

Plínio Corrêa's medieval worldview: ‘Monarchy is the ideal government’

by Gretchen Small

The Society for Tradition, Family, and Property has served as a private army of the Bragança family since its founding in 1960 by Plínio Corrêa da Oliveira, a 75-year-old Brazilian who proudly traces his history to a long line of ministers to the Brazilian imperial family. Two members of the Bragança household, Princes Luis and Bertrand Orléans e Bragança, have been members of the group since its inception. Servile adherence to those noble members is in turn an integral part of the brainwashing of TFP youths.

The TFP is constituted as a body of crusaders, dedicated to returning the world to a medieval system. Medievalism extends to the public dress of the cult's militants: They wear white robes and red capes embossed with long gold crosses, and carry red banners with a gold heraldic lion in their demonstrations, evoking their nostalgia for the authoritarian days of the Inquisition.

In the founding document of TFP, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, Plínio Corrêa da Oliveira calls the TFP the crusaders on behalf of the “counter-revolution” needed to reverse the changes brought about by the “first revolution,” the Renaissance, which, with its advocacy of science and technology, marked the onset of the “errors and iniquities” of mankind.

We publish here excerpts of a speech by Plínio Corrêa, outlining the Dark Ages program of the cult. The speech was published in pamphlet form (undated) by the TFP, under the title, “Justice and Sacredness in the Middle Ages.” It attacks the modern form of the nation-state which replaced feudal society; serfdom is portrayed as the true state of “freedom” for the population; the Law of the Roman Empire is held up as “natural law.” By asserting that the “ideal model of organization” of society found in the Middle Ages “is born from the order of Cluny, which is the perfected Benedictine order,” Plínio identifies the darkness into which he and his masters would plunge the world. The Benedictine monastery at Cluny forbid its monks to see light, for “knowledge” and light disturb the darkness which, for them, represented faith.

The warcry of TFP is that all men are *not* created equal. TFP-collaborator Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, touring Ibero-America to regroup the cult's forces after the banning of the TFP in Venezuela, stated to the Colombian press on Nov.

27, 1984, “It is absurd to think that we are all equals. Inequality exists in the world because God wanted it that way.” In the TFP view, humankind is divided into three classes: the first, the clergy and the Church; the second, the nobles; and the third, “the populace.” With a typical oligarchic touch, Plínio states that to the “populace” only belong the “lesser” tasks of “economic production.” Included in the concept of the “consummate equilibrium” of the Middle Ages is the worst anti-Semitism of the Inquisition.

‘Justice and Sacredness in the Middle Ages’

The following is an abridged text of Plínio Corrêa da Oliveira's pamphlet.

We can see the three social classes that medieval society was composed of—the clergy, the nobility and the people—who are presented as three steps of the same ladder.

Given this summary description of the medieval order, there is something that must be noted right away: proportionality. This deals with an order like a ladder where there are no gaps between one step and another. The steps all touch one another and are proportioned like a well-made ladder.

The kings of France, as with the kings throughout Europe, directly received in audience the plebeians who got down on their knees, kissed their hands, and spoke with them, presenting them with their requests. The Palace of Versailles was constantly invaded by all the people who wanted to enter it, in a way that no chief of state's home can be entered today. Saint Fernando de Castilla, when he passed through a city, went to a house and sat next to a window that looked out on the street, remaining within the reach of whatever plebeian passed by. Saint Fernando de Castilla, seated at a window attending to the people . . . what a beautiful scene!

The second point to demonstrate proportionality is the situation of the slaves of Antiquity compared to that of the manor serfs. It was in medieval Europe that an entire continent without slavery was known for the first time in history.

The manor serf was a servant who did not have the right to leave the countryside, the area where he worked. He had to work there all his life. He was tied to the soil. He was not, therefore, a free man in the fullest sense of the term, but

despite not being a free man, he had innumerable rights. He had the right to land, and the nobleman could not expel him from it. He had, therefore, more rights than a land-settler of today, than an employee today. He worked a part of the time on lands of the lord and many times even had the right to a part of what he produced on those lands. His day was organized by a hereditary and inviolable contract such that he could live from his own labor. He frankly had a better situation than that of the farmer today.

At the same time, if the lord sold the land, the serf went with it. The servitude of the serf was an intermediate state between slavery and freedom. Thus was formed the free contract between serf and owner, an advantageous contract to both sides.

The other justification of the medieval order is the specialization of functions.

The clergy and the nobility did not pay taxes. The social class which paid taxes was the people. It is easy to present this in a hateful way: "The rich clergy does not pay taxes. The well-dressed, fat, and opulent nobility does not pay taxes. The poor plebeian, working from sunrise to sunset to enrich the nobleman and the cleric—he must pay taxes." And so it is presented in the simple history textbooks as the "essence" of injustice. It is enough to simply know how things were to prove that that situation was just.

The clergy, aside from its own mission, which is that of saving souls, had two other responsibilities which today are discharged by the state and which correspond to two ministries of enormous expense: education and public health.

It is easy to dispense with the charlatany of the allegations of revolutionaries about nobles being exempt from taxes. Nobility was the military class, and in time of war the nobles were obliged to serve. The nobleman was obligated to fight, to pay his tax in blood. So, isn't it reasonable that he who fulfills such functions not pay taxes?

Here is the differentiation of functions: Economic production equals populace; war and administration equals nobility; culture and public health equals clergy.

Isn't this incomparably more dignified, more reasonable? Wasn't the Middle Ages completely different in that respect? The clergy and nobility had honorary, political, administrative, and economic privileges, as consequences of their functions. It was natural, organic, just.

Federative decentralization was a creation of the Middle Ages. Each fiefdom was a whole, with its own laws, customs, ambiance, art, and culture; and, freedom to be as you are was carried much farther than it is today.

Modern states have a single constitution which rules an entire country. Among medievals, there was not a single law for all the territory of a country. Each part had its laws. And the personal bond linked the feudal lord to the king.

The people legislated by means of customary laws. Much of the law existing in the Middle Ages was not made by

governments, but was fruit of repeated custom which became transformed into law . . . laws which varied tremendously from fiefdom to fiefdom because they had been derived from the people's customs.

In the previous part of my exposition, I showed that hierarchy was a dominant aspect of the Middle Ages and that since this hierarchical character was based on proportional inequality, it was in complete correspondence with the laws and precepts of justice. I must now deal with another aspect of medieval civilization, its sacral character.

Analyzing the Middle Ages in terms of the facts recently discovered by Prof. Fernando Furquim de Almeida in his studies on Cluny, and considering that the Middle Ages was born from the order of Cluny, which is the perfected Benedictine order, we can say that it practiced the motto of Saint Benedict: "Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus"—that God be glorified in all things.

Naturally, there were occasional outbreaks of heresy which affected some region, but these heresies were rapidly crushed; they were episodic phenomena, like an acute disease in the life of a man, but never a chronic illness. From time to time they affected the body of medieval Christianity, but they were eliminated after a time of struggle.

Since the Romans had known a great part of the natural order, the Code of Roman Law, cleansed of its pagan elements and completed by the Church in the time of the Roman Christians, became a code of perfect natural law.

Even more, the king, the most Christian king, the Catholic king, the king who promoted the Inquisition—that king was the protector of the Jews, as a persecuted community which could easily suffer injustices because it lacked ways to defend itself. It was watched by the kings, because of the hatred the sect held for the Church and Christian civilization and, at the same time, protected so that it would not be the object of ill treatment or exterminated, which would be against Evangelical Law. It is easy to observe the consummate equilibrium contained in this concept.

In principle, the heretic did not participate in the nation's life. The Jews and the heretics could not perform certain functions. For example, a Jew could not be a judge of Catholics. Also, a Jewess could not be a wet-nurse, except for Jewish children, so that Catholic blood would not be nourished by the milk of a person who denies Christ. These laws were not racist.

The monarchic principle translates the tendency of the whole world, the whole of society, toward the most perfect. To the degree that a society is Catholic, it seeks the most excellent in everything and normally distills out an aristocracy and produces a monarch and a dynasty. Although the republican form of government is not illegitimate, this ascending force in society makes monarchy the ideal form of government, the one which corresponds most to the metaphysical order.