY CATHY PEARSON

*“He was a murderer from the beginning...
He is a liar and the father of lies.” — John 8:44*

As Lent is a season of spiritual warfare, it behooves us to know our enemy. Our enemy, as St. Paul tells us, is not flesh and blood, but spirit — “principalities and powers of darkness in high places” — troops whose leader St. Peter describes as a roaring lion in search of someone to devour. The warfare over our souls is not between good and evil as intellectual concepts, but between active personal wills — God who is pure love and the devil who is pure hatred.

Ultimately this war touches each of us personally, and this reflection here will conclude on a rather personal note. But first it is important to create an analytical framework in which the seemingly random assaults of our enemy can be seen for what they are — part of a grand strategy by a wily general who has yet to concede that Christ has already won the final battle.

Through this window we will also be able to see that calumny and slander — sins so easily dismissed and often unconfessed — are in fact the ultimate weapon in the arsenal of our murderous foe.

KNOWING THE ENEMY

Each year at the beginning of Lent, the Church sets before our eyes the Gospel account of Christ’s temptation in the desert — perhaps lest anyone fall into the modern temptation of dismissing the idea of a personal devil as an Old Testament myth, to be discarded along with the supposedly equally mythical account of the Fall of Man.

In fact, the New Testament is replete with accounts of Our Lord’s battles with demonic spirits — who reveal their number as “legion” — and with their chief, Satan or Lucifer, the fallen archangel who declared his war in heaven with the fateful decision, “*Non serviam*” (“I will not serve”).

The essence of evil is not mere failure to do good. It is hatred of the good. The devil hates the good God, but is powerless against his Creator. Nor can he do anything to diminish the angels, whose goodness is as eternally fixed as his own iniquity. He thus turns his hatred on human beings, trying his best to separate them from the grace and eternal happiness to which they are called and which, unlike himself, they still have a chance to attain. His goal is to rid the human race of all that is good and bring it down to his own level.

Satan’s war against the good is a double-track offensive. He seeks to destroy each individual soul — to destroy whatever

good and potential for good is there — out of hatred for each person, but also to eliminate that soul as a *force for good* in the human community as a whole. He does this out of hatred for all mankind, and for God, and most especially for the God-man Jesus Christ, hoping vainly to deprive Him of His victory.

His strategy for eliminating his enemy, a good soul, is four-fold — to corrupt the good, to torment the good, to destroy the good, and to discredit the good.

Each tactic is a fallback for the one before. And together they show how closely related are the two seemingly distinct attributes by which Christ Himself described his archenemy: “a liar” and “a murderer.”

(1) First try to corrupt...

He starts in liar mode. As he lied to Eve, telling her that by eating the fruit she would not die but become Godlike, so he lies to all of us.

He tries to convince us we will be happier with whatever represents the forbidden fruit of the moment — whether it comes in the form of sensory or emotional gratification, intellectual satisfaction, security, longevity, whatever — than we will be by obeying God.

Of course, in the long term that is always a lie, and often enough in the short term — especially if one considers 80 or 90 years out of eternity as “short term.”

But believing the lie is not the essence of the sin; it just sets up the option. Neither Adam nor Eve, nor we when we sin, can duck behind “the devil made me do it.”

The fact that his promises are empty makes falling for them stupid, but no one loses his soul for stupidity.

Wisdom sees no advantage in disobedience; weakness and stupidity perceive an advantage that is in fact illusory; but virtue obeys in the face of a perceived personal advantage whether illusory or not. Satan’s trickery has made disobedience appealing, but only our sinful selfishness makes us decide that doing what is appealing is more important than obeying God.

Since placing anything above our Creator is the essence of idolatry, it is not surprising that the devil, in his temptation of Christ, makes the choice explicit — the *quid pro quo* for “all the kingdoms of the world and their riches” is to fall down and worship Satan.

With most of us he is more subtle, but the price is the same. Christ could have refused on the grounds that Satan could offer nothing that the King of Heaven could possibly want or need, but He answered instead with a reason that applies equally to the rest of us, for whom the devil’s temptations can be, and indeed often are, actually tempting: “The Lord your God shall you worship, and Him alone shall you serve.”

(2) If you can’t corrupt, torment...

Enticement is only the first salvo in Satan’s war against the good. Clearly, if he succeeds in “turning” his enemy (to borrow spy lingo), by getting that soul to fall for his allurements and turn from virtue to vice, he has gained a friend and lost one enemy, and need not activate the fall-back plans. But thanks to God’s grace, many *do* resist his blandishments — perhaps finding no appeal at all in some of his cruder evils (say, cruelty or perversion or witchcraft), habitually choosing to deny their own natural inclinations (for instance, toward pride or pleasure or vengeance) if indulging them would offend God, and, finally, humbly seeking God’s forgiveness if they should have the misfortune to fall into sin, thus quickly regaining His grace.

Faced with this type of tenacious resistance to his carrots, the devil swings into Plan B, whipping out his sticks. His *modus operandi* usually involves inciting others to commit violence or other sins against his targets (as, in the most egregious example, inciting Judas to betray Christ), though in some cases he sends his demons to buffet them directly (as many saints, ranging from John Vianney to John Bosco to Padre Pio, have reported).

To some extent, the devil’s campaign to torture his enemies can be seen as just another tactic to break down their resistance and

obtain a surrender under duress. Dramatically portrayed in the *Book of Job*, the devil flings the gauntlet before God: it’s easy for Job to serve Him while everything is going well for him; let’s see what happens when he’s miserable. The good person desires the will of God, and the more closely he learns to align his own will with God’s, the fewer of Satan’s propositions have any real appeal. That’s why spiritual warfare so often gets physical. Physical pain, emotional sorrow and bodily death are part of the uniquely human condition since the Fall, but they are so contrary to what a reasonable mind experiences as good, and to the happiness for which we were created, that no sane person chooses them for their own sake.

Thus the devil hopes that those souls he cannot snare through greed, malice, lust, dishonesty, pride, or other vices that entail some *attraction* to something evil, he will succeed in bringing down instead through their natural *aversion* to something evil, namely suffering and death. He can use that aversion to elicit sins of cowardice, impatience or bitterness, or even — in classic torturer fashion — to extort other sinful choices the victim would not have freely chosen.

But sometimes this tactic doesn’t work either. As in the case where he entices men to want things God forbids, when the devil contrives to make torture and death the price of obedi-



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ence to God, he again sets up his victims by creating a divergence of wills between them and God. But they can still choose to obey God, and as ordinary virtue would compel them to do so in the first case, heroic virtue compels also in the second.

Hebrews 5:8 tells us that Jesus Christ, "Son though he was, learned obedience by what He suffered." Because in His divine nature there could never be a divergence of will between Him and His Father, there could be no occasion for obedience, which implies doing *as* commanded and *because* commanded, something one would not otherwise have done anyway. Because Christ's human nature was itself sinless, his whole heart and mind and soul during His time on earth also desired exactly what the Father desired, a convergence requiring no obedience. The temptations of the devil in the desert thus had no impact; they had nothing to work with. So, as St. Luke tells us, Satan left Him "to await another opportunity."

Satan found that opportunity in the Garden of Gethsemani. At last he had his divergence, as Jesus, reflecting the natural aversion He experienced as man to the pain and death awaiting Him, prayed to His Father to be spared this suffering if possible, while adding, "not My will but Thine be done."

Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich and other mystics tell us that the devil tried his utmost to exploit that divergence between "Mine" and "Thine," mercilessly bombarding our Redeemer with temptations. But the Father of Lies failed in the garden as utterly as he had in the desert. We see it immediately in St. Matthew's Gospel. (Three evangelists record that the Lord in agony prayed essentially the same prayer repeatedly, but only Matthew separately records the original prayer and the repetition.) When Jesus restates His prayer, the divergence has vanished; there is no contrasting "not My will" — just "Thy will be done."

By the grace He won, countless saints have followed in their Savior's footsteps, winning the palm of martyrdom or similarly enduring with Job-like meekness the extreme torments thrown against them during lives of heroic virtue. To some extent, Satan's campaign to torment the good can be seen as the venting of blind fury, above and beyond any hope of breaking their resistance, bent simply on punishing them for

their imperviousness to his wiles. The fact that some men retain their virtue seems to strike the Biggest Loser as a personal affront, exciting in him envy of the undeniable mixed with disbelieving contempt.

Wisdom 2:12-24, which notes that "by the envy of the devil, death entered the world," captures his mindset perfectly:

"Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings... He is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his

life is not like other men's; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure... With revilements and torture let us put him to the test, that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death..."

(3) If you can't defile, destroy...

Checkmated by heroic virtue in individual souls, forced to concede that they are lost to him, the devil turns his war tactics to the next objective — containing the damage.

What he cannot defile, he is driven to destroy. By eliminating his enemy physically, he can limit the extent to which goodness reigning in an individual soul becomes a force for good in the larger community of man.

Satan, whom Christ rebuked as "a murderer from the beginning," is not above recruiting and training new Cains in every age. As the plot against Jesus gained momen-

tum, Our Lord confronted His guilty contemporaries: "You are trying to kill Me... you are doing the works of your father."

Famous murders frequently give rise to controversies over their parentage. The Gospels make it clear that a complex conspiracy played out in the death of Christ. Judas, the chief priests and elders, the Pharisees, others in the Sanhedrin, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, the crowds howling for Him to be crucified, the jeering bystanders, all had their roles, along with — most importantly — every sinner until the end of time, for each of whom Christ won redemption at the price of the Cross. But the conspirator-in-chief was Satan himself, egging on all the others.

We need not be "conspiracy buffs" to recognize that all murders, even those with a single known perpetrator, represent a successful conspiracy on the part of Satan and his demons to



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corrupt the murderer and destroy the victim.

Of course, it is important to remember that Satan can neither torment nor kill unless the permissive will of God allows it for God's own reasons. As illustrated in the *Book of Job*, and as Christ reminded Pilate, no one on earth or below can exercise any power over others that God has not given them. And God does have His reasons:

"Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace He proved them, and as sacrificial offerings He took them to Himself." (*Wisdom 3:5-6*)

No one knows why God's providence miraculously intervenes to stop numerous assassination attempts — for instance in the life of St. John Bosco, whom God protected in his apostolate of good works to an old age — while permitting other assassins to populate heaven with martyrs struck down in their youth, when their light had just begun to shine.

Faced with that mystery, we must also remember that an infinitely creative God brings good out of evil, that Christ has triumphed over His archenemy, turning the "necessary sin of Adam" into a greater blessing, that "where sin is, grace also abounds."

As the patriarch Joseph told his brothers who had tried to kill him, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (*Genesis 50:20*). Since Christ's redemptive death, we know that He permits and sometimes even invites "victim souls" to share in the redemptive mission of His own suffering.

Despite Satan's brilliant generalship, despite all his elaborate schemes to corrupt, torment and destroy the good, he always ends up shooting himself in the hoof. How bitterly must he contemplate how every act of betrayal and cruelty that culminated in Christ's crucifixion played into our Heavenly Father's superior plan for the redemption of the human race.

(4) If you can't destroy, discredit...

But our infernal enemy has one last strategy up his sleeve. The good that he cannot destroy, he seeks to discredit, and thus to destroy as a force for good in others. In the face of the Resurrection — his definitive defeat — the devil's fallback plan was to convince others that it never happened, that Jesus was a charlatan, that He was not who He claimed to be, that He did not work the miracles witnessed by thousands. It is tragic to contemplate the extent to which this brazen deception has found acceptance to this day.

Christ warned His disciples that servants are not above their Master — what was done to Him will be done to His followers. But He also promised they would be vindicated in the end: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of falsehood against you because of me; rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." (*Mt. 5:11-12*)

And indeed, throughout Christian history, we see over and over again the devil's zeal to discredit those whose goodness he cannot rob, in order to rob others of their good influence.

In the lives of the saints we find numerous examples of holy founders and foundresses removed from positions of leadership in their religious communities by envious confreres who misrepresented their sanity, their competence or even their virtue. We find other cases of deliberate lies and elaborate set-ups maliciously directed at imputing sexual misconduct to holy bishops of irreproachable virtue after decades of self-abnegation in the Lord's service.

The Curé of Ars, as ascetic and otherworldly a priest as ever was ordained, was once the victim of malicious gossip suggesting a scandal with a woman. The truth eventually exonerated the holy priest, but as he later wrote, "I thought a time would come when people would rout me out of Ars with sticks, when the bishop would suspend me, and I should end my days in prison. I see, however, that I am not worthy of such a grace."

It is, no doubt, an admirable act of humility on the part of saints to accept attacks on their person and character so meekly, being pleased to share the unjust treatment meted out to their Master. But from a different perspective, it is not the holy victims but all those deprived of their potential example and inspiration who suffer most when the devil causes the virtue and good name of God's servants to be defamed. I was always pleased to read how one of my favorite saints, John Bosco — a perennial lightning-rod for the devil — went to great pains, whenever he or members of his religious community were attacked by slander, to make sure that everyone up to and including the Pope learned the truth of the matter.

Apparent scandal, even when it is not true, can lose souls. So can the loss of credibility on the part of Christian teachers and leaders. The Church has the right and the duty to fight back. Fortunately, she has been given a powerful

weapon against the Father of Lies in the canonization process.

THE DEVIL AS THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE — LITERALLY

One of the things that most impressed me when I first became acquainted with the cause of Blessed Karl of Austria was not only that someone could achieve holiness as a national leader in modern times, but that the Church had been able to verify and document his reputation for holiness in spite of a concerted diabolical effort to discredit it, both before and after the holy emperor's death.

In his case, the devil's campaign went far beyond the type of isolated incident of false gossip endured by the saintly Curé of Ars. It was a massive, purposeful, multi-faceted onslaught that began as soon as Karl became ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I. Fueled by diverse interested



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parties — Masons, Marxists, foreign war propagandists, national separatists, anti-monarchists, anti-Catholics — the campaign encompassed a non-stop barrage of every imaginable charge, one after the other, but always with the same intent: to discredit the popular emperor in the eyes of his own people, to demoralize the soldiers, and on that basis to undermine both the war effort and Karl's peace initiatives, to prolong the war, destabilize and overthrow the government, and ultimately to bring down the last bastion of Catholic political order in Europe.

Sadly, the campaign succeeded in almost every respect. Before assuming the imperial office, the young archduke and military officer had been liked and admired by all with whom he served, as much for his friendly and engaging nature and his personal bravery as a soldier, as for his Catholic piety and moral code which his peers respected if not all shared. Everyone could see his sobriety, his diligence to his duties, and how devoted he and his wife Zita were to each other and to their children.

Once he became emperor, he showed his love and care for the people in countless ways — visiting communities in many parts of the empire to learn the people's concerns firsthand, speaking with them in their diverse languages, going to the front lines with his soldiers, living humbly and sharing in all the wartime austerities, and instituting social programs to help the poor and veterans. The majority of the people came to truly love him in return.

And yet, within two years, his enemies had managed, through lies circulated in print and by word of mouth, to accomplish a 180-degree turn in the ruler's image, portraying him — in the teeth of all evidence to the contrary — as a drunkard, a ladies' man, a liar, a traitor, and a weakling, ill-prepared for his office, indifferent to the fate of the soldiers and the people. Eventually many believed the lies.

In that climate, it was easier for those seeking the downfall of the government to force him out of office and into exile, even to rob his family of their personal property, and ultimately to embed at least some of their lies into popular history — "history" taught and believed by at least some of his countrymen to this day.

It is thus quite remarkable that the Congregation for the

Causes of Saints was able to cut through that blanket of disinformation and to definitively proclaim the truth. Although devotion to Emperor Karl, and the request to begin the process leading to canonization, began immediately after he died by those familiar with the circumstances of his holy life and death, the calumniators who had caused so much damage and occasioned him so much sorrow during his lifetime kept up the campaign right through the years of his exile and death, and indeed right through the 80 years his cause was advancing toward beatification.

The Vatican was repeatedly pressured to postpone action, even after the investigation produced an overwhelming and unanimous case for heroic virtue.

It is worth noting that the investigation took place before the office of Devil's Advocate was abolished — in this case referring not to the devil himself gleefully taking up that role but to the legitimate Church official charged with discovering facts that would discredit a Servant of God if any such facts do exist. When the work of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints was conducted on the adversarial model, this task was taken very seriously.

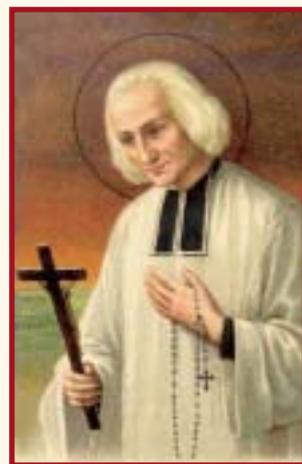
In the investigation of Karl of Austria, indeed in both the local and Roman phases of the inquiry, no allegation however unfounded, and no hostile witness however discreditable, was dismissed without serious scrutiny.

The voluminous and accessible record in his case, and the conclusions derived from it, are thus invulnerable to the kind of questions some-

times raised in connection with causes investigated in recent years after the procedures were revised.

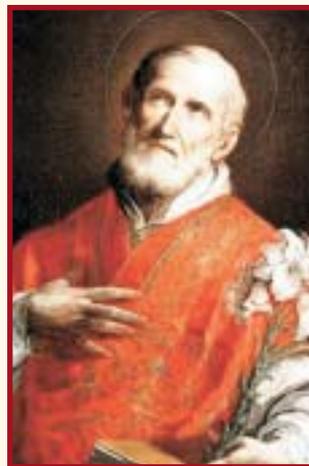
In Blessed Karl's story we can see in unusually clear relief the devil's four-fold strategy to disarm a potential force for good. One who (a) perseveres in virtue throughout his lifetime despite the devil's temptations; who (b) perseveres unto death in faith, patience, gratitude to God, and love of enemies despite extreme provocations; and who (c) continues to inspire good in others even after the devil has driven him from a position of influence to die in obscurity, leaves Satan only one last recourse — to try to destroy his good name after his death.

The devil is not content that the good should die, but that their good example die with them.



St. Philip Neri told a penitent who had confessed the sin of slander to buy a freshly-killed chicken and pluck its feathers as she walked back. The feathers were scattered to the four winds — "like your words of slander," the saint said

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DISCREDITING HOLINESS IN OUR OWN TIME

We don't even have to look to the calendar of saints to find examples of our infernal enemy's last, desperate tactic to discredit the good.

I do not doubt that most of us, if we thought about it, could point to examples, from our own personal knowledge and experience, of individuals of whose virtue, even heroic virtue, we are utterly convinced, but about whom damning accusations are widely believed. My own personal short list would start with Senator Robert Kennedy and Father Malachi Martin, both of whom I knew personally.

No doubt some readers who might roll their eyes at my candidates have names on their own lists that I in turn would regard with grave doubt.

In confusing times, it is hard even for those with the best of intentions to agree on the truth. Certainly there is enough real sin in the world — and in the most surprising places — that no one can assume as a matter of course that any particular accusation is false.

The devil's masterstroke is to bury God's heroes in the same indiscriminate muck. It is no wonder that for over a thousand years, every Holy Mass began with the psalmist's plea, "Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy; protect me from the unjust and deceitful man... Send out Thy light and Thy truth."

We cannot reach the truth by wishful thinking. But we can pray for God's truth to triumph. And we can make the devil's task a bit more difficult by resolving not to fall into his defamation trap so easily.

The Church teaches that all sins against truth violate the Eighth Commandment, but we do well to keep particular vigilance over the sin God chose to single out: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." It offends against both truth and charity, and has the effect of destroying in someone else's eyes the unique portrait of a real person created by God in His image, and replacing it with a fictional character created by the liar-murderer Satan.

It is no wonder that the modern phrase "character assassination" has been added to such ancient terms as calumny, slander and defamation.

Spiritual writers have long warned of the near impossibility of undoing the damage caused by slander. St. Philip Neri famously told a penitent who had confessed this sin to go to the nearest market and buy him a freshly killed chicken, plucking its feathers all the way back.

When she returned with the plucked chicken, he said, "Now go back and bring me all the feathers you have scattered."

When she protested how impossible that would be as the wind had carried them in all directions, he agreed: "You cannot. And that is exactly like your words of scandal. They have been carried about in every direction. You cannot recall them."

How often we have heard the saying, "You can't prove a

negative." It's easy for a lying witness to invent this or that incident — for instance, having seen someone steal something — but almost impossible to prove the person *never* stole anything. It often seems, indeed, that there is no way to restore an innocent reputation once lost.

The devil is so insidious! Thus he tends to make accomplices of us all! How easy it is to accept on first hearing, with no evidence whatsoever, a new charge against someone we already hold in low esteem, with little more than a shrug and a mumbled, "It figures." And how remarkable it is that even in the case of those who have earned our high esteem, an allegation we might dismiss outright as preposterous on first hearing can worm its way, even subconsciously, into a mental gray area of uncertainty after being heard a second or third time from seemingly independent sources.

Adolph Hitler, the father of the "Big Lie," had written in *Mein Kampf* that the "grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down." It continues to poison men's subconscious thoughts even when conclusively shown to be false. Joseph Goebbels, his propaganda chief, was said to act as if on the principle that "people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough, people will sooner or later believe it."

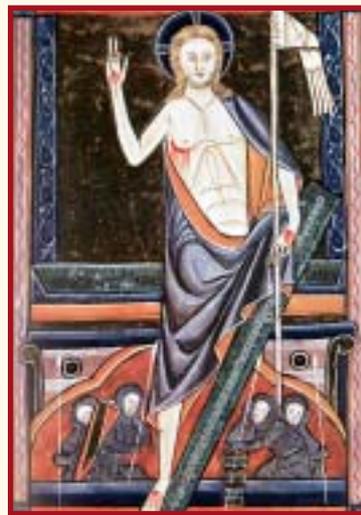
A HATE CAMPAIGN AND ITS TWISTED LOGIC

Satan obviously subscribes to the Big Lie theory. It is typical of the devil's brazenness that he tends to attack his victims not in their weaknesses but in their strengths. One thinks of the stories of Susanna and of Joseph in the Old Testament, accused precisely of the sin they had refused, and indeed by the very persons whose sinful invitations they had rebuffed.

You don't find Satan and his minions planting stories that a saint known to be prone to anger lost his temper from time to time after supposedly reaching an advanced state of perfection, or that a penitent converted from a dissolute life had been guilty of more former sins than generally known. That would be too logical.

Instead, you find the egregious spectacle of a most humble nun portrayed as a pride-driven control freak, the most angelic priest portrayed as a womanizer, the happiest and most faithful of spouses portrayed as adulterers, the most selfless and charitable of souls portrayed as petty, stingy or cruel. This, of course, makes complete sense when we remember that it is their virtues and not their weaknesses that the devil hates.

Perhaps the best example of this in our lifetime is the half-century-old smear campaign against Pope Pius XII. It is not only false to suggest that this saintly pontiff was a Nazi sympathizer, but also false to suggest he was a culpably neutral bystander, or even an *innocent* bystander, when in fact he was a true hero among the "Righteous Gentiles" — one of Hitler's



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most recognized and hated foes, whose condemnations of Nazi policies were early and unequivocal, and whose personal intervention saved the lives of many thousands of Jews.

So, of course, the devil recasts him in the role of a Holocaust collaborator.

Whatever credence one might place in last year's revelation by former Romanian masterspy Ion Mihai Pacepa that Soviet intelligence *created* the "Hitler's Pope" myth — even setting up and scripting Rolf Hochhuth's 1963 play *The Deputy* — it has long been evident that that original salvo and the whole relentless propaganda assault that has followed it have been orchestrated by enemies of the Church bent on discrediting Pius XII and through him the Church herself. It is typical both of the KGB and its diabolical progenitor that the open attack in mainstream media was launched after its victim was in his grave and no longer able to defend himself.

The unique malice of such defamation is its power to spread down a long chain in which perhaps only the first few links require malicious intent.

Farther down the chain, new links can be forged by self-interested opportunists, sloppy journalists, or even idle gossips on the level of St. Philip's hapless chicken-plucker.

Finally, when it has been heard often enough to pass for established fact, even innocent readers, students and later historians can be conscripted unknowingly into the chain of self-perpetuating falsehood.

FINDING THE WEAKEST LINK

I once asked a veteran newspaperman — who from personal knowledge of the facts had just dismissed as absolutely false a sordid tale then making the rounds — why any seemingly disinterested observer would make up something out of whole cloth that defames an innocent person.

"Why, for the money, of course," he answered without hesitation.

Apparently the 30 pieces of silver have not gone out of fashion, even if greed is only one of many weaknesses the devil might exploit to incite someone to commit calumny.

The sad thing is that, from the devil's point of view, playing the calumny card is so easy — far easier than the other three tactics. He doesn't have to find a breach in his impregnable target. All he has to do is find someone else — *anyone* else — whom he can manipulate more easily.

And it is so cruel. The good name that one of God's servants has managed to keep spotless through an entire life — perhaps through long decades of hard-fought resistance to the devil's relentless temptations, torments and assaults — can be wiped out in a few strokes of a liar's pen.

Some years ago, this tragic possibility struck very close to

home, as a major attack was launched on the reputation of someone very dear to my sister and me. The charges would be outrageous if false, incomprehensible if true.

One day my sister was kneeling in a church in Washington praying about these very matters — crying, in fact, and begging God for answers. Could any of this be true? Was it possible that the surpassing goodness — the force for good — that we had seen shining in another human being had been an illusion? Could one be so wrong about an encounter with holiness that every light of intuition, evidence and discernment had confirmed? All at once, as if in direct response to her appeal, she heard in the depth of her soul the promise found in *Psalms* 37: "Bright as the noonday shall be your vindication."

FROM ASHES TO VICTORY

More than a quarter century separates that day from this. The specifics of her prayer have yet to be answered, perhaps will never be answered in her lifetime.

The servant of God whose holiness she had begged God to affirm — like Pius XII, already in his grave when the allegations against him were mounted — has yet to be vindicated. (The next words in that psalm read, "Leave it to the Lord, and wait for Him.")

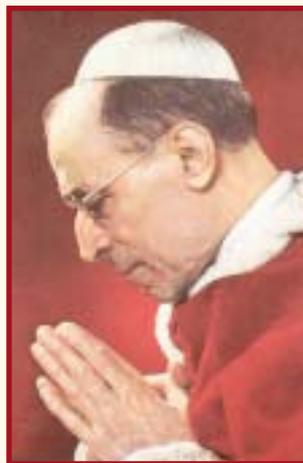
And yet, when God heard that prayer of my sister's — a prayer intention that she and I profoundly share — He led us along unexpected paths, showing us that even the passage of many decades does not prevent God from vindicating his own.

I think now of a very bright noonday, the noon of October 3, 2004, when we stood in St. Peter's Square as His Holiness John Paul II enrolled the name of Karl of the House of Austria among the blessed. How many more decades had the prayers of others been storming heaven for the vindication of this saintly man whom we had come to know and admire only so recently! Clearly, the Father of Lies doesn't get the last word.

Christ has promised that the Spirit will lead us into all truth. This Lent, as we are

reminded of the ceaseless battle between the Lord of History and the Father of Lies, perhaps a good Lenten resolution for all of us would be to try to listen to the Holy Spirit more, and to the "accuser of the brethren" less, as we pray again, "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth" and "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Him flee from before His face." We can pray that God will indeed vindicate His own, that we might the more joyously sing at Easter: "*The powers of Hell have done their worst, But Christ their legions has dispersed.... Alleluia!*" ●

Cathy Pearson, an American writer, lives in San Diego.



"It has long been evident that the whole relentless propaganda assault against Pope Pius XII has been orchestrated by enemies of the Church bent on discrediting Pius and through him the Church"