

MARCH-APRIL 2023

The

“Instaurare omnia in Christo”

ANGELUS

THE VOICE OF TRADITIONAL CATHOLICISM

10 YEARS OF POPE FRANCIS

The messy relationship between the SSPX and Pope Francis by Fr. Ian Palko

Fr. Jonathan Loop: Pope Francis & *Amoris Laetitia*

A Timeline of Francis's Papacy

Pater Scriptor—The Pope of Universal Brotherhood

Fr. Guillaume Gaud on Pope Francis and Islam: Deception or Illusion?

LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT SUPERIOR

Dear Reader,



Fr. John Fullerton
District Superior of the
United States of America

At the beginning of his pontificate, during the World Youth Day on Copacabana Beach in 2013, Pope Francis exhorted the youth to “¡Hagan lío!” or “Make a mess!” In the ten years since that event, the Pope himself has caused a staggering amount of chaos in the Church by seemingly ignoring its doctrinal and moral patrimony. Consider his disturbing interviews with atheist Eugenio Scalfari, the implicit permission for the divorced and remarried to receive Holy Communion found in *Amoris Laetitia*, paying homage to the rites of the Amazonians towards their Pachamama idol, changing the catechism to reverse the Church’s constant teaching on the death penalty, destroying the flourishing order of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, inviting globalists to the Vatican to talk about sustainability goals, and reversing *Summorum Pontificum* with *Traditionis Custodes*.

These events manifest a deepening of the Passion that the Church has been undergoing since the Second Vatican Council, a new swelling of the waves rocking the Barque of Peter. It is a call to all those who love Holy Mother Church to redouble their prayers for the ending of this crisis which has so worsened under the pontificate of Pope Francis.

The work of the Society of St. Pius X for the Church has become all the more important in the last decade. In the midst of such disorder and confusion, the SSPX has continued to provide stable communities for families to raise their children in the Catholic Faith. These communities make available all of the resources necessary for an integrally Catholic life, a life which is centered on the Mass of all time, but which also has need of schools, pilgrimages, retreats, summer camps, seminaries and convents.

By faithfully following the line set by Archbishop Lefebvre, the SSPX has been able to remain constant in the midst of a terrible storm. It continues to offer its services to the Church and to all souls seeking refuge in a most confusing time.

Fr. John Fullerton

ON OUR COVER: Pope Francis in Quito, Ecuador. Courtesy: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FrancisQuitoR.png (La Cancillería de Ecuador)

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“To publish Catholic journals and place them in the hands of honest men is not enough. It is necessary to spread them as far as possible that they may be read by all, and especially by those whom Christian charity demands we should tear away from the poisonous sources of evil literature.”
–Pope St. Pius X

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The Angelus (ISSN 10735003) is published bi-monthly under the patronage of St. Pius X and Mary, Queen of Angels. Publication office is located at PO Box 217, St. Marys, KS 66536. PH (816) 753-3150; FAX (816) 753-3557.

Periodicals Postage Rates paid at Kansas City, MO. Manuscripts and letters to the editor are welcome and will be used at the discretion of the editors. The authors of the articles presented here are solely responsible for their judgments and opinions. Postmaster sends address changes to the address above. ©2023 by Angelus Press. Official Publication of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X for the United States and Canada



iHagan lio!

The messy relationship between the SSPX and Pope Francis

Fr. Ian Andrew Palko, SSPX

The problem of understanding the relationship of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X with Pope Francis is perhaps best exemplified by two very different articles from *Catholic News Agency*. Only two months into the new Pontificate (June 27, 2013), an anonymous article declared, “Traditionalists indicate definitive break with Catholic Church.” Just under three years later (April 26, 2016), another anonymous article reads, “Pope Francis may soon offer the Society of Saint Pius X regular canonical status within the Church.”

In those two-and-a-half years, looking through headlines and articles, one would find precious little to explain this incongruity. In fact, doctrinal discussions held October 27, 2009 to April 11, 2011 found that the representatives of the SSPX and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith were unable to resolve key issues surrounding the interpretation of Vatican II texts and apparent errors in the texts that even those outside the SSPX ranks were begin-

ning to question. The difficulties were such that movements towards a canonical structure for the SSPX stalled.

A papal resignation intervened, and seemingly out-of-the-blue, for the Year of Mercy in 2016, Pope Francis in a publicly-released letter to Msgr. Rino Fisichella,¹ announced he was granting in an extraordinary manner, an ecclesial ministry to SSPX priests: the universal faculties to absolve penitents.² SSPX critics often questioned the Society’s argument for supplied jurisdiction validating the power to absolve. With this decision, there was no longer any question of validity, and now the SSPX received a clear directive from the Pope to act as priests.³ Following the Year of Mercy, this odd method of granting faculties was more formally extended, this time indefinitely, by Apostolic Letter.⁴

Whereas in 2009, the later-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and then Bishop of Regensburg, Msgr. Gerhard Müller, openly condemned as “illegitimate” the

ordinations the SSPX planned at its Zaitzkofen seminary in Germany, Pope Francis responded in 2016 in a private letter to the Superior General of the SSPX, with permission to “freely ordain” those priests.⁵

For the canonical trial of a priest, the Superior General of the SSPX was appointed by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Cardinal Müller, as a judge for the first-instance trial in 2015.⁶ The case was one that normally would be reserved to the Holy See itself.

In 2017, the same Cardinal Müller announced, as President of the Ecclesia Dei Commission, that Pope Francis wished local bishops to ensure SSPX priests received the proper delegation to witness marriages, or that he send a suitable priest from the diocese as a witness with the SSPX priest offering the Nuptial Mass which followed.⁷ The vast majority of bishops in the world simply granted this delegation to the SSPX priest, either in individual cases, or in a permanent manner.⁸

Few could imagine that in four years there would be such profound changes. The SSPX had suffered from loud accusations on the part of its detractors of being in schism and conferring invalid sacraments, even at the highest levels of the Church, for nearly 35 years. Now, sacraments were unquestionably valid, it had a legitimate ministry, received marriage faculties from the local Ordinary, and confessional faculties from the Pope Himself.

How did the Church arrive at today’s situation where no reasonable argument remains to convict the SSPX of having a “schismatic mentality” or conferring invalid sacraments?

To help explain this, we will take a whirlwind tour of the history of the SSPX.

Founding in 1970 to the “Hot Summer” of 1976

Jorge Maria Bergoglio was celebrating his first anniversary of ordination when the SSPX was founded in Fribourg, Switzerland on November 1, 1970, by decree of Msgr. François Charrière, the local ordinary. Then-retired Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers Abp. Marcel Lefebvre was approached by several young men wishing a traditional priestly formation, and the emeritus archbishop agreed to assist them. The men went to study at the University of Fribourg but when even this conservative forma-

tion began to introduce modern problems into theology and philosophy, the archbishop decided to teach the men himself. This also had the advantage of providing a common life for them, something he had encouraged in his time as Apostolic Delegate in Africa, and Archbishop of Dakar. The seminary at Ecône was inaugurated soon after, and the SSPX was canonically established in the Diocese of Fribourg.

It was not very long after that suspicions and rumors made their way to the loggia in Rome, especially from among the French clergy.⁹ A meeting of various prelates was assembled at Rome on March 26, 1974. It included Msgr. Pierre Mamie, the successor in Fribourg, and Msgr. Nestor Adam, bishop of Sion, where Ecône is located. A report was made and a commission of three cardinals (Msgrs. Gabriel-Marie Garrone, John Wright, and Arturo Tabera) was assembled to assess the SSPX. They decided on an Apostolic Visitation of the seminary at Ecône. The two visitors, Msgrs. Deschamps and Onclin, shared some of their unorthodox opinions during the inquiry, thereby scandalizing the seminarians. The visitors spoke of married clergy being an inevitable reality for Latin clergy, the lack of an absolute truth, and their doubts about the physical Resurrection of Our Lord. In response, Msgr. Lefebvre issued a private statement to SSPX members, which became his now-famous “Declaration” of November 21, 1974. This was an assurance of his commitment to orthodoxy and an encouragement for them to maintain their attachment to “eternal Rome.” As Michael Davies indicates, portions and quotes were made public and used “in a manner [Lefebvre] could not condone,” and so the full text was given to Jean Madiran for publication in his review, *Itinéraires*.¹⁰ While the report of the visitors was one of glowing praise for the SSPX, the commission of Cardinals seized upon this statement as a means to condemn Msgr. Lefebvre and authorize the suppression of the Society. Msgr. Mamie, present at a January 21, 1975, meeting of the cardinals, wrote three days later requesting permission to suppress the SSPX on the basis of the use of the Traditional Latin Mass. Beginning in February 1975, the SSPX was charged with refusing “the Council and the Pope,” based solely on Archbishop Lefebvre’s statement.¹¹ The Cardinals invited him to a February 13, 1975 meeting, and a March 3 follow-up, which was,

in fact, a *de facto* trial. Msgr. Mamie requested permission to suppress the SSPX, which the commission of Cardinals gave, and urged that it happen without delay. On May 6, 1975, Msgr. Mamie's letter arrived at Ecône. With less than a month before the end of the school year, the Seminary was ordered to close, and 104 seminarians were to be sent away as vagabonds, with no provision for their continued studies or support, something Msgr Lefebvre could not, in conscience, do.

The archbishop made an appeal of the decision on June 5, 1975 to the Apostolic Signatura, an appeal that would normally suspend the suppression. Without documentary evidence, the appeal was rejected on June 10, on claims that the Pope had authorized the actions of the cardinals *in forma specifica*, making an appeal impossible. A further appeal seeking evidence was sent to the Supreme Tribunal, on 14 June 1975, and it received no reply. A letter of June 29, 1975, from Paul VI retroactively tried to legalize the unjust condemnation and suppression.

The suppression and lack of due process was a violation of natural justice. Moreover, Abp. Lefebvre had a duty in charity to preserve Tradition and provide for the clerical members of the SSPX. As such, he refused to close the seminary. Prior to 1975, ordinands were incardinated into various dioceses, though the Holy See had tacitly admitted the SSPX could incardinate its own members when religious, such as Fr Urban Snyder, joined the SSPX.¹² Now, following the supposed suppression of the SSPX, and a letter from Cardinal Jean-Marie Villot, the Cardinal Secretary of State, urging bishops not to incardinate SSPX members into their dioceses, it became clear that Abp. Lefebvre would need to incardinate the priests he ordained into the SSPX for them to be able to live out their priesthood as traditional priests.

On June 29, 1976, Abp. Lefebvre proceeded to ordain his seminarians, incardinating them into the Society itself. Thus began what became known as the "Hot Summer" of 1976. On July 1, Msgr. Mamie condemned the ordinations and declared the Archbishop suspended from exercising orders for a year, and all of the ordinands also suspended. The Congregation of Bishops issued a formal suspension on July 22. At the invitation of the Association of St. Pius V, Abp. Lefebvre celebrated a Pontifical Mass

in Lille, his home town, on August 29, 1976. Ten thousand faithful from around the world attended, prompting a personal audience with Paul VI. The meeting showed the depth of disinformation filtered to the Pope, who accused Abp. Lefebvre of requiring seminarians to take an oath against the Pope. Pope Paul VI asked that he and the Archbishop work together to end the abuses in the Church but he would not authorize the Archbishop's "experiment of Tradition" or the traditional Mass.

From 1976 to the Consecrations in 1988

For the next 12 years, the SSPX operated in a quasi-limbo. It may have been officially suppressed, but this was due to several injustices. False information was being fed to the Pope Paul VI about the Society, and a private declaration made by one of its members should not have caused the whole Society to be condemned, even if liberal prelates objected to its solid orthodoxy. Meanwhile, the SSPX operated as it had before, waiting for its appeal to be addressed. According to Canon Law, such an appeal is "suspensive," that is, the decision it is appealing against is suspended until the appeal is answered.

The continued operation of the SSPX and other priests continuing their celebration of the traditional rites obtained the indult in 1984. This allowed priests to offer the older form of Mass, provided they did not object to the new rite. The SSPX viewed this as a good start, even though flawed in its conditions. With this good start in view, Abp. Lefebvre offered a good-will gesture of submitting dubia on Religious Liberty to the Holy See.¹³

The dubia consisted of a heavily annotated list of 39 doubts and multiple other questions on *Dignitatis Humanae* and its apparent incompatibility with traditional Catholic teachings on tolerance and religious liberty. Dubia such as these are a long-standing method of solving serious theological and liturgical questions in an official way. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith received the dubia in 1985. No public response was issued, but a private anonymous response claiming to be the Congregation's reply acknowledged the Vatican II teaching was entirely novel. The reply never addressed any of the points made by Msgr Lefebvre, but simply considered the 39 objections to



The 1988 Consecrations.

be a single repetitive argument, and dismissed any concerns on the basis that the Council said it was continuous with tradition. Archbishop Lefebvre took this non-response as one of the signs he may need to consecrate bishops to maintain the SSPX and its attached religious societies beyond his own lifetime.

The year of that response, in 1986, saw Pope John Paul II's public acts against the First Commandment at Assisi, praying with other religions and permitting overt sacrilege in the very home of St. Francis. This was yet another sign for the Archbishop of the need to consecrate bishops. His own declining health also prompted Abp. Lefebvre to ask the Holy See for permission to consecrate bishops to continue his work.

Discussions ensued, with a great deal of complication.¹⁴ Another Apostolic Visitation was performed by Cardinal Édouard Gagnon, who happily assisted at a Mass of the supposedly-suspended archbishop. He offered praise of the SSPX and there was an initial renewal of trust. At long last, a protocol of agreement was drawn up. While the Protocol did not lay out specifics, in principle Abp. Lefebvre would be able to consecrate a bishop. He had discussed planning

the consecration for June 30, 1988, the fourth date set. Candidates had already been suggested to the Pope on May 3. Cardinal Ratzinger however proposed an indefinite delay of the consecration of a bishop, and that there was no real necessity for bishops. The Archbishop was told that the end of June was too soon, but was not given a fixed date. Later he would share a conversation with Cardinal Silvio Oddi, in which the retired-Prefect for the Clergy indicated there was a lack of honesty on the part of the Holy See. Confidence that the Holy See was going to keep its part of the Protocol on a bishop was lost. After a constant effort of good will to pass through official channels and accept delays, the Holy See was again changing agreements which were the basis for that good will.

In an attempt to corner Cardinal Ratzinger into a guarantee of a bishop, Abp. Lefebvre indicated, he would feel bound in conscience to consecrate bishops himself on June 30, relying on the agreement made in the Protocol, that the Pope was not opposed to bishops from among the members of the SSPX. On May 30, Cardinal Ratzinger replied that June was unacceptable, but August 15 would be a potential date. The Vatican, however, would need more and

different candidates to vet.¹⁵ If two months had been too short to choose one of the four names the Archbishop had proposed, how would two months secure a candidate from far more candidates? The Archbishop judged that this was just another delay tactic, the fifth date being proposed as a stopgap only to put the consecration off even longer, and to propose that bishops were not necessary. “By rejecting the candidates proposed by Archbishop Lefebvre, Cardinal Ratzinger made clear that the Vatican was not sincere in fulfilling its proposes for a Bishop.”¹⁶ When the Archbishop insisted on the consecration happening on June 30, the Vatican refused to grant permission for that date or to name a candidate. Feeling his health declining with the stress of the negotiations and wanting to provide for the future of his society of priests that was now not going to be given canonical recognition by Rome, Archbishop Lefebvre proceeded with the consecration of four bishops on June 30.

Pope John Paul II responded with the Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, in which he declared that Abp. Lefebvre, Msgr. Antonio de Castro Mayer and the bishops consecrated by them had automatically excommunicated themselves, even though Canon Law provided

obvious exceptions to this penalty that were clearly in play on June 30, 1988.

Within days, some disillusioned priests and seminarians of the SSPX who had difficulties with the consecrations went to Cardinal Ratzinger, and with his help formed the Fraternity of St. Peter, which held itself to be the “pars sanior” or the “healthier part” of the SSPX.¹⁷

After the Consecrations up to Pope Francis

A détente of 12 years saw no formal and even few informal contacts between the SSPX and Holy See. After a major pilgrimage of a large contingent of SSPX clergy and other religious to Rome in 2000, then President of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission and Prefect for the Congregation of the Clergy Cardinal Castrillon-Hoyos began discussions to try to improve relations. Like their founder, who had died in 1991, the SSPX Superiors were happy to talk with Rome for the purpose of getting official authorization for the experiment of Tradition. The Superior General of the SSPX, Bishop Bernard Fellay, insisted on two pre-conditions, after which doctrinal discussions could begin as a preliminary to the SSPX’s canonical recognition. The two pre-conditions were (1) that the alleged excom-



Pope Benedict XVI arrives at Andrews Air Force Base, MD, April 15, 2008.

munications of the bishops in 1988 be declared void, and (2) that the traditional Mass be openly declared to be able to be used by any priest.

The pre-conditions were not fulfilled during the pontificate of John Paul II. They were, however, accomplished by Pope Benedict XVI. The second condition was met with the publication of *Summorum Pontificum* in July of 2007. The former condition was met in 2009, with the excommunications being declared as having “no longer has juridical effect.”¹⁸ The pre-conditions being fulfilled, a theological commission made up of members of the SSPX and theologians chosen by Pope Benedict met on October 26, 2009, and every two months afterwards. The discussions did not produce an agreement on the points in question, but nevertheless, in 2011, the SSPX was presented a Doctrinal Preamble by Cardinal Levada, Prefect of the CDF. Initially this document required unconditional acceptance of Vatican II and profession of the goodness of the new rites, but Cardinal Levada indicated by letter that the CDF was willing to accept suggestions for the improvement of the text. The SSPX proposed the formula of the 1988 Protocol (since these were deemed acceptable by Pope Benedict in 1988) with added professions of Faith. The Secretary of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission, Msgr. Guido Pozzo, had suggested this as a solution. Clergy close to the Pope assured the SSPX that Pope Benedict was willing to accept the alternative formula. It seemed, as with 1988, that an agreement was reached, but then in March 2012, Cardinal Levada replied to the SSPX superiors that no alternatives were possible, and the Pope personally insisted on the unacceptable Preamble as it originally stood, asking far more than what was acceptable in 1988. Confused by the contradictory information, the Superior General wrote to Pope Benedict XVI who confirmed personally he had rejected any alternative or amendment. Officially, the Holy See announced it was awaiting a response from the SSPX, even though a response had been made, and relations dropped into another quasi-limbo.

Benedict resigned February 28, 2013, and Francis was elected.

Anni Francisci

Within two years of his Pontificate, Francis began official changes to the approach of the Holy See towards the SSPX by setting the

question of the SSPX’s canonical status to the side, at least temporarily, and simply granting faculties to SSPX priests. As a result, by 2017, it was no longer possible to claim that the SSPX lacked some legitimate ministry, or that its confessions and marriages were invalid. Beyond these moves, however, the Pope also provided, personally, unusual assistance for the SSPX in his former see of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

While Argentina has a very liberal government, the country favors Catholicism by allowing Catholic congregations and entities legal status, which assist with obtaining visa and other legal benefits. Since coming to Argentina, the SSPX was never given official status as a religious organization but was tolerated as a cultural association for a time until the deportation of Msgr. Williamson, who had been Rector at the seminary of La Reja, in 2009. The added scrutiny that followed made obtaining visas difficult for the SSPX.

The Archbishop of Buenos Aires at this time was, of course, Cardinal Jorge Maria Bergoglio. In order to seek assistance with the difficult legal status of the SSPX in Argentina, the SSPX District Superior of South America at the time, Fr. Christian Bouchcourt, went to see the Cardinal. After declaring that the SSPX was certainly Catholic, Cardinal Bergoglio agreed to try to solve its legal woes. He wrote a letter to the government, saying that the SSPX is Catholic and should be recognized legally as such, but the Papal Nuncio Adriano Bernadini had already declared the SSPX as “not Catholic.” This left the government with contradictory declarations it was legally obliged to follow. When Bergoglio became Pope, however, the contradiction no longer existed, since the Pope was now the boss of the Papal Nuncio!

Pope Francis did not lose much time making good the promises he had made to the local SSPX superiors while he was the ordinary of Buenos Aires, and even made a phone call to the SSPX District House, located in the city, to inform the superior that he was taking care of the matter. At his request, Cardinal Arelio Poli, the successor of the Pope in Buenos Aires, asked that the government consider the SSPX in Argentina as an “Association of Diocesan Right,” certifying the SSPX as a Catholic Society, to which the government was forced to agree.¹⁹ Almost immediately, this decree and its legal effect in Canon Law became widely

known. In circles outside the SSPX some, such as Dom Pio Pace, questioned if it were a back-door regularization of the SSPX.²⁰

Msgr. Pozzo gave an interview indicating this decree should not be seen as granting any canonical status.

Quo vadis?

Because this brief history of Pope Francis's concessions to the SSPX seems confusing in light of his general dislike of the traditional movement, it had led to a variety of explanations. All of those bantered about, however, seem to fall into one of three generic categories.

Into the first category falls a set of theories expressed by many conservative and traditional Catholics, plus the most liberal Catholics, based, at least, on the average Catholic internet commentator or journalist. These theories suggest that Pope Francis is a cunning man who has a clear and meticulously designed plan to destroy the Catholic Faith and ultimately remake the Church in a new image and likeness.

For such theorists, *Traditiones custodes* provides evidence that the Pope is seeking to force compliance out of priests and faithful or, if they will not comply, to force them out of their "approved" Mass centers over to the SSPX or other groups. In doing this, these groups will become radicalized and justify the condemnation and possibly excommunication of the entire traditional movement, or at least its permanent marginalization.²¹ One commentator even suggested that Francis "hopes to sequester traditionalists into the Society of St. Pius X."²²

Various acts in dioceses where the bishops are devotees of Pope Francis make these theories seem palatable, but also seem to ignore Pope Francis's other actions, both before and during his papacy.

For example, as Cardinal Bergoglio, we see the assistance he gave to the SSPX in South America, an action which not only did not assist him in any way, but also put him at odds with the Apostolic Nuncio. After doctrinal discussions had finished and the chance for any amendment to the doctrinal Preamble gone, as Pope Francis granted to the SSPX a universal faculty to hear confessions. This came without any official request on the part of the SSPX. He, then indefinitely extended the faculty and provided a means to have delegation for marriages. These concessions were not followed up

with any demands being made of the SSPX. It was a carrot, but without the stick.

The second category of theories can be summarized as denying that the Pope has any particular agenda at all, and that he is motivated either by a desire to reach out to those on the "peripheries" of the Church, or to act kindly to those with whom he feels a personal connection.

In this case, the SSPX was familiar to him in Argentina, and while it never withheld criticism of his attendance at Protestant religious services, and other clear errors, it came to him asking for assistance, showing not merely an attachment to opinions and a particular liturgy, but something Bergoglio very much liked to see, acts of the corporal works of mercy. In Buenos Aires, one finds not only an SSPX chapel; but a seminary, constructed with the help of the seminarians themselves living in difficult conditions while doing so; a school, providing for those who were not always the most wealthy; and a myriad of other fruits.

For a Pope unconcerned with liturgy or doctrine, but action at the "margins" of the Church, he would find in the SSPX a group that did those works of mercy he thought embodied "Catholicism" and a marginalized group who was happy to ask for help. In other words, this theory either treats the Pope as a true Modernist, with no doctrinal principles, but only subjective and personal principles, or simply a one who likes those with whom he has a personal connection, whatever they may think.

Such a pope would not be concerned with "partial communion" or "full communion" or "communion" at all, but simply whether one is doing good, and being open and honest.

If this theory were correct, the negative view of other traditionalist groups or those who favor the traditional Mass can be chalked up to an unfamiliarity, or perhaps his sense that they also have criticism, but hide it.

A *tertium datur* is provided by Charles Hayward, who calls himself "Maximum Leader" at *The Worthy House*. In a reviewing of *To Change the Church* by Ross Douthat, he offers "a simpler answer that nobody seems to raise" that "the Pope is just a very stupid man who has, like Zelig or Forrest Gump, stumbled into a situation for which his talents and nature make him totally unfit."²³

It is well known that Francis has surrounded himself with figures who "ghostwrite" his

speeches and it is suspected, even documents like *Traditionis custodes*.²⁴ Men like Msgr. Victor Emmanuel Fernández or Prof. Andrea Grillo influence a weak man with their many different pet projects. They take advantage of his lack of vision, intelligence, and foresight to manipulate him into doing what they would like done. While the agendas vary, they are unified by their hatred of the traditional teaching and liturgy of the Church, and a drive to change the moral teachings of the Church, as well as eliminate the traditional liturgy. Thus, it is not the Pope who is driving the ship into the rocks, but those he allows to be around him.

Haywood continues explaining that “[s]uch men lack consistency, because they simply don’t have the intellectual horsepower to maintain it, while they quickly and without noticing contradict themselves if it’s needed to get shiny baubles such as the praise of those they realize to be their intellectual or social betters.”

In a sense, this is like many of the theories that try to explain the conflicted and highly inconsistent Paul VI. “I don’t dispute there are smart people who are trying to undermine Catholicism and turn it into Episcopalianism,” Haywood writes, “but Francis isn’t among them.”

This third way also helps explain the positive moves of the now-Pope Francis and once-Cardinal Bergoglio towards the SSPX. Those SSPX priests and bishops he has met have been open with him about their objections and criticism, but have also asked for assistance, and come to meet when he has asked. Without any long-term motive or vision, he acts merely on impressions, and the impression of the SSPX is good.

Regardless of which of these theories is closest to the truth, it is clear that the SSPX remains at the heart of the normalization of traditional Catholicism, that is, authentic Catholicism, within the Church. Throughout its entire history, its founder and his successors have only wanted to practice the faith of their fathers and provide that faith to as many souls as possible. They have been provided the right to do this by Our Lord Himself and the perennial teaching of His Church, but the traditional Faith is necessarily stifled when its practice is legally forbidden or otherwise hampered by those governing the Church.

Pope Francis has taken a step forward in making traditional Catholicism more mainstream by granting sacramental faculties to SSPX priests. Pope Benedict XVI’s statement from 2009 that SSPX priests while not excom-



Pope Francis driving through the crowds in Abu Dhabi, February 5, 2019.

municated or suspended, “do not legitimately exercise any ministry in the Church,” can no longer be cited as accurate.²⁵ In 2015, the Superior General received a legitimate ministry from the Pope, to make judgments in a Canonical case, and soon after all SSPX priests received a ministry to absolve sins and witness Catholic marriages.

At the same time, Pope Francis has taken two steps backwards by reversing the universal permission for the traditional Mass that the SSPX had requested for the Church and which had been granted by Pope Benedict XVI. The “Mass of All Time,” flourishing as it was and bringing many Catholics to the traditional practices that have long nourished souls, has now been shut down in numerous locations around the world, and there is near-constant rumor of worse just around the corner.

In such an environment, the members of the SSPX continue and will continue to work for the restoration of all things in Christ by maintaining the traditional Catholic practices in its chapels and schools, forming priests, and assisting Catholic families towards sanctity. The SSPX will also continue to pray that Pope Francis, or one of his successors, soon makes these practices mainstream within the Church.

Endnotes

- ¹ Msgr. Fisichella was, in 2015, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, and, as such, was charged to oversee the “Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.”
- ² Pope Francis. (Sep. 1, 2015). “*Lettera del Santo Padre Francesco con la quale del giubileo straordinario della Misericordia.*”
- ³ *N.B.* The SSPX has never questioned the validity of absolution by its priests. Unimpeachable justification, found in Canon Law itself, existed before 2015 to appeal to supplied jurisdiction, common error, and the legitimate requests of the faithful. The value of these actions of the Pope was to silence the arguments of opponents who, to deter faithful from coming to the SSPX, often declared its confessions “invalid.”
- ⁴ Pope Francis. (Nov. 21, 2016). *Misericordia et misera*. §12.
- ⁵ Cf. Interview with Bishop Fellay by Mr. James Vogel. Apr. 21, 2017. SSPX: United States District. <https://sspx.org/en/interview-bishop-fellay-april-2017>
- ⁶ *La Stampa*. June 3, 2015. “Holy See puts Fellay in charge of trying one of his own priests.”
- ⁷ Müller, Gerhard. Apr. 4, 2017. *Lettera della Pontificia Commissione «Ecclesia Dei» ai Presuli delle Conferenze Episcopali interessate circa la licenza per la Celebrazione di Matrimoni dei Fedeli della Fraternalità San Pio X.*
- ⁸ *N.B.* For the same reasons as with confessions, the SSPX never doubted the validity of marriages witnessed by it on the grounds of “Lack of Canonical Form” because Canon Law provides an extraordinary canonical form, or exemptions for when one is morally unable to approach a priest with delegation. As with confessions, though, opponents of the SSPX frequently proclaimed its marriages invalid, and

diocesan tribunals even improperly annulled the marriages. The decree silenced critics and prevented the faithful from abusing the extraordinary situation by getting an easy but false annulment.

- ⁹ Davies, Michael. *Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre.*, vol. 1. p. 21, “The success of Ecône provided so dramatic a contrast to this debacle that its very existence became intolerable for some French bishops. They referred to it as *Le Séminaire Sauvage*—the Wildcat Seminary—giving the impression that it had been set up illegally without the authorization of the Vatican.”
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.38.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ¹² The Congregation for Religious granted Fr Snyder, a Trappist, permission to leave his congregation into which he was incardinated, and to be ascribed to the SSPX.
- ¹³ Cf. Lefebvre, Marcel. *Religious Liberty Questioned*. 2001. Kansas City: Angelus Press.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Laisney, François. *Archbishop Lefebvre and the Vatican*. 1988. Kansas City: Angelus Press.
- ¹⁵ This is particularly unusual, as the normal method for choosing a new bishop is the “terna” where a Papal Nuncio (advised by other bishops) submits a list of three names, from which one is chosen.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ¹⁷ Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. Jul. 2, 1988. “Clarification.” Available at: <https://www.fssp.org/en/declaration-of-intention-by-the-founders/>
- ¹⁸ Congregation for Bishops. Decree of Jan. 21, 2009.
- ¹⁹ *Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina*. Apr. 9, 2015, p. 38.
- ²⁰ Pace, Pio. “The Society of Saint Pius X recognized in Argentina: what does it mean? Much more than you may think!” *Rorate Caeli*. Apr. 29, 2015. Available at: <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-society-of-saint-pius-x-recognized.html>
- ²¹ *E.g.* Cf. Altieri, Christopher R. “*Traditionis custodes*: Best, worst, and middle case scenarios in the short term”: *Catholic World Report* (July 16, 2021). Available at: <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2021/07/16/traditionis-custodes-best-worst-and-middle-case-scenarios-in-the-short-term/>
- ²² Westin, John-Henry. July 26, 2017. “Vatican rumblings: Pope Francis aiming to end Latin Mass permission” LifeSite News. Available at <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/vatican-rumblings-pope-francis-aiming-to-end-latin-mass-permission/>
- ²³ Haywood, Charles. Review of *To Change the Church* by Ross Douhat. GoodReads. (Mar. 30, 2018) Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/30753688>
- ²⁴ Kwasniewski, Peter. (Aug. 18, 2021). “Andrea Grillo: The Mind Behind the Motu Proprio” OnePeterFive. Available at: <https://onepeterfive.com/mind-behind-motu-proprio/>
- ²⁵ Benedict XVI. Mar. 10, 2009. *Lettera del Santo Padre Benedetto XVI al vescovi della Chiesa Cattolica.*

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Pope Francis & *Amoris Laetitia*

Fr. Jonathan Loop, SSPX

Only a few months after his election to the papacy, Pope Francis gave an unscripted interview to multiple journalists while on a flight to Rome. When asked his opinion about a priest who was reputed to be a homosexual, he responded: “if a person is ‘gay’ and searches the Lord with a good will, who am I to judge him?”¹ This short phrase was widely reported, causing delight to enemies of the Church and consternation to the faithful. Nearly 10 years later, he has returned to the theme by saying in an interview with the Associated Press that homosexuality is not a *crime*, even if a sin. He reiterated this point in a letter written to Fr James Martin, SJ, the director of Outreach:

When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that *every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin*. Of course, one must also consider the circumstances, which may decrease or eliminate fault. As you can see, I was repeating something in general.

I should have said “It is a sin, as is any sexual act outside of marriage.” This is to speak of “the matter” of sin, but we know well that Catholic morality not only takes into consideration the matter, but also evaluates freedom and intention; and this, for every kind of sin. And I would tell whoever wants to criminalize homosexuality that they are wrong.²

On the one hand, these statements of the Holy Father, coming nearly a decade apart, indicate he does not consider homosexuality a serious problem. While it may be sinful to commit homosexual acts *outside of marriage*³, being “gay” is not. Thus it seems the Holy Father views laws criminalizing homosexuality (laws manifestly meant to protect the traditional family) to be “exclusive” to homosexuals, making them more offensive than homosexuality itself.⁴

On the other hand, he seems to imply that he could not make an objective judgment of the moral rightness or wrongness of homosexuality. What the pope says—and, more importantly,

what he did *not* say—leaves open the possibility that one would have to judge the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality based on the concrete circumstances in which the person found himself. Some of these circumstances might even serve to “eliminate fault.” In a way, the Pope seems to make his own a version of “situation ethics,” which undermines the traditional and objective clarity of moral theology. This ambiguity has created much confusion in the Church; furthermore, it has reappeared on multiple occasions during the course of the Holy Father’s pontificate, most notably on the question of divorced and “remarried” Catholics in his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. We shall therefore see that the Holy Father does in some measure make use of situational ethics in his teachings. Furthermore, we will consider the traditional teaching of moral theology which should guide our judgments in this matter.

Where then does the Holy Father stand? If we consider briefly his Apostolic Exhortation, we can see that he favors—at least when it deals with issues pertaining to marriage and the family—some form of situation ethics. By “situation ethics” we mean that the value of a man’s moral action depends entirely on the circumstances in which he finds himself, and which he alone is competent to judge. There *may* be certain moral ideals of right and wrong, but their worth and application is tied to the situation in which a man finds himself. As a result, different men in different circumstances may choose to do the exact opposite, and yet both act “morally.”⁵

The Pope of Situational Awareness

Now, how can we see this in *Amoris Laetitia*? The stated purpose of the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which the Holy Father wrote to summarize and comment upon the Synod on the Family held in late 2014, is to “promote love within the family in the context of the modern world.” There are many elements of the document which reflect—to a greater or lesser degree—traditional teachings regarding marriage.

At the same time, the Holy Father emphasizes throughout the document the need for mercy and understanding of those who do not live up to these teachings, as well as the changed circumstances of the world which render fidelity to those teachings more difficult. We can reasonably say that the Pope sees himself as react-

ing against a spirit of “legalism” where the law becomes an end in itself, a legalism exhibited by the Pharisees whom Our Lord severely rebuked in such words as “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”⁶ In this way, from the Pope’s perspective, the law ceases to serve a higher purpose (for example, human happiness) and becomes a tool to tyrannize over people.

He therefore writes in *Amoris Laetitia*:

In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God’s mercy. Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would “indoctrinate” that message, turning it into “dead stones to be hurled at others.”

In other words, insisting that people make efforts to avoid sinful behavior is to “indoctrinate” the Gospel and make it an instrument with which to stone them. In the Holy Father’s mind, this is directly contrary to “love and mercy” which require one to be “understanding” of the sinful situations into which people may have placed themselves. It would seem he has in mind the Pharisees who wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery. They clearly did not care about the woman, merely wishing to use her transgression as a weapon to wound Our Lord. Later in the document, Pope Francis writes:

For this reason, a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, “sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families.”⁷

How does one avoid “judging with superiority and superficiality”? Though the Pope never uses the term, he does indeed advocate for a kind of “situation ethics.” Rules of morality and justice are subject to change according to the needs of men in particular cases. This can arise because one views the highest priority to be the individual and his personal conscience. If a man believes he must act in a certain way, his con-

science is necessarily correct. Thus, we are not surprised to read in *Amoris Laetitia*:

The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition."⁸

While it is true that circumstances may diminish culpability in certain instances, they cannot change the intrinsic nature of an action, which is rooted in the nature of man or in the divine law. Pope Francis appears to reiterate this basic point, but at the same time he makes statements such as this:

Hence it is can no longer simply be said that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule. A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding "its inherent values," or be in a concrete situation which does not allow him or her to act differently and decide otherwise without further sin.⁹

In other words, a man may know that the Church's teaching does not allow intimate relations outside of a true marriage, but *reject* it. We are speaking of something much more than invincible ignorance, where a person unknowingly and in good faith (i.e., he does not suspect he may be acting incorrectly) acts contrary to the natural or divine law. This rejection can very well be an act of his conscience, which he must follow. Thus, he cannot "act differently... without further sin." The Holy Father writes two paragraphs later:

Recognizing the influence of such concrete factors, we can add that individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church's praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage... Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is

what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal.¹⁰

This individual conscience rejecting the teaching of the Church must somehow be "incorporated" into the Church's praxis, or way of judging and handling concrete situations. So, when somebody is living in a state of sin¹¹ but judges that the most "generous response" they can give to God is to, for example, remain loyal to their adulterous partner, they can be morally certain this is what God asks of them in this situation, even if it is not ideal.

It should be noted that an *ideal* is a goal which one should strive for, but is not properly an *obligation*. In this light, it is interesting to note that in the footnote 329 of *Amoris Laetitia* the Holy Father writes: "In such situations, many people, knowing and accepting the possibility of living "as brothers and sisters" which the Church offers them, point out that if certain expressions of intimacy are lacking, "it often happens that faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffers." So, to ensure "faithfulness"—to a person to whom one is *not* married—one can show expressions of intima-



Pope Francis at the Asian Youth Day, Korea, August 17, 2014.

cy with the moral conviction this is not only not wrong, but actually what God *is asking*. But clearly God cannot be asking us to go against God's law in order to sinfully pursue a human good.

The Holy Father further seems to believe that laws need to be adjusted to reflect the norms of different cultures at different times. In a letter to an atheist Italian journalist named Eugenio Scalfari, the Holy Father wrote:

To start, I would not speak about, not even for those who believe, an “absolute” truth, in the sense that absolute is something detached, something lacking any relationship. Now, the truth is a relationship! *This is so true that each of us sees the truth and expresses it, starting from oneself: from one's history and culture, from the situation in which one lives, etc.* This does not mean that the truth is variable and subjective. It means that it is given to us only as a way and a life. Was it not Jesus himself who said: “I am the way, the truth, the life”? In other words, the truth is one with love, it requires humbleness and the willingness to be sought, listened to and expressed.¹²

In other words, the truth—especially in practical and moral matters—is not the expression of

unchanging principles independent of time, place, and cultural milieu. The truth is different for different peoples while remaining accessible by everyone, but necessarily in the light of the culture in which they have grown. The principle of unity is an ambiguous and ill-defined “love.”

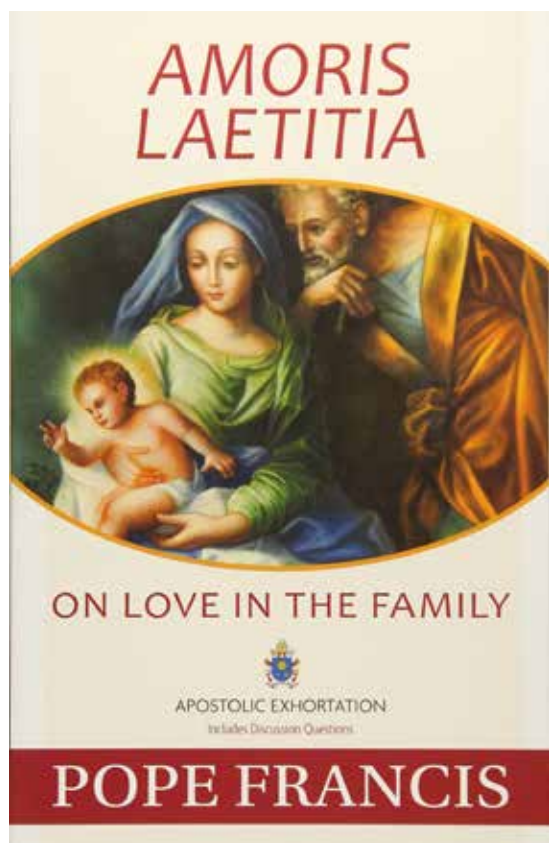
We can perceive this spirit in this quote from *Amoris Laetitia*: “Faithful to Christ's teaching we look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows... Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and call for an analytic and diversified approach.” One cannot simply apply moral norms universally and objectively without considering the situations in which people find themselves, their experiences, and weaknesses.

Thus, it is noteworthy that a large portion of the first section of *Amoris Laetitia* is dedicated to laying out the changing cultural attitudes of the modern world. These are presented as challenges facing traditional marriage which must be taken into account and may require the Church to adjust her moral teaching accordingly. It is no surprise that the Dutch bishops who published their scandalous “Rite for the Blessing of Same-Sex Couples” explicitly refer to the teaching of *Amoris Laetitia* to justify their efforts to “welcome” such men and women.

We can state therefore that Pope Francis does, in some manner, argue that there are some stable moral norms. For example, he does write in *Amoris Laetitia*:

It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality. Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.¹³

So, being a creature means we must accept what is intrinsically connected with our nature. However, these moral norms are not so much “obligations” as ideals which are ever to be aspired to, even if never fully attained. As a result, when men judge—either through conviction or weakness—they cannot abide by them, they can reject them in good conscience and act



accordingly, with the understanding that “this is what God is asking of them.” No one has the right to condemn them in these cases, even if it is still licit to present the “ideals” and invite men to embrace them. Thus, the Holy Father radically undermines the act of fraternal correction and lays the groundwork for anyone to reject Catholic moral teaching whenever it suits them.

A Traditional Response

How might we respond? Perhaps the clearest presentation of the traditional teaching may be found in the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas. Effectively, he teaches in the Treatise on Law¹⁴ that there is a “natural law”; i.e., certain foundational principles of good and harmful behavior that flow from man’s very nature (for example, “do good and avoid evil”). These remain the rules of human conduct regardless of the situations in which men may find themselves. Men by their reason devise certain “secondary” rules which are generally needed in order to attain the primary goals of the natural law. A well-formed conscience will be guided by these principles, applying them to the concrete situations of daily life. A man whose judgment contradicts these principles of the natural law has an erroneous conscience, and it is a work of charity to correct him as far as possible.

The secondary precepts are actions and behaviors that help men fulfill the primary precepts of the natural law. St. Thomas notes that these secondary precepts are conclusions of reason, reflecting on what is needed to attain the primary precepts. Furthermore, they deal with the specific cases in which men may find themselves.¹⁵ For these reasons, they are true in the majority of cases, but they may on occasion admit of exception or even alteration. However, the primary precepts that underlie them remain unchanged.

St. Thomas also speaks of the Divine Law, which presupposes the natural law, but which elevates it to a higher end. Thus, the sacrament of marriage presupposes the natural bond whose purpose is to assure the “preservation of the human race.” However, the sacrament prepares the man and woman to cooperate with the grace of God to lead the children entrusted to them by God to eternal life, something the natural law could never accomplish. Here too, St. Thomas notes that there is a similar relation



St. Thomas Aquinas

of primary precepts and what could be called secondary precepts.¹⁶

The essence of the New Law is the life of grace, and there flows from this certain works, some of which are necessary to maintain the life of grace, while others are intrinsically opposed to the life of grace. He gives the example of the profession of Faith, which is necessary, and the denial of Faith, which is intrinsically opposed. We can reasonably say that those actions contrary to the stability of the sacrament of marriage are intrinsically opposed to the New Law and can never be sanctioned. No amount of so-called “mercy” can change this fundamental reality.

This teaching of St. Thomas is admirably repeated by Pope Pius XII, precisely when he had to deal with people who were agitating to replace the Church’s traditional moral theology—especially with respect to marriage—during his pontificate. For example, he said in a radio address:

[...] The ‘new morality’ affirms that the Church, instead of fostering the law of human liberty and of love, and of demanding of you that dynamics which is worthy of the moral life, instead bases itself almost exclusively and with excessive rigidity, on the firmness and the intransigence of Christian moral laws, frequently resorting to the terms ‘you are obliged,’ ‘it is not licit,’ which has too much of an air of a degrading pedantry... Taking, therefore, the words of Christ and of the Apostle as the strict rule, should not one say that the Church of today is rather inclined more to indulgence than to severity? It so happens that the accusation of oppressive rigidity made against the Church by the ‘new morality,’ in reality, attacks, in the first place, the adorable Person of Christ Himself.”¹⁷

To conclude, therefore, we can say that the situation ethics which is given credence by Pope Francis and seen very clearly in *Amoris Laetitia* is fundamentally opposed to the sure and traditional moral teaching of the Church. True mercy does not consist in confirming people in sin. The prophet Isaias warns against such a false mercy: “Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” The Church placed this warning in her Ritual for the consecration of bishops, reminding them of their grave duty to communicate faithfully the truths and commandments which Our Lord entrusted to the Church, never hiding them merely because they were unpopular or even hard for men to accept.

So, the princes of the Church and the Vicar of Christ must especially make clear and precise moral judgments. This is not to imitate the Pharisees and to use doctrine as “stones” to hurl at sinners. Rather, it is the highest form of charity to help men see what separates them from God and to encourage them to convert. After Our Lord saves the poor adulteress from the bitter zeal of the Pharisees, He does not tell her to continue acting according to her conscience, but rather to “sin no more.”

Endnotes

- ¹ Quoted from an article published by Fr. James Martin, SJ on the *American Magazine* website on July 29, 2013. Accessed January 26, 2023. <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/pope-gays-who-am-i-judge>
- ² Handwritten letter dated January 27, 2023. Translated and published on Outreach.com. Accessed on January 28.

<https://outreach.faith/2023/01/pope-francis-clarifies-comments-on-homosexuality-one-must-consider-the-circumstances/>

- ³ See an article on Lifesitenews.com written by Jeanne Smits written on September 20, 2022. Accessed January 31, 2023].
- ⁴ The Holy Father fails to note that countries which still legislate on the subject (mainly in Africa and in the Middle East) do not criminalize the “tendency” to homosexuality, but homosexual behavior. What might his judgment be on the so-called “Don’t Say ‘Gay’” Law in Florida, which forbids exposing children in grades K-3 to any kind of sex education or “gender identity”? Is this “criminalizing” homosexuality, and therefore wrong?
- ⁵ The article at Wikipedia on “situational ethics” offers some interesting insight into the origin of the moral theory.
- ⁶ St. Mark 2:27.
- ⁷ AL #305
- ⁸ AL #79
- ⁹ AL #301
- ¹⁰ AL #303. This paragraph is explicitly cited by the bishops of Flanders in their document published on September 20, 2022 explaining the “rite of blessing” for homosexual union.
- ¹¹ Here, by “state of sin” is not meant merely having committed a mortal sin. Rather, it is meant a living habitually in a near occasion of sin. For example, a man who was validly married in the Church but subsequently got a divorce and re-married civilly is in a state of sin by living with his adulterous partner.
- ¹² Letter dated 4 September 2013. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_eugenio-scafari.html. Accessed 28 January 2023.
- ¹³ AL #56
- ¹⁴ This is a section of the *Summa* found in the Prima Secundae, beginning at Q90 and continuing to Q108, covering law in general, the natural law, human law, and the divine law (Old and New Law).
- ¹⁵ Ia-IIae Q94 Art 4. Pope Francis quotes this passage in his most controversial section of *Amoris Laetitia*, but we should note that he gives it a sense far different than St. Thomas would have intended.
- ¹⁶ Ia-IIae Q108, Article 1.
- ¹⁷ Pope Pius XII, “*La famiglia*.” *Radio Message on the Occasion of ‘Family Day,’ March 23, 1952*

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Joseph_Catholic_Church_(Central_City,_Kentucky)_-_stained_glass,_St._Thomas_Aquinas,_detail.jpg (Nheyob)

Timeline



March 2013

Elected

June 2013

Encyclical (1/3)
Lumen Fidei



May 2014

Visit to Israel,
Jordan, and
Palestine

November 2013

Apostolic
exhortation (1/5)
Evangelii Gaudium

September 2014

Visit to Albania

February 2015

Consistory list
(2/8), 20 new
cardinals appointed

June 2015

Visit to Bosnia
and Herzegovina

January 2015

Visit to Sri
Lanka and
Philippines

July 2013

Visit to Brazil

World Youth Day
in Rio de Janeiro



November 2014

Visit to France

Visit to Turkey

July 2015

Visit to Bolivia,
Ecuador, and
Paraguay



August 2014

Visit to South
Korea



May 2015

Encyclical
(2/3)
Laudato si'

September 2015

Announces Year
of Mercy; **grants
faculties to
absolve to
the SSPX**



Visit to Cuba and
the United States;
canonization of
Junipero Serra

2014-2015

Synod (1/3) on
the Family



Major Events of Francis's Papacy



November 2015

Visit to Kenya, Uganda, and the Central African Republic

October 2016

Visit to Georgia and Azerbaijan



Visit to Sweden

June 2016

Visit to Armenia

March 2016

Apostolic exhortation (2/5) *Amoris Laetitia* on marriage and the family



April 2017

Pope Francis encourages bishops to grant SSPX priests authorization to celebrate marriages



Visit to Egypt

June 2017

Consistory list (4/8), 5 new cardinals appointed



The "people's pope"



March 2018

Apostolic exhortation (3/5) *Gaudete et exsultate* on holiness

November 2017

Visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh

July 2016

Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*: women's contemplative life



Visit to Poland



World Youth Day in Kraków



September 2017

Visit to Colombia

May 2017

Visit to Portugal



November 2016

Consistory list (3/8), 17 new cardinals appointed

January 2018

Visit to Chile and Peru



February 2016

Visit to Cuba and Mexico

April 2016

Visit to Greece

April 2018

Cor Orans, further guidance on female cloistered contemplative life



June 2018

Visit to Switzerland

Consistory list (5/8), 14 new cardinals appointed

January 2019

Visit to Panama

World Youth Day in Panama City

September 2018

Visit to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

March 2019

Apostolic exhortation (4/5) *Christus vivit* to young people

Visit to Morocco



October 2019

Consistory list (6/8), 13 new cardinals appointed

Pachamama ceremony in the Vatican gardens



February 2020

Apostolic exhortation (5/5) *Querida Amazonia*, written in response to the Synod on the Amazon

June 2019

Visit to Romania

2019-2020

Synod (2/3) on the Amazon

2018-2019

Cardinal McCarrick accused and deposed



May 2019

Vos estis lux mundi, outline of procedure for accusing bishops of sexual impropriety

Visit to Bulgaria and North Macedonia

November 2019

Visit to Thailand and Japan



February 2019

Visit to the U.A.E. to participate in International Interfaith Meeting on "Human Fraternity"; signing of Abu Dhabi Declaration

August 2018

Visit to Ireland

September 2019

Visit to Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius

November 2020

Consistory list (7/8), 13 new cardinals appointed





July 2021

Traditionis Custodes, motu proprio limiting the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass



April 2022

Visit to Malta



The pope's official portrait

March 2021

Visit to Iraq



November 2022

Visit to Bahrain

December 2021

Visit to Cyprus and Greece

August 2022

Consistory list (8/8), 20 new cardinals appointed



For trips within the Vatican City, he uses a small Ford Focus from the Vatican motor pool.

June 2021

Pascite gregem Dei, reform of canon law addressing sexual scandal

2022-2024

Synod (3/3) on Synodality

September 2022

Pope Francis dissolves leadership of Knights of Malta

Visit to Kazakhstan

July 2022

Apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, clarifying and explaining *Traditionis Custodes*

Visit to Canada to apologize for crimes committed in relation to the Canadian Indian residential school system

September 2021

Visit to Hungary and Slovakia

February 2023

Rescript further restricts bishops' authority in implementing *Traditionis Custodes*





Fratelli Tutti

The Pope of Universal Brotherhood

Pater Scriptor

It may be a bad omen to begin an article with a disclaimer, but before writing about *Fratelli Tutti* one seems to be necessary. The following piece does not pretend to be an exhaustive exposé of what is commonly considered a very difficult and obscure text. The Vatican itself implicitly admitted this obscurity when, on its release, they published no less than eight different schematic tables to explain it!¹

What follows merely develops a thesis in regard to the 287-paragraph, 43, 000-word third Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis I. That thesis is that, following Abu Dhabi, *Fratelli Tutti* presents a universal human brotherhood built on a mistake that misrepresents St. Francis.

Following Abu Dhabi

The Abu Dhabi Declaration was co-signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo at Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, on February 4th, 2019. It was meant to unite Catholics and Mus-

lims in an ecumenical initiative, to build human fraternity.

The Society of St. Pius X's Superior General, Fr. Davide Pagliarani, published a statement soon after² pointing out that the Abu Dhabi Declaration stated that *the pluralism and diversity of religions is willed by God in His wisdom*. As Father rightly argues, that statement is opposed to the dogma that the *Catholic religion is the one true religion*. It falsely indicates that there can be peace outside of Christ.

The Declaration's ideology harkens back to a French secular movement of Catholic activists, *Le Sillon*, founded by Marc Sangnier in 1894. Pope St. Pius X condemned that movement in the 1910 letter *Notre Charge Apostolique*, addressed to the French Bishops. There he writes:

By separating fraternity from Christian charity thus understood, Democracy, far from being a progress, would mean a disastrous step backwards for civilization. If, as We desire with all Our heart, the

highest possible peak of wellbeing for society and its members is to be attained through fraternity or, as it is also called, universal solidarity, all minds must be united in the knowledge of Truth, all wills united in morality, and all hearts in the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ. But this union is attainable only by Catholic charity, and that is why Catholic charity alone can lead the people in the march of progress towards the ideal civilization.³

The Abu Dhabi Declaration comes back to the same idea as the Sillonists, talking about a universal human brotherhood which has its basis in something besides Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church He founded. *Fratelli Tutti* expands and develops the same ideology.

Fratelli Tutti Presents a Universal Human Brotherhood

Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* came out the year following the Abu Dhabi Declaration, on the feast of Saint Francis, October 3rd, 2020.

I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that '*God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties, and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.*' This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the document that we both signed.⁴

Brotherhood implies familial life, which in turn implies a common origin. People who are "family" share the same parents. The common origin on which Pope Francis bases the life all are called to live together as brothers and sister is human dignity: "It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Brotherhood between all men and women."⁵

Because Pope Francis bases societal familial life on human dignity, he invokes St. Francis as the inspiration of *Fratelli Tutti*. St. Francis spread the love of God and inspires a fraternal society because he helped people to become themselves, rather than imposing doctrines through verbal warfare.⁶ The Pope gives as an example of this St. Francis's visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt when he both kept

his identity and subjected himself to another human for God's sake.⁷

St. Francis's attitude implies not just personal initiative, but also that global measures should be put in place. A globalist structure will enable fraternity to develop through the cultivation of true liberty by ensuring equality among people.⁸ Ensuring a fraternal structure where people are free and equal means that the moral good, which is truly necessary for the integral development of the human person, can be pursued.⁹

The expression of Pope Francis's ideal is captured in a term he borrows from Pius XI, "political charity."¹⁰ Political charity is found in dialogue based on human dignity.¹¹ That basis implies roots in ethical principles taken from human nature. Those principles are fully expressed in the Gospel for believers but are embodied in the same practical rules as those that express the ethical principles from human nature. They can be acceptable to even agnostics, which gives perpetual room for dialogue.¹²

What assistance can religions give to this universal human brotherhood? Well, all religions respect people as God's children.¹³ That recognition comes from the established transcendent dignity coming from a common Father.¹⁴ In turn, respect for the transcendent dignity of a common Father leads people to a universal love for all regardless of religion.¹⁵ The great desire of the Pope for a globalist family would be helped by fostering respect for all people as God's children, resulting in peace, not fundamentalist violence.¹⁶

Built on a Mistake

Pope Francis's enterprise for universal brotherhood is built on a fundamental mistake. Though it may sound like a hard thing to say, not all men have the same dignity. And since they are not equal in this respect, the global order of *Fratelli Tutti* can't be found in universal fraternity based on a shared dignity among all people.

Why don't men have the same dignity and why is it impossible to build universal brotherhood on that dignity? Well, St. Thomas explains that human dignity is found in both what persons are and in what they do.¹⁷ The dignity in what they are is in their spiritual soul and their capacity by grace to attain Heaven. Their dignity in what they do is in their following God's law, again by the grace of God.

Since people follow God's law to different degrees in their individual actions; their dignity flowing from their actions is not the same. *Fratelli Tutti*, meanwhile, sees dignity as only consisting in what people are, not in what they do. However, the dignity in what people are is only a *capacity* to be what they should be!

Taking an example from family life might make this distinction clearer. A father's role in his family demands respect. The love that he gives his family by caring for his wife and children demands that respect for his actions. However, if he only tells his family that he loves



them but does not take care of them, he has a radical demand for respect by what he is, but his lack of fulfillment of his role in his actions as a father makes him unequal in dignity to a father who does fulfill his role through his actions.

True human dignity can only be found in what people do, in how they live, because that alone leads to their supernatural end. That dignity consists in keeping the Commandments by the Faith that the Catholic Church provides. To base any kind of human unity on anything else will always be inadequate. Archbishop Lefebvre points this out succinctly: "To the extent that a man adheres to error or attaches himself to evil, he loses his final dignity or does not attain it; and nothing more can be founded on it!"¹⁸

The false democracy that is based on a false concept of dignity has severe social implications. It can root people in a prideful independence, where they think that they do not need Our Lord or His Church.¹⁹ As Pope St. Pius X stated against *Le Sillon*, social life not based upon the one true religion has been historically proven to be impossible. Practical choices cannot ignore beliefs, because practical choices reflect beliefs.²⁰

We turn to Archbishop Lefebvre again and are reminded that true fraternal charity for peo-

ple demands their conversion: "Let us look at our neighbor with God's eyes, happy if we see him in God, wishing to see him there if he is not, convinced that he can get there as long as he has not died."²¹

Pope St. Pius X warned about taking non-Catholic solutions. If we open up the cross-pollination of religions to each other based on a false concept of human dignity while sharing the same practical rules, there will be consequences. Free expression of error can lead to a severe loss of Faith in that environment, especially for young people.²²

That Misrepresents St. Francis!

Pope Francis invokes St. Francis as the inspiration for *Fratelli Tutti* because he helped people become themselves, going to the Sultan to subject himself to another human being, not to impose his beliefs on him. The name of the Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is an echo of St. Francis's opening words of his sermons, to "all brothers."

Previous popes painted a different picture of that saint. Pope Leo XIII in September of 1882 published the Encyclical Letter *Auspucato Concessum* on the seventh centenary of St. Francis's birth. Leo XIII indicates that the express divinely ordained purpose of St. Francis was to bring people to the imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ and incite virtue specifically Christian.²³

The charity that he showed towards other people, especially the marginalized, was directed to the unification of all in the Catholic Church established by Christ. "Therefore, he has deserved well of that brotherhood established and perfected by Jesus Christ, which has made of all mankind one single family, under the authority of God, the common Father of all."²⁴

Leo XIII goes further and indicates that true social welfare had been made to advance by the Franciscan Third Order. Male and female members from all walks of life labor in the world for the same apostolic aims that St. Francis did, the growth of the Catholic Church in society.²⁵ The true Catholic spirit St. Francis and his followers spread in society was opposed by both the materialism that Pope Francis decries ubiquitously in *Fratelli Tutti* but also by the more "socialist" optics he seems to favor.²⁶

Thirty-nine years later in 1921 Pope Benedict XV wrote the Encyclical *Sacra Propediem* to

those same tertiaries to emphasize the proper characteristics of their specifically “Franciscan” service. He contrasts that with: “The St. Francis of Assisi whom certain moderns present to us, and who springs from the imagination of the Modernists, this man, cautious in his obedience to the Apostolic See, a specimen of a vague and vain religiosity, is assuredly neither Francis of Assisi nor a saint.”²⁷

Benedict XV goes on to say that problems among different countries and material injustice in the world comes from “disdain of Christian principles.”²⁸ He encourages people to imbue society with the Franciscan spirit in society by working for the glory of Our Lord and the triumph of the Catholic Church.²⁹ Indeed, for Benedict XV, the true social imitation of St. Francis can only be in leading souls to Christ: “

In truth what must really be done is, by imitation of Francis of Assisi, to open to the greatest possible number of souls the way which will lead them back to Christ; it is in this return that resides the firmest hope of salvation for society.”³⁰

Should the point not be driven home enough by Leo XIII and Benedict XV, Pius XI adds his voice to theirs in his Encyclical *Rite Expiatis* in April 1926. He invokes St. Francis as a patron of social involvement which is uniquely Catholic.³¹

Pius XI refers to Leo XIII’s work and specifically states that society can’t expect peace if it does not return to the Catholic Church as the one source of salvation.³² For Pius XI, a truly Franciscan spirit can result in a greater social order and protection of the unprotected, but that first requires a fraternity mutually seeking after a perfection that is purely Christian.³³

Finally, it’s worth noting that Pius XI refers to the same meeting between St. Francis and Sultan Malik-el-Kamil. Pius XI ascribes different motives to St. Francis than Pope Francis does, namely the desire to spread the Gospel and suffer martyrdom, a sacrificial death as a witness to his faith. Moved by an ardent desire to spread the Gospel and even to undergo martyrdom, he did not hesitate to go to Egypt and there bravely to appear in the very presence of the Sultan.³⁴

Conclusion

We cannot deny the truth of the problems in the world that the Pope presents in *Fratelli Tutti*. Crime and abuse are more and more present in a godless world. However, they will not end by

the establishment of a universal human brotherhood founded on a mistaken notion of human dignity. They will end by the conversion of both individuals and societies to the one “God-full” religion, the Catholic Church. This is St. Francis’s solution, and ours can be no other.

Endnotes

¹ <https://sspx.org/en/news-events/news/%E2%80%9Cfratelli-tutti%E2%80%9D-dummies-61427>.

² <https://sspx.ca/en/news-events/news/communiqu%C3%A9-sup%C3%A9rieur-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ral-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-saint-pius-x-true-fraternity-45364>.

³ *Notre Charge Apostolique*, para. 30.

⁴ *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 180.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 198.

¹² *Ibid.*, para. 214.

¹³ *Ibid.*, para. 271.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 273.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 281.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 284.

¹⁷ *IIa-IIae*. q. 64, a. 2, *ad 3*

¹⁸ Msgr. Lefebvre, *They Have Uncrowned Him*, pg. 192

¹⁹ *Notre Charge Apostolique*, para. 31

²⁰ *Notre Charge Apostolique*, para. 41

²¹ *The Spiritual Life*, pg. 239

²² *Notre Charge Apostolique*, para. 43

²³ *Auspicato Concessum*, para. 10

²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 13

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 21

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 22

²⁷ *Sacra Propediem*, para. 15

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 13

²⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 14

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 25

³¹ *Rite Expiatis*, para. 1

³² *Ibid.*, para. 5

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 35

³⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 37

Picture sources

TITLE IMAGE: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Francis_among_the_people_at_St._Peter%27s_Square_-_12_May_2013.jpg (Edgar Jiménez)

ABU DHABI: laportelatine.org/formation/apologetique/les-droits-de-lhomme-et-lislam



Pope Francis and Islam

Deception or Illusion?

By Fr. Guillaume Gaud, Translated by Mary Molliné

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2021 issue of *Courrier de Rome*.

At the initiative of Cardinal Bea, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was created during the second-to-last session of Vatican Council II, in 1964. This was anything but an isolated event; in fact, it was one of a whole array of creations, all of which held the promise of a bright future. The Protestant World Council of Churches created an Office for Interreligious Relations. The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) was born of a UN initiative and held its first sessions in 1970 in Kyoto, in 1974 in Louvain, and in 1979 in New York. In this same context, specifically Muslim-Christian relations were honored by the organization of regular public symposiums beginning in the 1970's: in Cordoba in 1974, in Tunis in 1974, in Tripoli in 1976, in Cordoba again in 1977, in Al-Azhar in 1978. To make the organization of these symposiums even more official, the French Episcopal Conference created in 1973 a Secretariat for Encounters with Mus-

lims, which later became the Muslim Relations Service (SRI) and would remain at the cutting edge of conciliar Modernism. The magazine *Islamochristiana*, published yearly from 1975 on by the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), has served since as a basis for studies.

This first impetus in the 1970's would lead to an unending proliferation in our days of groups and associations of every sort, whose common denominator remains the same as ever: the search by Catholics for an idyllic Muslim-Christian friendship. Hence the birth of the Islamo-Christian Research Group (GRIC) in 1977, the foundation in 1989 of the Association for Muslim-Christian Dialogue (ADIC) that would later become the Association for International Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Interreligious Encounters in 1995, and the creation of the Group for Islamic-Christian Friendship in 1995; not to mention the countless local groups that most often include only a few notably pro-

gressivist Catholics and a few Muslims doing their best to keep up a dialogue. In the past few years, the number of Muslim-Christian dialogue forums online has exploded. This apparent multiplicity really comes down to two types of contributions. The first category is made of up websites run by Muslims who use them as instruments of propaganda and so-called “apologetics” in favor of Islam for Europeans¹; their primary goal is to reassure Europeans and kindle an attraction for Islam (a “call to Islam”) in a manner “adapted to the Western mentality”. The second category consists of websites run by Catholics or Protestants whose goal is most often to present each religion in a positive light and encourage reflecting upon the answers that all religions could offer together. These websites are designed by people of the Western world for people of the Western world (be they Muslim or Christian) and present Islam in an honorable light, suggesting that it can and should have a place in the Western world. The result is clearly expressed in this naïve reaction published in *La Croix* on January 29, 2021, “Out of ignorance, I had a negative view of Islam.”

The author of these lines participated in several of these online forums and a number of these Muslim-Christian encounters. The only observable and observed result is that Christians have become involved in Islamization, in welcoming Muslim immigrants, in distributing books and videos praising Islam. Truly constructive discussions do not occur in these structures. At best, “Once diversity has been accepted as a positive factor, it is necessary to ensure that people not only accept the existence of other cultures but also desire to be enriched by them. In a discourse to Catholics, my Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, spelled out his deep conviction in these words: ‘The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives. She has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make.’[...] May believers always be ready to promote initiatives of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in order to encourage collaboration (cf. *Nostra Aetate*) on themes of mutual interest, such as the dignity of the human person, the search for the common good, the building of peace.² [...] If it is to be authentic, such a dialogue must avoid sinking into relativism and syncretism and must be inspired by sincere respect for others and by a generous spirit of reconciliation

and fraternity. I encourage all who are dedicated to building a Europe that is welcoming, supportive.”³

These remarks by the immediate predecessor of Pope Francis reveal great naivety and an equally great illusion regarding the way the major Islamic institutions consider the overall objective of this dialogue. But there is more: the illusion here leads to an actual self-censorship (which should be unacceptable) of the Church’s Mission to evangelize. How this illusion and self-censorship have continued and worsened under Benedict XVI’s successor is what we shall now proceed to consider.

A First Attempt at a Fraternity of Believers

In 1978, Fr. Anawati, OP, as member of the Vatican delegation to Al-Azhar for the symposium on interreligious dialogue, gave a conference⁴ in which he tried to reconcile the two religions, Catholicism and Islam, in a consensual vision. The purpose of this vision was to build a “humanism founded on God or a theocentric humanism,” a “consequence of faith in God.” To this end, the good friar found no better approach than to relativize the differences in faith between Islam and Catholicism, by means of two complementary tactics.

The first is based on the contents of the Faith. It consists in listing the truths of faith apparently shared by Catholics and Muslims, but without giving their precise contents, thus making things ambiguous, as for example having faith in one God. For he does not add that, in Christian Revelation, it is essential and not secondary to affirm that this one God is – in the essence of His transcendent and therefore mysterious Being – three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Nor does he mention that in the Quran it is essential and not optional to deny that God is Trinity. Fr. Anawati was very careful not to say that Catholics and Muslims believe in the same realities, but he also did not mention that Muslims do not have faith in the sense the Catholic Church gives this word. He also failed to mention the absolutely fundamental distinction between:

- a) The supernatural faith of the Christian, who accepts all revealed truths on the sole motive of the authority of God revealing them, a theological faith that puts the

believer in possession of the Truth which is Jesus, the Word of God, both revealed and revealer;

- b) And the Muslim faith which is a purely human belief and not only incapable of putting the Muslim believer in possession of the full Truth which is Jesus, but also is truly opposed to letting the Muslim believer gain access to true theological Faith.

This tactic contents itself with saying that in the Quran, Revelation is found in a reduced condition or a merely imperfect manner.⁵ This makes the religious essence of Islam incomprehensible, for its definition as such is a refusal of the three principal mysteries revealed by God and entrusted to His Church in Christianity: the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation, and the mystery of the Redemption.

The second technique makes use of the disposition of the believer. It consists in defining his faith as an existential and relational dimension between him and God. Attention is focused exclusively on the beautiful and admirable attitude of submission to the sovereign Being in the souls of Christian and Muslim believers. And the persisting contradiction between the objective elements of their respective beliefs is simply ignored. The similarity of their attitude serves as a basis for brotherhood among believers, a sort of theocentric humanism. This idea is to be found in the Pope's recent address in Iraq: "God asked Abraham to raise his eyes to heaven and to count its stars. [...] Today we, Jews, Christians and Muslims, together with our brothers and sisters of other religions, honor our father Abraham by doing as he did: we look up to heaven. [...] The otherness of God points us towards others, towards our brothers and sisters. Yet if we want to preserve fraternity, we must not lose sight of heaven. May we – the descendants of Abraham and the representatives of different religions – sense that, above all, we have this role: to help our brothers and sisters to raise their eyes and prayers to heaven."⁶ The Pope implies that all of us, Jews, Christians and Muslims, have the same beautiful and commendable attitude towards one and the same God; but the fundamental differences opposing Judaism and Islam to Catholicism, with their necessary consequences, are purposely not mentioned.

In his response to Fr. Anawati, Sheik Baraka

categorically maintained that Islam has never believed that Allah "had granted man the right to use his reason to organize society in accordance with a natural law corresponding to a universal human nature as founded on reason." For him, this would be opposed to Sharia law and would dissolve the articles of Islamic belief. He asserted that this would be a poor basis for interreligious dialogue, since it presents an obstacle to an agreement.⁷

A Non-Catholic Strategy

Both in his declaration in Abu Dhabi and in his address in Iraq, Pope Francis voluntarily avoided the Name of Jesus; Christ is mentioned neither directly nor indirectly, and the Christian social order, which has always been described by the Popes as the source of peace here below, is obviously not discussed. The Pope chose to adopt the same tactic as Fr. Anawati, a tactic that is neither that of a truly Catholic humanism, which finds its source of order and peace in the Faith, nor that of an atheistic humanism, that claims to find its source of peace in a humanity liberated from any imposed truth, but rather that of a so-called theocentric humanism. This humanism claims to find its source of peace in the fact that men all adopt the attitude of believers, which places them in an existential relation with God, even if their respective beliefs are contradictory. The immediate consequence, fully accepted by Pope Francis, is that anyone who adopts a tactic of this sort is obliged to abandon the exclusive perspective of Catholic doctrine and to keep silence about the only effective means of obtaining peace: Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Nations.

It is easy to understand how tempting this tactic is in the era of globalism when it is clear that the Church's doctrine on the Kingship of Christ stands little chance of being accepted. The Second Vatican Council succumbed to the same temptation long before Benedict XVI and Francis. But does not the social doctrine of Christ the King present the Catholic Faith exactly as it is? Did St. Paul not say, "Praying withal for us also, that God may open unto us a door of speech to speak the mystery of Christ."⁸ The Apostle showed that only faith in Jesus and our union with Him can unite men by protecting them from error, "...until we all attain to the unity of faith, and of the deep knowledge of the Son of God, [...], that we may be now no

longer children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine devised in the wickedness of men, in craftiness, according to the wiles of error. Rather we are to practice the truth in love, and so grow up in all things in him who is the head, Christ.”⁹ St. Paul is affirming that far from being just one religion among many others, the religion of Jesus Christ is the only true religion, the universal religion. “This mystery is that the Gentiles are joint heirs, and fellow-members of the same body, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel. To me, the very least of all the saints, there was given this grace, to announce among the Gentiles, the unfathomable riches of Christ.”¹⁰ Is this not the attitude we should expect of the one to whom has been entrusted the role of “religiously guarding and faithfully expounding the revelation or deposit of Faith”?¹¹ Is this not what we should expect of the successor of St. Peter, the Pope, pastor and doctor of all Christians?

Pope Pius XII, too, was faced with the same difficulties as Francis, a world tearing itself

apart. How did he react? Did he invite the believers of different monotheistic religions to raise up to the one God the common prayer of the children of Abraham? No. Pius XII recalled with precision the role of the Church in the establishment of world peace. The Church must contribute to the establishment of this peace by preaching a specifically Christian and Catholic order:

“What should be the Church’s contribution to peace? What is the legal title, the specific nature of her contribution? The legal title is the Eternal Son of God made man, whose name is *Princeps Pacis*, the Prince of Peace. The Prince and founder of peace, that is the characteristic of the Savior and Redeemer of the human race. His lofty and divine mission is to establish peace between each man and God, among men and among peoples. But the Divine Savior is also the invisible head of the Church, and for this reason, His mission of peace continues to subsist and be at work in the Church. [...] We find ourselves obliged to declare: the world is far from the order willed by God in Christ, an



Pope Francis prays alongside the Grand Mufti in Istanbul’s Blue Mosque, November 29, 2014.

order that guarantees real and lasting peace. This approach will convince any impartial observer that the heart of the problem of peace today is spiritual, that it is a spiritual deficiency or lack. A profound Christian sense is too absent in the world today, and there are too few true and perfect Christians. Men themselves places obstacles to the realization of the order willed by God.”¹²

The Pope went on to warn against a false peace that, by refusing the source of peace, Christ and His instrument the Church, dooms itself never to exist:

“This world speaks of nothing but peace and it has no peace; it lays claim to every possible and impossible legal title by which to establish peace, but fails to know or to recognize the pacifying mission that comes directly from God, the mission of peace of the religious authority of the Church.”

Going even farther, Pius XII denounced the false peace that Pope Francis preaches today:

But “if the religious authority of the Church is deprived of that which is indispensable for it to work effectively for peace, then the tragic condition of the modern world that is already in such upheaval is worsened. The defection of many men from the Christian Faith has led to this almost intolerable fault. And God seems to have responded to this crime of abandoning Christ by the plague of a permanent threat to peace.”

By choosing a stance that excludes the role of Jesus Christ and of the true religion, does the Pope not shackle the freedom of the Church and her missionary charity? He certainly runs the very real risk of being passed up by cleverer strategists, which is exactly what seems to have happened in Iraq. Indeed, the Pope sustained three resounding defeats.

The Pope’s first defeat was the interreligious meeting in the Plain of Ur. Francis wanted to invite all the descendants of the faith of Abraham, from his perspective of peace and coexistence. But the Jews did not come, for the Iraqi and Shiite authorities refused their presence.

The second defeat took place at the meeting in Najaf with Ayatollah al-Sistani. He refused to sign the Abu Dhabi document on human fraternity.

The third humiliation was that the Pope was unable to avoid listening to the frank and courteous explanations of Ayatollah al-Sistani at

this same meeting. He pointed out to the Pope the profound reasons that made it impossible for him to agree with the Abu Dhabi document. The first of these reasons was theological and has to do with the definition of fraternity. “Ayatollah al-Sistani has a saying which I hope I recall correctly. Men are either brothers by religion or equals by creation.”¹³ The saying comes from the Imam Ali, who limits fraternity (beyond that of the family) to the true faith in Allah and admits only an equality of nature among all humans. Ayatollah refused to sign a declaration based on ambiguous phrasing in which each party reads a different meaning into the text he signs.

His second reason was political. For what Islamic countries expect of the Pope is not words but actions. Sistani declared that the current human, social and material evils described in the Abu Dhabi document are mostly due to wars. He explicitly accused the great powers waging these wars of complete disregard for human rights and cited the oppressed Palestinian nation as a perfect example. Consequently, the secondary role of religious leaders is to bring these same powers to abandon their logic of war and not put their own private interests before people’s right to live with freedom and dignity. What is more, religious leaders have a duty to protect the people hurt by these wars, as is the case in Iraq. Ayatollah seems to have reminded the Pope of his own responsibility to act upon Western leaders and bring wars to an end, rather than multiplying ambiguous declarations.

Ayatollah did not accept ambiguous language. But he did take advantage of the Pope’s irenic illusions to use the head of the Catholic Church as a spokesman through whom he was able to present the entire Western world with a very satisfying image of Shiite action in Iraq.

... drawing the Pope right to the edge of the Muslim faith

The Pope began his speech in Ur by declaring, “In these stars, Abraham saw the promise of his descendants; he saw us. Today we, Jews, Christians and Muslims, honor our father Abraham.” In the prayer he then recited, he called Abraham “our common father in faith” and Jews, Christians and Muslims “children of Abraham.” With comments of this sort, did he



The Islamic Center of Washington, D.C.

realize that he was closer to the Muslim doctrine than to the doctrine of the Church?

For Islam, the faith of Abraham is a faith of pure monotheism (*hanif*) that associates nothing with God. “They say, ‘Be Jews or Christians so you will be guided.’ Say, ‘Rather, we follow the religion of Abraham, truly monotheistic (*hanif*), and he was not of the polytheists.’”¹⁴ Islam considers that the Jews and Christians deviated little by little from the faith of Abraham, and that Mohammed was sent to bring them back to monotheism, but they did not accept and have since remained halfway between belief and disbelief: “Say, ‘We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are in submission to Him.’”¹⁵ “Indeed, those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers and wish to discriminate between Allah and His messengers and say, ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in others,’ and wish to adopt a way

in between (belief and disbelief): those are the disbelievers, truly. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. But they who believe in Allah and His messengers and do not discriminate between any of them, to those He is going to give their rewards. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”¹⁶

What is more, certain religious terms used in the Abu Dhabi declaration take on an Islamic meaning.

The declaration speaks of “awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.” The word “grace” is used here in the Islamic sense of a natural benefit from God. Taken in the Catholic sense, this word would express a grave error and imply that all men are children of God through sanctifying grace by the very fact of their creation.

It also speaks of “the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all.” In the Christian doctrine, the word “salvation” is used in reference to sin which prevents us from entering into Eternal Life. Obtaining salvation means being liberated from sin, and this salvation is brought to us by Christ who expiates for our sins, a notion that Islam categorically refuses. In this declaration, it is simply the Islamic sense of the word, a salvation for the life of humanity on earth.

“We, who believe in God and in the final meeting with Him and His judgment,” is another typically Islamic expression.

The document goes on to say that “the pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.” Besides conveying explicit heresy,¹⁷ this phrase expresses pure Muslim doctrine. Muslim commentators made no mistake when saying that it “thus abandons all claims to an apologetic exclusivism and rejects the arrogant denial of another God-revealed faith.”¹⁸ And that is indeed the stumbling block: while the Quran maintains that the Gospel was revealed by God, the Church has always maintained that Islam is in no way revealed by God, as it presents no real sign of revelation, no motive of credibility, and rather contains all the signs given six centuries earlier by Sacred Scripture by which to recognize antichrists. And yet... the Pope signed the text containing this Muslim profession of faith, faithful to his aversion for everything he calls “proselytism” and that is in reality

the most authentic expression of the missionary spirit of the Church.

Lastly, other affirmations implement the strategy of Islamic Cultural Action whose objective is to use a Western moral authority to bring Europeans to accept Islamization and to exonerate Islam of any violence:

“Good relations between East and West are indisputably necessary for both. They must not be neglected, so that each can be enriched by the other’s culture through fruitful exchange and dialogue. The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism.” The text explicitly affirms here that the spiritual and religious evils of the Western world will find their remedy not in the Roman Church but in Eastern civilization—in other words in Islam, thanks to an interreligious declaration.

“Dialogue among believers means coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values and, from here, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. It also means avoiding unproductive discussions.” In the light of the experience of more than half a century of dialogue, we now know what is meant by “unproductive discussions”: the desire to convert others and to show them that their religion does not come from God.

“Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. ...Terrorism is deplorable and... is not due to religion, even when terrorists instrumentalize it.” “In the name of innocent human life that God has forbidden to kill, affirming that whoever kills a person is like one who kills the whole of humanity, and that whoever saves a person is like one who saves the whole of humanity.” This altered and truncated quotation from the Quran (5.32), which is actually a paraphrase of the Talmud, modifies its true Koranic meaning, which is that God only authorizes killing people if they are guilty of murder or corruption on earth. The following verse makes this explicit: “The penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and spread mischief in the land is death, crucifixion, cutting off their hands and feet on opposite sides, or exile from the land.”

We cannot but be appalled to see a Pope sign such affirmations from the Quran presented as the word of God.

Based on all of the above, it is quite clear that Pope Francis’s approach is but one of the many facets of an instrumentalization by Islam to the detriment of non-Muslim Western societies, and even more importantly, to the great scandal of Catholics, whose faith suffers an unprecedented alteration. Because of this, the present head of the Church bears a grave responsibility before God and men.

Endnotes

- ¹ For example, the dialogue forum islamchretien.forumactif.com.
- ² Paul VI, Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, August 6, 1964, §67.
- ³ Benedict XVI, Letter on the occasion of the Study Day for Interreligious Dialogue and Culture, December 3, 2008.
- ⁴ Cf. Article “Les acteurs et leur stratégie dans le monde musulman” (The Actors and Their Strategy in the Muslim Universe), June 2021 issue of *Courrier de Rome*.
- ⁵ As John Paul II does in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.
- ⁶ Francis, Address in the Plain of Ur, at the Interreligious Meeting during his Apostolic Visit to Iraq, March 6, 2021.
- ⁷ Cf. The study by Fr. Emmanuel Pisani, OP, *Le dialogue islamo-chrétien à l'épreuve : Père Anawati, OP – Dr. Baraka. Une controverse au vingtième siècle*, L’Harmattan, 2014. Fr. Emmanuel Pisani, a Dominican from Montpellier and member of the IDEO (Institut Dominicain d’Etudes Orientales du Caire) is the director of the ISTR of the Institut Catholique in Paris. He teaches Islamology in Paris, Lyon and Rome. He presented a doctoral thesis in philosophy and theology on heterodox and non-Muslims according to al-Cazâli.
- ⁸ Col. 4:3.
- ⁹ Eph. 4:13-15.
- ¹⁰ Eph. 3:6-9.
- ¹¹ Vatican Council I, Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4.
- ¹² Pius XII, Radio Message to the World, December 24, 1951.
- ¹³ Pope Francis, Press Conference on the flight back from Iraq, March 8, 2021.
- ¹⁴ Quran 2.135.
- ¹⁵ Quran 3.84-85.
- ¹⁶ Quran 4.150-152
- ¹⁷ See article “François et le dogme (II)” (Francis and Dogma) in the Feb. 2019 issue of *Courrier de Rome*.
- ¹⁸ Commentary on the Abu Dhabi Document by an international group of Muslim scholars and intellectuals, available on the website www.christians-muslims.com.

Picture Sources

TITLE IMAGE: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Kaaba_during_Hajj.jpg (Adli Wahid)

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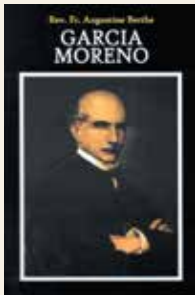
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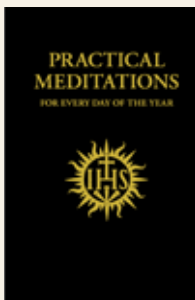
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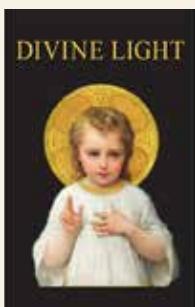


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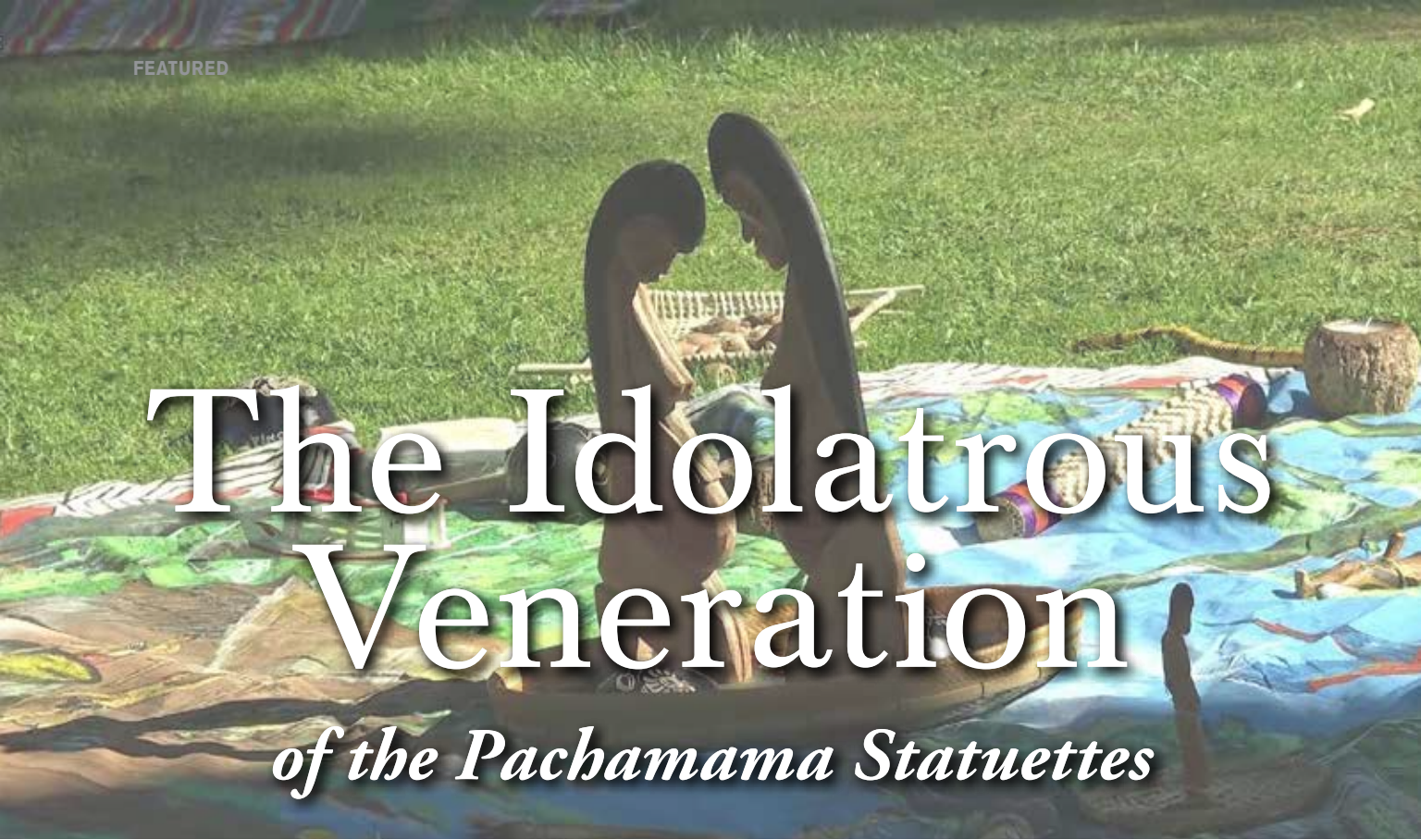
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The Idolatrous Veneration

of the Pachamama Statuettes

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Whether the Vatican accepts it or not, the “Amazon rite” affair that took place in the Vatican Gardens on October 4 in the presence of Pope Francis, and that of the Pachamama “statuettes” that followed, are far from closed. They require at least some clarification and a *mea culpa*.

Worship According to Catholic Theology

Worship (or cult) is a veneration manifested towards a being because of his or her own excellence or because of his connection with a being worthy of honor, for example an image that represents him. In the first case—that of a person’s own excellence—it is a question of what is called absolute worship; in the second, of relative worship.

St. Thomas recalls that “honor or reverence is due to a rational creature only” (*Summa Theologica* III, q.25, a.4). Included in the phrase “rational creature” is the person in general and not only his human nature. St. Thomas adds a second principle that there can be no honor owed to inanimate creatures or to objects unless they represent a rational nature. Worship must never

be rendered to nonhuman sentient natures—plants or animals—to carefully avoid any danger of idolatry.

Thus, only a person can receive absolute worship. This worship is divided into two types. The adoration of *latria* is reserved for God alone. Indeed, only God can be adored. The worship of veneration or *dulia* is applied to those who are filled with divine glory in Heaven, the angels and the saints who contemplate the face of God. The Most Holy Virgin Mary, queen of the angels and all the saints, receives this worship in its fullness, which is given the name *hyperdulia*.

Relative worship is given to some objects because they have had a connection with a person who receives absolute worship, or some images when they represent the person. Thus, the relics of the True Cross receive the adoration of *latria*, which applies to the very person of Jesus Christ, as do the images representing Christ. The remains of the saints, called relics, receive the veneration of *dulia*, as do the images that represent them.

Let us note that the marks of honor rendered to the members of the clergy in the liturgical ceremonies of the Church—inclination, genu-

flection, incensing—are a relative worship of Christ Who is always the One Who performs the liturgy as the only High Priest of the New Testament, and Who the clergy represents.

Finally, worship, liturgical or not, is manifested by gestures, attitudes, postures, prayers, which are intended to manifest the inner sentiment: adoration, submission, giving honor, all of which constitute the main part of worship.

What is Pachamama?

The Amerindian peoples of the Andes Mountains, especially the Aymara and the Quechua, have been immersed for thousands of years in both animist and polytheistic beliefs dating back at least to the 12th Century BC. Two deities dominate the Andean cosmogony: Viracocha, a type of creator, and Inti, the sun. There has also been added another very important deity, the Pachamama.

This term comes from Pacha or space-time, two notions that are united in Andean cosmology, and Mama, the mother. The Pachamama thus represents Mother Earth, not only the soil or the earth from a geological point of view, but the earth mother and nature as a whole. She is the protectress of the mountains, wildlife, and travelers. To obtain her protection, specific offerings must be made to her during worship: coca leaves, shisha (corn beer), and shells. It is common to sacrifice camelids: alpacas, guanacos, llamas, or vicuñas. This cult remains very much alive today in populations that still live in an agrarian culture.

During the evangelization of the Andean countries, the Amerindian divinities were conflated with certain Christian saints. Thus, the Pachamama took on the features of the Virgin Mary and the sun god became Christ. It is well known that polytheism willingly slides into syncretism. It took all the ardor and patience of the missionaries to ward off this danger, which could not always be eradicated. One needs only to think of the number of centuries it took to root out paganism in Europe.

What the Statuettes Represent

There is no equivocation on this point, and the pope himself confirmed it at the beginning of the 15th General Congregation of the Synod, according to *Vaticannews*: these statuettes represent the Pachamama. The Pope added that they were in the Transpontina church “without idolatrous intentions.”

Quite frankly, this interpretation is inadequate. Whether the Pope likes it or not, the Pachamama is an idol; what’s more it’s an idol that is current and not “ancient,” as the site *Zenit* tries to relativize it.

Paolo Ruffini, the prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, tries to explain the difficulty: “We have already repeated several times in this place that these statues represented life, fertility, ‘earth’ mother.” In other words, abstractions and concepts.

Zero Explanation

This justification does not hold. It is enough to consider the ceremonies performed around these statuettes, in the presence of the pope, to identify religious actions taking place: a true procession to bring these objects into the various places, a prostration on both knees, an installation in the sanctuary, and a prayer vigil. If these are not gestures of worship, what are they?

Moreover, the Church has never venerated, in any way, abstractions such as those portrayed by Mr. Ruffini. And especially not as represented by an image or a statue, naked no less. If a virtue can be represented by an image—what is called an allegory—it is in no way so as to render worship to it. On the contrary, the Bible is full of divine warnings against improper representations, which always risk being a source of idolatry. Thus honoring fertility, under the features of Astarte, is constantly condemned in the Old Testament. As was still the case regarding Diana of Ephesus in the New Testament.

Conclusion

It remains that these ceremonies were objectively idolatrous, whatever the intentions of the participants. Further, they have a marked syncretistic flavor that can only disturb the sense of the faith of the Amazonian peoples who live among the venerators of the goddess Pachamama.

As for Mother Earth, which is equivalent to creation, its adoration is only the crudest form of paganism, condemned on every page of Holy Scripture.

What remains is for the Church’s authorities to make the *mea culpa* needed for this sin, which attacks the First Commandment in a particularly grave way. This is the most serious sin that can be committed.



Four Principles

—*One Foreordained Conclusion*

Francis's Discerning Guide to a Willful Holy Spirit

John Rao, D.Phil. Oxon.

“Wilson has his Fourteen Points,” Georges Clemenceau is reputed to have grumbled; “God only had ten.” Pope Francis is more humble than the irritatingly pedantic American President. In his writings he publicly offers us a less extensive diagram for achieving the peace that passes all understanding based upon four principles alone.

Unfortunately, the pope's math seems to me to be faulty. To my mind, Francis's four principles are rooted in a number of others that are required both to activate them, as well as to divert attention from their true consequence. Nevertheless, there is no need for us to quibble in this regard. For whether his teaching is built upon four or seven or ten pillars, they all lead to one, all too predictable, foreordained, and repeatedly rehashed progressive Catholic conclusion. This conclusion is the need for the Holy Spirit to clean up His act; to shape up or to ship out.

Let us give the pope his due and at least

begin with the four principles. What are they? One is that the problems and conflicts of the particular spaces in which we think and live our limited lives are overcome and resolved through the passage of time, because “time is greater than space.” Resolution of the clashing forces of a limited space in historic time is aided mightily by his second maxim, the recognition that “unity is greater than conflict.” A third axiom tells us that the harmonious concord attained through a peace-giving unity must be achieved on an ever more global scale, since “the whole is greater than the parts.”

Still, if the mind of Francis is indeed entirely reflected in the four principles alone, surely the most significant among all of them, the one that clarifies their essential thrust, is that “reality is greater than ideas.” For those who would not adhere to this golden rule would be at war with what he sees to be the Holy Spirit's final, historical goal of global “diversity in unity.” They would be fighting to keep mankind under the iron scepter of empty rhetor-

ical guidelines, frozen in historical time and geographical space; dead formulae enshrining “angelic forms of purity,” “objectives that are more ideal than real,” various brands of “a-historical fundamentalism,” “ethical systems bereft of kindness,” and “intellectual discourses bereft of wisdom.”

Embracing “reality” over “ideas” ensures the “unity of the transcendentals”—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. Solidifying that unity guarantees that a soul-killing commitment to an isolated, theoretical intellectual “truth” does not work against practical moral and aesthetic values. It allows for all that is valuable within contrasting forces of particular times and places—whose harmonization petty, rationalist, theoretical “truth” obsessed minds cannot conceive possible—to be reconciled on an ever higher plane through the impetus given by the Holy Spirit. But, once again, I insist that what this *actually* means is the impetus of a Third Person of the Blessed Trinity obedient to the commands of His mortal “betters.” And those “betters,” firmly tied to what Francis defines as “reality,” once again, operate with the “frozen” vision that the Progressive Catholic movement has always tried to foist upon Holy Church.

Casting its pestiferous net very widely, Progressive Catholicism, solidly “incarnated” in the history of the Church through the tragic work of the brilliant but complex figure of the Abbé Félicité de Lamennais (1782-1854) and his disciples, has ultimately dragged up and mobilized for its purposes everything utterly irrational, willful, and power-hungry in the centuries-long project of “modernity.” Moreover, it has done so by employing the unfailingly seductive “media” tools already forged by the Sophist enemies of the Socratics in pre-Christian times. These have always had the mission of nipping in the bud all serious ideas judging and correcting a “reality” which is nothing other than the stubborn, “business as usual” behavior of fallen, sinful man. The Church authorities have repeatedly tried to toss this unholy “catch” back into the abyss where it belongs since the 1830s. It has

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now been trawled up again by Pope Francis so as to complete more openly and more blatantly the “proper” education of an otherwise hopelessly obscurantist Holy Spirit.

To see how he accomplishes this task we must return to the other pillars of Francis’s thought intimated above; the necessary substructure *requiring* the invocation of Francis’s four principles. Anyone eager for a full knowledge of all of the historical and personal influences claimed as a pedigree for his *oeuvre* in this regard should subject himself to a reading of Massimo Borghese’s *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Maria Bergoglio’s Intellectual Journey* (Liturgical Press, 2018), from which all of the citations found in this article have come, for further enlightenment—preferably in Lent. For brevity’s sake, allow me to plunge directly into this substructure itself, beginning with the pope’s call for “the redemption of modernity.”

Francis does not deny that there is a “bad modernity.” This is the modernity that he chastises for its “Promethean anthropocentrism”: its blasphemously man-centered, wickedly “self-referential,” limited earthly obsession with an isolated messianic “idea.” He sees one of the chief manifestations of this evil in that openly atheistic, dogmatic Marxism that is also promoted through Catholic Liberation Theology. Nevertheless, Francis argues that the danger to “the unity of the transcendentals” coming from that form of human, self-referential, intellectual arrogance has been surpassed since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc by the indirectly atheistic but equally doctrinaire Neo-Liberal form of individualist, consumption obsessed Liberation Theology preached globally from out of North America.

At first glance, this might not sound all that different from the Church’s *traditional* attack on a man-centered modernity. But Pope Francis warns us that it would be wrong to rummage through the musty documents of what amounts to an ecclesiastical form of “a-historical fundamentalism” to fight against it. Such an effort would smack of what he calls “Restorationism”: the attempt to revive a past now

buried under the rubbish heap of history. That past was marred by “moralizing proclamations” relying on the puffed-up pseudo-knowledge of an idea-fixated clerical elite of a specific time and place. It is this self-referential elitism and all too human intellectual manacling of the divine journey through history—also guilty of limiting God’s vibrant, evolving interaction with the “real world”—that he condemns both as “Promethean Neo-Pelagianism” as well as “Theistic Gnosticism.”

Hence, our need to return to the redemption of that “good modernity” which the Holy Spirit seeks to bring to its perfection if only we would let Him do so. Francis praises recent Western European churchmen for their yeoman service in this pneumatic labor through their assimilation of the valuable aspects of the Reformation and Enlightenment, which were finally given entry into the City of God by the Fathers and *periti* of the Second Vatican Council. He says that Eastern Europe and Eastern Christianity also made their contribution to the great endeavor by means of John Paul II’s appeal to the Roman Church to welcome “breathing” with Christianity’s second, oriental lung alongside her own.

Now, however, the Holy Spirit had aroused Latin America to bring her own wider experience of redeeming modernity to the fore to complete the divine plan. This experience was closely connected to the Society of Jesus’ commitment to two projects involving the expanding union of things old and new. On the one hand, that commitment entailed an enthusiastic combination of Renaissance Greco-Roman Humanism with Catholicism responsible for creating Baroque Culture; on the other, it was reflected in the global Jesuit missionary work of harmonizing the good in newly encountered non-Classical native cultures with the Christian message.

Latin America had historically been the most successful center for the joint realization of both of these projects. But she was now central to its still further completion, as seen in the decisions of the post-conciliar meetings of the entire Latin American Episcopacy at Medellin in 1968 and at Puebla in 1979. Here, the Church, embracing and running with Second Vatican Council’s activation of the role of the laity, made a special point of seeking to grasp its evangelical wisdom, combining it with a preferential option for learning the needs of its poorer members. All of

this signaled the nurturing of an exciting new “Theology of the People,” whose full mobilization would be the key to a comprehensive, global defeat of the limiting forces of Promethean Anthropomorphism—Marxism and Neo-Liberalism—along with the backward looking threats of Promethean Neo-Pelagianism and Theistic Gnosticism as well.

Now Francis does not say that this redemption of modernity will destroy the Magisterium. He seems to accept the fact that lip service will always have to be paid to that dead weight, while basically ignoring its practical significance. What really counts for the forward movement of the Holy Spirit is not an emphasis upon this heavy, moralizing, historical baggage, but, rather, the energizing, truly spiritual theological fuel that can only be pumped into the ecclesiastical tank by observing how the lowly People of God lives its Faith through its daily “reality.” God had become man to have hands to touch His People. He had taken a body to live in solidarity with them. Catholics “do not want a God without a Church, a Church without Christ, a Christ without people” (p. 190-191). Plumbing the depths of the Theology of the People would give the People of God what they want and need.

Alas, “The People” cannot be expected to yield its true theological message without some serious assistance. Yes, The People must be heard—and, hence, the central role of the Synodal Way in giving it its voice from the smallest local level to the universal stage. However, we have already seen that the Christian People, composed as it is of individuals and varied groups in their limited places and times, experiences growing pains involving clashes that must be overcome in order for its teaching to mature and become truly “real.” Forces seeking to keep that message in its adolescence—limited, Promethean Anthropocentric, Promethean Neo-Pelagian, and Theistic Gnostic forces—lurk everywhere. They must be uncovered, discredited, and rejected so that the People is not led astray and the true goal of the Holy Spirit is achieved.

Hence, the People serving as the conduit for that divine goal has to be “accompanied” by the self-sacrificing work of those who have already learned how to observe, weigh, measure, and, most importantly of all, spiritually “discern” exactly what is forward-looking in its experience and what is hindering its maturation and

perfection. Such discerning helpers must provide this accompaniment in a spirit of openness to all the valid, though often totally contradictory elements, rooted in the secular lives of The People reaching out towards God for perfection—many of which seem sinful to Catholics burdened by a dead past. Such discerning spirits can go about their labor confidently, avoiding destructive “self-referential” flaws, when their task of accompaniment is accomplished under the direction of the four principles.

Unfortunately, these four principles force the discerning companions to render the Truth utterly meaningless, thereby robbing it of any ability to understand, define, and promote that unity with the Good and the Beautiful—Truth’s “transcendental” partners—which Francis claims to be essential to the entire project. And, in fact, this has always been the “Original Sin” of the entire Progressive Catholic movement. Always and everywhere, that movement has worked to create a “reality” dominated by the triumph of the most irrational, sinful, human wills, seeking to prevent its victims from recognizing this awful truth by mobilizing all of the immortal Sophist tools designed to crush the influence of critical “ideas” that would enlighten them.

Lamennais seems to have at first merely unwittingly fallen into this trap through his sudden ascent to apologetic rock star renown without possessing the theological training required to separate the chaff from the wheat in his argument. Nevertheless, his equation of Catholic Truth with the presence of “energy” alone caused him to begin to cultivate this Original Sin, seeing in his own prophetic dynamism the clear voice of the Holy Spirit. His twentieth century disciples have carried that equation of Truth with a prophetic “energy” arousing popular enthusiasm that is still further dismissive of doctrinal principles and rational thought. Francis now appears openly and fully to revel in the sacrifice of the Truth to a will power hostile to any and all competition from the Deposit of Faith and the human brain.

His “Holy Spirit” does not merely want a Christian People and Church to be guided by something more than mere Reason, using “a language that touches the heart”. His Spirit wants them to reach conclusions that entirely contradict all logic, along with the Faith that once worked in unison with it. For the pope, a loving Faith does not simply “never define its edges” or “complete its thought” (pp. 57-253,



passim). Constantly in mystical dialogue with the clashing currents of the world, all battling one another in a “calm chaos”, his “Faith” is filled with a “merciful” appreciation for all opposing positions; all “antinomies,” even those that run counter to the teachings of Christ as followed by His People in the dead and surpassed past. His Spirit’s job is to teach us to “live poised between each individual moment and the greater, lighter horizon of the utopian future as the formal cause which draws us to itself”; to lead us to “go beyond”; “to grasp the greatness of God, the opening of God within the immanence of the world”; to accept Divine Surprises as we move to “the ever greater, always elusive Mystery,” towards “the greater God”.

Francis claims that the message of the Faith that emerges in this manner “is simplified while losing nothing of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing.” But what actually emerges through his cutting loose of the moorings of the Faith from any practical, continuous, substantive contact with the Magisterium, as well as from any respect for Reason and Logic, is the abandonment of the “truth,” “depth,” and “simplicity” of this supposed voice of the Holy Spirit to the whim of the accompanying “discerners” alone.

That means that the Petrine power, doctrinally defined—and thereby limited—by the First Vatican Council, fades away to be replaced by the omnipotent, personal whim of the current discerning pontiff. It means that both the episcopal authority more recently clarified by the Second Vatican Council, as well as that of the post-conciliar “Theology of the People” heard through the pursuit of the Synodal Way, also disappear, as Sacred Tradition becomes literally whatever the purifying labor of the discerning allies of the discerning pope declare it to be.

Would that the story ended there, but it does not! Francis Bacon already made it crystal clear at the beginning of the scientific phase of the current era that modernity has always been about using knowledge for gaining power. But in the hunt for power it is always the strongest energetic will that wins, defining Faith, Reason, and “Reality” as a whole as it sees fit. In this hunt, Francis & the Catholic Discerners do not stand a chance. They themselves must be dumped onto the rubbish heap of history.

The serious “convincing force” that is already standing behind Francis’s “deeper, more truth-

ful, and simpler” pseudo-Faith comes from the ever more tyrannical secular powers that obviously dominate our ever more nihilist Global Motherland. These are already instructing their Catholic chaplains regarding what the Holy Spirit commands them to preach. And under their guidance, Catholicism can become literally anything whatsoever; anything, that is to say, except what it always has been, and must be until the end of time; the Catholicism whose continued missionary propagation the successor of Peter now labels “solemn nonsense.”

Francis uses such denigrating language against his opponents because he is a Sophist, and Sophism, since its birth in Ancient Greece, has proven itself to be an all too powerful tool in the fight against a real unity of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. As Plato said, it teaches its practitioners a rhetorical “knack” for appealing to everything that keeps people trapped in their uncritical, undiscerning, “business as usual” caves, cultivating whatever passions help to make them slaves of the existing, stupid, but all too mighty order of things. While the secular Sophist media, serving its global puppet masters, does everything in its power to keep these slaves enchained, the Catholic Chaplaincy of the Global Motherland echoes and expands upon its message with its own pseudo-spiritual twist. It gives to anyone who is not brain-dead, anyone with a critical mind, anyone clinging to the doctrines of the Faith and to the cause of Reason and Logic that always gains from their triumph, the all too successful Sophist treatment: a mixture of ridicule and denigration of personal motive. Hence, the general assault on traditional believers who question the Holy Spirit’s guidelines as uncovered by the four principles the self-referential Argentinian. As Borghesi summarizes him: “They are like those ‘doctors of the Law’ who wondered if anything good could come out of Nazareth, from a ‘carpenter’s son’. In this case, Nazareth indicates the southern end of the world” (p. xi).

How long, O Lord? How long!

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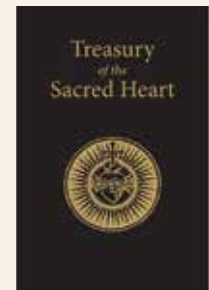
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By Alfonso de Castro, O.F.M. Translated by Fr. Paul M. Kimball

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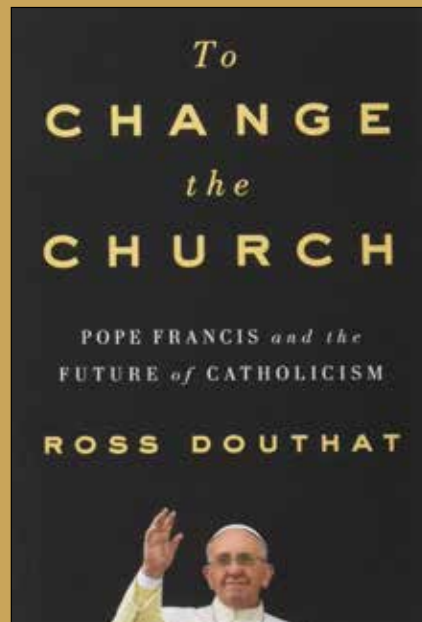
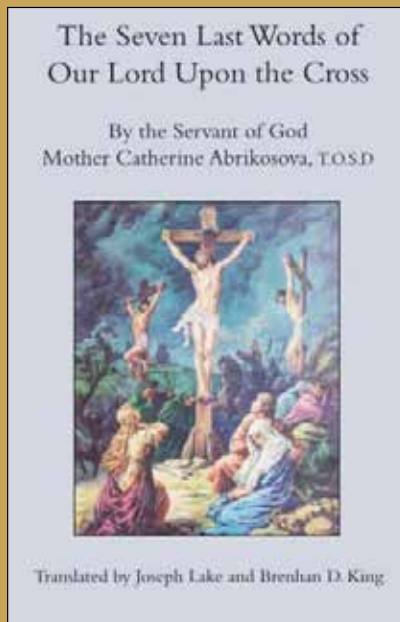
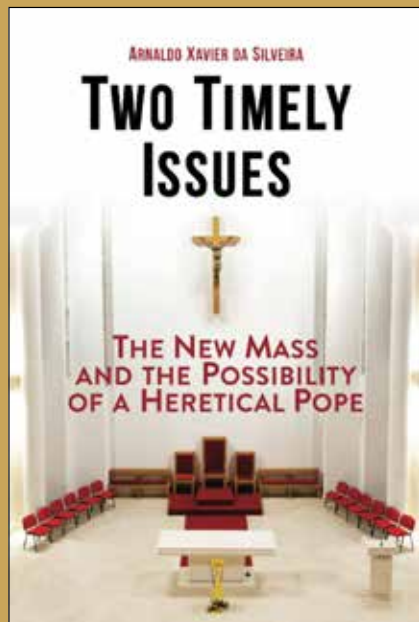
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Book Reviews

Two Timely Issues by Arnaldo Xavier da Silveira

Reviewed by Fr. Paul Robinson

Legend has it that, in a conversation with a seminarian in 1977, Archbishop Lefebvre remarked that the best book on the New Mass was the one written by Da Silveira. Given the excellence of the work, the story is quite believable. The author's research is deep, his arguments are compelling, and his judgments are reasoned and measured.

This book includes Da Silveira's original text on the New Mass, first published in 1970, which considers whether the New Mass, in its original form and in its instruction, is good or bad (chapters 1-6). It also includes a work published in 2016 and then revised in 2018, the year of Da Silveira's death, on whether a Pope can be heretical and, if so, whether he falls automatically from his office (chapters 7-18).

Da Silveira's devastating presentation of the problems with the New Mass was so feared by

Pope Paul VI that he forbade the publication of the work in 1973, seven years after he had abolished the Index. Da Silveira begins his critique with an analysis of the General Instruction that accompanied the new missal of 1969. Briefly, the Instruction represents a Protestant notion of the Mass. It leaves out mention of transubstantiation, the Real Presence, sacrifice and the propitiatory nature of the Mass; it puts the priest on the level of the faithful and makes the Mass just as much a memorial of the Resurrection and the Ascension as of Calvary. A Spanish commentary on the Instruction that appeared at the same time as the missal confirms one's worst fears on the Protestant theology that the New Mass represents.

Chapter 2 addresses the objection that the suspect passages of the Instruction should be interpreted in light of its clearly orthodox passages. Da Silveira sagely notes that this can be done when suspect passages are rare and seemingly accidental to the text, but not when they are common and form a system of thought that runs throughout the text, as is the case with the Instruction.

The book reads like a detailed *Ottaviani Intervention* in chapter 3, as it delves into the Latin version of the New Mass and finds there a striking departure from the Catholic theology on the Mass. The next chapter considers the changes that were made to the Instruction (not the Mass!) in 1970 in response to the outcry made against it, and finds that the new version keeps the errors but makes them more dangerous in being more subtle. Da Silveira's analysis of the New Mass concludes in chapter 5 with astonishing evidence that the New Mass is but a re-baked Lutheran liturgy.

Chapter 6 addresses what, in my mind, is the gravest objection to the SSPX's position that the New Mass is bad: is it not true that universal disciplinary laws are infallible and that the Church could not promulgate a liturgy that would be harmful to souls? Da Silveira points out that, while theologians have traditionally held that disciplinary laws are infallible, they have yet always qualified their opinion with limiting clauses. As such, circumstances can indicate that they are not so. In the case of the New Mass, it was clear that Pope Paul VI did not want to engage the charism of infallibility by the fact that he stated: "the rite and the respective rubrics are not by themselves a dogmatic definition; they are susceptible of theological qualification of varying value, according to the liturgical context to which they refer" (p. 150). Meanwhile, the fact that Paul VI on occasion expressed his will that the New Mass be obligatory does not mean that it is infallible.

The following twelve chapters of the book, 7-18, treat the question of a heretical pope. This has to be the clearest presentation of this topic that I have seen to date. Da Silveira summarizes St. Robert Bellarmine's presentation of five different possible opinions on the question. Then, he considers which opinions theologians in the history of the Church have chosen as their own. Da Silveira himself leans towards the fifth opinion, that a heretical Pope automatically loses office once his heresy becomes manifest. This does not mean that Da Silveira is a sedevacantist. On the contrary, as he clarifies on p. 230, the heresy is not manifest as long as the vast body of the Church continues to accept the Pope. There needs to be some procedure against the Pope by which he is rebuked for his heresy and he persists in it for the heresy to be manifest.

The book concludes with a summary of Da Silveira's position on the New Mass: it is bad and it is not infallible. Because so much effort has been expended in the previous pages to make clear distinctions, to anticipate objections, and to argue on the basis of solid research, the conclusion is compelling.

The Seven Last Words of Our Lord Upon the Cross by Mother Catherine Abrikosova

Reviewed by Marie Keiser

Translated by Joseph Lake and Brendan King. Edited by Brendan King. Published by St. Augustine's Press, 2019.

When your country is on the verge of civil war and militant atheists with no tolerance for dissent are trying to take over, starting a convent in the nation's capitol might not be the first thing on most people's agenda. Fortunately, Mother Catherine Abrikosova, author of *The Seven Last Words of Our Lord Upon the Cross*, was not most people.

Mother Catherine, as editor and co-translator Brendan King writes in his introduction, started a Byzantine Catholic convent in her apartment in Moscow in 1917, just as the Bolshevik revolution was erupting. She and her fellow sisters "offered themselves as a sacrifice, unto the last drop of blood, for the Salvation of Russia and for priests," a salvation she saw as synonymous with Russia returning to full communion with Rome while maintaining its ancient Byzantine rite.

After the Communist regime outlawed religious teaching, she and her fellow sisters started a secret Catholic school to preserve tradition in a new generation of children. Knowing that their work would be discovered, and that the penalty for it would be harsh, Mother Catherine wrote a meditation for her fellow sisters to prepare them for the coming ordeal.

The resulting work, *The Seven Last Words of Our Lord Upon the Cross*, is a beautiful and encouraging meditation on the love of Christ, as expressed through His last words.

From "Father forgive them," to "Into Thy Hands, I commend my spirit," Christ's words

on the Cross are an expression of His infinite, unconditional love. Strongly rooted in doctrine and Scripture, Mother Catherine's description of the Passion reminds us just how startling the Divine generosity is, both in the extremity of the torment Christ endures, and in the depth of the love He expresses.

More than that, however, her meditations are a challenge—a demand—for us to take Christ's words for our own, to put ourselves on the cross with Him, allow ourselves to be crucified alongside Him, and make His radical sacrifice our own. Skillfully weaving an exposition of the soul's spiritual progress and a call to holiness into a description of the Passion, Mother Catherine packs a lot into just a few pages.

If you are a busy Catholic with little time for reading, *The Seven Last Words of Our Lord Upon the Cross* might be just what you need to reignite your spiritual life next Lent. Or anytime. No reason to wait for Lent.

To Change the Church

by Ross Douthat

A review by Fr. Ian Andrew Palko, FSSPX

Ross Douthat is not a traditionalist. For a Catholic reading the official magazine of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, that is an important—nay, essential prerequisite to understand. It is also an important element in considering his *To Change the Church*, published in March 2018.

To give some context to this, in a 2018 article,¹ Douthat wrote that he could imagine a “traditionalists exile of the sort embodied by the Society of Saint Pius X” which he could not join, because, “the don't-call-it-a-schism maneuver also seems to answer absurdity with absurdity.” Throughout the book, he makes it clear he considers traditionalist Catholics, and the SSPX in general a fringe element. He does not seem to have changed his mind since *Traditiones custodes*, or the frequent rumors of an impending ban on the Traditional Mass, which would only affect the parking lots of SSPX chapels.

A traditional Catholic, then, picking up Douthat's book, will find his answers to the problems he describes naïve: perceiving a real and objective crisis, but with solutions or analysis lacking the conviction and clarity of the

definitive positions of a Msgr. Lefebvre or the Priestly Fraternity he founded.

At least it can be said that Douthat does perceive that there is a real and objective crisis caused by, or at least with the help of, Pope Francis from that liberalizing element that wants to see the Church unmade and remade in a very different image and likeness. “This is a hinge moment in the history of Catholicism,” Douthat writes, “a period of theological crisis that's larger than just the Francis pontificate but whose particular peak under this pope will be remembered, studied, and argued over for as long as the Catholic Church endures.”

Douthat opens by explaining his entry into the Church, and later his theological position, which could be said to be in line with John Paul II. He would certainly accept Pope Benedict XVI's “hermeneutic of continuity” as the authentic interpretation of Vatican II, where he openly places his sympathies. What is striking however, but perhaps not surprising given his sympathies and background, is that there is no discussion of those on the more conservative or traditionalist side who see Vatican II as having possibly promulgated errors as did the Council of Constance.² The analysis mentions nothing of the *Cætus Internationalis Patrum* or conservative element restraining the documents from the worst errors, obtaining, for instance, the *Nota explicativa prævia* into *Lumen gentium*. Lacking that, it is hard to see how his understanding of Vatican II can be an honest appraisal.

Douthat clearly does not see the “Ungovernable Catholic Church”³ as suffering from a metastasizing bout of always-morphing Modernism, but of some political tit-for-tat between conservative and liberal. Dismissive of any possible error emanating from the New Theology or Vatican II, this fight is between—the actual comparison he makes in the book—a new St. Athanasius and the Arians. In this fantasy, Raymond Cardinal Burke is the much-exiled deacon; the various Synods are the local councils of the 4th century called to support Arianism; and Pope Francis the unfortunate Liberius.

Predicting this objection, Douthat proclaims “[t]his is no more necessarily a fantasy than a similar scenario would have been in 357, when Athanasius was in his third exile, Arian-leaning councils were being organized, and Pope Liberius had been packed off to Thrace.” The only

difference, he says, is that today the Church is more centralized.

Our author's difficulty is that the reverie of a "Council of Nairobi, say circa 2088" (Douthat's fill-in for the Council of Constantinople) is chimeric, for it was the Apostate Emperor, Julian, attempting to destroy the (then-nearly Arian) Church, that put men like St. Athanasius back in their sees. Further, the scenario focuses on important, fundamental, but subsidiary doctrinal points. The Arian Crisis was a fight over Who God is. The present crisis is the same, but Douthat fails to see this, and makes the squabble into a fight over important, but ancillary points. Traditionalists, however, would say that this fight is, in fact, precisely over Who God is, because it is a matter of man's progressive substitution of himself for God, and anthropomorphically-centered liturgies like the *Novus Ordo Missæ* do precisely this—take man's focus away from God and place it on himself.

"Francis-era liberal Catholicism has so often ended up," Douthat writes "in arguments that imply that the church must use Jesus to go beyond Jesus, as it were, using his approach to the ritual law as a means to evade or qualify the moral law, which means essentially evading or qualifying his own explicit commandments, and declaring them a pharisaism that the late-modern church should traffic in no more ... [t]o fulfill Jesus's mission, to follow the Jesus of faith, even the Jesus of scripture must be left behind."

He is absolutely correct with this notion. There is a movement to escape from Jesus Christ, and justify this by selective quotation and ambiguity, to leave Christian doctrine and morals, even the Natural Law behind. Very much like the liberal element at Vatican II and Modernists before. There we find the crux of the matter. Marriage and divorce, Communion for adulterers, or the other heterodox practices Douthat brings up issuing from the liberalizing faction in the Church are only the symptoms of the real problem, which is the abandoning of Jesus Christ. That was happening already well before Francis. It was something even the younger Ratzinger was happy to participate in. The solution, therefore, is not to return to the conservative golden years of a Benedictine Papacy, or place one's trust in a Burke-turned-new-Athanasius, who balked on his "formal correction."

That difference is, of course, at the root of the fundamental divide between the Society of Saint Pius X and the so-called "conservative" Catholics or other groups which formerly fell under the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission. At long last, these latter groups are beginning to see that there is a true crisis, and that it goes to the very top of the Church. Hard choices need to be made, with notable consequences. Do they see, however, that the crisis is not one that began in 2013, nor even in 1962, but one which goes much farther back in history? At least Douthat does not seem to.

After these criticisms have been made about Douthat's work, it bears mentioning that he presents a detailed and very useful historical account of how things came to be the way they are in the Vatican. His theories suggesting that Francis' ghostwriters (mentioned several times) may be leading a less-decisive pope down a more liberal path than he would, himself, take, is an interesting take, and perhaps bears study.

Whether that is particularly useful for the average Catholic to worry about, however, is debatable. Finishing the book, most Catholics would not be better prepared to deal with the trials of daily life, nor encouraged in any meaningful way in the practice of their Faith. If anything, they may end up seeing a Church in the throes of its passion, and only B-rate fantasy provided as a possible solution. A very depressing scenario.

To Change the Church clearly is an important book. The value of it for a traditional Catholic, or even for a "conservative" Catholic, however, is not quite so clear.

Endnotes

- ¹ Douthat, R. & Miles, J. "Why I'll Stay, Why I Left." *Commonweal*, Nov. 19, 2018.
- ² The decree *Hæc sancta synodus* which promulgated the later-condemned heresy of conciliarism, was initially passed over by Pope Martin V, resisted by Eugene IV, only to be later rejected by the Fifth Lateran Council—to which, ironically, Douthat compares Vatican II as a failed attempt at reform.
- ³ The title of his July 27, 2021 *New York Times* opinion piece on *Traditiones Custodes*.



The Conspi *Vendita* of

Excerpt from *They Have Uncrowned Him* by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, Chapter XXI. Available from Angelus Press.

So now we have arrived, in our brief historical outline of Catholic Liberalism, at the eve of Vatican II. Before analyzing the victory won at the Council by Liberalism, I would like to go back a little to show you how the penetration of Liberalism into all the hierarchy and even into the papacy itself, unthinkable two centuries ago, was nonetheless conceived, foretold, and organized as early as the beginning of the last century by Freemasonry. It will be sufficient to produce the documents that prove the existence of this plot against the Church, of this “*supreme attempt*” against the papacy.

* * *

The secret papers of the *Alta Vendita* of the Carbonari* that fell into the hands of Pope Gregory XVI embrace a period that goes from 1820 to 1846. They were published at the request of Pope Pius IX by Creteineau-Joly in his work *The Roman Church and Revolution*.¹ With the brief of approbation of February 25, 1861, which he addressed to the author, Pius IX guaranteed the authenticity of these documents; but he did not allow anyone to divulge the true names of the members of the *Alta Vendita* implicated in this correspondence. These letters are absolutely bewildering; and, if the popes have asked that they be published, it is

racy of the *Alta* the Carbonari

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre

so that the faithful will know the conspiracy hatched against the Church by the secret societies, that they will know its plan and be guarded against its possible fulfillment. I will say no more about this now; but you will tremble as you read these lines. I am not inventing anything; I am only reading, without making any secret that they are taking place today! Without hiding the fact that the most audacious of their projects are even surpassed by the present-day reality! So let us read! I will emphasize only what should strike us the most.

* * *

The pope, whoever he is, will never come to the secret societies: it is up to the secret societies to take the first step towards the Church, with the aim of conquering both of them.

The task that we are going to undertake is not the work of a day, or of a month, or of a year; it may last several years, perhaps a century; but in our ranks the soldier dies and the struggle goes on.

We do not intend to win the popes to our cause, to make of them neophytes of our principles, propagators of our ideas. That would be a ridiculous dream; and if events turn out in some way, if cardinals or prelates, for example, of their own free will or by surprise, should enter into a part of our secrets, this is not at all an incentive for desiring their elevation to the See of Peter. That elevation would ruin us. Ambition alone would have led them to apostasy; the requirements of power would force them to sacrifice us. What we must ask for, what we should look for and wait for, as the Jews wait for the Messiah, is *a pope according to our needs...*

With that we shall march more securely towards the assault on the Church than with the pamphlets of our brethren in France and even the gold of England. Do you want to know the reason for this? It is that with this, in order to shatter the high rock on which God has built His Church, we no longer need Hannibalian vinegar, or gunpowder, or even need our arms. We have the little finger of the successor of Peter engaged in the plot; and this little finger is as good, for this crusade, as all the Urban II's and all the St. Bernards in Christendom.

We have no doubt that we will arrive at this supreme end of our efforts. But when? But how? The unknown is not yet revealed. Nevertheless, as nothing should turn us aside from the plan drawn up, and on the contrary everything should tend to this, as if as early as tomorrow success were going to crown the work that is barely sketched, we wish, in this instruction, which will remain secret for the mere initiates, to give to the officials in charge of the supreme *Vente* some advice that they should instill in all the brethren, in the form of instruction or of a memorandum...

Now then, to assure ourselves a pope of the required dimensions, it is a question first of *shaping for him, for this pope, a generation worthy of the reign in which we are dreaming*. Leave old people and those of a mature age aside; go to the youth, and, if it is possible, even to the children... You will contrive for yourselves, at little cost, a reputation as good Catholics and as pure patriots.

This reputation will put access to our doctrines into the midst of the young clergy, as well as deeply into the monasteries. In a few years, by the force of things, this young clergy will have overrun all the functions; they

But if, on the contrary, we really have faith in this unique Mediator and in all the means He has provided to save souls, then whatever the result of our efforts; whatever the success of our apostolate, we know that we are carrying out the will of the Good Lord. We know that we are continuing the apostolate of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

will govern, they will administer, they will judge, they will form the sovereign's council, they will be called to choose the Pontiff who should reign. *This Pontiff, like most of his contemporaries, will be necessarily more or less imbued with the Italian and humanitarian principles* that we are going to begin to put into circulation. It is a small grain of black mustard that we are entrusting to the ground; but the sunshine of justice will develop it up to the highest power, and you will see one day what a rich harvest this small seed will produce.

In the path that we are laying out for our brethren, there are found great obstacles to conquer, difficulties of more than one kind to master. They will triumph over them by experience and by clear-sightedness; but the goal is so splendid that it is important to put all the sails to the wind in order to reach it. You want to revolutionize Italy, look for the pope whose portrait we have just drawn. You wish to establish the reign of the chosen ones on the throne of the prostitute of Babylon, *let the clergy march under your standard, always believing that they are marching under the banner of the apostolic Keys.* You intend to make the last vestige of the tyrants and the oppressors disappear; lay your snares like Simon Bar-Jona; lay them in the sacristies, the seminaries, and the monasteries rather than at the bottom of the sea: and if you do not hurry, we promise you a catch more miraculous than his. The fisher of fish became the fisher of men; you will bring friends around the apostolic Chair. You will have preached *a revolution in tiara and in cope, marching with the cross and the banner*, a revolution that will need to be only a little bit urged on to set fire to the four corners of the world.²

Here is another excerpt from a letter of “Nubius” to “Volpe” of April 3, 1824:

Our shoulders have been laden with a heavy burden, dear Volpe. We have to bring about the immoral education of the Church, and arrive, by small, well-graded, although rather poorly defined means, at the *triumph of the revolutionary idea by a pope.* In this scheme, which has always seemed to me to be of a superhuman reckoning, we are still groping our way as we walk...³

“Superhuman reckoning,” says Nubius; he means a diabolical reckoning! For this is to

calculate the subversion of the Church by its head himself, which Monsignor Delassus⁴ calls *the supreme attempt*, because nothing more subversive for the Church can be imagined than a pope won over to the liberal ideas, than a pope using the power of the keys of St. Peter in the service of the counter-Church! Now, is this not what we are living right now, since Vatican II, since the new Canon Law? With this false ecumenism and this false religious liberty promulgated at Vatican II and applied by the popes with a cold perseverance in spite of all the ruins that these have been producing for more than 20 years!

Without the infallibility of the Magisterium of the Church's having been involved, perhaps even without any heresies properly so called having been maintained, we are seeing the systematic *autodemolition* of the Church. "Autodemolition" is a word of Paul VI, who implicitly exposed the true culprit: for who can "autodemolish" the Church, if not he who has the mission of maintaining it on the rock? What acid is there more effective for dissolving this rock, than the liberal spirit penetrating the successor of Peter himself!

This plan is of a diabolical inspiration and a diabolical fulfillment! It is not only the enemies of the Church who have revealed it. It is also the popes who have very explicitly unmasked it and foretold it.

Endnotes

* The Carbonari was an informal network of secret revolutionary societies active in Italy from about 1800 to 1831. The Italian Carbonari may have further influenced other revolutionary groups in France, Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Uruguay and Russia.

¹ 2nd vol., original ed., 1859; reprinted by Circle of the French Renaissance, Paris, 1976; Monsignor Delassus produced these documents again in his work *The Anti-Christian Conspiracy*, DDB, 1910, Tome III, pp. 1035-1092.

² *Permanent instruction of 1820*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-90.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴ *The Problem of the Present Hour*, DDB., 1904, Tome I, p. 195.

Lexicon of the Crisis “Tradition”

Fr. Paul Robinson, SSPX

Introduction

In his landmark encyclical on Modernism, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, Pope St. Pius X identifies several traditional terms that are used by Modernists, but in a completely different sense from that of Catholic teaching. After the publication of the encyclical, Modernism went underground for some time, but then resurfaced in a subtler and more dangerous form, that of Neo-Modernism. Like its grandfather in anti-faith, Neo-Modernism employs traditional terms with different meanings. Those who are not aware of the change of meaning are likely either to judge the writings of Neo-Mod-

ernists to be ambiguous but innocuous or quite simply orthodox. The purpose of this lexicon is to take the terms identified by St. Pius X as being reinterpreted by Modernists and try to show the difference between their traditional meaning and how they have been employed by the documents of Vatican II and the Conciliar Popes. We hope that this will assist those reading post-Conciliar documents and statements to detect the Modernism that is latent in them but which is not often immediately apparent if one does not understand the sense in which the words are being used.

Old Meaning

What is Tradition? Tradition is the deposit of the Faith confided by Our Lord to the Apostles and the Church, embodied in oral Tradition and written Tradition, and transmitted to future generations by the Magisterium of the Church infallibly guided by the Holy Ghost

New Meaning

What is Tradition? “Tradition is the history of the Spirit who acts in the Church’s history through the mediation of the Apostles and their successors, in faithful continuity with the experience of the origins [of the Church]”¹

What are the elements of Tradition?

Its elements are the following:

- Its *contents* are the unchanging truths that must be believed to save one's soul.
- Its *action* is the transmission of those same truths to all generations until the end of time.
- Its *composition* is two sources of Revelation, oral or ecclesiastical Tradition, and Scripture, whose contents are different.
- Its *role* is a remote rule of faith for Catholics, which the living Magisterium, the proximate rule, makes explicit.

So Tradition is living?

No. The Magisterium or teaching office of the Church is living, in that it is present at all times to present to Catholics the *same* truths in different *ways*, adapted to circumstances, and to *make clear* what Tradition contains, i.e. what has been believed by Catholics “everywhere, always, and by all.”

So Tradition changes?

No. The *dogmas* that Tradition contains never change. The *way* in which they are presented changes according to each time. Their *understanding* by the faithful becomes clearer over time through definitions of the Magisterium.

What are the elements of Tradition?

Its elements are the following:

- Its *contents* is the experience of the faith common to all Catholics throughout the ages.
- Its *action* is to transmit to each Catholic throughout the ages an experience of all that the Church is and believes.
- Its *composition* is the mass of Catholics throughout the ages sharing a common faith experience with the Apostles and bearing witness to the beliefs and identity of the Church.
- Its *role* is to make the reality of the faith accessible to believers, providing them experiences from which they can construct their faith.

So Tradition is living?²

Yes. Over the course of the history of the Church, believers attain a deeper awareness of the realities that the Apostles experienced through their own faith experiences. Thus, the pilgrim Church progresses in its journey throughout the course of history.

So Tradition changes?³

Yes. Tradition is not “a collection of things or words, like a box of dead things” but “rather a river of new life.”⁴ It is passed on by one man to another by a living exchange, such that it imposes itself with continual innovation according to the needs of the times, while at the same time progressing toward plenitude.

So Tradition is subordinate to the Magisterium?

Yes. The Magisterium is the proximate rule of faith for Catholics, telling them what is contained in Tradition with the authority of Jesus Christ and binding them to believe it.

So Tradition is subordinate to the Magisterium?³

Yes and no. The Magisterium determines the objective faith of Catholics, but with the assistance of living Tradition. The Holy Ghost places the realities of the faith in the faithful through their faith experiences. This in turn gives them a collective consciousness and makes them active witnesses of Tradition. By this, they provide the Church with Her intuition about who She is and what She has received.

Which is more important, ecclesiastical or written Tradition?

Ecclesiastical Tradition is more important than Scripture by its *contents* (it contains truths not found in Scripture), its *antiquity* (the Apostles preached before writing the New Testament), its *plenitude* (it contains of itself all revealed truths), and its *sufficiency* (it does not need Scripture, but Scripture needs it).

Ecclesiastical Tradition both *establishes* truths of the Faith that are not in Scripture and helps *interpret* the meaning of Scripture.

Which is more important, ecclesiastical or written Tradition?⁵

Written Tradition or Scripture is more important in that it contains all revealed truths while Tradition merely interprets them. Scripture is *inspired*, while oral Tradition is *assisted* by the Holy Ghost. Scripture is *fixed*, while oral Tradition is *living*, a means of penetrating the realities of Scripture.

What quotations support this notion of Tradition?

There are many Catholic texts that support this notion:

- **Vatican I** – “The doctrine of faith which God revealed ... has been entrusted as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted. Hence, also, that understanding of its sacred dogmas must be perpetually retained, which Holy Mother Church has *once* declared; and there must never be recession from that meaning under the specious name of a deeper understanding [can. 3]. ... (cont.)

What quotations support this notion of Tradition?

There are many Catholic texts that support this notion:

- **Vatican II** – “The Tradition that comes from the apostles *makes progress* in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes ... through the contemplation and study of believers, who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth.” *Dei Verbum*, §8.

- ‘Therefore . . . let the *understanding*, the knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as of all, of one man as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but let it be solely in its own genus, namely in the *same dogma*, with the same sense and the same understanding’ (St. Vincent of Lerins.)” *Dei Filius*, ch. 4 (Dz 1800)
- **Pope Pius IX** – “The Church of Christ, watchful guardian that she is, and defender of the dogmas deposited with her, never changes anything, never diminishes anything, never adds anything to them.” *Ineffabilis Deus*
 - **Pope St. Pius X** – “Tradition, as understood by the Modernists, is a communication with others of an *original experience*, through preaching by means of the intellectual formula. To this formula, in addition to its representative value they attribute a species of suggestive efficacy which acts firstly in the believer by stimulating the religious sense . . . and secondly, in those who do not yet believe by awakening in them for the first time the religious sense and producing the experience. In this way is *religious experience* spread abroad among the nations.” *Pascendi*, §15 (Dz 2083)
 - **Pope Pius XII** – “Fictions of evolution, by which whatever is absolute, firm, and immutable, is repudiated, have paved the way for a new erroneous philosophy which . . . has obtained the name of ‘existentialism,’ since it is concerned only with the ‘existence’ of individual things, and neglects the immutable essence of things.
There is also a kind of false ‘historicism,’ which attends only to events of human life, and razes the foundations of all truth and absolute law, not only insofar as it pertains to the philosophical matters, but to Christian teachings as well.” *Humani Generis*, Dz 2306
 - **Pope Francis** – “Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, queries, but it’s alive, and able to unsettle, animate. Doctrine has a face that isn’t rigid, a body that moves and develops, it has tender flesh: that of Jesus Christ.” (Discourse in Florence, Nov. 10, 2015)
 - **Pope Francis** – “Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the ‘deposit of faith’ as something static . . . The word of God is a dynamic and living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfillment that none can halt . . . Doctrine cannot be preserved without allowing it to develop, nor can it be tied to an interpretation that is rigid and immutable without demeaning the working of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ (Oct. 11, 2017, address on changing the catechism’s teaching on the death penalty)
 - **Pope Benedict XVI** – “Thanks to the Paraclete, it will always be possible for subsequent generations to have the same experience of the Risen One that was lived by the apostolic community at the origin of the Church . . . Tradition is not the transmission of things or words, a collection of dead things. Tradition is the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present.” General Audience, April 26, 2006
 - **Pope Benedict XVI** – “It is clear that this commitment to expressing a specific truth in a new way demands *new thinking* on this truth and a *new and vital* relationship with it.”
“The Second Vatican Council, with its *new definition* of the relationship between the faith of the Church and certain essential elements of modern thought, has reviewed or even corrected certain historical decisions, but in this *apparent* discontinuity it has actually preserved and deepened her inmost nature and true identity.” December 22, 2005

- **Pope Pius X** – “Fourthly, I sincerely hold that the doctrine of faith was handed down to us from the apostles through the orthodox Fathers in exactly the same meaning and always in the same explanation. Therefore, I entirely reject the heretical misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another, different from the one which the Church held previously.” *Anti-Modernist Oath*

- **Pope John Paul II** – “The root of this schismatic act [the consecrations of 1988] can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the living character of Tradition.”
 “The extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council’s continuity with Tradition, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps *because they are new*, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.” *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*, §§4, 6

What does this notion of Tradition serve?

It serves reality, the divine order, and divine revelation.

What does this notion of Tradition serve?

It serves modern man, by making his experiences the determinant of truth, modern philosophy and evolution, by the idea of progressive truth, and ecumenism by holding Scripture as the only source of objective Revelation.

What are the major differences between these two notions of Tradition?

The one on the left considers Tradition as fixed, while the one on the right considers it as changing. In the one on the left, Tradition is *objective* (dogmas), while for the notion on the right, it is *subjective* (experiences). On the left, man believes what he is told, while on the right, he tells what he believes.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, May 3, 2006 (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060503_en.html)
- ² Cf. Gleize, Fr. Jean-Michel, “*Du Magistère Vivant et de la Tradition – pour une ‘Réception Thomiste’ de Vatican II ?*” *Courrier de Rome*, July-August 2009.
- ³ cf. Emmanuel-Marie, Fr., “*Dei Verbum: Les notions conciliaires de Révélation et de Tradition vivante*,” in *La Religion de Vatican II* (Avrillé:2004), First Paris Symposium, Oct. 2002.

- ⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, April 26, 2006 (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060426_en.html)
- ⁵ Cf. Brandler, Fr. Christopher, “*De Dei Filius à Dei Verbum: un progrès ?*”, *Le Sel de la Terre*, no. 7, Winter 1993.
- ⁶ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_conveg-no-nuova-evangelizzazione.html

FACING PAGE: Inside Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet church. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Nicolas_du_Chardonnet_-_nef_et_choeur.jpg (BastienM) [Color lightened.]

My Path to Tradition

Anonymous

1. Tell us a little about yourself. Where did you grow up, and what was your level of exposure to Catholicism as a child and as a young adult?

I grew up in a small city in Iowa and was educated at the area Catholic school. I never heard anything about the Latin Mass growing up. For me, nothing existed before the 1960s except for Fatima.

2. What experience first piqued your interest in traditional Catholicism?

I can recall attitudes and beliefs among my family and parish that today would be described today as “traditional.” My parish had two beautiful old churches that never quite fit in with the New Mass; I could see this even as a child. In college I found out about the Latin Mass online. I particularly recall watching a video of a High Mass at Saint Nicolas du Char-donnet.

3. What issues did you wrestle with during your discovery of traditional Catholicism, and how have you found resolutions to those concerns?

The only real issue that I wrestled with was how this would look with my Catholic community back at home. Going to the Latin Mass can be seen as a condemnation against those who you grew up with. There is no resolution to this until the Church gets back in order. I can only take solace in the fact that this problem is

shared among a majority of Catholics who go to the Latin Mass today.

4. Why did you settle on the SSPX as opposed to some other TLM community?

I believe the SSPX emphasis on the priesthood is the proper way to address the main problems facing the church. I also like that the SSPX is a large organization that offers Mass all around the country. It’s always enjoyable to visit other SSPX chapels and meet people there who share your values.

5. Now that you are a traditional Catholic, what are the greatest challenges that you face?

The greatest difficulty with the Catholic faith is that it is true. There are sacrifices you have to make physically, spiritually, and financially in order to practice the faith to its fullest.

6. Do you have any advice for the reader who may be considering, but not yet committed to, traditional Catholicism?

Traditional Catholicism has a strong community behind it due its the struggle it has undergone since the Second Vatican Council. Communities and social organizations have been dying around the country due to the growth of suburban life and the online world. It’s wonderful to be part of the community of Latin Mass Catholics who are working together to continue practicing the faith of our ancestors.



Anastasis / The Harrowing of Hell (Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, Constantinople, c.1315-1321). Christ is shown vigorously tearing Adam and Eve from their tombs.

Anastasis

The Icon of the Resurrection of Christ

Romanus

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Our Lord is the most important event in human history and the confirmation of our faith. As St. Paul says, *“If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”*¹ It has released us from the power of death and restored our relationship with God and with one another. In Greek the Resurrection is called the *Anastasis*, “raising,”

because the victory of Christ is a re-creation, a new beginning.

In the art of the Latin Church, at least from the 11th century, the most common representation of the Resurrection is that of Our Lord emerging victorious from the shattered tomb, carrying the standard of the Cross, while the guards are fast asleep, fallen to the ground.

But the Eastern Church, considering the Resurrection as the mystery of mysteries, as an event far too great and incomprehensible for men, has chosen to represent it in two different ways.

One scene, the most ancient, which we may call “narrative,” closely follows the text of the Gospels, which do not talk about the exact moment of the Resurrection.² After Our Lord’s deposition from the Cross and His burial on Friday afternoon, the Gospels remain silent until Sunday at dawn, when the holy women—the *Myrrhophores*, “myrrh-bearers”—come with oils and perfumes to anoint the body, only to find the tomb broken, the guards gone, the shroud empty and the angels announcing to them that the Lord has indeed risen: “*Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here, but is risen*” (Lk. 24:5-6).

The second scene is “dogmatic,” in the sense that it reveals to us the purpose of Christ’s death on the Cross and His Resurrection: the redemption of the human race, the possibility of salvation returned to men. It is the icon of the Descent of Christ into Hell, an illustration of the article of the Apostles’ Creed.

The Harrowing of Hell

Freely accepting death, Christ assumed the mortal condition of men. As in the death of every man, His body and soul were separated—“*He rendered the spirit*”—but the union of human and divine natures remained:

While corporally in the tomb, Thou were in hell, with Thy soul, as God; and in Paradise with the thief, and upon Thy throne, with the Father and the Spirit, filling all, being infinite.³

Jesus Christ was not content with lying in the tomb for three days after His crucifixion. Instead, while His body was entombed, Christ’s soul descended into Hades, or Hell. This descent of Christ into “hell” has been an article of the Apostles’ Creed from the time of the Council of Nicaea, and is taken from Scripture.⁴

Like many Fathers before him, St. John Damascene speaks explicitly of the descent into hell:

The deified soul descended into Hell, so that the Sun of righteousness that shone upon men lying on earth could also shine upon those who lie beneath the earth in the darkness and shadow of death. Just as he announced peace to those on earth, the release of prisoners, the recovery of sight to the blind and that he was

the cause of eternal salvation for those who believed and accused of their unbelief those who did not believe, so he spoke to those who were in Hell, so that before him all knees would bend, in heaven, on earth and under earth. Having thus delivered those who had been chained for centuries, He returned from the dead by opening the way to our resurrection.⁵

The Council of Trent⁶ explains that the word “hell” signifies those hidden abodes in which the souls that have not attained heavenly beatitude are detained. However, those abodes are not of one and the same kind. One is that most loathsome and dark prison, the *Gehenna*, the “bottomless pit,” in which the souls of the damned, together with the unclean spirits, are tortured in everlasting fire. This place is, literally, Hell. Another abode is Purgatory, in which the souls of the pious are purified by a temporary punishment, that they may be admitted into Heaven. Lastly, there is a third abode—“Abraham’s bosom,” the “Limbo of the Fathers and Patriarchs”—which contained the souls of the just before the coming of Christ and where, without any sense of sin, sustained by the blessed hope of redemption, they enjoyed a tranquil dwelling. Adam and all the righteous of the Old Testament, who were expecting the Savior, were liberated by Christ descending into this abode, this “hell.”

In turn, the term “harrow” is derived from the Old English *hergian*, meaning “to ravage, seize, or plunder,” thus emphasizing Christ’s victory over the powers of sin and death, and his freeing of the saints.

For a long time, it was assumed that inspiration for the iconographic details had been taken from the apocryphal “Gospel of Nicodemus,” but recent scholarship shows that its main sources might have been the homilies and liturgical texts in use from the 4th century onwards.

Whatever the source, there were obvious difficulties in representing such a subject, but the fresco of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople (Istanbul) has become the standard representation.

An Orthodox author gives a beautiful description of this icon:

Christ descends into hell to destroy it. He is of a blazing whiteness, but now He is no longer on the mountain of the Transfiguration, but in the abyss of dark anguish and suffocation. One foot, with a gesture of incredible violence, breaks the chains of this underworld. The other



Exterior of the Chora Church in Istanbul. It is famous for its Byzantine mosaics.

leg, with a dance movement, begins to rise again, like the swimmer who has reached the bottom and gathers his strength to return to the air and light. But Christ Himself is the air and the light. Air and light radiate from His face, in the brilliance of the Holy Ghost. And here is His liberating gesture: with His hand, Christ grasps Man and Woman by their wrists—not by their hands, because salvation is not negotiated, it is given. Thus, He drags them out of their graves. There are no shadows: every face has the light of infinity. No reincarnation: every face is unique. No separation: all faces are flames of the same fire. And the purpose is not to achieve the immortality of the soul, because the souls in hell are already immortal. Every face is of this earth, but of this earth that has been grafted onto Heaven.⁷

The Underworld

Hell is symbolically represented by a black space, a dark cave under a steep mountain. That black cave reminds us of the caves in other icons—in the Nativity, in the Crucifixion, in Pentecost. This black hole symbolizes the “outer darkness,” a realm impervious to the divine Light—sometimes hell, or the grave, or the sinful world that has rejected Christ or that has not yet received Him.

Beneath Christ’s feet lay the gates of Hades, which were hitherto locked and are now smashed and wide open. It is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy:

Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of Glory shall enter in. Who is this King of Glory? the Lord who is strong and mighty: the Lord mighty in battle.⁸

Those gates are often shown lying crossed at the feet of Christ: they are useless now, incapable of being closed and holding humanity captive. But they are also a reminder that through the Cross, Hell is defeated. Christ has trampled death by His death on the Cross.

Within that dark underworld are scattered broken chains and locks. Christ has opened the gates of Hades to bring out those who were locked within them, and freed from their chains those who were held captive there. On some icons, at the very bottom, we see a man, hands and feet tied, who represents the Devil now reduced to powerlessness.

The dividing of the rocks in the background recalls the parting of the Red Sea, when God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt into the freedom of the Promised Land. Those

broken rocks are also a reminder of the quake that shook the earth after the Crucifixion.

The Victorious Christ

In the icon, Christ stands victoriously in the center. It is a very dynamic image. Christ's knees are bent but He is not walking in either direction. Rather, the sense of movement is upwards. The Christ Who stoops down to the underworld does not appear there as a prisoner, but as a conqueror, as a deliverer of the captives.

Robed in dazzling white garments, the glorious Christ is represented surrounded by the *mandorla*, an almond-shaped halo of star-studded light, the symbol of Heaven, of the divine glory and the Uncreated Light.

The three concentric, sparkling circles of the *mandorla* certainly have a Trinitarian connotation, but they also point out the three stages of the soul's journey to God. It may appear surprising that the lighter circle is the most external and as we proceed deeper into the *mandorla*, it becomes darker. According to Denys the Areopagite, the movement of the soul towards God is like the movement of light through a cloud into darkness. As holiness increases, as we come closer to God, we realize that He is incomprehensible, that the essence of God is beyond human comprehension and understanding.

Adam and Eve

The central event of the icon is the meeting of the two Adams, between the Creator and His first-created, between the one in whom we have all sinned and the One through Whom we are all saved.

The creative hand of God catches Adam, in earthy-colored mantle, in his fall to his death. Next to Adam, Eve is wearing a red mantle, symbol of flesh and humanity, as she is the mother of the living. One of her hands is covered as a sign of a respectful offering.

Christ is shown vigorously tearing Adam and Eve from their tombs, pulling them by the wrist, and not the hand, and into His *mandorla*. It is not Adam and Eve who cling to Christ; it is He who takes them with Him, to make them live with Him, in His glory.

The strong sense of upward motion indicates that Adam and Eve are not just being saved from enslavement to sin but are being called, indeed *pulled*, to something higher, into the

divine life of the Trinity; they are divinized by the action of Christ.

The icon of the Harrowing of Hell becomes the icon of the restoration of the relationship between God and men. The first Adam and the New Adam are face to face for the first time. The bond is recreated between Adam and the source of his life.

The Just of the Old Testament

Those who died before Christ's crucifixion descended to Hades, where they patiently awaited the coming of their Messiah. In the precise moment when the soul of Adam was finally liberated, all the righteous of the Old Testament and the whole human race were also liberated.

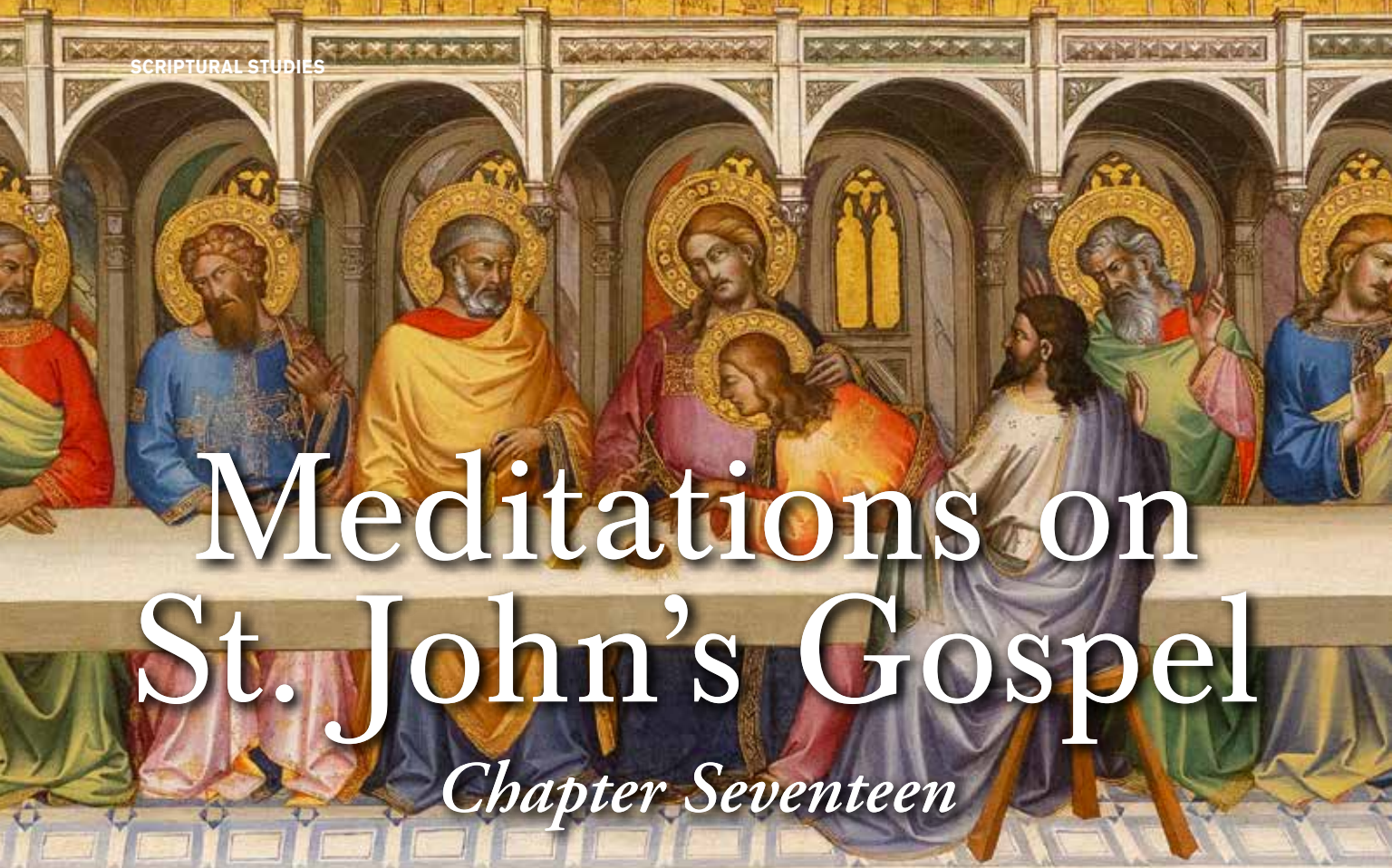
They are represented by the other characters, symmetrically arranged in relation to the central element of the image. Surrounding the victorious Christ are usually David and Solomon, easily recognizable by their royal clothing; Abel as a young shepherd-boy; Moses holding the tables of the Law; John the Baptist and the other prophets pointing out the One they have announced and whom they recognized as soon as He entered Hell.



The icon gives us hope by showing us Christ, Who draws us out of death to bring us into His own light. Christ goes deep within us, to release us from the chains of our refusal of love and our anguish, our alienating passions and our fears, to restore in us His Resemblance, to awaken us and to lead us to the True Life, which is eternal—Christ is truly the *primitiae dormientium*.

Endnotes

- ¹ I Cor. 15:14.
- ² Mt. 28, Mk. 16, Lk. 24, Jn. 20.
- ³ Paschal antiphon of the Byzantine liturgy.
- ⁴ I Pet 3:19, 4:6; Ps. 107:6; Heb. 2:14, Eph. 4:8-9; Apoc. 1:18.
- ⁵ *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book III, 29.
- ⁶ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Part I, ch. VI.
- ⁷ Clément, Oliver. *Dialogue avec le Patriarche Athénagoras*. Paris: Fayard, 1969.
- ⁸ Psalm 23:7-8.



Meditations on St. John's Gospel

Chapter Seventeen

Pater Inutilis

The present chapter is now the 5th in St. John's gospel recording for us Our Lord's words at the Last Supper. Christ, though, has given His disciples all they can bear for the moment (16:12), and now addresses His Father—but still out loud, that by this prayer of His they might yet believe the more (11:42). He will pray for Himself (vs. 1-5), for His disciples (vs. 6-19; 24-26), and for those who will believe, thanks to the preaching of these disciples (vs. 20-26).

God is infinite Being, Truth and Goodness. Glory is excellence known, proclaimed and admired. The perfection of the godhead each Person sees, and delights in, in each Other. This is the eternal glory of God; it is the Son's too, by divine right. In the Son, though, this was obscured before men (but not the Father, Who loves Him—vs. 23 & 26), when He “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7f). Now this

“hour is come” (vs. 1). God Incarnate has wanted, and worked for, the glory of His Father. “I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (vs. 4). To glorify God is to make known His perfections, and so provoke to love Him. “I have manifested thy name” (vs. 6 & 26; cf. 1:18). It is only right that the Son, too, receive divine glory before men, as within the Trinity: “And now glorify thou me, O Father, with thyself, with the glory which I had, before the world was, with thee” (vs. 5). This will, of course, but redound to the glory of the Father (vs. 1). Our Lord's Passion, when “He humbled himself,” is already a glorification (12:23 & 32f; 13:31f): it is a manifestation of God's love. “In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us” (1 Jn. 3:16). How much more is not Jesus' “exaltation” (Phil. 2:9-11) the answer to this His prayer? “And we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father” (1:14; cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-3). To acknowledge and embrace this

glory is the last end of every rational creature. “Now this is eternal life: that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (vs. 3). “Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me; that they may see my glory which thou hast given me,¹ because thou hast loved me before the creation of the world” (vs. 24). The glory of the Saints will be the same divine perfections received and radiated by them, even Christ Himself in them: “That the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and *I in them*” (vs. 26).

This glory of God in Himself and in His Saints being the end of creation, it is what Jesus Christ prays for firstly, for Himself and for His disciples. For these, it begins already to the degree that they are with Christ. The Apostles have received His words, they have believed in Him (vs. 8). They cannot yet come with Him (13:33). Hence, “now I am not in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee” (vs. 11). This is “expedient” for them (16:7). And so, “I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world” (vs. 15). Their adherence to Christ in the face of the opposition of the *world* also glorifies Christ. “I am glorified in them” (vs. 10). This “world” is not that of verses 5 and 11, but that of verses 9, 14 and 16: “men” who serve mammon rather than God (Mt. 6:24), whose prince is Satan (14:30); or the principles inspiring these men (I Jn. 2:15f). It is not for them that Jesus is praying now (vs. 9)—though “if *any* man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just” (I Jn. 2:1). He is praying for the Eleven, those who are the Father’s and the Son’s (vs. 9 & 11). He asks: “keep them in thy name” (vs. 11), and “that thou shouldst keep them from evil” (vs. 15) and “sanctify them in truth” (vs. 17); and thus that they receive “eternal life” (vs. 2). “For them do I sanctify myself”—set myself apart as a consecrated sacrifice—“that they also may be sanctified in truth” (vs. 19)—set apart as His worthy ministers to the world (vs. 18). This will be their glory, and His. There is, though, “one of the twelve” (6:72) who is of the world: he has chosen to serve mammon (12:6) and so be Satan’s (13:24). Judas is “lost,” “the son of perdition,” as foreknown and foretold (vs. 12).

The Apostles sent into the world will bear much fruit (15:8 & 16), and Our Lord prays “for them also who through their word shall believe in me” (vs. 20). For them He asks an unity, like

unto His with the Father in the same one divine nature (vs. 21 & 23). This can only be when the same one Son, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, abides in each branch of the vine (14:23 & 17; 15:4f). The principle of unity is God Himself. But this unity will also be manifest to the world, an incentive to believe in Christ (vs. 21 & 23). To be visible humanly, Christ’s disciples will have to be one (10:16) in mind (II Jn. 10) and heart (13:35), in government (10:16; 21:15-17), and prayer and the sacraments (I Jn. 5:8).²

This whole “Discourse after the Supper” finishes with a fitting last word: “I have made known thy name to them” (vs. 26). To make known the Father is to glorify Him—and this is Jesus’ principal motive in all He says and does. The consequence, for those who receive this word, is an idea underlying this entire discourse: “that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them” (vs. 26). This is charity: a love of God in Himself and of God in one’s neighbor. It’s God loving Himself in and through us. And so may be fulfilled His new commandment, “That you love one another as I have loved you” (13:34).

Endnotes

¹ In His divinity, by being the Son begotten (1:14), the Word spoken (1:1); in His humanity, by His coming to the Father (vs. 11 & 13), His Ascension (3:12f).

² “Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body and one Spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all” (Eph. 4:3-6).



Fr. Juan Carlos Iscara, SSPX

1. What must a penitent do to obtain absolution for his sins?

The penitent must have contrition, i.e. sorrow for his sins, which includes a firm purpose of amendment. As we will see later, he must also make an integral confession of mortal sins not yet confessed, and accept the satisfaction (penance) imposed by the confessor.

The fundamental act is contrition. In certain particular circumstances, a person may be saved without confession or satisfaction of sins (for example, when there is no confessor at the time of death), but no one can be saved without sorrow or repentance for his grave sins.

2. What is “contrition”?

Contrition is a sorrow and hatred of the sins we have committed inasmuch as they are an offense against God. Such sorrow, if it is true,

is accompanied by the purpose of confessing them and never sinning again.

It is a *sorrow* or sadness due to an awareness of the sins committed, by which the soul has offended God and put itself in a state of enmity with Him. This does not mean that the penitent must experience an intense *feeling* of sorrow for sin but rather that he must *judge* sin to be a greater evil than any other, so that he would be prepared to endure all other evils rather than to fall again into sin.

It is also a *detestation*. This word is not redundant, since sorrow is not the same as detestation, although the first inevitably leads to the second. Sorrow, as we have just said, is an interior sadness in the face of the calamity of sin. Detestation, on the other hand, is such an abhorrence of sin that it kindles in the penitent’s soul the desire to uproot it. It supposes hatred of the sin committed, that is, a true retraction of the bad will that the sinner had when he committed it. It is related to anger rather than sadness. Detestation occurs in the sensitive appetite in the pres-

ence of an evil difficult to eradicate, although, like sorrow, it need not necessarily be felt.

The *sins committed* are the material object of contrition, i.e. the sins committed are what we are sorry for. These sins do not include original sin, future sins, or to the sins of others; they only include actual sins that we, ourselves, committed.

The sorrow must be caused by our awareness of the *offense we have given to God* by falling into sin. True contrition must be supernatural, both in its principle (it is brought about with the aid of supernatural grace) and in its motive (i.e. not caused by natural, purely human motives).

Thus, contrition is considered *perfect* if the sorrow is prompted by our love for God. But it is imperfect (and called attrition) if the sorrow arises not from such supreme love but from some other supernatural motive, such as fear of the eternal or temporal punishment which is due to sin and is justly imposed by God. Such fear implicitly includes love and subjection to Him, and is commended by Sacred Scripture: *“The fear of the Lord driveth out sin: for he that is without fear, cannot be justified”* (Ecclesiasticus 1:27-28).

To regret our sins *only* for fear of the sufferings to come or for the happiness that we will lose, but without any reference to God who is offended, is not sufficient for genuine attrition.

Moreover, the sinner must have at least the implicit *purpose of sacramentally confessing* his sins. Without this relation to the sacrament of penance, true contrition does not exist.

Finally, the penitent must have the *firm purpose of not sinning again*. This is the logical and inevitable consequence of sorrow and detestation. He who feels he has offended God and truly wants to root out his sin must clearly be willing not to commit it again. This does not mean that he will in fact never sin again: in spite of our good intentions our human will is still weak and flawed and may fail in the face of temptation. What is required is that, here and now, the sinner sincerely and honestly proposes to make all possible efforts never to sin again.

3. What is the purpose of amendment?

Purpose of amendment is the deliberate and serious will not to sin again. A simple wish is not enough. A firm, energetic, unconditional

act of the will is required. It is evident that one has not truly repented of his sins if he does not have the willingness to avoid them in the future. Without such a true and sincere repentance, it is impossible to obtain forgiveness of sins.

Usually such a purpose is implicitly included in the act of contrition, by which all past, present or future sins are rejected. In practice, the penitent should elicit not only an implicit purpose of amendment but also one that is explicit and centered on some special sin, since this will be more effective for the amendment of his life.

It must be *firm*—that is, the penitent, at the time of repenting of his sins, must be completely determined not to sin again, even if he must lose all his goods and bear all possible evils in order to avoid future sins.

It is not required, however, that the penitent be firmly persuaded that he will fulfill his purpose. Sincerity of purpose is compatible with doubt about its successful outcome, and even with the penitent’s almost moral certainty that, given his weakness, he will fall again sooner or later. That conviction is an intellectual judgment, while purpose is an act of the will.

Therefore, the firm purpose does not exclude fear or doubt (not even the intellectual certainty of a future relapse), but the penitent must consider that amendment, though difficult, is possible with the help of God and that it can be achieved by putting into practice the means at his disposal (v.gr., removing or avoiding the occasions of sin, breaking off bad friendships, frequenting the sacraments, etc.).

The purpose must also be *universal*, that is, it must include all the mortal sins to be avoided in the future. Regarding venial sins, it is not absolutely necessary that the purpose be universal, but it would be very fitting and profitable.

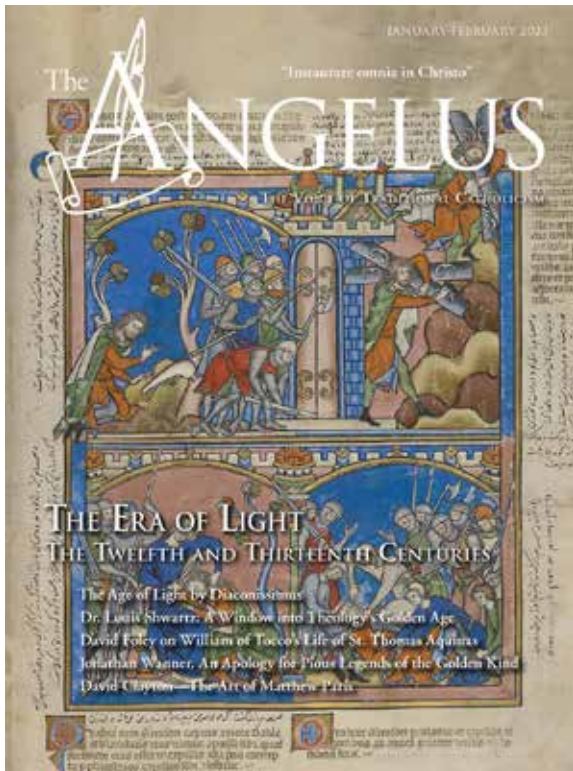
It must be *efficacious* to the extent that the penitent must use all the means necessary to avoid sin, such as prayer and vigilance; he must avoid voluntary proximate occasions of sin and do all in his power to repair any damage caused by his sins.

Some very pious penitents, especially if they are prone to scruples, accuse themselves thoroughly of all their venial faults along with all their smallest details. They must be reminded that repentance and the purpose of amendment are incomparably more important than the exhaustive accusation of little faults.

[... to be continued.]

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THE LAST WORD

Fr. David Sherry
District Superior of Canada

Dear Reader,

Have you ever noticed that when someone accuses another intemperately, it's often an accusation of what he is himself but doesn't admit? It's certainly a giveaway of a Pharisee. "Now we know that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil" means in Pharisee-speak "we are not true followers of God and are sons of the father of lies, you are not like us." "We found this man plotting against Caesar" translates as "We would love to plot against Caesar, but this Man wasn't."

The Pharisaical critics of the Church of Christ err from the truth and then accuse the Catholic Church of the very error they themselves commit. They remove those institutions which give woman dignity and then turn around and accuse the Church of demeaning women. They flood the world with obscenity and without a blush accuse Catholics of being obsessed with sins against the sixth commandment.

The essence of a Pharisee being one who makes justice sit on the outside rather than on the inside, you might well suspect that the Protestant "Reformers" would be in on the act, and you would be right. They made it an axiom that every man was inspired and infallible when interpreting Sacred Scripture and they submitted the spiritual power to the temporal one. In England, the King became supreme head of the Church, and in the Empire, *Cuius Regio eius*

Religio (which means "you better follow the religion of your ruler whether it's true or false or else") became the governing principle. In short, a man would make up the religion as he went along. Then, broadening his phylacteries and enlarging his fringes, the Protestant turns on the Catholic Church and accuses *Her* of having a head who usurps the place of God. But, dear separated brother, the power you impute to the pope is the one that, in reality, *you* give to men – that of making up a religion. Peter is not nearly so powerful; *he* has to stick to the Faith as was handed down by the Apostles. His infallibility does not give him any power to invent new truths, it merely prevents him from solemnly declaring what is error in matters of Faith. And if, as has happened once or thrice, a pope otherwise teaches error, it serves as the counterexample which proves the rule: I obey Peter insofar as he is the servant of the Faith; if he deviates from it, I must obey God rather than men.

Fr. David Sherry

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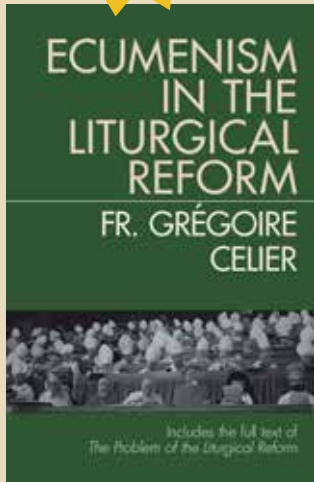
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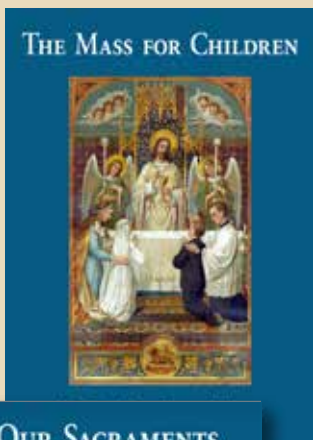
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