

Staying the Course, V

Any Catholic who desires to practice the teaching of his church in its fullness and in its glorious orthodoxy, will sooner or later be confronted with, and dismayed by, the lack of discipline in the Church. In general, both clergy and laity can teach whatever they want in opposition to the Magisterium, and do so with impunity. Why is this? One reason has to do with the decision of Pope Paul III in 1542, to create a permanent dicastery or department in the government of the Church, with the sole objective was to "spread sound Catholic doctrine and defend those points of Christian tradition which seem in danger because of new and unacceptable doctrines."

It went through some changes to be sure, and among them was its very name. Its original name was 'The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition. You can tell by the name that it had teeth to back up the teaching of the Church. In 1908 its name was changed to the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office by Pope St. Pius X. In 1965 it was renamed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, by Pope St. Paul VI. In 1985 it was renamed again simply as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by Pope St. John Paul II.

But the biggest change in its history is not the change of names – though that is significant. The biggest change was the position of the dicastery. That is, from its founding to 1965 the ordinary authority of the Church went from the pope to the Holy Office. In 1965 Paul VI demoted it and placed it under the Secretary of State. What has this change meant in practice? It has meant that at every level of the Church truth is second to diplomacy. Catholics wondering why in the world this politician who so supports abortion is not corrected in any way should understand that diplomacy trumps truth with the hierarchy. Words like heresy or schism are discarded or ignored because they are perceived to be undiplomatic. And if the initiative of Pope Francis to create a new super-dicastery over all the others takes place, then doctrine will be two steps down so to speak. And given that the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei was absorbed into the CDF, then the traditional groups in communion with the Holy See will likely be in a more precarious position than when I began this series of sermons.

You've probably guessed by now that I am not in favor of these decisions, and if so, you are correct. I think they are an enormous mistake. Which is an enormous and rather cheeky position for me to take. But if we want the tradition of the Catholic Church, then we cannot blithely accept these decisions *and* remain faithful to tradition. Something has to give.

Let me outline this problem in more detail by looking at the modern ecumenical movement in the Church. Now in a genuinely Catholic position pursued in church history, we find a simple, overriding desire, which was to remedy the scandal of Christian division. The prayer of our good Lord was that "They may be one, Father, even as you and I are one." And thus the modern ecumenical movement which began in the 1920's was in earnest pursuit of that goal.

This pursuit became even stronger by 1946. What had happened was the Second World War. In that war, many, many priests and Protestant ministers were murdered, and those who survived the work camps were seared by the memories. The Catholic priests admired the ministers and vice-versa. So it was the most natural thing in the world to want to continue that friendship – because that's what came out of the camps – after liberation.

A similar thing happened in this country with the Know Nothings. The Know Nothing political party was very strong in this country by 1850, and it was absolutely dedicated to the hatred of the Catholic Church. It was called this simply because if any of its members were asked about it, they would respond "I know nothing." We fought them in various ways, such as by debate, and sometimes by threat. For example, Archbishop John Hughes of New York City had an interesting response to the Know Nothing burning of the Ursuline convent in the city. The nuns escaped, and the Archbishop was livid. He went to the city council to request protection for his churches. The blue-blood Protestant council said nothing could be done. The Archbishop said in response, "Fine. If a single stained glass window of any Catholic church is broken, then I will instruct the wild, drunken Irish to burn the city to the ground." Not the sort of thing to get one canonized I supposed. No stained glass was broken. The threat was serious, and of course we can't go along with his position because you should not use an evil means to achieve a good end. But what really stopped the Know Nothings was the service of Catholic soldiers and of Catholic nurses in the Civil War. Our record was astoundingly good. But let me skip forward many years to the 1980's. Check the bulletin insert about intervening developments.

Under the guidance of Pope St. John Paul II, ecumenism took a radically different turn. Upon a visit to India in February of 1982, he permitted a Hindu priestess to impose the mark of Tilak upon him, which indicates which god or goddess you worship. And a few days later to smear vibuthi, or sacred ashes on his forehead, which do more than symbolize the supreme lordship and power of Shiva, a Hindu god. And at a Mass in Australia, he permitted the penitential rite of the Mass to be replaced by a ceremony of aboriginal fire worship.

These were outdone however in Assisi, Italy, in October of 1986. There, under the direction of the pope, Hindu's, Tibetan lamas, Japanese bonza's, tribal snake worshippers, and animists of all sorts performed their various rites and incantations. A group of Buddhists entered the church of San Pietro, and set a statue of Buddha on top of the tabernacle, and venerated it with incense and prayer scrolls. To this you might be saying to yourselves, "Thou shalt not have strange God's before me."

But before considering in a moral sense this policy of John Paul II of a union of all faiths including paganism, what should be our attitude to pagans? Is it not quite simply that they were created in the image and likeness of God? That they are loved by God Who desires their salvation? This position does not involve treating the true Faith as part of many other faiths in an underlying spiritual reality. And so we see no harm in greeting a pagan neighbor, or in a friendly meeting with the pope and the Dalai Lama. But what use is it to make a rapprochement with religions that have no defined doctrinal or moral code with which we could make common cause, or the practical aims that could be served by collaboration with Protestants? That is, what medical doctor attends conferences with tribal witch-doctors on the grounds that they share some heart-warming impulse to cure the sick? No! The basis of Christian belief is not a human instinct for religion. Its basis is the objective revelation of the One, True, God.

Apologists for the fiasco of Assisi blather about seeking world peace, but they sound like contestants for Miss Teenage America. And those who think along such lines fancy that the Church shows a Christ-like humility the more it abases itself and surrenders its claims, and the more it apologizes for its existence.

What was the justification for this? An appeal was made, and continues to be made that this is in keeping with a general ecumenical council, namely the Second Vatican. One would like to refute it by asking "Where in the world was anything like this in the documents of that Council?" But this appeal is of little use. Pope St. John Paul II was a peritus, an expert at that council, and attended every one of its sessions. He emphatically asserted that Assisi was a fulfillment of the spirit of Vatican II. If this is true, then the so-called spirit of the council maintains that the foundation of true religion is not in God Who reveals Himself to man, but the foundation is in the religious instinct of man, groping for some kind of faith, whatever its object may be. This however is a matter for future popes and councils to decide whether that was what the Council truly meant or whether the aberration belongs entirely to Pope St. John Paul II.

But in the meantime, if we want to keep the Mass, we are going to have to be stubborn, and take no part in ceremonies like that of Assisi. And we must hold to what our ancestor's in the faith thought about this, such as St. Paul wrote in his second epistle to the Corinthians, 6:14-17. "Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what participation hath justice with injustice? Or what fellowship hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath the faithful with the unbeliever? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God saith: I will dwell in them, and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, Go out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing:"