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Ut ecclesia ædificationem accipiat.

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— Preface —

The Motu Proprio blog began, after a fashion, as an experiment: Did I have anything useful to contribute to the Catholic coffeehouse conversation? The reader will have to judge that for themselves.

In another sense, however, it was as natural as breathing. I started blogging—that was the hip thing to do before the rise of Facebook—soon after I moved to the United States in 2004, first under my own name at a blog titled I Respectfully Dissent, and after June 2006 as a contributing editor at Stubborn Facts. Emigration is a new birth of sorts, I suppose, and so, in the summer of 2009, it felt very much as though I had been blogging for as long as I had been engaged with the world. When I read things and had something to say about them, I was in the habit of saying it; I was in the mental habit of thinking aloud, in writing, about things that interested me. Thus, when I began my journey into Christianity generally and the Catholic Church in particular, and things pertaining to that world thus became interesting, it followed as day after night that I would write about Catholic things that interested me just as I had “always” (so it felt) been writing about politics and law.

I didn’t announce it; truth be told, as I saw (and see) it, I wasn’t doing anything different. I just started writing about Catholic issues that interested me, in the same style(s) in which I wrote about other issues. Nothing had changed.

But as I noted in my introductory post, see About Motu Proprio (June 1, 2011), adiacentem post, Stubborn Facts is not a religion blog, and I felt uncomfortable imposing so many ecclesial topics on it. Thus, Motu Proprio: A room with a view, a space entirely my own where I could contribute whatever I might be able to contribute to the conversation of the Catholic blogosphere, and to work out in writing what I thought about this, that, and the other. After a few months, I started to feel that I was
contributing usefully, and the idea of collecting worthwhile posts as an annual began to percolate.

In the end, I wrote 75 published posts in the “June 2011 term” (quasi-legal terminology seems to seep into everything I do), two of which published longer off-blog writings (Green paper on RCIA curricula, post, p. 84, and Essay on Communion in the Hand, post, p.115). Most of that work—not quite all; there always seems to be ephemera—is reproduced herein. Much of it has fared fairly well, I think. Some of it has not. Nevertheless, I have tried to edit with a light hand, focusing on technical corrections in spelling and citation, and resisting the temptation to exclude posts that now seem unnecessarily tendentious, to revise wordings that now seem suboptimal, or to stuff in additional citations that have since occurred. (As a pedant, I’m always trying to improve as a writer, and editing work written at some remove invariably gives me the uncomfortable feeling that I have indeed made progress.) But it does strike me as a satisfying start, and a coherent body of work through which a number of themes are woven.

Reflecting on winning an Oscar, Hans Zimmer observed that it would be nice if they would give you, along with the trophy, the first bar of the next piece of music that you have to write. I think writers tend to have the same anxiety; I rarely have any idea where the next post is coming from. But it always seems to work out that there are interesting things to read and write about; sometimes, it even turns out that I have something to say. Trusting God’s providence on that front, I look forward to the June 2012 term and to seeing what populates the second volume of the Moto Proprio Anuum next year!

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam,
Simon J.A. Dodd, June 5, anno nostre salutis 2012.
About Motu Proprio

June 1st, 2011

This post is a brief personal introduction and something of a mission statement for the blog.

About me, and about this blog

I’m Simon. Originally from Gloucester, England, I moved Stateside in 2004, and became a U.S. Citizen in 2010. I’ve been married to my lovely wife Vicki since 2003, and we have a son (her biological, my adoptive) getting ready to go to college. I like Joss Whedon shows (you’ll find me at various Browncoat events), some sci-fi (my latest obsession is Niven’s Ringworld), and I’ll try police procedurals if there’s an interesting twist (e.g. Castle or Mentalist). I really liked Yes Minister, and lament the absence of such sensibilities in American comedy. I’m an NPR junkie although their editorial line cuts against my ideological sensibilities; I like lefty talker Leslie Marshall and righty talkers Rush Limbaugh, Michael Medved, and Dennis Miller, and I try to catch EWTN when I can, particularly if Patrick Madrid is on. I have pretty eclectic musical tastes, and from time to time I may post music—anything from Palestrina to Bach to Saint-Saens to Yes to Eric Johnson to Richard Cheese. (I do like “praise music,” as a rule, but I adamantly oppose its use at Mass, and have called for a “New Cecilian Movement” to purify our liturgical music.) Organ and choral music particularly tickle my fancy, and I appreciate any recommendations that you’d like to offer. Sometimes there will be gut-wrenching metal
or classic rock n’ roll, but not very often. I’m a techie, although I don’t write about that stuff very often. I also homebrew and tinker with guitars; sometimes I post music I’ve recorded.

Since 2006, I’ve been a contributing editor at the group blog *Stubborn Facts*. I’m not a lawyer, but I’m interested in law; I spend a lot of time reading it, and sometimes I write about it. I’m not a politician, either, but I’m interested in politics. And I’m a conservative; that perspective shapes how I think about almost everything—but in this day and age, where political labels are a problem, that doesn’t say enough. From time to time, I therefore wax philosophical about conservatism and what kind of conservative I am. SF: *Care and feeding of your conservative* (June 3, 2011) and SF: *Modernism in Politics* (May 6, 2011) are probably the most comprehensive statements I’ve offered. Lastly, I’m a pedant. Or, less self-critically, I’m interested in and care about writing well.¹ That goes for my own writing as well as other people’s (SF has a whole category of errata); when I get it wrong, I appreciate polite correction, and rarely hesitate to do the same.

I do not envision, however, that *Motu Proprio* will feature politics or law, which brings us to its *raison d’être*. I’m in the process of converting to Catholicism, and aside from the legal and political stuff, I write about Catholic and more broadly Christian topics, too. I anticipate that *Motu Proprio* will primarily focus on these.²

So: Why are we here? *Motu Proprio*, as the title implies, is a purely personal journal. SF imposes no
particular restraint on content, and I’ve written about religion there, but it’s not a religion blog, and as a matter of personal restraint, I’ve tried to avoid turning it into a pulpit. The upshot is that I’ve often ignored stories that I’d like to write about either because I perceive them to be “too ecclesial” for SF, or because the recent mix there has been too “Church-heavy.” MP was created as an outlet for those topics.

In summary, then: Motu Proprio is a personal blog primarily focused on Catholic issues, with occasional forays into personal topics. If you like what you read here and would like to see roughly analogous treatments of political and legal topics, come over and join the fun at Stubborn Facts. Lastly, I do not expect this blog to be particularly high traffic; I invite and urge RSS subscriptions.

Three guideposts for notation and citation form

- For the most part, I hew to the bluebook’s citation rules, with a few exceptions and without excessively pedantic care for fine points of detail. I’m not as critical of the bluebook as is Judge Posner, but there are a few points on which I dissent; if you’re at all familiar with legal form, you’ll figure it out as we go, and if you’re not, I think you’ll find it easy to pick up. As with writing errors, I appreciate polite notes about citation form; sometimes they will be declined, but sometimes I’m just getting it wrong. I use both footnotes and inline citations, depending on which I feel the situation calls for; discursive or tangential material will sometimes
appear in footnotes, and a string cite or citation with a parenthetical quotation will almost invariably be moved to a footnote. On almost every question of form and style, I am pragmatic rather than dogmatic.

- Some posts will appear in the interlineated format popularized by Fr. John Zuhlsdorf, because it’s convenient for me to write and I find it convenient to read. This approach comes out of the toolbox when a story raises several points to which I’d like to respond, but they are dispersed throughout the story and do not have a thematic link allowing them to be textually regrouped. You can see a typical example here.

- I reference previous writing quite often. Blog posts at Stubborn Facts will be cited in the format SF: [title] ([date]); blog posts at Motu Proprio will be cited in the format MP: [title] ([date]). For instance, you might see a citation like this: Compare SF: Modernism in Politics (May 6, 2011) with MP: Hypothetical future post (Jan. 14, 2012). When a post is subsequently referenced, I typically Shepardize the original post by adding an entry to an appendix titled (tongue in cheek) “post facto”; you can see an example of how that looks at the bottom of this post. (I started doing that because we were seeing a lot of traffic arriving via Google at posts whose content had been developed in subsequent writing, and I wanted to give readers a cue that they could explore further.)

Now you’re up to speed.
A word on comments

I don’t anticipate getting a lot of comments here, but I’ll preempt the issue by observing that we’re all grownups here. When a comment hits the “in” basket and its form implies the presence of an adolescent interloper of any calendar age—profanity, vulgarity, and the like—it will be deleted or redacted. SF has had a rule since day one, and I think it’s a good one: “Play nice and respect others. Opinions and debate are good, facts are better, name-calling and profanity/obscenity are Right Out. ... We reserve the right to mock those who regurgitate knee-jerk talking points without independent thought, who ramble off into irrelevant rant, or who mistake opinion for fact and evidence.” That policy will remain in force at MP.

-Simon J. Dodd, June 3, anno nostrae salutis 2011

Notes:

2. You will wonder—fair game, since I said above that I’m a conservative and a pedant—whether I’m a “traddie,” and the answer is no: While I’m a small-t traditionalist and attend the usus antiquior when possible, I’m perfectly happy attending the novus ordo. I am, however, a “reform of the reform” type.
3. The allusion is to Andy Richter Controls the Universe, one of my favorite comedy shows. It was quirky, funny, and enjoyable—and so it had to die, because those qualities are the kiss of death in an era when the networks want crude trash like Happy Endings.
The hierarchy and the bourbon laity
June 3rd, 2011

Max Lindenman has this on the hierarchy and the laity. It strikes me as vital that we hew to a balanced view of holy orders and ecclesiology, steering between the imagined monster of clericalism (truly terrible it would be if it existed) and the very real and corrosive cloud of what we could call “laicism,” a phenomenon ably represented in Lindenman’s article by Paul Lakeland’s proposal. I say “imagined” because I see little evidence that the attitude described as clericalism by laicists has existed in decades; if it exists today, it exists solely as a straw monster to be poked at and to frighten us into accepting the prescriptions of radicals like Lakeland.

And if the laicists’ mode of argument is disingenuous, the content and object of those arguments are all the more so. Even if the Holy Father was incorrect in saying that “[n]o one can claim to speak ‘officially’ in the name of the entire lay faithful, or of all Catholics, in matters freely open to discussion,” no one should think for even a moment that proposals for involving “the laity” in Church governance are motivated by any desire for lay involvement in Church governance. They aren’t. The objection is not to ecclesiastical authority per se but to the failure of current officeholders to subscribe to various modernist heresies and liberal preferences in liturgy. See SF: America magazine’s duplicitious editorial (Feb. 13, 2011). When the National Catholic Fishwrap, for example, calls for laymen to be given more say, they don’t mean people
like Michael Voris (a point to which Lindenman alludes); far from it. They have a substantive agenda and wish to empower whomever will get the job done, ordained or not. The rest is smoke and mirrors.

Have there been bad bishops? You bet. But so long as their number doesn’t rise above one in twelve, I’d say we’re ahead of the game. For what it’s worth, I tore into the clericalism fearmongering here.

**Revealed preference and the peril of interest capture**

*June 3rd, 2011*

Rocco Palmo reports that Vice-President Joe Biden met with the Holy Father today, but observes that the meeting appears to have been kept unusually quiet. When then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi met Benedict in a publicized meeting, the Vatican paired it with public criticism of Pelosi’s dissent—de facto schism, I would say—from the Church’s teaching on a number of issues, so one could speculate that today’s silence is a courtesy: “If we meet publicly, we must condemn your disobedience, but if you’ll forgo the publicity, we’ll hold fire.”

As Palmo notes, it’s common to see calls for pro-choice politicians to be excommunicated, either formally or practically. And that’s not a surprise, because the Church’s teaching on abortion is crystal clear.¹ Easy as it is to mock Biden as dim, he’s a
reasonably intelligent man, so it’s hard to imagine that he’s unaware and uncomprehending of the teaching; how, then, do those politicians square their political position with their faith?

To answer that, we must first realize that to our right and left alike, we see a problem that I call interest capture: People who are intellectually-compromised by an overriding commitment to a particular interest or result on which they are at odds with the Church. It need not go so far as sede vacantism (typically on the right, but sometimes on the left, too) or conciliarism (on the right before Vatican II and on the left after it) to be a problem, because dissent on a single topic can have far-ranging and corrosive consequences, especially for one of the most fundamental questions: The Magisterium. A necessary antecedent to evaluating the content of the Magisterium is a theory of the Magisterium itself: As J.I. Packer perceptively observed in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, most of the fundamental questions that divide Catholics from Protestants and Orthodox boil down to the central question of the Church’s authority. What evangelicals Norman Geisler and Joshua Betancourt said of the Magisterium’s apex, papal infallibility, is no less true for the Magisterium as a whole: If the Catholic Church is right about it, “then every other branch within Christendom … has become the obstinate stepchild to the Mother Church.”² Professed Catholics like Biden must, on paper, believe in the Magisterium (“I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by
God”), and they cannot be unaware of its teaching on the most heated issues. And yet they place themselves in dissent from those teachings, a stance that—through the miracle of revealed preference—calls into question their actual beliefs about the Church’s authority to promulgate those teachings.

And therein lies the problem. When someone rejects the Church’s teaching on a particular issue, they must generally do one of two things. They can accept that they have separated themselves from the Church. Or they may convince themselves that there is a legitimate response called “dissent,” and that they are still in the Church, albeit also in this “dissent” on one or two issues. The challenge of the latter route, however, is its requirement that they manage the cognitive dissonance by refining their theory of the teaching and governing offices of the Church and her bishops in order to elide the teaching on which they dissent. This produces—almost inevitably and all-but invariably—a distorted theory of the Magisterium. Instead of determining a theory of authority in vacuo and applying it neutrally, they start with a result and build their theory of authority around it so as to leave the desired result undisturbed, producing a warped and twisted simulacrum of the Magisterium distorted into “geometrical forms for which an Euclid could scarcely find a name.” It’s like trying to draw a straight line of iron filings past a magnet.

It is at this point that the distinction between public and private dissent becomes important. One who has private reservations about this or that teaching is no harm to anyone (save, perhaps, himself). When
a distorted theory of teaching authority is advanced in public dissent, however, the theory escapes the bounds of the dissenter’s peculiar *bête noire* and becomes a tool for everyone with every kind of difference with the Church. For example, suppose Smith dissents on the topic of ordaining women. To preserve his position, he manipulates a poll to show that self-identified Catholics (the qualifier is important) agree with him, and to make his opinion and his poll relevant, he advances a neutered theory of episcopal authority which pulls the hierarchy inside out, placing the judgment of the laity on top of the pile. But Jones hears him and says “hey, I disagree with Smith on that, but I disagree with the bishops on birth control, and if the bishops can get Smith’s issue wrong, maybe they got *my* issue wrong, too!” For the next person the issue is the death penalty, for the next, gay marriage, the person after him wants to rethink the hypostatic union, and so on. The effect is (with a hat tip to Robert Bork) slouching into heresy. Put another way, private dissent on any single issue has a corrosive effect on one’s view of the Magisterium, and public dissent has a corrosive effect on the faith of those within earshot of the dissenter. The result of the latter is to infect the Church with (if you will forgive the negative connotations of the metaphor) viral anglicanism.

That public-private dichotomy becomes even sharper when it is public dissent by a public figure, and sharpest of all when it touches bishops and clergy. As the Lord warns: “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will
be demanded of the person entrusted with more” (Lk 12:48). When a person publicly advances heresy, they threaten to mislead those who hear and trust them. When a public figure such as a politician publicly advances heresy, the difference is not of kind but of scale: Their words reach more people. And when a Bishop publicly advances heresy, that is worse in both kind and scale, for while politicians are trusted to lie, Bishops are supposed to be our shepherds in truth, and when they lead their flock astray, a robust and rapid response—far more rapid than the languorous handling of Toowoomba bishop William Morris—is demanded.

To end where we began, then, with Vice-President Biden, we might ask: Acknowledging that he ought to be admonished, should the further step of excommunication be taken, as many advocate? We are all sinners; not one of us is worthy of what we receive in and through the Eucharist. All of us could be hung from one verse of scripture or another at any given time. But in the case of those who give grave public scandal to the Church, who mislead others and provide cover for those who do likewise, action seems appropriate—not because they should be punished more severely, but because excommunication is a remedial measure and public figures who have in fact separated themselves from the Church are in more drastic need of the medicine, for both their own sake and everyone else’s.

**Notes:**

1. See SF: *Auntie gets it wrong*, n.1 (Nov. 23, 2009).


4. H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* ch. 5 (1931).

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**On choosing gods and churches**

*June 4th, 2011*

At *Wednesday’s general audience*, the Holy Father recalled the time when God called Moses to Mount Sinai in order to deliver the ten commandments:

> While the Lord is giving the Law to Moses on the mountain, at the foot of the mountain the people sin. Unable to endure the wait and the absence of the mediator [i.e. Moses], the Israelites demand of Aaron, “make us a god who will be our leader; as for the man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him” (Ex 32:1).

Tired of a journey with an invisible God, now that even Moses, the mediator, is absent, people are demanding a tangible presence, something that can be touched, the Lord, and seek it in the golden calf made by Aaron, a god made accessible, operable, within human reach. This is a constant temptation in the path of faith—to elude the divine mystery by constructing for ourselves a comprehensible God, more compliant with their own projects and plans.

The temptation is always present, even today. It does not always come, however, in so overt a form;
no less than when we more-or-less explicitly fashion a new god (perhaps of money, or fashion, or worldly success), the same principle is in play when we try to make God more convenient to ourselves. We can do this by downplaying the hard sayings (cf. Jn 6:60), for example, or by “reimagining” God in a manner more conducive to ourselves, our preferences, and our plans (cf. this). It is not hard to see why many leave the Catholic Church: The Church is difficult. She is demanding. But if her teaching is correct, then we must echo her first shepherd: We cannot leave in the face of hard teachings, for “to whom else shall we go?” (Jn 6:68; cf. Lumen gentium, no. 14 (2d Vat. Co., 1964).) One does not “choose” the Catholic Church in the manner one might shop around for a protestant community that is aesthetically and doctrinally appealing; I am not on her doorstep because she is convenient and comely. To accept the teaching of the Catholic Church includes acceptance of her ecclesiology (cf. MP: Revealed preference and the peril of interest capture ¶ 3 (June 3, 2011), adjacentem ante)—the role and authority of the Church as a component of revealed truth and all that that implies for our relationship with her. John Haran put it appealingly in The One Church and Reunion Movements, 1 Theological Studies 278, 283 (1940): “[M]an is not free to work out his own idea of God, nor of God’s revelation, nor of God’s Church. Man must be saved God’s way, not select a convenient formula for himself.”
Excerpt from Two quick links
June 6th, 2011

An interesting perspective on Universæ Ecclesiæ in this interview. . . .

[Question]: And how will precisely the promotion of the “older” rite further “reconciliation within the Church” after it has led to so much conflict until now?

[Answer]: The conflict essentially is due to the misunderstanding, so perilous for the Church, that Vatican II established a new Church. The struggle surrounding this misunderstanding must be endured to the end. Covering it up with peaceful phrases doesn’t help the Church.

Reconciliation requires that we recover the “historical Vatican II”—the real council, liberated from what was wrought in the name of its “spirit” by willful individuals. We can’t have a frank debate about the council until we can all agree on what exactly it did and didn’t teach, and the council said nothing about a number of things for which it has been invoked by some and blamed by others.

Post facto:

The Kansas City fumble
June 7, 2011

Elizabeth Scalia has a primer on what appears to be a mishandled case of a priest found to have an unseemly interest in children, although it doesn’t seem to have gotten so far as direct physical abuse. You can get the full story via that link and the stories to which Scalia links, but the salient facts for my purposes are these: In May 2010, the principal of a Catholic school sent a memo to her diocese outlining concerns about the school’s pastor, Father Shawn Ratigan. It’s not clear whether the ordinary, Bishop Robert Finn, ever saw the original report, but he did see a summary, the contents and author of which are unclear. Nor is it clear what exactly Bp. Finn did about it; the characterization offered is that he “sat on” the report, but who knows what that means? At any rate, it wasn’t until more evidence washed up unbidden on the chancery’s door in December that the cops were called and Fr. Ratigan was (in effect; there’s more to it than this) removed.

Much of the timeline is opaque, so it’s important to exercise some restraint in judging Finn’s response. Nevertheless, it’s hard to avoid at least a tentative judgment on the facts presented. It is beside the point that Ratigan was ultimately found to be doing something wrong; the fundamental problem is the lethargic (indeed, seemingly comatose) response. After all that has happened, how can any chancery in the country have failed to designate an office(r) to investigate claims of impropriety by priests toward children? I find it hard to believe that as many as
one bishop in the United States could still be asleep at the switch on anything even close to abuse by 2010. The episcopate cannot be unaware of how much damage has been done by the abuse scandal (both *eo ipso* and as a result of its weaponization by enemies of the Church), so one might think that allegations of impropriety would rocket to the top of a bishop’s docket and stay there long enough to get a sense of what is actually happening.

I understand that everything takes time. I understand that bishops have much to do and little time in which to do it. I also understand that sometimes there is smoke without fire: Allegations turn out to be false, suspicions turn out to be groundless. What I don’t understand is the lack of any sense of urgency. I don’t expect bishops to personally undertake the investigation any more than I expect Presidents to personally lead Seal Team Six into battle or join the cast of *CSI:Feds*; Cadfael was the sleuth, not Prior Robert, who had better things to do. But I do expect them to have well-oiled processes in their chanceries for expeditiously investigating claims and determining whether they are false, groundless, and so on. Rambling, ramshackle, and ad hoc processes run by remote control from the chancery won’t suffice any more. I don’t expect the system to be perfect; I don’t expect it to be airtight, with no cases falling through the cracks; but I do expect there to be a system. There should be an office in every diocese designated to investigate and manage complaints of abuse, and the officer in charge should meet with the bishop regularly to give an overview. I think that
it’s perfectly feasible that every complaint should have had at least a tentative evaluation within a month—interviews with the involved parties and a recommendation for further investigation or not.¹

And who knows—perhaps it happened just like that in Kansas City. Bp. Finn was handed at least a summary indicating that there could be a problem; I would like to know what happened next, beyond the bland abstraction that he “sat on it.” (That sounds a lot like media-speak for “if we ask questions the answers might destroy our narrative.”) But we can ground a tentative judgment on two key data that we do know: We know that the diocese was notified in May 2010, and we know that it had taken no action by December 2010. Whatever happened between those dates was, clearly, insufficient. If the chancery had done nothing by December, the situation was not being actively handled with the level of concern, attention, and dispatch that one would have expected ten years of this scandal to have beaten into the bishops.

Post facto:


Notes:

1. The Federal Speedy Trial Act, 18 U.S.C. §§ 3161 *et seq.*, supplies an instructive comparison. Broadly, the act requires that a trial begin within seventy days of an indictment, which must in turn be filed within thirty days of the arrest. See, e.g., Zedner v. United States, 547 U.S. 489 (2006). It seems reasonable to treat section 3161’s understanding of “speedy” as a benchmark for “expeditious.” Given today’s technology, thirty days is long enough to make a tentative assessment; three months and some change is long enough to reach a conclusion.
Any reasonable process should have suspended or cleared Ratigan by the end of August. And think about the consequences of delay! An innocent priest has a cloud hanging over him, and a guilty one is left in a position to do more harm.

**Three thoughts on Father Corapi**  
*June 18, 2011*

In March, Father John Corapi was suspended after allegations that he was improperly involved with a woman. After weeks of silence, Fr. Corapi announced today that he will leave the priesthood after being stymied in attempts to clear his name. Audio of the announcement is [here](#); the text is [here](#). I have three main points to make.

**First**, I understand if Corapi feels mired in process, unable to clear his name. I understand him being angry at a process that is—if his version of events is essentially accurate—unfair and being abused to silence him by certain powers that are critical of a robust voice for Catholic orthodoxy. At the same time, however, *it’s only been three months*. That *isn’t* excessively long by the standards of civil litigation, and, depending on how you draw the analogy, it’s more-or-less within the speedy trial act’s timeline for criminal trials. *Cf.* MP: *The Kansas City fumble* n.1 (June 7, 2011), *adiacentem post*. And leaving the priesthood is a huge decision. We have all felt persecuted and paralyzed from time to time, and have yearned to break free, but it seems very hasty to take so precipitous a step after so little time.
Second, having raised the possibility of his story not holding up, I must add that I assume that Corapi’s telling the truth, broadly-speaking. I have no reason to doubt him. Yet it’s important to avoid being unreasonably credulous about a man simply because I happen to like him and find his testimony powerful; good men sometimes fall and do bad things. As people have observed for centuries, Holy Mother Church is a hospital for sinners not a drawing room for saints. Accordingly, I acknowledge that there are two sides to every story, and Corapi makes several accusations, especially about his excellency Bishop Michael Mulvey. But that maxim has limits: To avail himself of it, Bp. Mulvey must tell his side of the story. He cannot seriously say “there’s two sides to every story; I’m not going to tell you my side of it, but don’t buy what he’s saying.” Absurd! Corapi has made some claims about Mulvey’s conduct, and if Mulvey wants to avoid being thought of as the bishop who unjustly terminated Corapi’s ministry, fairly or not, it becomes incumbent on him to tell his side of the story. Fairly or not, like it or not, the ball is in your court, your excellency.

Third, having mentioned Corapi’s testimony, I think that we must distinguish between that testimony and Corapi’s ministry. Many believe that Fr. Corapi has been an extremely effective ambassador from Catholic orthodoxy in his preaching, and I agree. But I fancy that Corapi is fondly familiar to many of his followers because we were sold on his testimony—on his story. He rose to the heights of what the secular world would regard as success;
money, drugs, girls, you name it. And he fell as fast, as far, and as hard as anyone has: Addiction, homeless vagrancy, institutionalization. (Watch the condensed version here and a fuller account here.) Yet from these depths, he not only recovered his faith, but was opened to answering a call to the priesthood—no easy gig, as any priest will tell you—and commenced the ministry to which I’ve referred. And it is this narrative arc, this testimony, that I think most attracts people to Corapi. His testimony is powerful because it vividly illustrates that there are no depths to which you can sink whence God cannot rescue you and use you in His service. Like so many of us in kind, but worse than most of us in degree, this man was a disaster without God, yet became triumph with and through Him. It’s unfortunate that a cloud may now hang over Corapi’s ministry; his critics will undoubtedly use it as a weapon to discredit him. But his testimony—because it isn’t really his testimony, any more than was Job’s, but rather God’s—remains undimmed.

I’m personally saddened by Corapi’s decision and the situation that led to it. I wouldn’t say that he was instrumental in my conversion, but he helped a great deal. Above all else, Corapi’s statement strikes me as a dignified shrug of the shoulders and somewhat elaborated personal serenity prayer:

I am not going to be involved in public ministry as a priest any longer. There are certain persons in authority in the Church that want me gone, and I shall be gone. I have been guilty of many things in the course of my life, and could easily and justifiably be considered unfit
to engage in public ministry as a priest. ... Suffice it to say that I love the Catholic Church and accept what has transpired.

Corapi feels, I am sure, that he is accepting something he cannot change. I know that God will continue to bless you, Father.

**Post facto:**


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**Who was the first bishop of the Moon?**

*June 18, 2011*

Father Zuhlsdorf has a post noting that Archbishop William Borders had once staked his claim to have been the first bishop of the moon. The theory works like this: Because Apollo 11 had departed from Cape Kennedy, which lay within the Diocese of Orlando, of which Abp. Borders was bishop in 1969, he acquired jurisdiction when *Eagle* landed on the Moon. (Notwithstanding, by the way, that neither Armstrong nor Aldrin, nor the orbiting Collins, were Catholics.) Call it “port of origin jurisdiction.”

The claim should be easy to test, because there is ample history whence to analogize. In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, as every child learns, landing in San Salvador, Cuba, and Hispaniola. Fewer people know that he set sail from Palos de la Frontera, and back in 1492, so far as I can tell, that town was within the Archdiocese of
Seville. (Today it is within the Diocese of Huelva, carved out of Seville in 1952.) Thus, under Borders’ “port of origin” theory, Seville acquired jurisdiction over those territories between 1492 and 1493. Thus, so long as the Church recognizes then-Archbishop, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza—the ordinary of Palos de la Frontera in 1492—as the first bishop of San Salvador, Cuba, and Hispaniola, Borders is in good shape. If she doesn’t, he may need to call the leg store for something to stand on.

The idea seems preposterous to us, but in due course, I expect that there will be a Bishop of the Moon; perhaps even several. And of Syria Planum, and so on. Colonization of the solar system is a stock image of science fiction, and where man goes, the Church will go also, shepherded by her bishops.

More details emerge about Father Corapi’s situation
June 21st, 2011

Today we learned some new things about the Corapi situation (see MP: Three thoughts on Father Corapi (June 18, 2011), ante, p. 18), and the most important ones—those that do the most to back up Corapi’s claims—came not from Fr. Corapi, but from SOLT, the religious order from which he was suspended (at the instigation, he claims, of Bishop Michael Mulvey, whose Corpus Christi, TX diocese includes SOLT’s American HQ).
The first thing that we learned came from Father Gerard Sheehan, Corapi’s religious superior, *via the National Catholic Register*. To understand the money quote, we must first note that the former employee who instigated this process had signed a non-disclosure agreement with Corapi’s company, Santa Cruz Media, and that Corapi has filed a civil defamation lawsuit against her. Against this backdrop, Fr. Sheehan claims that “[i]n canon law, there can’t be any pressure on witnesses; they have to be completely free to speak. The investigation was compromised because of the pressure on the witnesses. There were other witnesses that also had signed non-disclosure agreements … [and so w]e tried to continue the investigation without speaking to the principal witnesses.”

The second thing that we learned came from Sheehan, again, *via SOLT’s blog*. Incredibly, Sheehan admits that Corapi was placed on leave before any determination of credibility had been made about the accusations. That is made crystal clear: After three months, “SOLT had not arrived at any conclusion as to the credibility of the allegations under investigation,” and “[i]f the allegations had been found to be credible, the proper canonical due process would have been offered to Fr. Corapi, including his right to defense, to know his accuser and the complaint lodged, and a fair canonical trial with the right of recourse to the Holy See.” Worst of all, Sheehan claims that this “suspend immediately, investigate later” model is “normal procedure.” (More on this point in a footnote that we’ll get to later.)
If these self-accusations are true, Corapi has every reason to feel hard done by. Separately, each datum is troubling. But when they are put together, the picture becomes truly unacceptable.

Let us first take them separately. As to the first, imagine trying to import such a rule into a civil law context. In essence, the rule would be this: If you file a lawsuit, the defendant may exclude any witness’ testimony simply by filing a counterclaim that implicates them. That’s insane as a matter of legal policy, and I’m not sure that it would even be constitutional. As to the latter, imagine if your employer suspended you from your job—and required you to remain silent and take no other work—every time they received an anonymous complaint about you. Or imagine that the government abolished the probable cause requirement and went about arresting people for the duration of an investigation based on any complaint received, even anonymous ones, deciding on whatever timetable best suited them whether the complaint was credible enough to be tried.¹ I think we would be appalled. We would call it, with some justification, Orwellian. Yet this is precisely what was done to Corapi—not based on his say-so, mind you, but based on SOLT’s admission against interest.

So, taken separately, both items point to something being rotten in the state of Denmark. But consider their cumulative effect. Corapi was suspended pending a determination of the complaint’s credibility, and a bizarre procedural rule was then invoked that eliminated any realistic possibility of
making that determination, leaving the case in limbo. Feed that into what we already know: A complaint was made by someone under cover of anonymity, who stands to lose nothing from a false accusation. On their unilateral say-so, Corapi was suspended, before any kind of assessment of the complaint’s credibility was made. And because of an insane (alleged) canonical requirement, the investigation could consult none of the principal witnesses!

We can now better-understand Corapi’s original statement that there was no way to resolve the situation without giving up his rights. SOLT placed Corapi on administrative leave while investigating the credibility of the complaints against him. It seems to be the case that the charges could (or at least would) be neither dismissed nor tried without such a determination. And by an obscure alleged canonical device, they appear to have excluded the only witnesses through whose cooperation such a determination could be made, because they were the subject of a civil suit by Corapi for defamation (among other things). No wonder Corapi felt that the suspension was functionally indefinite: On these stipulations, the case was left in limbo. We may therefore parse Corapi’s statement that he couldn’t get a fair trial and the matter couldn’t be resolved without dropping his rights: SOLT seems to have essentially said, you’re suspended until we can assess the credibility of the complaint, and if you don’t drop your civil lawsuit, we can’t assess the credibility of the complaint. That is not an attractive hill to defend.
Many people in the Catholic blogosphere have disappointed me in the last few days with the almost total failure of empathy for Corapi’s situation. And, quite frankly, some of his most ardent admirers have done him no favors either, insisting that it’s *inconceivable* that Corapi did anything wrong, either with this woman (unlikely, I think) or in his response to the complaint (arguable: Why couldn’t he just drop his civil suit and be patient? For Pete’s sake, Father—literally!—It’s only been three months; is it really so important to litigate this stuff? Is it worth sacrificing your public ministry as a priest?). I don’t want to be misunderstood: I remain an admirer of Fr. Corapi, and that’s no less true because I refuse to close my eyes to the possibility that even the best of us can fall. We are *all* sinners, and I think Corapi’s public statements since Friday humbly acknowledge that point (“Perhaps I deserve that,” he said on Friday, *and again today*: “I accept what has happened, kind of as a punishment for my past sins; I wasn’t perfect, you know, and I’m still not perfect”; is this what we would expect from the kind of man Corapi’s critics have attempted to paint him as?). Nevertheless, I will believe his version of events until given some reason not to, and given what we have learned today, I am convinced that he has been dealt a procedural wrong. Perhaps—as SOLT’s chilling statement that this is “normal procedure” implies—it is nothing personal, but wrongs multiplied are not wrongs diminished. As things stand today, Fr. Corapi appears, by some way, more sinned against than sinning.
Post facto:


Notes:

1. Last week, I suggested that Corapi had probably acted rashly by bailing out after only three months, a timeline, I suggested, that barely transgressed the Speedy Trial Act. See MP: Three thoughts on Father Corapi (June 18, 2011), ante, p. 18. Given what we now know, we can call that an error, because it misunderstood the case’s posture. The Speedy Trial Act requires trial within seventy days of the indictment, but it also requires the indictment to follow within thirty days of the arrest. The posture of the Corapi case at its conclusion is more analogous to the former than the latter, which means that the Speedy Trial Act—which, I underscore, I am not applying to this case, to which it obviously does not apply, but am merely using as a benchmark for a reasonably expeditious process—would have been violated in mid-April.

2. Which, by the way, is a disgraceful failure of due process in itself, given that there was no possibility of ongoing harm by leaving him in situ. I support immediate suspension pending a speedy determination—and I do mean speedy—of credibility in abuse cases, cf. MP: The Kansas City fumble (June 7, 2011), ante, p. 15, but that is a narrow exception to the rule. The balance of equities tips toward immediate suspension in abuse cases because such cases typically involve a priest in active ministry who is, if the complaint is true, in a position to do ongoing harm. But such extraordinary relief can only be granted when (1) there is a clear and present danger of ongoing harm that (2) will be ameliorated by suspension. In this case, there is not the slightest suggestion that either criterion is met.

Episcopal throughput

July 2nd, 2011

Father Zuhlsdorf has a reader’s letter relating a priest’s experience of making changes in his parish. The priest, new to the parish, “wanted to
make some changes that would put us more in line with the new liturgical movement,” Fr. Z’s correspondent writes, including “offering all Masses ad orientem ... and changing our Mass schedule and format to include one EF Low Mass and one EF High Mass each week.”1 While many parishioners were thrilled by these changes, inevitably “a small but loud minority ... called our Bishop and complained.”

I want to pick up on what happened next:

Within a matter of days, our Bishop called a meeting with our new priest and told him (as the Bishop claimed to have received “a number” of complaints) that he was to not make any changes in the Mass schedule or format, and that he was not to offer Mass ad orientem. He also told our priest that he would be watching his every move and that he didn’t want to hear any more complaints about him – not so much as a blip.

On the one hand, we should be careful to remember and respect the ordinary prerogatives of the bishop over his diocese. And I certainly don’t want to suggest that the faithful shouldn’t, in appropriate circumstances, take their concerns to their bishop, or that the bishop shouldn’t act in appropriate circumstances. Liturgical abuses happen, for example, and although one should always try to resolve it with the pastor first, episcopal intervention may become necessary. See Redemptionis sacramentum, nos. 169 et seq., 96 A.A.S. 549, 596 ff. (CDW Inst., 2004)
On the other hand, however, there’s a problem with this kind of episcopal micromanagement (by which I mean swift intervention in parish-level events where no kind of abuse of discretion is alleged; obviously liturgical abuse is abuse of discretion). If people get to thinking that bishops will precipitously react to any criticism they receive by supposing it to reflect parish sentiment, the only rational response for those who are delighted by the change is to provide a counterweight, writing _supportive_ letters to the bishop. So what happens? The result is an increase in the amount of correspondence received, reducing the bishop’s ability to evaluate each letter himself—even if he happens to be a good bishop who, remembering Balthazar’s warning,\(^2\) wants to do so. (Of course, the bishop may simply have used the complaints as cover for imposing his own preferences, but the same analysis applies if so.) Overwhelmed, the bishop is more likely to delegate correspondence to staff, removing them from the direct loop.\(^3\) The result of micromanagement is that bishops become even less able to govern their dioceses, because their available time gets sucked into this kind of exercise. (_But cf. MP: The Kansas City fumble_ (June 7, 2011), _ante_, p. 15.)

I recognize that it’s a delicate balancing act, but in this case, circumspection on the parts of both the priest and the bishop would have been advisable.

**Notes:**

1. All good changes, in my view, although the wisdom of the timing is an open question. Fr. Richard Kaley, OFM (Conv.), our pastor for several years, once remarked that when you move to a new
parish, it’s usually a good idea to change very little for a year, to give the parish a chance to get to know you and vice versa. I think that’s good advice (and not just in ecclesial contexts), unless there are grave abuses happening that require immediate correction.

2. Hans Urs von Balthazar warned that “Jesus always designated persons for service, not institutions. The persons of bishops belong to the fundamental structure of the church, not bureaucratic offices. There’s nothing more grotesque than to think of a Christ who would want to establish committees!” Quoted in Richard Gaillardetz, Teaching with Authority 171 (1997); cf. MP: The place of the Curia (May 25, 2012), ante, p. 160; MP: Teaching and governing (Dec. 20, 2011), ante, p. 95.

3. Which is precisely what Balthazar was warning about, and correctly so in my view.

The scope of Summorum Pontificum
July 12th, 2011

The question is raised: Is Summorum Pontificum’s liberalization of the usus antiquior aimed solely at those whose attachment to it predates Vatican II and the reforms set in train by the council? And if so, may younger Catholics attend? In my view, it is not, and they may.

It is true that Summorum Pontificum, 99 AAS 777 (Ben. XVI, 2007), is a link in a chain of indults and allowances that—as the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei puts it in the most recent link in that chain, Universæ Ecclesiae, 103 AAS 413 (PCED Inst., 2011)—were primarily aimed at those who, “formed in the spirit of the liturgical forms prior to the Second Vatican Council, expressed a lively desire to maintain the ancient tradition.” Nevertheless, those documents always had broader reach than was at
first apparent. *Ecclesia Dei*, 80 AAS 1495 (John Paul II, 1988), for example, expressly concerned itself with “all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical and disciplinary forms of the Latin tradition.” Id., at 1497-98, no. 5(c) (emphasis added); accord id., no. 6(c).

This trend continues and strengthens in the Benedictine documents. *Summorum Pontificum* itself says that “in some regions, no small numbers of faithful adhered and continue to adhere with great love and affection to the earlier liturgical forms”; it’s not hard to see why, at first blush, this could be read as implying preconciliar attachment, but the text has no such limitation. Nor is such a limit to be found in the motu proprio’s active provisions, which are broad. Likewise, consider the Holy Father’s accompanying letter to the bishops. True, it sounds notes similar to *Ecclesia Dei*: “Many people who clearly accepted the binding character of the Second Vatican Council, and were faithful to the Pope and the Bishops, ... desired to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was dear to them.” And it’s true that the letter cites “reconciliation” as a motivation for liberalizing use of the older form. But the Holy Father continues:

Immediately after the Second Vatican Council it was presumed that requests for the use of the 1962 Missal would be limited to the older generation which had grown up with it, but in the meantime it has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the
Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them. Thus the need has arisen for a clearer juridical regulation which had not been foreseen at the time of the 1988 Motu Proprio.

(Emphasis added.) Thus the need for an expansion of the *usus antiquior* has arisen! Not just for the older generation who grew up with it, not just for reconciliation, but *because the usus antiquior has had a broader appeal*. And bringing us right up to date, PCED’s directive on implementing the motu proprio, *Universae Ecclesiæ* tells us that *Summorum Pontificum* “aims to ... offer to all the faithful the Roman Liturgy in the *Usus Antiquior*, considered as a precious treasure to be preserved” and of “effectively guaranteeing and ensuring the use of the *forma extraordinaria* for all who ask for it....” 103 AAS, at 415, no. 8. We are told that “the use of the 1962 Roman Liturgy is a faculty generously granted for the good of the faithful,” ibid.—the faithful, without qualification, not merely those who grew up with it.

What’s more, several provisions of the Benedictine documents make little or no sense if it’s true that celebration in the older form is no more than a temporary sop to those who can’t shake an attachment formed in a distant youth. For instance:

- *Summorum Pontificum* and its accompanying letter insist that the older form of the rite was never abrogated and in principle could always have been celebrated. It seems hard to reconcile such language with the notion that celebration
in the extraordinary form is a temporary indulgence.

- *Universae Ecclesiae* insists that the “stable group of the faithful who adhere to the earlier liturgical tradition” required for celebration need not predate *Summorum Pontificum*. (UE15.) If that’s so, it implies that a new group could form after *Summorum Pontificum* was issued, a group that would perforce antedate Vatican II.

- If the allowance is simply to meet the needs of those attached to the older Mass, why would we need to train new priests in it, as UE21 directs? Let’s be candid about this. Although Paul VI would not issue *Missale Romanum* until 1969, the widespread celebration of the *usus antiquior* effectively came to an end four years before that with *Inter œcumenici*, 56 AAS 877 (SCR Inst., 1964). And for someone to have become so thoroughly attached to the older rite as to be unable to let go, they must have been immersed in it for a reasonable number of years before 1964. To be quite frank about it, then, the theory that *Summorum Pontificum* is aimed solely at those who were attached to the Tridentine Mass at the time of Vatican II is a theory that SP is aimed solely at those who were middle-aged or older more than four decades ago—a generation now entering its twilight. The Church might certainly seek to accommodate such people as a pastoral measure, but training a new generation of priests? Starting in 2011? For a measure aimed solely at people no younger than their seventies? That doesn’t add up.
• And along similarly morbid lines, one might also speculate that the very existence and attention given to the *usus antiquior* is telling. If the liberalization of access was no more than a ministry to Pre-Vatican II hold-outs, one would expect it to become a less pressing issue with each passing decade. To the contrary, however, year-by-year the Holy See has grown *more* insistent on access.

The consensus *seems to be* that “Benedict XVI’s intention … is not, in fact, that of making the two forms of the rite, modern and ancient, coexist indefinitely. In the future, the Church will again have a single Roman rite. But the journey that the pope sees ahead in order to integrate the two current forms of the rite is long and difficult.” And therein lies the rub: The goal is not to allow the *usus antiquior* to wither with the pre-Vatican II generation. It is to integrate the two expressions of the Roman rite as one “reform of the reform.” And in the meantime, both forms appear fully permissible for any Catholic to attend.

**Post facto:**

“Pastoral care is directed towards salvation, not comfort.”
July 29th, 2011

If you take nothing else away from this, a column that is well-worth reading for several reasons, let it be the reclaiming of one of the most abused words in the Catholic lexicon, so often used to demand or justify lassitudinous “don’t judge” “anything goes” attitudes. “Pastoral care is directed towards salvation, not comfort.” Pastor derives from shepherd, and it is a poor shepherd indeed who lets his flock walk off a cliff for fear of offending the sheep.

Post facto:


The Scottish Posture
August 5th, 2011

The Bishops of Scotland are considering having their congregations stand for moments for which they once knelt. I have no comment on the propriety of the change, but I do have one observation about its timing:

“If the Scottish bishops go ahead with this proposal, it would make sense for any changes to congregations’ participation in the Mass to be introduced in Scotland simultaneously with the new English translation of the Roman Missal,”
said Liz Leydon, editor of the Scottish Catholic Observer, to EWTN News.

To the contrary, I think that’s a very bad idea. If postconciliar history teaches us anything, it is that when a lot of changes happen at the same time, even if they are discrete and come from distinct sources, they tend to get bundled together. This helped the hijackers of Vatican II in creating the myth that a number of changes rammed through in the 1960s are untouchable because they are part of “Vatican II” (I’ve previously referred to this process as the substitution of an ersatz council for the historical Vatican II; see, e.g., SF: Who’s Defending What? (Feb. 28, 2011); MP: Two quick links (June 6, 2011), ante, p. 14). Think about it this way: Why is it that one cannot criticize the wanton destruction of altars and altar rails, or the comprehensive vernacularization of the liturgy, or communion in the hand, or any number of changes wrought in the 1960s, about which the council said nothing, without being accused of trying to roll back Vatican II? Because it’s easy to see (or cause to be seen) simultaneous changes as being related.

With this in mind, my fear is that simultaneous liturgical changes that have nothing to do with the new translation will become associated with the latter, and we will have another “change moment” whence a number of unrelated changes become bundled together in people’s minds. Parishioners who really dislike the posture changes—or one can suppose any number of other changes that could be carried out: Introduction or withdrawal of altar girls; musical changes; etc.—will naturally be disposed to
associate the change with the new translation. Moreover, this kind of bundling amplifies the change’s bow shock, increasing (for no good reason) the disorientation and amount of things to relearn.

Bundling has a certain intuitive appeal, but I don’t think it holds up to scrutiny.

**Post facto**


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**Leading by example**

*August 9th, 2011*

A commenter at Fr. Zuhlsdorf’s blog says:

[H]aving viewed every papal Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict in St. Peter’s Basilica in recent years, he always says Mass there completely in Latin — the collect, super oblata, postcommunion, all the dialogues (Dominus vobiscum, etc), the Preface, the Eucharistic prayer, the final blessing — every word of every prayer of the Mass that the Pope himself says is in Latin. And the Introit and Ordinary of the Mass are sung by the choir in Latin, the Pater Noster always in Latin, etc

Benedict seems to prefer to lead by example, and the result can be some beautiful examples; but his influence on the liturgy will be limited, I fear, if he is not willing to go beyond leading and engage in governing. If “problem parishes” are willing to ignore
the GIRM, why would we expect them to be fixed by a salutary example?

**Ezekiel and Paul**  
*September 5th, 2011*

I suggest a link between today’s first two readings (Ezekial 33:7-9 and Romans 13:8-10). St. Paul exhorts us to love our neighbor. But to love is not always to indulge; sometimes we must correct our neighbor—call them to account, remind them of God’s command. And there Ezekiel picks up the story:

> If I tell the wicked, ‘O wicked one, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death. But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.

For those of us who aren’t well-fitted for evangelization, this is a difficult call.

**The First Commandment, iconoclasm, and Mary**  
*September 5th, 2011*

Catholics are sometimes attacked for the use of religious images and for devotions to the saints generally and Mary specifically. Some of the
criticisms are sophisticated and well-taken; others are not. The argument that the First Commandment makes such actions idolatrous per se falls into the latter category.

In principle, we could divvy up Exodus 20:2 et seq. and Deuteronomy 5:5 et seq. into ten or more discrete commandments in more than one way, but church tradition seems clear on how we number them. With that numbering in mind, let’s skip over the first for a moment. So far as I know, there is consensus that the third commandment is the directive to keep the sabbath holy, Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15, and the fourth the directive to honor one’s parents, Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16. Accepting this division requires that one accept that the intervening verses, Exodus 20:9-11 and Deuteronomy 13-15, merely explain the commandment to keep the sabbath holy, and in view of their content, which is clearly expository of the preceding commandment, it’s no surprise that people accept that.

Why, then, would we resist treating the verses following the first commandment—viz. to have no gods before God—in the same way, as exposition of the commandment rather than as independent “commandmentlets”?

The prohibition on taking the Lord’s name in vain is broadly accepted as the second commandment, so let’s look at the text available to constitute the first commandment. Exodus 20:2 et seq. reads as follows:
I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them: I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: And shewing mercy unto thousands to them that love me, and keep my commandments.

I suggest that verses 4-6 are exposition of the first commandment, just as verses 9-11 are exposition of the third commandment. This is not to say that the directives to not make graven images or adore those images aren’t to be taken seriously, but rather, that they must be taken in the context of the commandment that they expound. An image of Christ used to focus the mind—most of us are visual creatures, sensual creatures for better or worse—is unobjectionable because it does not place a strange God before God: To the contrary, it is a vehicle for the adoration of God.

So too it is with Mary, who always points toward her son and our Lord. Marian devotions have the potential to become problematic (thus the per se qualification above), but so long as they remain fundamentally centered on Christ—so long as ad iesum per mariam remains the high water mark—don’t think they violate the first commandment. The
touchstone is always whether focus remains properly on the creator or whether it is being drawn toward exulting created things.

_Sancta Maria, mater lucis, ora pro nobis!

Two comments on Bishop Zurek, Father Pavone, and Priests for Life

_Sevenber 15th, 2011_

Father Frank Pavone, the public face of Priests for Life, has had his ministry put on ice; he has been ordered back to the Diocese of Amarillo where he’s incardinated due to concerns of his excellency Bishop Patrick Zurek over PFL’s finances. Elizabeth Scalia has a link-rich summary of the story [here](#), Prof. Ed Peters looks at its canonical aspects [here](#), and Max Lindemann has some useful thoughts [here](#), so I won’t spend too much time reciting the facts. I want to add two comments.

**The first** is how lamentable the situation is and concomitantly how important it is that it be kept on the front burner. Bp. Zurek has made some quite serious allegations—and taken a quite serious practical move against—a well-known priest and the highly visible public ministry with which he is associated. The situation is especially wretched because there would seem to be only three plausible outcomes: Either the charges are _true_, in which case a very public ministry doing important work has been corrupted, and we are now watching the first
act in a horrendous public fallout; or the charges are false, in which case Zurek has either acted rapaciously and jealously if he knew it, or, if he did not, in good faith but precipitously and in a manner that will tarnish PFL’s reputation for a long time to come. The latter requires more explanation: The guilty are often publicly exposed, but the innocent rarely enjoy complete and public vindication. The allegation runs on page one, the correction runs a month later in small print on page twenty; people mutter “no smoke without fire”; the bishop sends a very public letter asking his brothers to instruct their flocks to stop giving to PFL, but is likely to be less diligent in asking them to sound the all-clear.

None of the likely outcomes of this business, then, are boons for the Church. No matter what happens, no matter who is declared the ultimate “winner,” the losers are quite clear: Those whom PFL hoped to help and the morale of scandal-weary Catholics vis-à-vis our clergy.

One more point on this: While I realize that available facts are sketchy at this point, public attention is warranted to keep this on the front burner. PFL does important work, and Zurek has acted to effectively suspend their income. The longer that this drags out, the greater a threat to PFL’s survival it is: A man can tolerate suspension without pay for a week, but make it a year and it becomes an existential threat; make it indefinite and it becomes torture. Thus it is very much in the interest of those who are concerned with the objects of PFL—which one hopes comprises all faithful Catholics—to keep this issue on the front burner, to keep it under close
scrutiny in search of a speedy resolution, instead of allowing it to disappear into a bureaucratic dungeon to rot under indeterminate sentence.

The second is how much I appreciate Pavone’s response. To my mind, the decision seems sketchy and motivated by quite amorphous concerns—and that’s taking Zurek’s stated reasons at face value despite a few reasons we have to look deeper. (Among other things, Pavone’s canonist claims that Zurek “has threatened in writing to withdraw Father Pavone permanently from pro-life ministry if he were to exercise his canonical rights to hierarchical recourse”; if that is true, it looks very bad for his excellency.) That’s just my gut response. And Pavone’s reply letter seems a touch hot under the roman collar too, as Peters notes. Nevertheless, the sum and substance of Pavone’s reply is exactly what it should be, and, mutatis mutandis, is what Father John Corapi should have done (even if one believes, as I do, see MP: More details emerge (June 21, 2011), ante, p. 22, that he was done an injustice): He shows meek obedience to his legitimate ecclesiastical superior. We are called to bear wrongs patiently and to respect the hierarchy that is charged with our care. Pavone appears to be doing so, and I hope that that continues.

Is it time for a Catholic political party
September 22nd, 2011

...in England? The question is posed.
The idealistic answer is yes—And yes without any doubt in England, where secularism is much further advanced than it is here, although one might ask whether, for just that reason, it might not be worth trying to broaden the party into a broader Christian Alliance Party. The answer is yes in the United States, too: It would be splendid to have a party that sought to bring public policy into harmony with all the Church’s teachings to the extent Constitutionally-permissible. A party that advanced what Joseph Cardinal Bernardin called the seamless garment or “consistent ethic of life”—all the Church’s teaching, not just policies that comport with some of it and others that clash. (I am aware, of course, that the seamless garment was hijacked as a vehicle for minimizing issues disfavored by liberals, but Card. Bernardin was not wrong in what he said, even if Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was right that some issue are more pressing than others.)

But that’s idealism. The biggest challenge for a Catholic political party, I should think, would be that even if there was universal agreement on doctrinal principles—in other words, if we could wave our hand and the scales would fall from the eyes of those who dissent on various issues, whether right or left—the line from doctrinal principle to public policy does not run straight and clear, and there would still be legitimate disagreement on how to operationalize our principles. Cf. Gaudium et spes, no. 76 (2d Vat. Council, 1965), but see also Ap. Ep. Octogesima adveniens, no. 42, 63 AAS 401, 431 (Paul VI, 1971); Pacem in terris, no. 160 ¶ 2, 55 AAS 257, 300-01 (John XXII, 1963).
It does not follow, for example, that because the Church teaches that one may not use birth control, CCC ¶¶ 2370 et seq.; see generally Humanæ vitæ, 60 AAS 481 (Paul VI, 1968), that a Catholic Party must insist on making contraceptives illegal. I would think that in a properly liberal and tolerant society, a Catholic party could take the position that government should neither promote nor ban contraceptives. It is a legitimate position to say that while Government may not actively promote or favor immoral or sinful behavior, it may be neutral toward it, to the extent that that is possible and when it doesn’t harm third parties. In other words, the state doesn’t regulate your relationship with salvation, but it doesn’t require other people to pay for your choices. But I don’t know that everyone shares my view on that, and it’s a debate that would play out across a broad range of issues were one to form a Catholic party and frame a platform for it.

Similarly, while a Catholic party in the United States today would have to oppose the death penalty, CCC ¶ 2267; Evangelium vitæ, no. 56, 87 AAS 401, 463 ff. (John Paul II, 1995), it does not follow that the party must take a “by any means necessary” approach, sinking resources into Constitutional amendments or using policy to indirectly strangle the death penalty into practical desuetude. And while I would suppose that a Catholic governor or President would be obliged as a matter of individual conscience to commute any death sentences over which he had clemency authority, it does not follow that this must be a corporate commitment or platform plank of the party.
So there are some pretty serious challenges that would make it difficult to have such a thing, but it’s a nice dream.

Post facto:


The hermeneutic for Vatican documents and Church law

October 8th, 2011

Reading John Allen’s book All the Pope’s Men, which tries to explain Vatican culture to outsiders, I ran across an interesting nugget. Allen writes that in Italian culture,

law is regarded as the expression of a human ideal, a descriptor of a perfect state of affairs, and everyone realizes most people will fall short. This is very different from a typical Anglo-Saxon approach, which expects the law to reflect what people actually do. Thomists believe the purpose of law is to promote virtue; in the social contract theory underlying Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, the law represents the minimum infringements on personal liberty necessary to regulate social life. In this sense, Italians … think the law should indeed promote higher standards of morality, but they don’t really expect it to work. While they grumble about lawlessness, fundamentally they are believers in subjectivity. No law, they believe,
can ever capture the infinite complexity of human situations, and it’s more important for the law to describe a vision of the ideal community than for it to be a lowest common denominator of civic morality.

All The Pope’s Men 105 (2004). Allen continues with an example: A man asks the CDF’s then-Archbishop Angelo Amato whether he must confess a sin he has on his conscience before taking communion. He “didn’t feel he was ready to confess, but at the same time he wanted to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.” Amato replied:

[Y]ou should go to confession. But now let me talk to you person-to-person. As a priest, I can’t substitute my conscience for yours. I can’t tell you to go [to confession] or not to go. You have to make that choice in conscience, always bearing in mind that it must be a well-formed conscience.

Id., at 106. Allen summarizes Amato’s italianate gist: “the law’s ideal must be upheld, but individuals have to make the choices that correspond to their own unique situation.” Id.

Allen appears to be saying that compared to the more aspirational Italian assumptions about law, the Anglo-American conceptualization of law is of a system of rules—the rule of law is a law of rules, as Justice Scalia’s famous article of that name maintains—that are thought to be reasonable and to which it is therefore reasonable to hold a person’s conduct. The latter implies much stricter
assumptions of how law should be applied, not at the conscious level of whether law should be applied liberally or with a hard line, but rather in its bedrock assumptions about what law is and therefore what it means for law to be applied at all.

If this assessment of Italian culture in regard to law is correct, it is troubling because the Vatican naturally marinates in Italian culture. I therefore wonder whether this suggests a hermeneutic for reading Vatican decrees—one that displeases people like me. Everyone understands that a legal test that is a standard should be applied as a standard, i.e. not rigidly, whereas a bright-line rule should be applied as a rule, i.e. more-or-less strictly. We naturally read a directive as a directive not as a suggestion. If we understand that a document expresses an ideal to which people should aspire rather than a legal rule, a practical standard that governs behavior, we will naturally interpret it in a different manner.

Yet much of the Church’s regulatory structure presents itself as law, including but not limited to canon law. Anglo-American readers will naturally understand ecclesiastical law as law, and will thus, even more naturally, conceptualize its directives as just that: Practical rules to govern behavior within a legal paradigm. If Church laws are born of Italian legal philosophy, however, and thus presuppose an entirely different hermeneutic, do we still interpret and apply them faithfully when we do so through an Anglo-American legal paradigm—at least when they do not by their structure require such treatment?
Mariology and today’s gospel reading

October 8th, 2011

Like Mark 3:31-35, today’s gospel is one of the more difficult for the more extreme claims of Mariology:

While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

Lk 11:27-28. In neither case, of course, is the point to diminish Mary, and the passage just quoted must of course be read in light of the Magnificat: “For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” (Lk 1:46 et seq.) We should look for a balanced mariology; the joint Catholic-Evangelical statement *Do Whatever He Tells You* is a good start. *Lumen gentium*’s mariology strikes me as reflecting the right balance:

because [Mary] belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is “the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.” Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection
and piety as a most beloved mother. [*Cf. Jn 19:26-27.*]

... ...

The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of His Son, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life. ... Adorned from the first instant of her conception [because of her unique role as a living tabernacle] with the radiance of an entirely unique holiness, the Virgin of Nazareth is greeted, on God’s command, by an angel messenger as “full of grace”, and to the heavenly messenger she replies: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word”. Thus Mary, a daughter of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. ... Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. ... “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.” ...

There is but one Mediator ... [and t]he maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men
originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ.

**The Finn indictment**

*October 17th, 2011*

At the beginning of June, I noted an emerging situation in Kansas City involving his excellency Bishop Robert Finn: The diocese had failed to respond with due urgency to a situation involving allegations about presbyterial misconduct. *See MP: The Kansas City fumble (June 7, 2011) ante, p. 15.* In her comments, Elizabeth Scalia observed that “[t]he fallout from all of this will land on Finn, as it should,” and those chickens have now come home to roost: Finn has become the first prelate to face criminal charges for actions relating to the abuse scandal.

I must admit to struggling with this story. On the one hand, it’s obvious that Finn is being made into the scapegoat: “We couldn’t get Cardinal Law, but we can get this guy, even if what he did isn’t quite as bad.” And as several people have observed, there’s an odor of prosecutrixial career advancement hanging over the affair. On the other hand, however, Finn did mishandle the situation (I myself said so in
my June post); is the failure of law enforcement in previous cases really a warrant for doing nothing now? Moreover, this isn’t a religious persecution story; this isn’t like the state imprisoning a bishop for refusing to violate the seal of confession, the law proposed in Ireland recently. And this isn’t a SNAP lawsuit seeking to extract money from the Church. This is different. Candidly, I feel, and I think many people feel, that the bishops failed to adequately deal with the situation in the past, and that the Vatican failed to adequately deal with the bishops, and consequently, while recognizing that this is a pandora’s box and that this is far from a firm conclusion, it’s hard to feel that justice isn’t being served in this instance when the state steps in.

To be sure, it sucks for Finn; his seems the smaller sin, but the Church has to draw a line under the abuse crisis. At some point we must say that a bishop who failed to take reports of abuse seriously had enough information from the surrounding context that they are liable for their mistakes. And we are far beyond that point. As I said in my June post:

I find it hard to believe that as many as one bishop in the United States could still be asleep at the switch on anything even close to abuse by 2010 ... so one might think that even an allegation of impropriety would rocket to the top of a bishop’s docket and stay there long enough to get a sense of what is actually happening. ... We know that the diocese was notified in May 2010, and we know that it had taken no action by December 2010. Whatever happened
between those dates was, clearly, insufficient. If the chancery had done nothing by December, the situation was not being actively handled with the level of concern, attention, and dispatch that one would have expected ten years of this scandal to have beaten into the bishops.

Quite frankly, if they aren’t afraid enough of God or the Vatican to take abuse seriously and act accordingly, perhaps personal criminal liability will do it.

**Communion under both kinds**

*October 18th, 2011*

The time has arrived to say something about the imbroglio that began after news broke that his excellency Bishop Robert Morlino (D. Madison-Wisconsin) would follow the lead of his excellency Bishop Thomas Olmsted (D. Phoenix) and begin restricting the distribution of the chalice at Mass. Before we get to my comments on the issue, let me say on a personal note that Bps. Olmsted and Morlino have been on my radar for a while; I started praying daily for Olmsted [last December](#), and Morlino shortly afterward after he received flack for standing by his orthodox priests against his dissenting flock. I say this to underscore that I have no axe to grind against either prelate; quite the contrary. I am grateful for their leadership. I believe, however, that they have called this one wrong.
I.

Where shall we begin? Although Olmsted went first (see this), it seemed to escape widespread notice until last week, when we heard from Monsignor Kevin Holmes, rector of Morlino’s cathedral parish. Msgr. Holmes claimed that “the widespread American practice of offering both species at most Sunday Masses began here under an indult … given by the Vatican in 1975, which expired in 2005.” While the American bishops “did apply for an extension of the 1975 indult,” Holmes wrote, it was denied, with the upshot that the diocese would begin to restrict the availability of the chalice beginning at the start of advent. (A questionable idea, I think, cf. MP: The Scottish posture (Aug. 5, 2011), ante, p. 35.)

This turned out to be exceedingly dubious; no one could find the supposed indult, nor identify the need for it; nor were the request for or denial of its renewal anywhere to be found. Worse yet, everyone was painfully aware of a different indult that expired when the missing indult supposedly expired, and of the letter from CDW denying its renewal at the time when the missing indult was supposedly denied. (It had to do with EMHCs “doing dishes,” and you can read it here or here.) Suspicions naturally ensued.

Accordingly, we next heard from Morlino, in a letter to his priests. Watching matters unfold in real time, it seemed to me that the whole indult business was quickly discovered to have been a mistake, and so Morlino was moving to reground the change onto sounder authority: His own. Like Olmsted, Morlino
noted that the GIRM envisages bishops governing reception under both kinds *vel non*, and he articulated the concerns that led him to restrict it:

I have been told of, and have personally experienced, the reality that the provision both that the faithful be well instructed and that there be no danger of profanation of the Sacrament, is not being met. As such, while recognizing the need for patient, prudent and practical steps according to your individual parishes, I’ve asked you [viz. the priests of his diocese] to move in this direction.

As I’ve said, over and over again, and as you know well, this requires catechesis. So many do not understand the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ’s Sacrifice, his death and resurrection; nor the real presence of Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under both species of bread and wine; nor the role of the ordinary and, if necessary, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. ...

... 

Thus, I cannot in good conscience, allow us to go forward without addressing these matters. That’s specifically what I’ve asked you to do. Please help your people to know and understand the beautiful gift we have in the Eucharist, to know our obligations of preparing for reception of the Sacrament, both in terms of our preparation through the Sacrament of Confession, our observance of the pre-
communion fast, our attending to our attire as best we can, and the like.

Taking Holmes’ and Morlino’s comments in sum, communion under both kinds will not cease in the diocese, but it will be limited—the chalice will not be available to the laity at every Mass.

II.

All this must be seen against the appropriate backdrop: For centuries, the Church did not allow the laity to receive the chalice at Mass. That changed after Vatican II, and I must say that I regard it as a wholly positive development.¹ Christ said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn 6:53), and the Church accordingly teaches that receiving both His flesh and His blood is, while not strictly necessary (e.g. Council of Trent, 13th sess., can. 3), better (e.g. CCC ¶ 1390). “Better” is, of course, not prejudicial to countervailing interests, and I suppose that the Church stopped distributing the chalice for fear that it might be spilled. But to invert Father John Zuhlsdorf’s comment here, while Communion under both kinds may not be strictly necessary in the ordinary course of events, there are other factors to consider as well, other goods to be upheld.

III.

Father Zuhlsdorf is not alone in seeing the issue of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion lurking in the background, but his post can be asked to speak for them:
I wonder if the high dudgeon about Bp. Olmsted and Bp. Morlino is less about Communion under both kinds and more about having as many lay people involved as EMHCs as possible.

I am guessing those who object to the decisions of the aforementioned bishops have figured out that by curtailing Communion under both kinds, the occasions and numbers of Extraordinary Ministers will also be reduced. Some people have the false notion that “active participation” means “doing stuff”. They want lots of lay people in the sanctuary doing things, stepping into the role the priest is supposed to fulfill.

There’s some truth to that—if it’s just about catechesis and belief in the real presence, why is communion available under either species?—but with some caveats.

First is the asymmetry issue. It follows that if you are a trendy liberal liturgist who thinks that the congregation isn’t participating if a number of them aren’t serving as EMHCs, then you’ll resist moves that threaten to reduce the need for EMHCs, including elimination of regular communion under both kinds. It does not follow, however, that if you are against eliminating regular communion under both kinds, then you are a trendy liberal liturgist who wants lots of EMHCs. I caution against the assumption that those who oppose this change are advancing an agenda; certainly I am not.
Second is the *symmetry* issue. The door swings both ways; *pace* Fr. Zuhlsdorf, I wonder if the high *praise* for Olmsted and Morlino in certain quarters is less about communion under both kinds and more about doing away with EMHCs. And *I* am guessing those who support the decisions of the aforementioned bishops have figured out that by curtailing Communion under both kinds, the occasions and numbers of Extraordinary Ministers will also be reduced. Fair to say? Would those who support this change be supporting it if every parish had three priests, a deacon, and no EMHCs? And if this *is* about EMHCs, why not simply ban EMHCs? The bishops can do that at least as effectively as they can do this.

Everyone seems to recognize that some—*some*—opponents of the restriction are opposing it because they see it as an attack on EMHCs, and it seems quite obvious that some—*some*—proponents of the restriction are supporting it for precisely the same reason. But addressing the problem indirectly isn’t simply inefficient, it risks turning the precious blood of Christ into a surrogate into an intramural liturgical spat. If the problem is too many EMHCs, deal with *that* problem. Say that communion under both kinds is just fine when there’s a second priest or a deacon, but that EMHCs will not be used, even for the precious blood. I could support that.² I do not support this.

**IV.**

Finally, having stated a preference about the *availability* of communion, I want to cabin what I’ve
said above with a tangential observation about the frequency of receiving communion. We are required to attend Mass every Sunday. We are required to receive communion at least once every year. The Church certainly doesn’t discourage us from receiving at every Mass, but she does not presume that we will, and that juxtaposition suggests to me that the faithful would do well to think twice before receiving. When one takes into account 1st Corinthians 11:29, it strikes me that the best advice is “when in doubt, keep your kneeler!” Better to skip communion for a Mass or two than to receive unworthily. There are any number of circumstances in which I would not feel it appropriate to receive (starting with the obvious: Not having had the opportunity to visit a confessional). While it is my view that communion should be available under both species, I want to suggest that we rethink what appears to be the default preference of many Catholics to receive under either species at every Mass.

Post facto:

MP: The laity and the chalice in Phoenix (Nov. 22, 2011).

Notes:

1. Far too many people who rightly perceive serious problems in the postconciliar Church seem to carry it too far, giving the impression that they see nothing positive in what has happened. This mindset believes that the Church made a wrong turn at Vatican II and that everything she’s done since is poisoned fruit to be ignored and discarded. Indicia of that mindset include rejection of things that have been taught by or after the council, and resisting anything from the postconciliar
era by citation to, in particular, the Council of Trent. It is the mirror-image of the liberal mindset that sees everything before the postconciliar era as bad, that rejects virtually everything that was done before the council, and which resists anything from the anteconciliar era as “going back.”

2. If the precious blood can’t be distributed at a given Mass because no ordinary minister happens to be available and we decide to get rid of EMHCs, that is very different from withholding the chalice from the laity. It can only be seen as the same if we inappropriately and myopically focus on the bottom line question of whether I can receive at any given Mass that I happen to attend.

**Straight talk on altar girls**

*October 19th, 2011*

*America* magazine has a singular talent for maximizing the irritation that one might pack into a single column, and the editors’ *Save the Altar Girls* (Oct. 10, 2011) is no exception. The immediate focus of the editors’ ire is Father John Lankeit, rector of Ss. Simon & Jude Cathedral, who has decided to restrict altar service to males. His statement is [here](#), and the bottom line is simple enough: Altar service has historically been a garden of the priesthood, and Fr. Lankeit is concerned to foster vocations.

First, a point of context. *America* neglects to mention, but it’s important to realize, that altar girls are an *extremely* recent development. They were allowed for the first time in 1992, and then only by consent of both the celebrating priest *and* his bishop.¹ In fact, as recently as *Inæstimabile donum*, no. 18, 72 AAS 331, 338 (CDW Inst., 1980), we read that while women may be lectors and cantors, they “are not, however, permitted to act as altar servers.”
America says that “[t]he key issue is the status of the baptized: that the laity may be called by the Spirit to offer their talents in various roles.” Actually, the key issue is the so-called “vocations crisis”: If we may rationally conclude that service as an altar boy is helpful in fostering vocations to the priesthood, we may rationally prioritize unmarried men and especially boys for altar service. And we might carry it a step further: If we may reasonably conclude that the presence of altar girls discourages boys from altar service, it makes sense to exclude girls from it. Frankly, it puzzles me why altar girls would discourage altar boys, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it’s true (a point that William Oddie notes in his remarks on the subject: “[A]s soon as girls appear, the supply of altar boys tends simply to dry up”). Moreover, some deference is owed, not only to Lankeit’s judgment that there is a sound basis in evidence or reason for the move, but also to the expedient of experimentation; since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, it would be a shame to interrupt the cook while it’s still in the oven. Given the urgency of the concerns animating Lankeit’s decision and the paucity of empirical evidence available, allowing the experiment and seeing what happens over a reasonably brief period of, say, ten to twenty years, is valuable. (Indeed, early returns would appear within a matter of a few years if not a few months: If altar girls discourage boys, ceteris paribus, we would expect to see an increase in males volunteering for altar service in short order.)
I must add that subsidiarity rather than universal legislation is a better way to handle the issue, in my view. I don’t think we shouldn’t restrict access to the ministry based on gender without good reasons, but experimentation on how to better-foster vocations is a good reason, and the best teachers on this point are experience and empirical research, not abstract theory, and least of all quasi-sociological guff about making people feel included.

To be sure, there are some people who reject altar girls ab initio on principle, but that doesn’t appear to be Lankeit’s concern and it certainly isn’t mine (more on that anon), so they aren’t the issue here. When we face the practical basis for Lankeit’s move, America’s objection that “[t]he rejection of altar girls disregards the counsel of the Second Vatican Council that the charisms of the baptized ‘are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation’” wilts. And it was hardly vigorous before, truth be told! For five decades, liberals’ stock move has been to ground everything they want in Vatican II; unable to break the habit, this is a particularly tenuous effort as they go. But even if it worked, the claim grounded on it doesn’t: “That this call should be fully welcomed does not appear to be a priority in Phoenix.” Just because something is a priority doesn’t preclude something else from taking higher priority, which is precisely what is happening here: Because the priesthood is a constitutive element of the Church, tending the garden of the priesthood is a higher priority. It is simply more important. And if America is really concerned with a distant, shrinking priesthood, as they claim in the following paragraph,
one might imagine that they would support measures that are reasonably-calculated to increase vocations.

I have one more thing to say about altar girls, but first a clutch of housekeeping on the *America* editorial. The editorial is larded with other (orthogonal at best) complaints and grievances:

- They complain that altar rails are a “barrier between the priests and the people,” which is neither true nor relevant to the article.
- They complain that restricting altar girls “limit[s] laywomen’s access to the altar” and “threaten[s] to drag the church back into the pre-Vatican II world”; on this, see SF: *The Irrevocablility of Everything* (Oct. 18, 2011).
- They complain that a priest “did not consult the parish council, he says, because its members are not theologically trained”; the priest is under no obligation to consult the parish council at all about anything.⁴
- And because “[i]nevitably the issue of women’s roles in the church raises the question of women’s ordination to the priesthood,” they fire off a cheap and inaccurate shot in this characterization: “[S]ince Pope Benedict XVI, despite continued agitation, has reaffirmed the policy of John Paul II to allow no discussion of the topic, the matter of altar servers must be considered a separate and independent issue.” (Emphasis added.) Well, for one thing, it is a separate and independent issue. And more to the point, it is a gross distortion to refer to the Church’s position on ordination of women as a
“policy” against “discussion”; in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, blessed John Paul II of happy memory “declare[d] that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” This is not a policy against debate; it is an authentic act of the Papal Magisterium, *held to be infallible*, which has eliminated a prerequisite of the debate: Capacity. As a purely intellectual exercise, we could debate what it might be like if the Church could ordain women and whether we or this pope or that might like to do so, but if she has no authority to do so in the first place, as *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* confirms, the debate is sterile.

Finally, I would be remiss to conclude without clearly stating my own position on this issue. In my view, the Church should, *as a general rule*, welcome the talents and contributions of women in every way that is appropriate and possible. Perhaps even to the point of ecclesiastical office: I am not specifically opposed to female deacons, and I publicly flirted with the notion of elevating women to the cardinalate before tentatively concluding that the proposal was unworkable. That would certainly include altar service. I have no truck with the borderline misogyny of those who gleefully rubbed their hands together at the realization that *Universae Ecclesiae* essentially barred women from serving the extraordinary form (although it does), or who support Lankeit’s moves based on their hostility to
female servers rather than his concern for fostering vocations.

General rules, however, admit of exceptions, especially when they clash with other general rules and create a competition of needs. I share Lankeit’s concern for fostering vocations. We live in alarming times; we need more men to answer their vocation to the priesthood. The reasons for the decline in seminarians since Vatican II are many and variegated, of course, and not all of them pertain to developments in the Church. (Those who point to falling Mass attendance since the introduction of the *novus ordo* forget that the Church exists in the world, and because the postconciliar era coincides with seismic changes in society, a control group is missing.) Nor is it immediately apparent, quite frankly, that there has been a significant drop in seminarians since altar girls were allowed: CARA reports that there were 4,063 American seminarians in 1985 and 3,608 in 2011, although those numbers may not be revealing. But we should be encouraging any measures that are reasonably-calculated to encourage men to take up their vocations. I am inclined to believe that there is sufficient reason to believe that restricting altar service to boys may encourage vocations, and that it is therefore worth experimenting in a few parishes. I am not suggesting, as did Oddie in his piece linked above, that we rescind the permission for altar girls; to the contrary, as I said above, subsidiarity is the right approach, at least for now. Nevertheless, I support Fr. Lankeit, and I suggest that reasonable pastors
should consider participating in this worthwhile experiment.

Notes:

1. See Redemptionis sacramentum, no. 47, 96 AAS 549, 565-66 (CDW Inst., 2004), and generally this, this, and this.

2. I.e., if there is sufficient evidence for a reasonable trier of fact to reach the same conclusion, cf., e.g., Wright v. Southland Corp., 187 F.3d 1287 (11th Cir. 1999); Young v. Warner-Jenkinson Co., 152 F.3d 1018 (8th Cir. 1998).


4. The role of the parish council is to advise, not to direct. See 1983 CIC canons 515 § 1, 519, and 536; The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community, no. 26 (Cong. Clergy Inst., 2002); cf. Ecclesiæ sanctæ, nos. 15-16, 58 AAS 757, 766-67 (Paul VI, 1966); Omnes Christifideles, no. 8 (Cong. Clergy 1973). The left is apt to complain about clericalism, but, as I alluded to last year in Clericalism in the Era of the Vocations Crisis, it’s actually laicism—a distension of the laity’s role—that poses the greater ecclesiological problem today, in salient part because of an inflated idea of the role of lay structures in the parish.

5. 86 AAS 545, 548 (John Paul II, 1994) (“declaramus Ecclesiam facultatem nullatenus habere ordinationem sacerdotalem mulieribus conferendi, hancque sententiam ab omnibus Ecclesiae fidelibus esse definitive tenendam”).

6. The original is reported at 87 AAS 1114 (CDF, 1995); additional remarks by then-prefect Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger can be read here. A long-delayed essay, Obsequium: A Great and Stately Jurisdiction will eventually appear in these pages, arguing that the question is settled beyond argument even if the CDF’s statement that the teaching was infallible—a statement approved by John Paul, albeit in forma ordinaria—is incorrect.

7. Comments on the former are not available in a public forum, but the gist is that Ordinatio sacerdotalis does not address the question because the Catechism is explicit in placing deacons outside of the priesthood; on the latter, see, e.g., SF: America magazine’s duplicitous editorial (Feb. 13, 2011).
The Magisterium in the early Church

November 1st, 2011

St. Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is the oldest writing of the New Testament, predating the gospels by decades and the canon of the New Testament by centuries.\(^1\) It is thus interesting to encounter, as we do in Sunday’s second reading, this statement:

[I] give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.

1 Thes 2:13; accord id., verse 4 (“God has approved us [i.e. the apostles and their successors, the bishops] to be entrusted with the gospel, and this is how we preach, seeking to please not human beings but God who tests our hearts”); 2 Thes 2:15 (“Therefore, brethren, stand fast; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word, or by our epistle”); 1 Tim 3:15 (“the church of the living God [is] the pillar and ground of the truth”); 2 Tim 1:13 (“Follow the pattern of the sound[a] words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus”); 1 John 1:5 (“This is the message we [apostles] have heard from Him and proclaim to you”).

This is, to some extent, a challenge for Protestantism. Can we say that 1st Thessalonians or the other passages just cited supply biblical authority for Sacred Tradition? Yes and no. On some
level, of course, they are instances where we glimpse the Magisterium in scripture, and the status of these letters as scripture stamps divine authority on them, which makes them prescriptive insofar as their *divine* author is concerned. At the same time, however, it would seem anachronistic to forget the situation of their *human* author. Notice: St. Paul is *describing an existing state of affairs*. In the oldest scripture in the New Testament, the teaching office of the Church is met as a *fait accompli*!

And when you think about it, that’s no surprise. Even without these textual references, it would be obvious that the Magisterium precedes and predates scripture. How could it be otherwise? The need to authoritatively transmit the gospel preceded the writings that would ultimately compose the New Testament by decades, and the canonization of various writings as scripture by centuries. The transmission of the gospel could not be accomplished by means other than the authoritative preaching of the Church; as evangelical John MacArthur perceptively writes in *Twelve Ordinary Men*, at the time of the ascension, “the future of the Church and the long-term success of the Gospel depended entirely on the faithfulness of [a] handful of disciples.”

What we are really seeing here is not a textual foundation, but rather the reason why it is unreasonable to *expect* an explicit textual prescription of the Magisterium in scripture: New Testament scripture was written at a time when the Magisterium was, perforce, coextensive with Christian teaching. There was simply no other
means of transmitting teaching other than the oral preaching of the Church, and her authentic witnesses, the apostles and their successors the bishops (cf. Acts 1:8 and 15:24), concepts that we today designate by labels such as “Magisterium” and “Sacred Tradition.” So pervasive was that presupposition that we merely glimpse references to it in scripture. But when we glimpse it, as we do in this reading, it is unmistakable.

Notes:


Altar bells and keeping faith with tradition

November 10th, 2011

At a recent class on the corrected translation, there was some discussion of whether altar bells would make a comeback; my parish doesn’t use them, and while some people are very happy about that, there are others who would prefer, often with equal passion, to have them back. I am firmly on the side of bringing the bells back, but that vote requires a few words of explanation.

Candidly, I’m not strongly concerned about altar bells per se. While I don’t feel that they’re strictly necessary for those who are participating fully and actively in the Mass, as St. Pius X and Vatican II called on the laity to do,¹ liturgy isn’t just about the
necessary, and I’m not at all dismayed if they’re used; they neither edify nor distract me. (Some people don’t like the little altar bells, and personally I would prefer to have the main bells rung if we’re going to have bells, but I’m sanguine about that issue, too.)

I am concerned, however, for tradition, and for our obligation to be faithful stewards of it. As I have remarked many times before (most recently here), I believe that a generation’s job is to receive our patrimony from our parents’ generation and pass it on, as intact as we possibly can, to our children’s generation. Perhaps a little more burnished, perhaps with some sharp edges sanded down, but undiminished. To be sure, it’s hard to overstate how fundamentally at odds that conviction is with the world of today, or how fundamentally hostile some people have become to the notion that we owe our inheritance anything but contempt—we are told to make our world anew, and that anything received from generations past must be treated with extreme skepticism, to be accepted only if we, in our infinite wisdom, deem it good—but that is what I believe, exhort, and teach. (You’ll find the themes of this paragraph fleshed out in SF posts such as this one and this one.)

With this in mind, we must remember that the question of altar bells isn’t just about altar bells, still less my personal preferences on that specific issue. The question arises in a context. Altar bells have been a traditional accoutrement of the liturgy for at least seven centuries, but in recent decades, like many other things about which Vatican II said
nothing, they were swept away by the group that we might call the “pseudoconciliarists”—the self-proclaimed stewards of Vatican II who caused enormous damage to the Church (and to the Council, for that matter) by vesting their personal preferences in the garb of an ersatz Vatican II, even though the council didn’t approve, and wouldn’t have approved, such changes. The wrecking ball went through the Church’s liturgy and her sacred spaces during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, sweeping away (or at least under the rug) things like altar rails, sacred art, friday penance, and any number of traditional practices that accompanied Catholic faith and practice—including altar bells, which largely perdured only in more traditionalist parishes.

Happily, just in the nick of time, a great number of traditional things that are considered outré in circles that take the National Dissenting Reporter are being recovered in a great number of parishes. We see a greater use of incense; we see a growing number of bishops and priests celebrating ad orientem; we see a resurgence in celebration and attendance of the usus antiquior Mass; we see a revival of Latin and chant in the celebration of the novus ordo; we hear of parishes reinstalling altar rails and making their churches more beautiful during scheduled refurbishments rather than less; across the pond, the Bishops of England and Wales have reinstated the Friday obligation. The big picture is that we see a robust and growing orthodoxy that is in stark contrast—as Mark Shea and George Weigel have recently noted—to the
dissenters of the last generation who have failed to intellectually reproduce and are now dying out. It is becoming ever clearer that the genuine conciliar reforms will endure, but pseudoconciliarist excess will not. These are exciting times!

Altar bells are a part of our liturgical tradition; they are part of the inheritance that pseudoconciliarists tried to deny succeeding generations, and they are part of the orthodox revival now underway. I don’t personally have a strong attachment to altar bells, but altar bells don’t stand or fall alone; after all, a traditionalism that seeks to preserve only those traditions for which I personally have strong feelings is no traditionalism at all! To stand on tradition when something that I like is called into question but to say nothing of it when it’s something for which I don’t personally care is not deference to and respect for tradition, but rather the unseemly utilitarianism of “any stick to beat a dog.” Accordingly, I am a ready and cheerful ally of any effort to recover any traditional part or accoutrement of our liturgy—including those parts about which I am personally ambivalent.

On November 10, 2011, the feast of St. Leo the Great.

Post facto:


Notes:

1. Insofar, that is, as their original purpose was to call the congregation’s attention to the altar at key moments of the liturgical action. See Nicholas Gihr, The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass 266 (1902).
2. Gihr says that bells at the consecration have been with us since the fourteenth century, see id., at 644 n.3, and writing a half-century later, Josef Jungmann had evidence of the practice as early as 1201, see THE MASS OF THE ROMAN RITE, ITS ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT 426 (Brunner, trns. 1959); we may reasonably suppose that it was well-established practice by the time it appears in extant documentation.

3. That is to say, before such things could disappear from living memory.

More undignified than this

November 12th, 2011

A 1977 article urging communion in the hand on the basis (inter alia) that it is “dignified” made me think about the dignity of the Eucharist.

I thought about how very dignified Peter must have felt as Jesus washed his feet, and how dignified Jesus must have felt as he washed Judas’ feet.

I thought about how very dignified Jesus must have felt as he was scourged within an inch of his life, and how dignified He must have felt as he was nailed to a cross for my sins and yours.

I thought about how dignified it is to have go back to God, time and again, and knock on the door of His forgiveness, sheepishly saying “... Lord ... Yeah... It’s me again.”

I thought about how dignified it is to stand before a priest to whom we have confessed our sins and receive from him the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord.
And then I thought about how sad it is that people could be so wrapped up in their pride as to believe that we have an ounce of dignity to bring to the Eucharist in the first place—or that they should aspire to having it in a sacrament that is quintessentially about humility. We should receive Him in humility, in awe at the incomprehensible mystery that our God not only became our brother, not only allowed himself to be killed for our sake, but that He now offers us his body and blood under the species of bread and wine. Before a God who knows us through and through, whither dignity?

Tell me any reason for receiving communion in the hand that you like, but please—don’t tell yourself that it’s about dignity.

The corrected translation: day one
November 26th, 2011

This is the day that the critics have dreaded—the day when their doomsaying is proved wrong. In my parish, we have spent the last month adding parts from the new translation gradually, and everyone has kept calm and carried on. On Thanksgiving, with the house half full, we had a dry run of sorts with the corrected translation from start to end,
and *everyone kept calm and carried on.* And today, throughout the United States, Catholics in English-speaking parishes that use the *novus ordo* will keep calm and carry on.

**The mismatch**

*November 30th, 2011*

The *Creative Minority Report* blog reports that Raymond Cardinal Burke has offered harsh words for DHHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius:

“To the degree to which (Sebelius) proclaims herself to be a practicing Catholic, she is very wrong,” said Cardinal Burke. He sees it as “simply incomprehensible” for a Catholic to “support the kind of measures that she is supporting.”

Burke’s comments make for an interesting contrast with Archbishop Timothy Dolan (D. New York), who recently sent a letter claiming that religious liberty is now increasingly and in unprecedented ways under assault in America. This is most particularly so in an increasing number of federal government programs or policies that would infringe upon the right of conscience of people of faith or otherwise harm the foundational principle of religious liberty. As shepherds of over 70 million U.S. citizens we share a common and compelling responsibility to proclaim the truth of religious freedom for
all, and so to protect our people from this assault which now appears to grow at an ever accelerating pace in ways most of us could never have imagined.

Even the WaPo noticed the problem.

So why hasn’t Sebelius been excommunicated?

There’s a mismatch here between episcopal rhetoric and episcopal inaction. Whereas Card. Burke gets right to the heart of the matter, Archbp. Dolan avoids the issue; if he believes that DHHS is besieging the religious freedoms of Catholics, surely the only thing worse would be to have that assault led by a self-styled catholic. So why hasn’t Sebelius been excommunicated?

Under a nominally catholic secretary, Dolan says, “it is now standard procedure in the Obama administration to deny funding to some Catholic programs based solely on their pro-life beliefs.” That nominally catholic Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, is “an outspoken pro-choice [soi-disant] Catholic” with “a long history of conflict with Catholic authorities.” Under a nominally catholic secretary, DHHS has adopted policies that USCCB’s President publicly recognizes in writing as “assault which now appears to grow at an ever-accelerating pace in ways that most of us could never have imagined.” So why hasn’t Sebelius been excommunicated?

It’s worth recalling what John Paul II said in 1987: “It has also been noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their
adherence to the Church’s moral teachings. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium is totally compatible with being a ‘good Catholic’ and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments. This is a grave error that challenges the teaching office of the bishops....” And if that is so, it is surely the case that presiding over a government body that is at war with Catholic institutions is an even greater obstacle. So why hasn’t Sebelius been excommunicated?

This is grave scandal (see CCC ¶¶ 2284 et seq.)—not just the conduct of Sebelius (and Pelosi, Biden, etc. ad nauseum), but the bishops’ failure to act. Qui tacet consentire videtur, but a fortiori he who could take action but does not! Some might say “well, they’re probably working in private.” Well, but that’s not good enough when the problem is public and ongoing. Whatever private measures have been taken, it’s a matter of public record that they have been inadequate. This is scandal, and the bishops’ inaction on Sebelius et al. undercuts their credibility to complain about DHHS. There’s nothing wrong with the Dolan letter within its four corners, but it’s tough to take it seriously when there’s so yawning a gap between its political rhetoric and pastoral action. How can Dolan fret that it’s tough to keep breathing with all this constriction going on while the snake remains publicly in good standing?

Linking to the WaPo story above, Bishop Christopher Coyne (Ad. Indianapolis) called it “food for thought.” Food for thought? Watch what the snake does when it’s done crushing the life out of us.
Post facto:


Phil Mathias on the corrected translation
December 6th, 2011

The corrected translation has attracted a lot of criticism, very little of it substantial. Phil Mathias’ National Post commentary does little to redress the balance. It’s hard to keep reading after Phil regurgitates the tired “hierarchy vs. the people” line that’s been so in vogue, but we shall soldier on and tackle five difficulties in his comments.

(1) Phil tackles “consubstantial,” and it doesn’t go well. He seems unable to comprehend why we would make the change, but it’s not hard to understand:

[ICEL1973] declared that Christ is “one in being with the Father,” a clear expression of Catholic belief. The new version says Christ is “consubstantial” with the Father. “Consubstantial” is a literal translation of the Latin word consubstantialem, which basically means “one in being” with the Father. So why make the change? (“Consubstantial” is particularly inept because in English usage, only material things have “substance” and God is a spirit.)
First and foremost, because *that’s what the latin says*. We translate a foreign word to its most precise English equivalent, and when there’s an established English word (even if originally a loanword) that is the established translation of a foreign word, *we use that word* rather than some other word that’s more-or-less coterminous. That’s why, for example, we pray for our auxiliary bishops rather than our “helper overseers” when translating *episcopi auxiliarii*, even though one can argue for the former rendering (and even cite bible translations that use it). *Consubstantial has been good English since the 1570s*; the language of the liturgy should not be limited by the laziness of the lowest common denominator.

Second, because “consubstantial” is a better fit for the Mass, where the Creed is recited immediately before the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Phil says that “‘Consubstantial’ is particularly inept because in English usage, only material things have ‘substance’ and God is a spirit,” but that’s problematic. John 4 notwithstanding, God is Father, Son, and Spirit—one God in three persons. *Cf. Lk 24:39*. The three divine persons are consubstantial—of the same substance—and in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we partake of that substance. What exactly does Phil think *transubstantiation* *means*? The accidents of bread and wine remain; the substance changes, allowing us to receive the *substance* of Christ’s body and blood—not in some vague spiritual sense but physically and literally—which is itself *of the same substance* as the Father.
And third, pastoral felicity. Phil’s troubled understanding of substance actually serves to highlight why the change is necessary; if he has been mislead, it’s a good bet that others have been, too. Confessing the consubstantiality of the trinity at Mass, and the catechesis that will support it, may help the faithful to better-understand the trinity and the Eucharist. Elsewhere, I’ve put the point this way: We tend to think that we know what “one in being” means because we know what the words mean individually, but we truly don’t. It’s a mystery. “Consubstantial” better expresses the unity and mystery of the trinity.

(2) Phil claims that “[t]he new liturgy is a literal translation of the Latin Mass that was universally used before the Second Vatican Council....” The new missal isn’t a literal translation, and it isn’t a translation of the usus antiquior; like ICEL1973, it’s a translation of the 1969 ritus modernus. One of the biggest problems with the critics of the corrected translation is that they rarely appear acquainted with the underlying text that is translated, appearing for all the world to be assessing the texts as composition rather than translation.

(3) Phil asks: “What is so special about Latin as a vehicle for Christian devotion?” And for sake of argument, we can accept his answer: Nothing. But that’s a red herring; the real question is “why is latin the issue here?” And the answer is, because that’s the language in which the Mass is written. To ask why the latin text is the touchstone of the English translation is like asking “what is so special about Italian as a vehicle for drama” when asked to
translate *Nessum Dorma*. If the Mass were written in Italian, it should be properly and faithfully translated from the Italian, not because Italian is special but because *that’s the source language*. (If ICEL had translated *Nessum Dorma*, by the way, I suspect that *Dilegua, o notte! Tramontate, stelle! Tramontate, stelle! All’alba vincerò!* *Vincerò!* *Vincerò!* would have come out something like “In the morning, we will win.”)

(4) Phil says that “Benedict has already started to undo some of the Second Vatican Council’s work,” which he hasn’t, and that Benedict “can’t reinstate the Latin Mass universally,” which he actually has.³

(5) Finally, we come to the tired fight over the correct translation of *pro multis*—a point on which, ironically enough, the Holy Father may agree with the critics in his private opinion.⁴ Phil says:

> One particularly troubling element in the new liturgy comes where the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice is declared. He died “for all,” the older version of the liturgy says. He died “for many,” according to the new liturgy. (In English usage, “for many” usually excludes the notion of “for all.”)

Is this change merely a heavy-handed translation of a Latin expression that has a subtly different meaning, or was it chosen by conservative writers moved by the idea that Catholics will get to heaven while others won’t?

Here’s a concise defense of the corrected translation from the *Commentary on Hebrews 9:28* by St John Chrysostom (†AD 407). Why it should say that
Christ died “”to bear the sins of many”? Why, that is, John asks, “‘of many’ and not ‘of all’? Because not all believed. For He died indeed for all, that is His part: for that death was a counterbalance against the destruction of all men. But He did not bear the sins of all men, because they were not willing.” Here’s the Catechism of Trent’s useful distinction:

[The words “pro multis”] serve to declare the fruit and advantage of His Passion. For if we look to its value, we must confess that the Redeemer shed His blood for the salvation of all; but if we look to the fruit which mankind have received from it, we shall easily find that it pertains not unto all, but to many of the human race. ... With reason, therefore, were the words ‘for all’ not used, as in this place the fruits of the Passion are alone spoken of, and to the elect only did His Passion bring the fruit of salvation. And this is the purport of the Apostle when he says: Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many; and also of the words of our Lord in John: I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me, because they are thine.

USCCB also has a useful FAQ here. But it really boils down to this: All are called; only many will answer. I hope you will answer.

Notes:

1. Some of it, however, has been mordantly funny. In a comment at the blog PrayTell, Joe O’Leary said that those who publicly support the corrected translation remind him “of excited
communist students of the 1960s desperately trying to find inspiration in Stalinist jargon and wisdom in Mao’s little red book.”

2. The tendency to import this image into the ecclesial context didn’t start with Occupy Wall Street, but it has intensified with it. There is a troubling pattern of behavior on the part of the Church’s progressive wing that frames every issue as a narrative about “us vs. them,” of “clerics vs. laymen.” The gambit airs the demands of the individual, asserts that the vast majority of Catholics agree, and claims that the only obstacle standing athwart the realization of these goals is the intransigent, out-of-touch “hierarchy” (by which they mean the Church; things like that, and calling the Holy Spirit “she” are dogwhistles). This becomes particularly ironic when the author(s) are themselves clerics! (See, e.g. the last section of this post.) In reality, there is no contentious issue in the Church today—if there ever has been one—that substantially divides laity and clergy. Consider the translation. Phil, a layman, doesn’t like it; in this, he is joined by a few clerics (Fr. Anthony Ruff, for instance). Meanwhile, I, also a layman, joined by I dare say most clerics, including Fr. Ray de Souza in an NP companion piece, are fully in favor of it. A reasonable person could look at the situation and say “Mathias and Ruff are wrong,” or they could say “Dodd and de Souza are wrong,” but what no one could say with a straight face is that the issue divides a hostile laity from an “out of touch imperial clergy.”

3. That’s Pope Benedict’s great gift in Summorum Pontificum, 99 AAS 777 (2007): It is now the universal law of the Church (confirmed by Universæ Ecclesiae, no. 2, 103 AAS 413 (PCED Inst., 2011)), that every priest may now celebrate Mass in the usus antiquior, no matter how much his bishop is opposed, and every Catholic wishing to do so may, ceteris paribus, attend. Cf. MP: The Scope of Summorum Pontificum (July 12, 2011), ante, p. 30. Until Summorum Pontificum, i.e. under the regime of Ecclesia Dei, 80 AAS 1496 (JP2, 1988), bishops could block celebration of the usus antiquior, but since 2007, if you know a willing priest, your bishop could be Annibale Bugnini himself and he still couldn’t deny you access to the usus antiquior. Any latin-rite priest “whether secular or religious, may use the Roman Missal published by Bl. Pope John XXIII in 1962,” on any day outside the triduum, without “need for permission from the Apostolic See or from his Ordinary.” Such Masses may “be attended by faithful who, of their own free will, ask to be admitted.” (SP art. 2; UE, no. 20.) To be sure, that pertains to technically “private” Masses, and things get slightly murkier
when we get into the issue of technically “public” Masses in the extraordinary form. And indeed, one must suggest that outright defiance of one’s bishop, regardless of one’s authority to do so, is a problem. Cf. *Lumen gentium*, no. 18 (2d Vat. Co. 1964); MP: *Episcopal throughput* (July 2, 2011), *ante*, pp. 27, 28. Nevertheless, bishops no longer have general authority to stop the celebration of Mass according to the *usus antiquior*.


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**Green paper on RCIA curricula**

*December 7th, 2011.*

I just submitted to the parish a green paper on proposed emendations to the RCIA curriculum. Comments are welcome.

**Green paper on reform of the RCIA curriculum**

Simon J. Dodd

To: Donna MacKenzie.
CC: Fr. Mark Weaver; Sam Bunch.

When I started RCIA in 2009, you asked me to look out for things that could be improved or done differently in the structure and content of the class. I have been percolating on that for a couple of years now, and while I hesitate to make suggestions about a process that I recognize to be exceptionally difficult,¹ I recently set down my thoughts and ran them past a few converts to see whether they agreed. The response has been positive.

Fundamentally, I have contemplated this question: “If I was to design an RCIA course based on what I found useful—what I found convincing, helpful, and decisive during my conversion process—what would it comprise? Assume that the students all start at the same time, and that they arrive as reasonably intelligent Christians who are not strongly denominationally-affiliated.” I have also accounted for what I
have concluded are necessary doctrinal foundations for any RCIA course.

There follows a rough sketch of my proposed curriculum, with some marginal notes and tentative suggestions on materials (the use of the Catechisms of the Catholic Church, Trent, and especially Baltimore are taken for granted). I have worked very much at a modular level without too much concern for how classes would distill into discrete sessions, but I have given a lot of thought to sequence, in many cases breaking up a topic across two or more classes.

1. **Church history: Overview.** It can’t be stated often enough or strongly enough that we aren’t starting from scratch here, that the heavens didn’t open and drop upon us this book telling of long-ago events that we can or must now try to understand in a vacuum. The organic development of the Church—the discoveries that she has been here since the very beginning, teaching the same doctrine and celebrating the same sacraments, and that we find her *in ovo* in the New Testament and more-or-less fully-realized in the patristic literature—was of critical importance to my conversion, to Scott Hahn’s, and I dare say to those of many other people. I do not yet have a proposal for a working text for this class, but suggested additional reading might include Stephen Tomkins’ *Short History of Christianity*, and Alan Schreck’s *Compact History of the Catholic Church*.²

2. **Authority 101.** Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium: The books and the bishops. This class would introduce the Catholic perspective on scripture, and then hit students hard with apostolic succession. I have come to realize that the latter is the lynchpin of *all* doctrine; if students don’t buy into succession, everything that we give them about Tradition, doctrine, magisterium, and primacy will be built on sand. Speaking for myself, at my first encounter with a bishop, having absorbed a lot of material on Church history and succession, I had an emotional moment where I thought to myself “I’m in the presence of a successor to the apostles!” And that was the turning point. After that moment, after that realization that I didn’t only *understand* what the Church taught about herself but knew it to be *correct*, I would say that my conversion became all-but inevitable, because wrapped up in succession are questions that, frankly, lack persuasive non-Catholic answers. *Ad Lucem Dei*
devotes some of its lengthiest entries to topics orbiting this subject, such as the canon of scripture, the apostolic succession, and the magisterium, and I dare say that it could be mined for working materials; other suggested reading might include *Lumen Gentium*, *Christus Dominus*, and *Dei Verbum*, Bp. Henry Graham’s *Where We Got the Bible*, Rahner & Ratzinger’s *Episcopate and the Primacy*, and selected texts by the evangelicals J.I. Packer and Bruce Metzger.

3. **Doctrine 101.** Our main focus here should be the large-scale structure of sin (an introduction to original, personal, mortal, venial), grace, and salvation. The Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on Justification* is a great starting point.

4. **Sacraments 101.** “The ring”: The Sacramental worldview and the role of the sacraments in the economy of salvation. When I was in the class, I felt that we launched into classes on the individual sacraments before I felt that I had a sound grasp of what sacraments are conceptually and how the Church understands what it has in its care. As a result, my earliest perception of them was defective: They seemed like little more than ceremonies.


   a. *The Eucharist*: Source and summit. (This may, in practice, preempt the need to deal with the real presence in Doc201. As materials and sessions are developed, this point should get clearer.)

   b. *Sacraments of Initiation*: Baptism and Confirmation.


   d. *Sacraments of Vocation*: Marriage and Holy Orders.

6. **Liturgy 101.** The history and structure of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This would include the “slo-mo Mass” (about which I have some particular suggestions that are beyond the scope of this document) and the two ways to receive communion. Unsurprisingly, in view of the liturgical turbulence of the last fifty years, finding a single working text has proved difficult; it may be necessary to construct one. *Mediator Dei*, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Nicholas Gihr, Josef Jungman, Edward Foley’s *Commentaries on the Order of Mass of the Roman Missal*, and even (if handled with immense care) Klaus Gamber might be mined to produce a viable working text. Donald Card. Wuerl’s *The Mass* and Scott Hahn’s *The Lamb’s
Supper—an exceptionally accessible introduction to the biblical roots of liturgy—will supply useful additional reading.

7. **The life of the world to come.** The afterlife, the saints, Mary, angels, etc. Richard McBrien’s treatise Catholicism, although it must be handled with extreme care, has an effective treatment whence to draw, and the Joint Catholic-Evangelical declaration on Mary, Do What He Tells You, is particularly helpful. Scott Hahn’s Hail Holy Queen is somewhat glib but quite accessible.

8. **Doctrine 201.** A tour of the distinctively Catholic substantive beliefs, such as the real presence, purgatory, etc. Waterworth’s Council of Trent, Coppens’ Systematic Study of the Catholic Religion, Ratzinger’s Eschatology, and Brant Pitre’s Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist would be helpful texts.

9. **Discerning the truth, one error-correction at a time: A brief history of heresy.** I realize that heresy is a touchy subject, but the Church has historically moved to define orthodoxy most precisely when it has been challenged by heresy. I found it very helpful to see the “edges of the path”—and not a little comforting to know that virtually every “new” idea one can come up with has already been met. (A dictionary of heresies with chronological and thematic indices, under the working title What Not to Believe, is in the works.) Doubts about including this one evaporated when I recently saw someone advocating a position that was, in every key detail, Marcionism. When people have no idea where the edges of the road are, they’re going to tumble.

10. **We’ve been here before.** A brief introduction to the fathers, doctors, martyrs, and other great teachers of the Church. Jimmy Akin’s The Fathers Know Best and Pope Benedict’s two volume Church Fathers are ideal secondary texts; St. Cyril’s Catechetical Lectures may be useful. Careful selection of primary texts can bolster what is covered in other classes—for example, we will meet Justin Martyr for the first time in Church History, and again in Liturgy 101, before a more detailed look here. Likewise, St. Irenaeus will be met in Authority and Heresy, but he has more to say and we can cover it here.

11. **Liturgy 201.** A more advanced look at the prayers of the Mass (particularly the Eucharistic prayers). An introduction to the Latin Mass—if Summorum Pontificum
left any doubt that the EF is here to stay, Universae Ecclesiae dispelled it—and the Eastern Rites.

12. **The fabric of Catholic practice**: The lexicon and “speaking Catholic” (*Ad Lucem Dei* covers essentially that ground), devotionals, sacramentals, the grout list, religious life, etc. A how-to on the divine office. This might be better-handled broken into a series of addenda attached to each session rather than as a discrete class.

13. **Doctrine 301**. A review of the fundamentals through an exploration of either of the creeds. Ratzinger’s *Introduction to Christianity* and Coppens’ *Systematic Study of the Catholic Religion* would be great working texts.

14. **Authority 201**. A refresher/review looking with greater specificity. Could be skipped depending on the class’ actual needs (i.e. if everyone’s on board and understands the various levels of teaching authority and the relationships of scripture, Tradition, and the episcopal college, it can be skipped).

15. **Dissent**. An elective (or breakout session from the Heresy class) introducing dissent as a concept, practical dissent right and left (issues like birth control, abortion, gay marriage, the death penalty, ordination of women), modern schism (e.g. sede vacantism, SSPX etc.), and explaining why they’re wrong. The class should also cover false positives—identifying the scope of teaching and thus what isn’t dissent, e.g. advocating married priests, deaconesses, and so on. There is a temptation to close our eyes and pretend that these issues will go away, but sticking our heads in the sand isn’t a strategy. Unless they are contemplating a vocation as hermits, Catholics are going to encounter these issues; far better for converts to encounter them for the first time in a safe and authentically Catholic environment.

I would love to be involved in preparing materials for these classes and teaching them, particularly the authority and liturgy classes. I believe (at risk of outing him) Sam Bunch also has some interest in getting involved with catechesis, and I think others do also. At any rate, I submit these suggestions not as a definite proposal, but as green paper: A proposal or series of proposals that I think would help, in order to prompt and provide a suggested framework for further discussion on a vital if thorny topic.7
On December 7th, 2011, the Feast of St. Ambrose

Notes:

1. The challenge of designing RCIA curricula, it seems to me, is that they must adequately meet the needs of diverse people arriving from diverse intellectual and spiritual backgrounds with have wildly different pastoral and catechetical needs. The problem is all the more acute if students may enter the program at any time, but the alternative—telling potential converts that they must wait until the next cycle of classes begins—is daunting to the point of pastoral impossibility. For all these reasons, like the proverbial dog walking on its hind legs, the wonder is not that it’s done well, but that it’s done at all. I accordingly hesitate to intrude.

2. There is a Church history class called “Epic” that we could profitably introduce for AFF; unfortunately, while its structure and content are apt to use in RCIA, its length is prohibitive. I would suggest pitching Epic as a post-confirmation elective for RCIA graduates.

3. As a rule, I think that it is always positive to introduce students to the historical Vatican II, lest students get the sense that the council is amorphous and malleable spirit rather than sixteen very concrete documents.

4. Packer’s treatment of authority, Fundamentalism and the Word of God, was exceptionally helpful to me in clarifying the questions and issues involved, even if I ultimately came down on the other side of the issue from him. Metzger’s work on the canon and “parchment and ink” aspects of scripture, especially The Canon of the New Testament and The Text of the New Testament, are enormously helpful and somewhat more accessible than F.F. Bruce’s comparable work.

5. The individual sacraments are best understood in the context of the sacramental worldview (for which reason I place what I’ve called Sacraments 201 after Sacraments 101), which is in turn best understood in context (for which reason I’ve placed both the aforementioned classes after the classes on History and Authority 101). The sacraments are present in scripture, of course, but they become clearest in the history and teaching of the Church—and non-Catholics don’t typically care (much) about those things. Thus, before we present any particular teaching of the Church, we must first explain why a catechumen should care about what she teaches. The question of authority is logically antecedent to any question of doctrine, and while it can be treated independently of history, I think that it is of great moment, and a real revelation for some people, that the Church has always had this understanding—that she has always celebrated the seven sacraments, always been led by the bishops, and so on.
6. While not diminishing the blessed mother in the slightest, I agree with Richard McBrien that for catechetical purposes, Mary is best treated as a special case within the broader questions treated in my Life of the World to Come class. Protestant difficulties—and I think it fair to assume that the average catechumen is arriving from a protestant background—with Mary are partly cultural, but fundamentally arise from differing conceptions of the afterlife and our interaction with it. If a catechumen doesn’t buy that we can ask the prayers of any given saint, they could, but in practice I think will not, buy that they can ask for the blessed mother’s prayers. I think all that stuff is best treated as a single unit, with Mary as the culmination and capstone. I also think that given the assumed intake from Protestantism, there is only very limited need to cover eschatology beyond the distinctively Catholic dimension just mentioned.

7. For this reason, discussion and explanation—rather than presentation—have been sparing in this paper, deferred for later discussion.

**Active participation**

*December 9th, 2011*

Father John Zuhlsdorf has a [post](post) noting the distortions that follow from misunderstanding Vatican II’s call for “active participation” in Mass.

Some people claim that “active participation” provides some warrant for a wholly vernacular liturgy, but that view is untenable. It’s important to understand that the council didn’t invent “active participation”; in trying to convey whatever point that it had in mind, it used an established term, and it is unexceptionable that terms of art are to be given the meaning that they have accumulated rather than a broader or narrower meaning that could be obtained from parsing the individual words comprised.¹ Active participation in the liturgy had been the request of St. Pius X sixty years before
Sacrosanctum concilium. His call was renewed by Ven. Pius XII sixteen years before Sacrosanctum concilium, and if we took a more granular look at the record, I would be very surprised if we didn’t find an antepian demand for the same thing and if no pope between ten and twelve made similar statements. Well, the Mass was in latin when Pius X called for active participation, and nobody thinks that Tra le sollecitudini was a misunderstood demand that it be translated. And the Mass was still in latin when Pius XII called for active participation, and nobody thinks that Mediator Dei was a misunderstood demand that the liturgy be translated. And even when we arrive at the Council itself, Sacrosanctum concilium’s call for active participation stands shoulder-to-shoulder with its directive that the liturgy—which was still in latin—should remain in latin. A reasonable mind should wonder: How could full participation be incompatible with Mass in Latin when the two have coexisted for more than a century?

Notes:

1. Cf., e.g., Standard Oil Co. v. United States, 221 U.S. 1, 59 (1910) (“where words are employed in a statute which had at the time a well-known meaning at common law or in the law of this country, they are presumed to have been used in that sense unless the context compels to the contrary”); Crouch v. Norris, 251 F.3d 720, 725 (8th Cir.2001) (“second or successive’ remains a term of art that must be given meaning by reference to both the body of case law developed before the enactment of AEDPA and the policies that prompted AEDPA’s enactment”); Boutilier v. INS, 363 F.2d 488 (2d Cir. 1966) (“the term ‘psychopathic personality’ as employed in [the statute at issue] ... was employed as a term of art to be interpreted by what Congress intended as a guide, and not to be left to the vagaries and honest but conflicting theories of psychiatry for determination”); NLRB v. Associated Machines Inc., 219 F.2d 433 (6th Cir. 1955).
The Roman Missal of AD 2100

December 9th, 2011

The core of this post is pure speculation. I have to say that up front, but it’s speculation based on what I think are fairly sound premises. Our current liturgical perch, with the Roman Rite divided between the “ordinary” form (the novus ordo or, in Gamber’s phrase, the ritus modernus) and the “extraordinary” form (the usus antiquior, TLM, Tridentine Mass, whatever term one prefers), is almost certainly a temporary arrangement. Somewhere down the line, we should expect a reunified Roman Rite; Kurt Cardinal Koch has said it; Raymond Cardinal Burke told us so just the other week. And we may infer a little about the shape of that rite, too: It will draw some elements from the usus antiquior. We know that because the Holy Father could have achieved a unified Roman Rite simply by revoking the indults and Ecclesia Dei, and suppressing the usus antiquior, that he instead chose to reinvigorate and liberalize its use tells us that Benedict anticipates that the next Roman Missal will be a true blend of the two forms. So what’s the gameplan?

I will tell you my own view, and I think that Benedict has something similar in mind. First, I fully embrace the Council’s desire for reform of the usus antiquior; I think their concerns were well-taken and one cannot simply ignore the council. And why would we ignore it anyway? The situation that we have today is not the result of executing Sacrosanctum concilium—Vatican II’s Constitution
on the Sacred Liturgy—but rather the result of its hijacking and use as a battering ram to force through a great number of liturgical changes of which it said nothing. And that’s the next point to make: **Second**, I think that the execution of *Sacrosanctum concilium* was horribly botched; as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in an introduction to Msgr. Klaus Gamber’s *Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, “after the Council[,] ... in the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, living process of growth and development over the centuries, and replaced it ... with a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product.” Moreover, whatever the merits or shortcomings of the *novus ordo* itself, the era introduced a number of problems that are found nowhere in its text—the comprehensive vernacularization of the Mass, *versus populum*, etc. And **third**, we must recognize that the *novus ordo* is not going to simply disappear.

The upshot is that we have a bifurcated liturgy that is problematic on both forks: The unreformed MR1962, in which perdure all the issues that led the Council to ask for reform, and the *ritus modernus*, which bears little resemblance to the Mass envisioned by the Council and which has real problems in both its platonic form and especially in the *ars celebrandi* that has grown around it. How do we move forward?

I think (and as I’ve said, I don’t know but I suspect that Benedict has something similar in mind) that in the long term, the way forward is to actually *implement Sacrosanctum concilium*—to have a do-over.¹ But what does that look like? In practice, it
means reforming MR1962 in line with *Sacrosanctum concilium*, incorporating the legitimate reforms of MR1969 while purging the problems that came with it and that were added to it by a deeply flawed culture in the *ars celebrandi*. Before one can do that, however, the *usus antiquior* has to be healthy enough to survive the operation, which means that it has to be returned to the point where it’s a healthy, living liturgy in widespread use, which ordinary Catholics encounter in their parishes. We are decades away from that point, but in *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict has begun the process.

And after what is really a lot of prologue, we now turn to the pure speculation part. **What will the Mass look like in nine decades?**

My bet would be that we’d see an opening rite lifted almost whole from the *usus antiquior*, but with the *congregation* giving the responses in the manner of the *novus ordo* (“Deus, tu convérsus vivificábis nos—Et plebs tua lætábitur in te,” etc.). I don’t speculate on what *language* that part will be in, but I’ll speculate that the priest will face the same direction as the congregation. We’ll then have a liturgy of the word very much like the *novus ordo*, in the vernacular and *versus populum*. There would follow a hybrid liturgy of the eucharist in either latin or the vernacular depending on the parish, celebrated *versus apsidem*, but with an audible canon (most likely the additional EPs from the novus ordo will stay), usually sung and in latin. Postcommunion will probably be short and *versus populum* after the
pattern of the *novus ordo*. The propers throughout will be in the vernacular.

That’s pure guesswork—and in truth, my predictive powers are colored by what *I’d* like to see—but if I had to put money on it, because that’s what I think the council’s vision was, that’s what I’d bet the liturgy celebrated by the first bishop of Olympus Mons will look like. The current situation isn’t stable, and I wouldn’t bet against seeing such a synthesis in my twilight years under a Pope who may not even have been be born yet.

**Notes:**

1. In the short term, the way forward is to first begin celebrating the *novus ordo* according to its text and then to celebrate it according to those traditional liturgical norms that still apply. That is to say, first we have to fix the translation, which has now been done, and then we have to recover an authentic *ars celebrandi*, which includes music, posture, and so on.

**Teaching and governing**

*December 20th, 2011*

On the one hand, Hatcave prefect Marc Cardinal Ouellet is right that we need bishops not just apostolic administrators (to misappropriate the latter term): Shepherds, evangelists in the public square, theologians, and apologists, not merely canon lawyers hiding in (or, worse yet, *behind*) their chanceries.¹ On the other hand, however, I found myself nodding at many of the observations John Allen Jr. makes [here](#), discussing a new book by *La Repubblica*’s Marco Politti which advances several
criticisms of Pope Benedict’s reign. Allen hedges a little—unnecessarily. While he’s right that Catholics who are outside of the progressive camp might be inclined to dismiss criticisms of the Holy Father by a journalist who’s decidedly in that camp, and while they might dismiss Politi’s specific concerns, I think that the general notion that Benedict is uncomfortable with the job of governing is quite commonplace, even among those who love and revere him. It’s a criticism I’ve made myself on more than one occasion, and as Allen notes, “Benedict XVI sees himself as a teaching pope, not (at least, not primarily) a governing pope.”

Well, so which is it? It seems that I’m trying to have it both ways: Can I agree with Card. Ouellet that bishops ought to be teachers and shepherds before administrators and agree with Allen (and, to an extent, Politi) that Benedict can be faulted for being a teacher and shepherd but not an administrator? The thought snaps into focus reading Elizabeth Scalia’s piece (responding in part to Allen) here. She observes that John Paul II

was happy to practice political messaging both subtle and subversive; his colossal global presence helped enlarge the very definition of a ‘governing pope.’ Not particularly interested in acting as a manager and Vatican overseer, John Paul steered the papacy toward the geopolitical stage, and it is clear from Allen’s piece that some believe a pope who lacks the interest, or the calling, toward such engagement is somehow only half on the job.
It strikes me that one could readily make the opposite argument: That Popes who lack interest or calling toward managing and overseeing the Roman Curia are only half on-the-job. If one had to brief the case against John Paul II, \textit{qua advocatus diaboli}, the opening argument would doubtless be his failure to act decisively on the abuse crisis, which can be characterized as a failure to govern (and to govern the Church through) the Roman Curia. And almost without exception, the problems of Benedict’s papacy have roots in curial dysfunction that only the Pope can fix (for example, the disgraced bishop Richard Williamson’s lifted excommunication; a little more on that point momentarily).

The Curia is supposed to be the instrument through which the Pope governs the Church; it “exists to inform and give effect to the pope’s ministry as pastor of the universal Church,” as George Weigel recently put it; John Paul II’s Constitution reforming the Curia, \textit{Pastor bonus}, 80 AAS 841 (1988), put it this way: “The Roman Curia is the complex of dicasteries and institutes which help the Roman Pontiff in the exercise of his supreme pastoral office for the good and service of the whole Church and of the particular Churches.” We find no curia in scripture, only Peter. It is only because Peter cannot possibly govern a Church comprising thousands of dioceses, and more than a billion faithful, without help that the Curia must exist. The idea of the Pontiff expending time to manage the curia therefore seems backwards and implies a level of dysfunction. But if the curia \textit{is} dysfunctional enough that it requires a measure of supervision, only the Pope
can fix it, and while it may it require a significant investment of papal time to get it to a point where it will function without direct supervision, that investment will free up papal time later.

So let’s corral this to a point. Card. Oullet is right that bishops have to be, in a word, *pastors*—not simply *administrators*. Taking care of the administrative work and boiling it down to digestible decision points for the bishops where their intervention is necessary is the job of chanceries generally and the Roman Curia particularly. But to the extent that chanceries are bureaucracies, and especially given the concerns that I mentioned in footnote one, bishops must also be, if not competent administrators, then competent and confident *leaders* of administrators. And sometimes that will mean investing time to make the bureaucracy work right so that one has time to be a pastor. The reader might think I’m trying to have my cake and eat it too, so let me try it another way. What I’m saying is that if bureaucracy is unavoidable, it can either work poorly, soaking up the bishop’s time into pointless trivia while failing to put important issues before him (googling Williamson, for instance, and flagging the issue for Benedict’s attention, or the [Kansas City fumble](#)), or it can work relatively efficiently, freeing the bishop’s time to be spent as a pastor, and on balance, it’s worth investing a little time and effort—and swinging the ax if necessary—to make sure that it’s running efficiently. One can be a bureaucracy’s leader or its chief administrator, and a bishop will only have the time to be a pastor if he can position himself as the former.
Post facto:

MP: The Place of the Curia (May 25, 2012), post, p. __.

Notes:

1. Hans Urs von Balthazar aptly observed that “Jesus always designated persons for service, not institutions. The persons of bishops belong to the fundamental structure of the church, not bureaucratic offices. There’s nothing more grotesque than to think of a Christ who would want to establish committees!” Quoted in Richard Gaillardetz, Teaching with Authority 171 (1997); cf. ante, p. 30 n.2 (quoting the same). An organization of the Church’s size cannot avoid a level of, well, organization. Bureaucracy. But she should never be a faceless bureaucracy. Authority should always be exercised personally, and the “institutional” church should always serve as an auxiliary to the “ministerial” church, under the direction and supervision of the bishops.


Usage notes from 2011

December 31, 2011

Over at FB, I’ve been posting an occasional series of “friday usage tips.” Here’s what we’ve looked at so far:

Usage tip #1: That and Which. As a rule, use “that” for defining clauses, i.e. when what follows restricts what preceded (“the book that I wrote”); use “which” when what follows simply gives more information (“the book, which has a blue cover”).

Usage tip #2: Criterion and Criteria. “Criterion” is singular, “criteria” are plural.
Avoid embarrassing malapropisms like “I have but one criteria” or (less common but heard on the radio just now) “he has ten criterion.”

**Usage tip #3** is cosponsored by Embarrassing Malaprop of the Day: “[The bishops' refusal to be assertive about Catholic identity] has left the Church open to attacks from secularists who hate it as antideluvian.” You can see where she went wrong—after all, it’s “deluge”—but rest assured that no one hates the Catholic Church for being opposed (“anti”) to “deluvian,” who or whatever he, she, or it may be, and only the dimmest of her critics would accuse her of being (as the writer presumably intended) antediluvian—from lat. ante=above/before + diluvium=flood/inundation.

**Usage tip #4.** The myth that a sentence cannot end in a preposition is, as Winston Churchill quipped, the sort of nonsense up with which we should not put. Our goal is always to write clearly, not to adhere to arbitrary rules. For precisely that reason, however, the sandwich’s stale bread shouldn’t put us off the good meat within, and the converse of Churchill’s point is also true: The gymnastics required to avoid ending a sentence in a preposition often produce an awkward and opaque construction, and fear of looking like a misguided pedant can produce muddier prose. Perhaps the translators of Crime & Punishment feared that they would seem wooden, formal, and old fashioned had they written “the moment for which she had waited so long had at last arrived,” or even “the
moment she had awaited for so long had come at last,” but in avoiding it, they blundered into the horribly awkward sentence “the moment she had waited for [for] so long had come at last.”

Like that other irrepressible grammar myth that one must not split an infinitive, the preposition myth is a petrified exaggeration of a helpful rule of thumb: Ending sentences in prepositions can often produce muddier writing. Effective writers should treat the myth with a pinch of salt, always considering its guidance (and being aware of syntax in the first place), hewing to it when it produces clearer, punchier prose, and ignoring it when it doesn’t.

One more point about usage, although it’s not a tip per se and isn’t supported by any rule of usage—it’s just personal aesthetic taste. I suggest that the recent trend by anti-latin types towards forcing round latin loanwords into awkwardly square English pluralizations—rather than simply using the latin pluralization¹—produces ugly words. This is especially true of formerly second declension neuter nouns. It’s media, quanta, stadia, memoranda, addenda, aquaria, etc., not mediums, quantum, stadiums, memorandums, addendums, aquariums, etc. It is referenda not referendums, fora not forums, gymnasia not gymnasiums, maxima and minima not maximums and minimums, dicta not dictums...

Although I confess that I balk at the thought of listing the alba in my CD collection!
Notes:

1. The accepted approach until recent decades, and still the accepted approach with appropriations from languages like French: “Solicitors-general”!

Re-proposing “fish friday”
January 3rd, 2012

In What Makes Us Catholic, Thomas Groome recounts a Jewish friend’s simple, direct, and satisfying explanation of his adherence to kosher rules: “It reminds me to bring my faith into every aspect of my life, even decisions about what to eat.” I would say the same about “fish friday”: Choosing fish—or pineapple pizza, or pasta and sauce, or anything else from the meat-free menu—for one day a week isn’t a heroic sacrifice, but in a small, manageable way, cabining one’s food choices discharges the obligation of Friday penance in a traditional way that focusses our attention on the need to put God at the center of even the routine trivia of our lives. I do it, and, in the spirit of re-proposing tradition, if you don’t, please consider joining me.

Now, some Catholics think that “Vatican II” did away with all that kind of stuff, and some younger Catholics are unaware that fridays are penitential days at all, let alone that abstinence from meat is the normative method of discharging that obligation.¹ If that’s you, please read on—this post is for you.
The colloquialism “Fish Friday” is actually a misnomer; tradition didn’t encourage fish on Friday so much as it proscribed meat. No one seems to know when Catholics began to abstain from meat on Fridays, but whenever its precise origin, abstinence from meat was still the traditional Friday penance when Vatican II ended, required by law and custom, as it had been for centuries. And the council fathers never dreamed of changing that.

Pope Paul VI, however, was a dreamer. In his February 1966 Apostolic Constitution on Fast and Abstinence, he authorized episcopal conferences to substitute alternative forms of penance in lieu of abstinence from eating meat except during lent, and the US bishops responded a few months later in their November 1966 Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence. The latter is particularly worth your time, especially its introduction and paragraphs 18 through 28; I won’t quote it all, but here’s a flavor:

Changing circumstances ... have made some of our people feel that the renunciation of the eating of meat is not always and for everyone the most effective means of practicing penance. ... [S]ince the spirit of penance primarily suggests that we discipline ourselves in that which we enjoy most, to many in our day abstinence from meat no longer implies penance, while renunciation of other things would be more penitential. ...

[F]ar from downgrading the traditional penitential observance of Friday, and motivated precisely by the desire to give the spirit of
penance greater vitality, especially on Fridays, ... [we] urge our Catholic people ... [to remember that] Friday ... remains a special day of penitential observance throughout the year ... [and] should be in each week something of what Lent is in the entire year. For this reason we urge all to prepare for that weekly Easter that comes with each Sunday by freely making of every Friday a day of self-denial and mortification in prayerful remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ.

Our bishops intended to create flexibility in the manner of penance: If your pleasure is a martini at the end of the day rather than a steak, abstaining from the latter on Fridays may be a suboptimal penance, and if you’re a vegetarian, it may be no penance at all! The problem is that when things become optional in theory they often end up undone in practice, and in the postconciliar chaos, Friday abstention came to be seen as optional; a generation later, it’s rarely seen at all.

Against this backdrop, I want to underline three points that must weigh on our consciences today:

(1) **The Code of Canon Law still obliges Friday penance, throughout the year.** “Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities.” [1983 CIC 1251](#).

(2) **The 1966 Pastoral Statement didn’t make Friday penance optional, it merely allowed**
diversity of form—to substitute more personally penitential alternatives to abstinence from meat.

(3) Abstaining from meat remains the default Friday penitential practice, even in the United States. The Pastoral Statement says:

Among the works of voluntary self-denial and personal penance which we especially commend to our people for the future observance of Friday, even though we hereby terminate the traditional law of abstinence binding under pain of sin, as the sole prescribed means of observing Friday, we give first place to abstinence from flesh meat. We do so in the hope that the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to Church law.

Although there’s much to say about the nexus between Fish Friday and Catholic Identity, this post won’t explore the wisdom of the decisions that made abstinence optional; we’ll get into that another day. No, here’s the major point that I want to convey to you today:

Abstinence from meat is the time-honored, traditional, and default expression of the Friday penance that is mandatory for Catholics.

If you take nothing else away from this entry, take that.

Apropos, the blog Te Deum Laudamus reported today that Fr. Eduard Perrone has challenged his
parishioners “to do one act of penance every week during the year 2012—an act in addition to any penitential acts which may already be one’s practice or which the season (viz., Lent) may dictate.” Fr. Perrone likely assumes that his audience is already observing a Friday penance; he means one more. But if you aren’t, may I ask you to consider Perrone’s challenge as a personal challenge to do so? And may I furthermore propose—assuming that you’re not a vegetarian—that you do so by abstaining from meat? Abstention is, as we’ve seen, the traditional and normative Friday penance in the Latin Church, and there are other good reasons too, not least in that it builds a sense of identity, provides opportunities for witness, and that it supplies a weekly echo of the formal penances of Lent and of Good Friday.  

Abstention is a practice that has been partially forgotten for a few years, but was the praiseworthy practice of our forerunners in faith. May we, therefore, like Groome’s friend, go and bring our faith into every aspect of our life, even our decisions about what to eat.

Post facto:


Notes:

1. Cf. MP: Straight talk on altar girls (Oct. 19, 2011), ante, p. 60. The latter’s a direct result of the former, but enough of that for today.
2. Some say that it goes all the way back to the apostles and cite what strike me as inconclusive passages from Church Fathers like Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria; others think it a mediæval accretion. I suggest that its obscure origins are a
credential not a weakness: In Blackstone’s felicitous phrase, “the goodness of a custom depends upon it’s having been used time out of mind; or, in the solemnity of our legal phrase, time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. This it is that gives it it’s weight and authority....” 1 WILLIAM BLACKSTONE, COMMENTARIES ON THE LAWS OF ENGLAND 67 (1769).

3. At the opposite extreme, a pious abstention from meat may endanger the health of certain faithful, especially those under the physical duress of pregnancy and illness.

4. The Pastoral Statement expressly makes this connection, by the way.

The Holy Father’s Epiphany homily

January 9th, 2012

It’s well worth a read. He paints an image of the Mass as a participation of a great journey, a procession, a pilgrimage, one that was begun by the Magi and which continues throughout history:

The journey of the wise men from the East is, for the liturgy, just the beginning of a great procession that continues throughout history. With the Magi, humanity’s pilgrimage to Jesus Christ begins – to the God who was born in a stable, who died on the Cross and who, having risen from the dead, remains with us always, until the consummation of the world. ...

The wise men from the East lead the way. They open up the path of the Gentiles to Christ. During this holy Mass, I will ordain two priests to the episcopate, I will consecrate them as shepherds of God’s people. According to the words of Jesus, part of a shepherd’s task is to go ahead of the flock . ...
That’s not only an evocative and intriguing image, it it begs the question: In which journey, procession, or pilgrimage has the guide or leader ever stood at the front of the group facing the pilgrims? Which shepherds stand before their flocks with their back to the direction of travel?

**Neniam Serenitatis**

*January 9th, 2012*

Sume amorem meum, terram meam sume, deporte me de quo non possum sistere; Sine curas sum, maneo in libertatem, non potes rapere meo caelum!

Vehe me foras in furvo, refer illis non revertar; Arde terram et maria ferveface, non potes caelum meo rapere!

Non possum usquam esse inventus serenitas!

**The merit of the Blessed Sacrament**

*March 3rd, 2012*

A friend asked why we need to receive Christ in the Eucharist more than once if He comes to live in us through the Blessed Sacrament. Does Jesus “wear off”? What follows is a slightly more elaborate version of my answer.
Let us begin by securing the premise: Why would it be necessary at all? The answer to that is on the lips of Christ:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world. ... In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person.

Jn 6:48-51, 53-54, 56. So, if reception at least once is necessary, why would reception more than once be necessary? The answer to that comes from our understanding of mortal sin. By separating ourselves from God, cf. CCC ¶ 1855; Edmund Wirth, Divine Grace 191 (1903), we kill our relationship with Him, and thus, I would suggest, the grace of the sacrament. Cf. Baltimore Catechism, no. 375. Our relationship is repaired in the sacrament of reconciliation, CCC ¶ 1856, but the discrete graces of the blessed sacrament should thereafter be renewed through receiving anew.

So, if reception is advisable following mortal sin and reconciliation, why (assuming that the foregoing’s not a weekly occurrence) would reception on a
weekly basis be necessary? The short answer is that it *isn’t*. As I noted recently, see MP: *Communion under both kinds*, part IV (Oct. 18, 2011), *ante, pp. __, __*, the Church obliges us to hear Mass every Sunday, see CCC ¶ 2042; 1983 CIC 1247, but obliges us to receive the Eucharist only once a year—the same minimum frequency with which, not coincidentally, she obliges us to receive the sacrament of Penance. See CCC ¶ 2042; 1983 CIC 920, 988-89.

While frequent reception isn’t *necessary*, however, it does seem to be *good*. Just on a practical level, frequent reception obliges a more scrupulous avoidance of sin and more frequent trips to the confessional. That’s a good incentive! As the Holy Father *recently said*, “participating in the Eucharist, we live in an extraordinary way the prayer that Jesus has done for each and continually makes for evil, that all encounter in life, did not act in us to win and the transforming power of death and resurrection of Christ.” And as the *Baltimore Catechism* puts it: “It is well to receive Holy Communion often, even daily, because this intimate union with Jesus Christ, the Source of all holiness and the Giver of all graces, is the greatest aid to a holy life.”

**Post facto:**

Four aspects of confirmation
March 3rd, 2012

Father John asked me to say what confirmation meant to me—how, that is, I would explain it to a person who happened to ask why I would do such a thing—and I thought that it was worth sharing my reply here. I saw three aspects to it, and I will add a fourth that has subsequently occurred to me.

The first, we could call the *gateway* aspect. One must be confirmed in order to gain access to other sacraments, and even if one harbored reservations about Confirmation per se, it is a prerequisite for Penance and especially the Eucharist, the value of which can hardly be gainsaid.

The second, we might cautiously—given the risk of misunderstanding—call the *social* aspect. To be confirmed is to publicly profess adherence to the Church: “I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.” To the extent that the Catholic Church is a fully-functional society (an *imperium supra imperiis*, even), Confirmation might be thought of as a publicly-professed citizenship oath. Or perhaps we should think of it this way: The Church that sojourns in this life is, in the older formulation, called the Church Militant, and Confirmation is a commission that “marks the Christian as a soldier in the army of Christ.” In many senses, it is not only Cardinals who “are entrusted with the service of love: love for God, love for His Church, [and] an absolute and
unconditional love for his brothers and sisters, even unto shedding their blood, if necessary…”

The third, and most important, is what we must call the *sacramental* aspect. Far from an “idle ceremony,” Confirmation “imprint[s] in the soul a character, that is, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign” that “complet[es] … baptismal grace.” The *Catechism* puts it this way:

Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, “Abba! Father!”;[ Rom 8:15.]
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;[ Cf. LG 11.]
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:[ Cf. Council of Florence (1439) DS 1319; LG 11-12.]

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in
your hearts. [SL Ambrose, De myst. 7, 42 PL 16, 402-403.]\(^{10}\)

Father Charles Coppens, SJ, adds that its increase of sanctifying grace fortifies the confirmand “openly and patiently to profess the faith, and to combat against our spiritual enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh,”\(^{11}\) and the *Rite of Confirmation* (we’ll use the ICEL1973 text) gets right to the point:

[The Bishop says] My dear friends: in Baptism God our Father gave the new birth of eternal life to his chosen sons and daughters. Let us pray to our Father that he will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen his sons and daughters with his gifts and anoint them to be more like Christ the Son of God[:]

All-powerful God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide.  
Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of right judgment and courage,  
the spirit of knowledge and reverence.  
Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Finally, on a more personal note, I should add what we might call the *psychological* aspect. In protestant
communities rooted in the anabaptist tradition, including American evangelical groups, adult converts are baptized, even when it is in fact a rebaptism. Whether sacramentally null or not, this serves as a valuable psychological demarcation in their lives: It is a tangible act done to affirm both internally and externally a changed internal disposition. And, candidly, I must tell you that I was somewhat disappointed (having attended an evangelical church as an agnostic husband to a Christian wife, and thus having absorbed some of its assumptions) to realize that I would not be rebaptized. (Indeed, couldn’t be rebaptized: We don’t have to revisit the history behind it today, but that is the essence of the affirmation in the Credo that “I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.”) Confirmation would seem to fulfill the same psychological need.

These are the thoughts I have on it looking forward toward the Easter Vigil.

Notes:

2. Importantly, that is an affirmation of the Magisterium, not an independent concurrence with each item of doctrine. The logical endpoint of protestantism is that one could—while remaining a protestant and solely on the basis of one’s own scriptural analysis—agree with every single doctrine taught by the Church except its authority to teach authoritatively. The Magisterium is the distinctively Catholic proposition.
5. As contrasted to the Church Triumphant, which is the communion of saints in Heaven, and the Church Suffering,
comprising the souls undergoing the cleansing fire of purgatory, cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15.


8. WATERWORTH’S COUNCIL OF TRENT, at 55, 58 (7th Sess. 1547); cf. BALT. CAT., supra, no. 337.

9. CCC ¶ 1285; cf. Acts 8:14-17 and 19:5-6; Tertullian, On Baptism, ch. 7 (c. AD 200).

10. CCC ¶ 1303; see also id., ¶¶ 1287-89.

11. COPPENS, supra, no. 143.

Essay on communion in the hand
March 18th, 2012

This Easter, all else being equal, I will be confirmed in the Catholic Church. Because the prospect of first communion is now before me, I must make a decision on whether to receive communion in the hand or, as is traditional, directly on the tongue, both options being licit in the United States. In the following essay, prepared over the last two years and titled Domine, non sum dignus, I weigh the options and explain my decision.

On March 18th, 2012, the feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Domine, non sum dignus

Conclusions on the manner of receiving Holy Communion

Simon J. Dodd
INTRODUCTION

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKDROP
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III. CONCLUSIONS.

“When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant.”

I have before me the prospect of receiving first communion, and so a decision on how I should exercise that discretion is now unavoidable.

Today, communion in the hand (“CITH”) appears to be the prevalent mode of receiving Holy Communion in the United States, but this is a surprisingly recent development. For a thousand years, communion on the tongue (“COTT”) was the exclusive manner of receiving the host in the Roman Rite; it remains such in the extraordinary form thereof, and our brethren in most eastern rites and the Orthodox Church continue the practice. And even in the ordinary form of the Roman Rite, despite its stateside prevalence, CITH is an option; the norm remains COTT. Converts, ipso facto, must make a decision on this option, but we are given little encouragement to investigate it, and find few resources with which to do so; to my knowledge, it was not even mentioned in RCIA classes, and many converts (indeed, many Catholics raised in the postconciliar Church) may be entirely unaware of the issue. Worse yet, attempts to weigh it suffer from its situation as a flashpoint between traditionalists and liberals. While Vatican II said nothing about it, CITH is so closely identified with the
postconciliar Church that COTT critics are apt to suggest that it defies the council. The smoke from that fight tends to obscure the question and its attendant issues, and to have a woefully tribalizing effect on any attempt to investigate it: To ask questions—for, as we shall see, there are serious questions to be asked of both sides—is to risk being branded as one of them at a time when most converts are but dimly aware of who “them” are! This will not do.

In this essay, we will survey the applicable considerations, and I will explain my decision as to my own praxis. Insofar as it explains the reasoned part of the decision, I am hopeful that it may prove useful to other converts. As I will acknowledge in part II.D, however, the decision is and ought to be grounded in prayer as much as reason; accordingly, while I hope that readers might find this helpful, I doubt that they will find it decisive to their own consideration, because it neither can nor does fully treat the role of prayerful contemplation.

One last item of prolegomena. I feel obliged to admit at the outset that for me, arriving with a conservative disposition, the dice are loaded. When a practice is backed by the unbroken tradition of the Church, it arrives with immense force, regardless of my legal authority to ignore it. For example, even if the arguments from scripture and magisterium were unpersuasive, the unbroken tradition of an all-male clergy would force my hand on the question of ordaining women. But the present question is more complicated: Although COTT enjoys the authority of a millennium of tradition, it does not reach back in unbroken line to the apostolic era.

I. The Historical Backdrop

A. The First 1,960 years

The Church’s earliest practice is opaque. While it is clear that the real presence was understood from the outset, “there is no exact account of the manner of receiving Holy Communion” in the writings of the early fathers of the Church because “[t]here was no reason to explain the usual practice....” Nevertheless, at some point CITH became widespread, and it seems clear that “Christians through the
first centuries … normally received communion in the hand while standing.” Proponents of CITH can point to the oft-quoted advice of St. Cyril, a fourth-century Bishop of Jerusalem:

> Approaching, therefore, come not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers open; but make thy left hand as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hallowed thy palm, receive the body of Christ, saying after it, ‘Amen.’ Then after thou hast with carefulness hallowed thine eyes by the touch of the holy body, partake thereof; giving heed lest thou lose any of it; for what thou losest is a loss to thee as it were from one of thine own members. For tell me, if anyone gave thee gold dust, wouldst thou not with all precaution keep it fast, being on thy guard against losing any of it, and suffering loss?10

This episcopal instruction on proper reception in the hand seems to confirm that so receiving was licit and being practiced to one extent or another.11

Accordingly, we can say this much for sure: CITH existed in the early church. Nor can we easily dismiss the bolder claim that it was *normative* in that era.12 Whatever the case, we know that COTT became first popular and ultimately obligatory; we know that this movement was underway by the early sixth century at the latest because, during the reign of Pope Gregory the Great, “the custom was for the priest to place [the host] in the [communi-cant’s] mouth.”13 And to whatever extent CITH was widespread in the early church, all must agree that it was long dead by the end of the first millennium.14 A canon adopted by the synod of Rouen summed up the Church’s Eucharistic practice for the next thousand years: “Nulli autem laico aut feminæ eucharistiam in manibus ponat, sed tantum in os eius.”15

**B. Vatican II and its aftermath**

The Second Vatican Council may fairly be called the Yogi Berra of Church Councils: Like Berra, it didn’t say half the
things it said. Although CITH is sometimes attributed to it, one will scour Sacrosanctum Concilium—the council’s constitution on the liturgy—without finding a single word about abolishing COTT. It is not mentioned in the interim directives Sacram Liturgiam and Inter Æcumenici, nor in the novus ordo missal itself, nor in Paul VI’s Missale Romanum.

CITH belongs instead to the complex of liturgical innovation that hooked a line onto the council and was dragged along in its wake. The Holy See charitably summed up these developments in 1969: “[I]n recent years, a fuller sharing in the eucharistic celebration through sacramental communion has here and there evoked the desire to return to the ancient usage of depositing the eucharistic bread in the hand of the communicant, he himself then communicating, placing it in his mouth.” Nevertheless, this innovation had been undertaken without Rome’s sanction, and Rome now consulted the world’s bishops as to its propriety. The bishops overwhelmingly rejected the use of CITH.

Pope Paul VI agreed. Nevertheless, permission was given that in those places where CITH had already taken root, episcopal conferences could petition Rome for an indult allowing CITH. The American bishops’ conference rejected a motion to request an indult in 1973, but—apparently bowing to the growing prevalence of illicit CITH—approved one in 1977, a requested granted in short order by the Holy See, subject to the discretion of the local ordinary. Since then, American Catholics have had discretion to choose their mode of communication.

II. THE ISSUES.

A. Some preliminary observations

The bare fact that CITH is licit and prevalent in the United States, however, cannot answer the question of how any individual Catholic should choose to receive. Nor will general statements about the availability and broader effect of CITH supply a rule of decision, as some COTT proponents seem to
believe: Claims that CITH leads to abuse, irreverence, and declining belief in the real presence address the question of whether it should be allowed, and that does not translate from the macro to the micro. The observation that it is (or can be) used irreverently by others decides nothing about my own practice, since I shall be neither abusive nor irreverent. The issue for decision is not whether CITH should be banned, but whether I should receive that way.

The bottom line, all agree, is that proper respect must be shown to the body of Christ, “truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of [bread and wine].” Even that, however, does not answer the question by itself. “[T]o open the mouth and stick out the tongue,” CITH proponents contend, “is not a gesture of respect…. They think it a much more ‘human’ gesture to extend the hand, inasmuch as this action expresses a self-commitment.” They argue that Christ said “take and eat.” And, “[r]ejecting our Lord’s invitation to be fed like little children, they asserted that it was ‘childish’ to be fed directly into the mouth.”

**B. Plowing the road: Common objections rejected**

1. *Unpersuasive arguments against COTT and for CITH*

   The two arguments that we met immediately above are easily dispatched. CITH proponents sometimes argue that it is “childish” to be “fed” by a priest. That argument is untenable. Against it can be laid the words of the Lord: “I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whomever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” As the evangelical theologian James Packer notes, “Scripture pictures the believer as one who knows himself called to take the attitude of a child, and who is looking to his divine Teacher for instruction.”

   Of no more substantial construction is the argument that Christ told us to *take* and eat, which fails because it rests unbearable weight on the word choice of the translator. The key
verb in Mathew 26:26, Luke 22:17, and 1st Corinthians 11:24 is the plural imperative accipite (primarily “receive”);\(^{35}\) only Mark has sumite (primarily “take”),\(^{35}\) and the original Greek is λάβετε, which happily serves in both senses.\(^{37}\) The notions of “take” and “receive” are close, and when a language’s semantic distinction is not clean-cut, we can infer that the culture’s conceptual distinction was no more so.

Nor do proponents do themselves any favors in emphasizing secular concerns such as the (in any event mistaken) notion that CITH is more practical.\(^{38}\) Worse yet is the argument that COTT is the fruit of “an exaggerated respect for the sacrament,”\(^{39}\) a locution dripping with scorn for—and which, by necessary implication, rejects—the real presence. In the Eucharist, “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.”\(^{40}\) If this is believed, it is hard to see how there can be such a thing as “exaggerated” respect for the sacrament.

CITH proponents will also rhetorically ask: “Did Christ place the bread on the apostles’ tongues at the last supper?” This, too, is flimsy. We know that the Last Supper was attended by Christ and the twelve,\(^{41}\) and we may assume that the apostles received in their hands. But we also know that at the same time that Christ gave them the Eucharist, He instituted them priests of the new covenant.\(^{42}\) (We must take this as a given because it is heresy to deny it.\(^{43}\)) Accordingly, there is no tension between the institution and COTT; as St. Thomas Aquinas explained, “[o]ut of reverence towards [the Holy Eucharist], nothing touches it, but what is consecrated; hence the corporal and the chalice are consecrated, and likewise the priest’s hands, for touching this sacrament.”\(^{44}\)

Finally, we consider the buttress asked by CITH proponents to carry much of the load: The early practice of the Church. The weight is too much and the support too weak. Quite aside from the fog surrounding just what that practice was,\(^{45}\) Pope Pius XII wrote presciently on this very subject in his towering encyclical Mediator Dei. Casting an eye toward those “who are bent on the restoration of all the ancient rites and ceremonies

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indiscriminately,” the Holy Father warned that while the “liturgy of the early ages is most certainly worthy of all veneration,”

ancient usage must not be esteemed more suitable and proper, either in its own right or in its significance for later times and new situations, on the simple ground that it carries the savor and aroma of antiquity. The more recent liturgical rites likewise deserve reverence and respect. They, too, owe their inspiration to the Holy Spirit, who assists the Church in every age even to the consummation of the world. They are equally the resources used by the majestic Spouse of Jesus Christ to promote and procure the sanctity of man.

Assuredly it is a wise and most laudable thing to return in spirit and affection to the sources of the sacred liturgy... [b]ut it is neither wise nor laudable to reduce everything to antiquity by every possible device. ... [No sincere] Catholic in his right senses [may] repudiate existing legislation of the Church to revert to prescriptions based on the earliest sources of canon law. Just as obviously unwise and mistaken is the zeal of one who in matters liturgical would go back to the rites and usage of antiquity, discarding the new patterns introduced by disposition of divine Providence to meet the changes of circumstances and situation.46

Of course, that knife cuts both ways; it could be used as a critique of more exclusivist proponents of the Tridentine Mass.47 Moreover, if the proponents of CITH could be accused of “exaggerated and senseless antiquarianism” in the 1960s, can’t the same be said for those who cling to COTT after five decades in which CITH has entered common usage? The answer is no. Mediator Dei warns against indiscriminate restoration of ancient usages, not the continued use of ancient forms never abrogated.48 COTT was never abolished and never lapsed into de facto desuetude. While coexisting with alternative methods of communication, it has remained in continuous and common use throughout the latin rite Church, including in the dioceses of the United States. Mediator Dei thus stands squarely and unambiguously behind COTT.
2. Unpersuasive arguments against CITH

On the other side of the fence, COTT’s more activist proponents have created a veritable cottage industry of misread, misrepresented, and fabricated quotes designed to impeach CITH’s historical pedigree.\(^49\) We must touch lightly on these.

An example of misreading arises from the Council of Trent’s observation that “it was always the custom in the Church of God[ ] that laymen should receive the communion from priests; but that priests when celebrating should communicate themselves; which custom, as coming down from an apostolical tradition, ought with justice and reason to be retained.”\(^50\) In citing this passage, COTT proponents assume that “receive” means “receive on the tongue,” and—when the citation is to the Tridentine Catechism rather than the council—that “administer” means “administer on the tongue.” But the decree doesn’t say that. CITH practitioners “receive the communion from priests,” too, and a priest “administer[s]” it to them, just as Trent and its catechism say.\(^51\) In order to read those documents as COTT proponents urge, we must not only contort the semantic content of the words, we must also impute historical error to the council: As we have seen, COTT was not always the Church’s universal custom.\(^52\) That is not an appealing hermeneutic.

An example of a misrepresentation is the attribution to the Synod of Saragossa (A.D. 380), with the confirmation of the Synod of Toledo (A.D. 400), of excommunications against anyone attempting CITH. Saragossa’s third canon excommunicated one “who[ ] does not consume the Holy Eucharist given him in church,”\(^53\) and Toledo’s fourteenth canon held that “[t]hose who do not really consume the Holy Eucharist[,] which they have received from the priest, shall be treated as ‘sacrilegious.’”\(^54\) Those canons in fact presuppose the existence (if not necessarily prevalence) of CITH—how would such situations arise if communion was given only on the tongue?—and they do not order COTT as a remedy.

Another example of misrepresentation involves St. Basil of Cæsarea’s fourth century Letter #93,\(^55\) pulled inside out by articles such as Jude Huntz’s oft-cited Rethinking Communion in the Hand.\(^56\) Huntz et al maintain that Basil “says clearly that to receive Communion by one’s own hand is only permitted in
times of persecution or, as was the case with monks in the desert, when no deacon or priest was available to give it.”

What Basil said was: “It is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of a priest or minister is not a serious offense.”

What this says clearly is that it’s good to communicate, and that it’s too obvious to require discussion that in times of persecution, one may “take the communion in his own hand” (whatever that means, and it has an idiomatic ring). Nevertheless, if Basil had stopped there, if he had said nothing else but the text just quoted, it might be reasonable to construe the remark—in the spirit of exceptio probat regulam in casibus non exceptis—as “impl[y]ing that to receive in the hand under other circumstances, outside of persecution, would be a grave fault,” as Huntz proposes. But Basil does not stop there, and in the very next breath adds:

[A]t Alexandria and in Egypt, each one of the laity, for the most part, keeps the communion, at his own house, and participates in it when he likes. For when once the priest has completed the offering, and given it, the recipient, participating in it each time as entire, is bound to believe that he properly takes and receives it from the giver. And even in the church, when the priest gives the portion, the recipient takes it with complete power over it, and so lifts it to his lips with his own hand.

That appendage cannot be squared with Huntz’s interpretation, and leaves adrift any attempt to cite Letter #93 for the proposition that Basil implicitly condemns CITH.

Finally, an argument that defies easy classification is the citation of an act by one of two seventh century councils at Constantinople, either the third council thereof in AD 681, or the AD 692 synod in trullo. We are told, without specific quotation, that the council (whichever it was) excommuni-cated those who self-communicated. The reference is clearly to canon 58 of the 692 synod:

None of those who are in the order of laymen may distribute the Divine Mysteries to himself if a
bishop, presbyter, or deacon be present. But whoso shall dare to do such a thing, as acting contrary to what has been determined shall be cut off for a week and thenceforth let him learn not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

As we have already seen, however, by the late seventh century, CITH was in terminal decline if not outright desuetude, and this council belongs properly to the era of COTT. Moreover, canon 101 of the same synod has this to say:

if anyone wishes ... to offer himself for the communion, let him draw near, arranging his hands in the form of a cross, and so let him receive the communion of grace. But such [communicants] as, instead of their hands, make vessels of gold or other materials for the reception of the divine gift, and by these receive the immaculate communion, we by no means allow to come, as preferring inanimate and inferior matter to the image of God.

We should not lightly attribute incoherence to a council, and because the reading urged of canon 58 can’t be reconciled with canon 101, it should be dismissed.

**C. The heart of the matter: Identifying the rule of decision.**

We have now shorn—as cant, irrelevant, or ill-taken—the arguments that are most commonly dragged into the arena by gladiators for both sides of the debate. What remains?

We must face the fact that from the middle ages (if not earlier) until the 1960s, COTT was the universal practice of the Church. It remains the normative practice of the Latin Rite,⁶¹ the prevailing practice in much of the Church,⁶² and the practice preferred by the Holy Father.⁶³ It is a tradition deeply-rooted in over a millennium of Catholic practice, whereas CITH, despite its use in the early Church, was reintroduced barely fifty years ago (as an abuse, at that), received limited Vatican sanction only in 1969,⁶⁴ and has been licit in the United States for no time at all, approved in 1977.⁶⁵

COTT therefore arrives with a heavy presumption in its favor.⁶⁶ Although I am authorized to depart from it, the exercise
of that discretion is not unconstrained; there must be some persuasive reason to deviate from the traditional and universal norm of the Church. The mere existence of the choice, and its adoption by many in this country, will not suffice; to paraphrase St. Thomas More, I am not bound to conform my conscience to the counsel of one era against the general counsel of Christendom. It is entirely rational to instead defer to the traditional practice of the Church, for there is much wisdom in Chesterton’s apt observation that

> tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. ... If we attach great importance to the opinion of ordinary men in great unanimity when we are dealing with daily matters, there is no reason why we should disregard it when we are dealing with history or fable. Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.

This is particularly true when one considers that the Church’s catholicity—its universality—is not merely geographic but temporal. Given that Catholics received communion on the tongue for a millennium and a half, it strikes me as obvious that if tradition is given its due weight, I may only decide to exercise the option to receive in the hand if there is a thoroughly persuasive case for doing so; in the absence thereof, the universal norm of the universal Church should govern.
D. Beyond the intellectual process: Personal and prayerful concerns acknowledged

Having identified the rule of decision, things look bad for CITH. As we have already seen, many of the arguments raised by its proponents simply defend the practice’s validity, and whatever merit such arguments have, they cannot overcome a presumption in favor of the traditional practice. Before concluding, however, a few words must be said addressing human considerations, which are unavoidable, and prayerful reflection, which is an unmitigated good.

As I investigated this issue over the course of two years, through a combination of prayer and intellectual development, I felt myself inclining toward COTT, but there were lingering personal concerns that no amount of research would dispel. Candor demands that they be mentioned. I worried that I would look ridiculous; I worried that I would stand out (thinking that the de facto norm in the United States is to receive in the hand), thus violating what I thought was Jesus’ warning against showy acts of public piety; I worried that it was an inconvenience to the priest; I worried that it complicated reception, shifting the focus from reverence to the mechanics of receiving. Ultimately, however, I came to see these concerns as trivial, and as elaborations of an amorphous and inchoate anxiety that might be summed up as the even less defensible concern that “isn’t CITH just easier?” When I began, prayer supplied the call, and the intellectual process removed the obstacles that I perceived. Toward the end, matters reversed: The intellectual process drove consideration forward, while prayer was needed to remove perceived obstacles (and to confirm that they were not warnings to turn back).

III. Conclusions.

Holy Mother Church does not give the faithful discretion so that they can do whatever they want, but so they may better follow the individualized guidance of the Holy Spirit. “[W]here such liberties [as freedom of worship] are in use, men should employ them in doing good, and should estimate them as the
Church does; for liberty is to be regarded as legitimate in so far only as it affords greater facility for doing good...."74

I must admit that while researching and writing this essay, I became sympathetic to the arguments that CITH is inherently problematic its availability should be reconsidered. While compatible with Catholic orthodoxy, it seems disharmonious, and on the macro level, experience suggests that when CITH is practiced over the course of generations, the result is a gradual sloping off of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament and belief in the real presence. The macro level, however, is not the issue before us. On the individual or personal level, the disposition and attitude of the recipient are more important than the manner in which one receives; “there is nothing intrinsically more reverent about reception on the tongue or less reverent about receiving in the hand.”75 “[W]e should not forget that not only our hands are impure but also our tongue and also our heart; we often sin more with the tongue than with the hands.”76 And CITH is a canonically legitimate option. Yet freedom to choose is not a rule of decision;77 as Lord Acton pithily put it, freedom is “not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought.”78 Given freedom, what should we do? We thus arrive back at the question: Both options being available, how should I—and, I dare say, how should you—choose to receive?

As we saw in part II.C, the rule of decision is supplied by tradition: When there is a manner of doing something that is received from and has been approved by myriad generations, and has thus been worn smooth in the living river of tradition,79 that approach should be the default, over and above a contrary practice that is easy, convenient, adjacent, and recent. We may deviate from tradition when there is a convincing argument for doing so, but, to my knowledge, CITH proponents have advanced none. “[T]he time-honored tradition is to receive the host on the tongue,”80 and, as a general matter,81 I find insufficient basis to depart from it.

*On March 18, 2012, the Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem.*
Notes:

1. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 160 (U.S. ed. 2003); see also *Redemptionis sacramentum*, no. 92 (CDW 2004). The *editio typica* has “et Sacramentum recipit, ore vel, ubi concessum sit, manu, pro libitu suo” (“and receives the Sacrament, in their mouth or, where it is authorized, in their hand, at their discretion”) (emphases added); because communion in the hand has been authorized for American dioceses, the U.S. edition of the GIRM simplifies the *editio typica* text to account for the indult.


3. See, e.g., Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy* 9, 121 (1990); infra, notes 13 and 62.


5. See, e.g. *LUCIEN DEISS, THE MASS* 97 (1992) (claiming CITH as “among the most successful reforms of Vatican II”); KLEMENS RICHTER, *THE MEANING OF THE SACRAMENTAL SYMBOLS* 91-92 (1990) (claiming that “the changes introduced with Vatican Council II[ ] once again mak[e] Communion in the hand an option”); cf. Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality*, 188 AMERICA, no. 6 (Feb. 24, 2003), available at http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2810 (last accessed March 1, 2012) (“Because the hermeneutics of discontinuity has prevailed in countries like our own, the efforts of the Holy See to clarify the [council’s] documents have regularly been attacked as retrenchments … [even though] the critics did not convincingly show that the official teaching had departed from the teaching of Vatican II”).


11. I say “seems” because we can’t exclude the possibility that Cyril may have had a similar mindset to those American bishops who argued that CITH should be allowed because it was happening illicitly anyway. See JAMES O’TOOLE, *HABITS OF DEVOTION* 226 (2005).

12. See, e.g. JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *GOD IS NEAR US* 70 (2003); M. FRANCIS MANNION, *PASTORAL ANSWERS* 112 (2002); CHUPUNGO, supra note 4, at 308; MARIE ZOGLMAN & MARY MCCUE, *EUCHARISTIC MINISTRY TO THE SICK* 10 (1996); DEISS, supra note 5, at 98.

13. 1 T.E. BRIDGETT, *HISTORY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN GREAT BRITAIN* 217 (1881). In this period, St. John of Damascus wrote that

[t]he bread and the wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!) but the deified body of the Lord itself: for the Lord has said, “This is My body,” not, this is a figure of My body: and “My blood,” not, a figure of My blood. And on a previous occasion He had said to the Jews, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. For My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed. And again, He that eats Me, shall live John 6:51-55.

Wherefore with all fear and a pure conscience and certain faith let us draw near and it will assuredly be to us as we believe, doubting nothing. Let us pay homage to it in all purity both of soul and body: for it is twofold. Let us draw near to it with an ardent desire, and with our hands held in the form of the cross let us receive the body of the Crucified One.

In the same period, the eastern Churches settled on their practice of “intinction,” i.e. communion under both species, fed simultaneously to the communicant on a spoon. See E. GLENN HINSON, THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT 333 (1995); WILLIAM MAXWELL, AN OUTLINE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP 41 (1936). This remains the practice of many eastern Catholic rites, see, e.g., OSV CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA 256–57 (Stravinskas, ed. 2008) (Byzantine rite); 1 ARCHDALE KING, THE RITES OF EASTERN CHRISTENDOM 100, 190-92 (2007) (Syrian rite); id., at 477 (Coptic rite).

14. See Michael Kunzler, The Liturgy of the Church 241 (2001); ROBERT CABIE, THE EUCHARIST 216 (1986); but cf. CHUPUNGO, at 307 (implying that COTT was invented at this time).

15. “The eucharist may never be given to a layman or woman in the hands but only in the mouth.” The date of this synod is a matter of some confusion; some place it in A.D. 650, e.g. W.H. FREESTONE, THE SACRAMENT RESERVED 227 (1917), while others place it more than two centuries later, in A.D. 878, e.g. ELIZABETH SAXON, THE EUCHARIST IN ROMANESQUE FRANCE 153 (2006); CHUPUNGO, at 307. Bishop Karl von Hefele’s authoritative documentary history of church synods and councils inclines toward the later date on the basis that three of the sixteen extant canons struck him as addressing concerns more apt to that timeframe, but reckons the matter “very uncertain.” See 4 KARL HEFEL, A HISTORY OF CHURCH COUNCILS 468 (1896). For our purposes, the valence of the dispute is negligible.

16. Berra, famous for his mangled English, was humorously sending up his penchant for malapropisms. He meant that he didn’t say half the things attributed to him.

17. See supra, note 5.

18. Unsurprisingly, given the brooding omnipresence of the conciliar upheaval, it was “a period of ‘complete liturgical anarchy.’” KEITH PECKLERS, THE GENIUS OF THE ROMAN RITE 36 (2009) (quoting KLAUS GAMBER, THE MODERN RITE 7 (Taylor, trns. 2002). At first blush, it's hard to understand how things got so rapidly out of hand given that both Sacrosanctum concilium and Inter œcumenici explicitly warned against sua sponte innovation, but we must avoid projecting modern assumptions back onto the time. Accessing the conciliar documents was not then as simple as a mouse click on the internet; given the incentives and epistemological limits of the time, it is not entirely surprising that the council’s “spirit” could be successfully invoked as a kind of ersatz directive. Happily, in recent years, we have made great strides toward recovering the historical Vatican II. See, e.g., BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO THE ROMAN CURIA (DEC. 22, 2005), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html (last accessed March 1, 2012); AGOSTINO MARCHETTO, THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

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(Whitehead, trns. 2009); VATICAN II: RENEWAL WITHIN TRADITION
(Lamb & Levering, eds. 2008); Dulles, supra note 5.
(“On their own, priests began giving Communion in the hand,
in emulation of the Protestants.”).
21. Id., at 544.
22. Id., at 545. Supporters of CITH tend to present this sequence
of events in ways that could be described diplomatically as soft
focus and candidly as misleading. See, e.g. U.S. Bishops, supra
note 8, at 52.
23. See Catholic Bishops To Study Change In Communion in The
24. See, e.g., Vatican Backs Holy Communion By Hand in U.S. in
the hand is widely practiced in this country, even without
official sanction of the Church. Failure of large numbers of
Catholics to confine themselves to the traditional method of
communion distribution was one of the reasons cited by
bishops last spring for formally changing the procedures”).
25. See Bishops drop excommunication of re-wed Catholics in THE
NEW YORK TIMES, May 5, 1977, p.16; Penalty Lifted, supra note
4; Bishops vote to Ask Vatican to Permit communion in Hand in
THE NEW YORK TIMES, Jun 3, 1977, p. 10; Communion In Hand
Voted By U.S. Bishops in THE WASHINGTON POST, Jun 3, 1977,
26. The USCCB advises me that the indult was issued on June 17,
1977 under Prot. no. CD 701/77 (email on file with author).
See also Vatican Backs Holy Communion, supra note 24; 7
27. Cf. CHUPUNGO, supra note 4, at 309; Ratzinger, op. cit. note
12, at 69-70. My experience has been that some CITH
proponents assume that the mere existence of a choice
supplies a decision, appearing perplexed by the very idea that
there could be more to the question.
28. See, e.g. Dominicae cenæ, no. 11, 72 AAS 114, 137 et seq.
(John Paul II, 1980).
29. THE CANONS AND DECREES OF THE SACRED AND ECUMENICAL
COUNCIL OF TRENT 76 (Waterworth, ed., 1848); see, e.g.,
Kunzler, at 241; THOMAS RAUSCH & CATHERINE CLIFFORD,
CATHOLICISM IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM 212 (2003); U.S. Bishops,
supra note 8, at 53.
30. O'TOOLE, at 216; accord CHUPUNGO, at 308.
31. O'TOOLE, op. cit. supra note 11, at 226 (emphasis added); U.S.
Bishops, supra, at 53-54. N.b. the intellectual jump from “take”
to “take with your hands.”
32. FRANCIS RANDOLPH, KNOW HIM IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD
162 (1998); see also JAMES O'TOOLE, THE FAITHFUL 215 (2008);
Gerald O’Collins, Living Vatican II 64 (2006) ("Instead of being received kneeling at the altar rail and on the tongue, holy communion is normally received standing and in the hand—a dignified and more adult practice retrieved from early Christianity"); Penalty lifted, supra note 4 ("Proponents of change maintain that the traditional practice of the priest of the priest placing the wafer in the communicant’s open mouth—‘like feeding a baby bird,’ they scornfully describe it—symbolizes a servility degrading to the worshipper and not in harmony with Christian theology"); U.S. Bishops, supra, at 51.

33. Mt 18:2-4 (RSVCE 2d); Mk 10:13-16; cf. Ps 131 ("I have calmed and quieted my soul...; like a weaned child is my soul within me" (ESV)); but n.b. 1 Cor 14:20.


35. It can bear the meaning “take,” but its primary sense is “receive.” See, e.g., Charlton Lewis, An Elementary Latin Dictionary 10-11 (1899) (accipio–cepi, to receive, get, accept, take without effort, or admit (in the sense of let in)). Cassell’s Latin Dictionary 6 (Marchant & Charles, rev. 1892) defines it as to take or receive, but its entry lists numerous senses, all of which place the emphasis on reception. At most, we can say that it is ambiguous between the senses, and that is fatal for the argument rested on it.

36. E.g. Lewis, supra, at 828 (to take, take up, take in hand (which is close to “receive”), lay hold of, or assume); Cassell’s, supra, at 555 (to take or lay hold of).

37. Compare Jn 18:31 ("take [λάβετε] him yourselves and judge him") with Jn 20:22 ("receive [λάβετε] the Holy Spirit"); both are rendered as accipite in the vulgate.


40. CCC ¶ 1374.

41. Mk 14:17; Lk 22:14.


43. See Waterworth’s Council of Trent, supra note 29, at 158 (22d Session, 1562) (“If any one saith, that by those words, Do this for the commemoration of me, Christ did not institute the apostles priests; or, did not ordain that they, and other priests should offer His own body and blood; let him be anathema” (citation deleted)).


45. See supra, part I.A. The epistemological limits on ascertaining early Christian praxis tend to corrupt inquiries into it when used for polemical purposes; compare, in a different context, Uwe Michael Lang, Turning Toward the Lord 56 et seq. (2004).
46. *Mediator Dei*, nos. 61-63, 39 AAS 521, 545-46 (Pius XII, 1947), available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei_en.html (last accessed May 16, 2011). I say “towering” because the encyclical “is seen today as the ‘Magna Carta’ that prepared for the general reform called for in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.”


47. Cf. *Universæ Ecclesiae*, no. 19 (PCED 2011) (“The faithful who ask for the celebration of the *forma extraordinaria* must not in any way support or belong to groups which show themselves to be against the validity or legitimacy of the Holy Mass or the Sacraments celebrated in the *forma ordinaria* or against the Roman Pontiff as Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church”)


51. See supra note 31 and accompanying text for a mirror-image error made by CITH proponents.

52. See supra part I.A.

53. 2 HEFEL, supra note 15, at 293.

54. Id., at 420.


57. Loc. cit. (emphasis added).


General Secretary of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote in 1981 that while “Rome has given permission for this practice ...[,] it is to be considered a ‘barely tolerated exception.’” No split between Pope and Canadian Bishops in THE CANADA GLOBE & MAIL, Jan 17, 1981. GIRM 161 in its Latin text, and in English translations without changes peculiar to the United States, says “the priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying: The Body of Christ. The communicant replies: Amen, and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed and if the communicant so chooses, in the hand” (emphasis added).

62. Practice in the Roman rite is mixed, but the Byzantine rite, and most other Eastern-rite Catholics, continue to receive by a species of COTT (see supra note 13).

63. E.g. RANDOLPH, supra note 32 at 163; Pontiff Softens Traditionalism on Sacrament in THE NEW YORK TIMES, Nov 19, 1980, p.A15 (“the Pope caused a controversy when he declined to follow the practice of placing communion in the hands of the faithful, instead of following the traditional practice of placing it on the tongue. The new practice has gained favor in some countries, including the United States, in line with efforts to modernize church services.”). Benedict XVI has followed the lead of his predecessor in this matter, see, e.g., Latin Mass Appeal in THE NEW YORK TIMES, Nov 29, 2009 p.WK8, despite what appear to be his personal predilections, see JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER & PETER SEEWALD, GOD AND THE WORLD 410 (2000) (“I would not want to be fussy about [CITH vs. COTT]. It was done in the early Church. A reverent manner of receiving Communion in the hand is in itself a perfectly reasonable way to receive Communion.”)

64. See supra part I.B.


66. See, e.g., Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics, reprinted in CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THOUGHT 170-72 (Finlayson, ed. 2003). Oakeshott warns against the cast of mind—we might recognize “rationalism” as that which is elsewhere called “modernism,” see Pascendi Dominici gregis (Pius X, 1907)—which subjects every habit, practice, and belief to the judgment of his own sense of reason, which sees no value in any experience but his own, which finds no value in the mere existence or antiquity of a practice, and for whom “the past is significant ... only as an encumbrance.” Such an attitude, which elevates personal preference over the received wisdom of the Church, strikes me as thoroughly protestant. For better or worse, however, the indult allowing CITH requires us to do what we should generally avoid: A practice inherited from myriad generations of Catholic practice is thrown into the dock and we are dragged—unwillingly, I hope—to the bench. See id., at 171 (the rationalist drags “the social, political, legal, and institutional inheritance of his society before the tribunal of his

67. For More’s original remark and its context, see, e.g., GERARD WEGEMER, THOMAS MORE: A PORTRAIT OF COURAGE 216, and generally ch.24 (1995).


69. See DODD, op. cit. supra note 42, at 48-49 n.346 and accompanying text (s.v. “Four Marks of the Church”).

70. This is not to say that COTT proponents fare much better in this regard. See supra, part II.B.2.


72. See Mt 6:1-6 and 16-18, but cf. Mt 5:13-16.

73. It might be thought a species of subsidiarity. Cf. Quadragesimo anno, 23 AAS 177 (Pius XI, 1931).

74. Libertas praestantissimum, no. 42 (Leo XIII, 1888).


76. RATZINGER, op. cit. supra note 12, at 71; see James 3:6.

77. See supra, Part II.A.


81. In concluding that there is no basis for departing from the traditional practice in general circumstances, but that CITH is deprecated rather than impermissible, I leave open the possibility of exceptional circumstances. The advisability of COTT as a general matter is underscored by an observation at the intersection of doctrine and practicality: Given the real presence, and given the reality that hosts are likely to have crumbs, it seems highly plausible that crumbs will be left on the hands of a CITH communicant, visibly or otherwise. This creates a situation that requires a level of care, caution, and attention that is impractical as a routine matter, and difficult to envisage in the context of the Mass. But it may be possible, and in truly exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary. For example, there have been instances when our bishops have requested that the faithful receive communion in the hand for the duration of viral outbreaks; we should seek to be obedient...
to our shepherds, and when a request is reasonable and may be accommodated with heightened—but still reasonable—effort, we should try to do so. Moreover, in the case of a priest with a physical infirmity, loving charity toward our brother suggests that we should make all the extra effort necessary rather than standing on our rights. I therefore reserve the option to communicate via CITH on an ad hoc basis in genuinely extraordinary circumstances.

Why Roman Catholic?

April 9th, 2012

Some Catholics bridle at the modifier “Roman,” noting that it has derogatory origins, but I think that there’s much to be said for what then-Father Joseph Ratzinger had to say about the label fifty years ago:

In that it says “Catholic” it is distinguished from a Christianity based on scripture alone, instead acknowledging faith in the authority of the living word, i.e. in the office of the apostolic succession. In that it says “Roman” it firmly refers this office to its center, the office of the keys vested in the successor of St. Peter in the city consecrated by the blood of two apostles. By uniting the two to say “Roman Catholic” it expresses the pregnant dialectic between primacy and episcopate, neither of which exists without the other. A church which wished to be only Catholic, having no part with Rome, would thereby lose its Catholicity. A church which, per impossibile, wished to be only Roman without being Catholic would similarly deny herself and degenerate into a sect. “Roman” guarantees
true Catholicity; actual Catholicity attests Rome’s right.


**Blessings and the Communion line**

*April 12th, 2012*

Father John Zuhlsdorf responds to a question from an RCIA candidate who asks whether it is wrong to join the communion line for a blessing. The practice of inviting non-Catholics forward to receive a blessing is a (likely) illicit but very common practice in the United States; the questioner reads Father Z’s blog and had been troubled by a recent post lauding a priest who has stopped giving such blessings.

I want to add a reflection on my experience, because I was in a similar situation to the questioner. While I was in the first stage of RCIA, I would go up for a blessing like everyone else; we were expressly invited to do so, and when you’re new you do what you’re told. Besides, you don’t want to be in the way! But as time went on, things that I was reading started to give me anxiety that there was a problem with the practice. In particular, a letter on EWTN’s website from the CDW indicating that they had some concerns and were actively studying the issue made me anxious that regardless of the invitations and the ubiquity of the practice, the communion line
was and should be for people receiving communion—period.

At about this time, we were blessed with a new pastor, and when I presented myself for a blessing, he seemed uncomfortable. (Please read that sentence precisely: I didn’t say that he wasn’t or isn’t comfortable with it, only that he seemed uncomfortable with it. *Capiche*)? This was a bit of a kick in the tuchus for me. In light of the reading and consideration I’d given the issue, I took this as a good opportunity to stop going up for blessings, at least as a general matter. I wasn’t ready to encourage others to do likewise, to say “this is a problem,” still less to encourage the parish to stop the invitation, but I felt that it was enough of a problem that I couldn’t continue to participate in it while mulling it further. It is quite often, in law and life, that you have to make a tentative decision about an issue because the world keeps turning while you’re pondering the question, and you must decide what to do while figuring out your decision. *Cf. Christian Legal Society v. Walker*, 453 F.3d 853 (7th Cir. 2006) (Sykes, J.). So I stopped going up for a blessing, and tried to ensure that I found a pew where I wouldn’t be in the way if I kept it.

Because my path to confirmation was, for various reasons, unusually protracted—I was finally received at last week’s Easter Vigil—this situation continued for more than a year. Thus, I had a lot of time to think about it. And at some point, the thought occurred—maybe this is pride, I don’t know—that there may be something quite positive about keeping one’s pew. It may be a good example
to others. It seems to me that what’s really at the root of this “come up for a blessing” business is the desire to circulate everyone through the communion line. I’ve read that people sometimes feel that if they don’t go up in line, people will look at them funny (“look at the sinner!”; “look at the outsider!”); my guess is that at some point in the past, the “inclusion” people—you know the type—decided that if everyone joined the communion line, no one would feel excluded, and the people who would otherwise have had to keep their pews could subtly get a blessing instead. This is, of course, well-intentioned poison. It isn’t hard to predict what happens next: Once everyone’s in the practice of going up at every Mass regardless of their last trip to the confessional, it’s a short jump to receiving communion at every Mass. But receiving should never be the default option! I can’t help but feel that by keeping one’s pew, one gives a positive example: Never receive on autopilot. Only if one is affirmatively in a good place to receive should one present oneself for communion. By breaking the mindset that “everyone goes up,” by people visibly keeping their pews, I think that’s actually quite helpful to breaking the mindset that receiving is the default.

**Sister Le Fer on the habit**

*April 27th, 2012*

On August 16, 1853, Irma le Fer, Sister St. Francis Xavier, SP, sent “word of joy and happiness”: Her sister Elvire had become doubly a sister, joining the
Sisters of Providence as Sister Mary Joseph. She “has received the Holy Habit; she has laid aside the garments of the world to clothe herself with the livery of Jesus poor and despised. You would have wept for joy to see her, so modest and pure, at the foot of the altar.”

143 years later, as the postconciliar chaos finally began to recede, the Holy Father exhorted religious to be “true signs of Christ in the world,” living in a manner that “present[s] itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel. The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs.” And because “the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular Religious family,” he joined “the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit....”

What do you suppose that Sr. Le Fer would make of today’s religious who have set aside the livery of Jesus to clothe themselves with the garments of the world?

Notes:

1. CLEMENTINE DE LA CORBINIÈRE, LIFE AND LETTERS OF SISTER ST. FRANCIS XAVIER 346 (1934).
The Democratic fallacy

May 1st, 2012

Periodically, someone will suggest that bishops ought to be elected, and they will place immense weight on the point that bishops were once elected; they are likely to offer a quote (without sourcing) that he who is to govern all should be chosen by all.¹

While it’s true, after a fashion, that bishops were once elected (more on this in a minute), the fundamental error of the demand is its presupposition that bishops serve their flock in a similar manner to that in which members of Congress serve their constituents.² In a word, it pictures the Church as a democracy. But she is no such thing; bishops are not our representatives to Rome but Christ’s representatives to us.³ They are our shepherds; we are their flock.⁴ Have you ever heard of sheep electing their shepherds?

Quite aside from the structural error just mentioned, there’s a fault in the argument from history. Michael Buckley, SJ, suggests that “[i]t could well have been necessary ... that the shape given to the Papal ministry by Gregory VII was dialectically necessary for the freedom of the local church from secular rulers in the electing of its bishops; while now that same centralizing dynamic is weakening the local church through an excessive focus upon the holy see.”⁵ He suggests that because the functions of the episcopal-papal relationship are somewhat dynamic, it can simultaneously be true that it was then necessary for the Pope to appoint bishops and that it is now necessary that that power
devolve. What this argument misses, however, is that the opposite is no less a valid inference: It could well have been impossible in earlier times for Popes to exercise the power proper to the successor of Peter. It may be that the limits on papal power in centuries past are the problem and that advances in technology—especially transport and telecommunications—have allowed us to perfect that power.

Buckley’s position seems to be (and the historical argument presupposes a somewhat less sophisticated version of it) that the current practice arose as a practical compromise accepted in response to circumstances that no longer obtain, and that we are therefore now free to return to the ideal past practice. It seems far more plausible to me that the prior practice was a practical compromise accepted in response to circumstances that no longer obtain, and that we have subsequently been freed to progress to the current practice. And as Buckley elsewhere recognizes, we can’t safely assume that “the post-apostolic Church was immediately in such full possession of itself, of its own structure, that it immediately asserted (or assented to)” papal primacy.6

In sum, the notion of electing bishops seems in tension with the basic function and character of the episcopate, as Vatican II explained, and the historical argument at most proves only that bishops can be elected when practical considerations entirely preclude the operation of the normal appointment process.
Notes:

1. In the letter to which I replied here, Prof. Swidler claims it; here’s another example; for an instructive example of the argument in its elaborated form, see Joseph O’Callaghan, Electing Our Bishops (2007).
3. LG27; cf. LG8, 14.
4. LG18 ff.
6. Id., at 21 (quoting McCue, 25 T.S. 161 (1964)).

Simon’s big picture philosophy of philosophies

May 2nd, 2012

Three years ago, I suggested that our two political camps reflect two different psychologies, casting conservatives as turtles and progressives as hares. I want to sketch a view of the same distinction through a different, more philosophical lens.

To be a progressive or a conservative is to take sides on an epistemological question: How much information can individuals obtain, relative to the amount of information one needs to make informed and thus responsible decisions? (This applies especially to individual people, but it also holds for individual generations, cf. Chesterton, Orthodoxy 84-85 (1909).)

If one is highly optimistic about individuals’ capacities to obtain all the information relevant to a decision and perform adequate analysis of it, one will be apt to have great faith in the abilities of
individuals employed as planners and managers to direct society. By the same token, the more skeptical one is of those capacities, the less confidence that one will have in the ability of planners. Both of these are compounded depending on one’s intuition as to the amount of information about potential consequences that one believes to be necessary in order to make an informed decision, and the degree to which one is willing to accept the risks of unanticipated consequences.

Conservatives want a greater degree of outcome-certainty before allowing individuals to meddle, and we are skeptical about the capacity of individuals to acquire the necessary information, given the dense and often subtle interconnections that tie society together. The upshot is that we prefer incremental change over relatively long periods of time, and are dubious about proposals that empower individuals—especially individuals who are epistemological optimists—to make sweeping decisions.

Post facto:


A Matter of Identity

May 4, 2011

In a recent post, I implied that I disagree with the 1966 decisions of Paul VI and the NCCB (USCCB’s
forerunner) to make fish Friday optional. I set aside that discussion until today. See MP: *Re-proposing fish Friday* (Jan. 3, 2012), *ante*, p. 102.

One of the things that worries me is Catholic identity; I would call it waning but that seems a generation too late. In a recent post on celibacy, his excellency Bishop Christopher Coyne notes the sexuality-based identity so prevalent in the modern world:

> Sadly, we live in a culture driven by the sexual definition and understanding of the human person as the primary one. The starting point for most people is the sexual label: ‘I’m gay, I’m straight, I’m lesbian, I’m bi, I’m transgender, etc.’

And so it is. But I wonder if perhaps the Church can learn something from the gay community.

My impression is that a large percentage of that community organize their lives around their “gay identity.” There is a gay media, which they read; there are gay clubs and bars, to which they go; there are gay social organizations, to which they belong; there are gay-themed recreational activities such as gay cruises, and so on. There are gay think tanks to advocate gay-friendly social policy. Most of my gay friends and acquaintances, it seems to me, see *everything* through the prism of that identity; you remember the old saw that the *New York Times*‘ headline when the apocalypse comes will be “world ends, women and children hardest hit”? Well, for them—so it can often feel to an outsider—it isn’t news until the *Advocate* runs it, until the Pink Press
has come up with a gay-related angle. Simply put, to the extent this impression is correct, gays get identity.

Do Catholics, still?

Catholicism isn’t a solitary religion; it isn’t just about a vertical and personal relationship between the individual believer and God. We recognize that our adoption into the Holy Family requires a horizontal relationship with the community of believers. See, e.g., Richard McBrien, Catholicism 12-14 (2d ed. 1994). We recognize and support one another’s faith, mutual piety reinforcing mutual piety. Identity helps us to recognize one another and so helps ad intra; it also helps ad extra: “Preach the gospel at all times—if necessary, use words!”

In the last few decades, however, the “grout” of shared Catholic identity seems to have decayed. Small wonder that the tiles are falling out! Just to take one example, if one walked into a restaurant on a Friday a few generations ago, picking out the Catholics was easy: They’d be the ones crossing themselves to say grace over a nice slice of fish.

There are reasonable arguments for making “fish Friday” optional, and my previous post mentioned some of them, but in focusing solely on in terms of the vertical, the bishops of 1966 failed to take into account its place in the horizontal. A norm whence substitutions are allowed isn’t implausible, because, for example, abstinence qua penance is small potatoes for vegetarians! The problem, however, is this: Although the bishops expressly assumed in the
1966 *Pastoral Statement* (see my previous post for details) that abstinence would remain the norm, in practice, the move was not perceived by the first generation as allowing substitutions but rather as license to do nothing (making something optional will typically have that effect). The second and successive generations, not having learned from the example of their parents, are not even aware of the issue. Children learn by watching their parents and those around them in the community; if one generation stops doing something, successive generations are unlikely to recover it because it will simply not occur to them. A thing must be conceived before it can be considered.

Thus, after the generation to which the *Pastoral Statement* was given abandoned friday abstinence, their children had no models from whom to learn; the children had no idea that that was something that Catholics did (a situation that worsens if they didn’t hear contrary voices from the pulpit, and in the 1970s, preaching Catholic praxis was decidedly “out,” in favor of a stripped-down and diluted _catholicism-lite_). And so, where their parents simply didn’t do it, the children *didn’t even know that there was something to do that they were neglecting*. And *their* children, in turn, are even *less* likely to be exposed to the notion of abstention and thus even less likely to do it. Like communion on the tongue, *see generally* Simon Dodd, *Domine Non Sum Dignus* (Mar. 18, 2012), *reprinted ante*, pp. 115 ff, they have no idea that it is even an issue, save only the occasional contemptuous reference by a trendy
liturgist to the supposed horrors of the preconciliar Church.

Examples could be multiplied; to supply only one more of them, I recently read a blog post discussing the collapse of attendance on Holy Days of Obligation. The child of parents who diligently attend Church on days of obligation may or may not continue to do so herself, but at least she knows that that’s what Catholics do; the child of parents who never bother is unlikely to be exposed to the idea that attendance on such days is obligatory, and is likely to reject it as contrary to his experience if he should be exposed to it. Cf. Dwight Longenecker, *Can you be good without God?* (Apr. 24, 2012).

We have a crisis of identity; people are leaving the Church, and, worse yet, some of them don’t even know that they’ve done so. (How many times have you heard “I don’t think that I have to attend Mass or agree with the Church on X, Y, and Z in order to be a good Catholic”?) To begin addressing this problem, should we not start by reclaiming the pieces that comprise our shared identity as a communion of the faithful?

So, what can be done? In the short term, the bishops would do well to reissue and publicize the *Pastoral Statement*, admonishing the flock that Fridays are penitential days (not optional), that some kind of penance is required (not optional), and that the default penance is abstinence (not optional, but susceptible to substitutions for those for whom abstention is not penitential). The Holy Father has used the term “re-propose,” and it has been adopted
in other contexts: I suggest that just as we should re-propose faith *ad extra*, we should re-propose orthodoxy and tradition *ad intra*. If we could start by getting back to how things were immediately after the *Pastoral Statement* was issued, if we could trim the subsequent rot back to the healthy plant, that would be a good start; it would help foster our sense of Catholic Identity. And we should do so with alarm and speed, because right now we are to a great extent living on the inertia and memories of an aging generation who was brought up before the grout was stripped out; at risk of sounding morbid, we really only have until they die to get the grout back in place.

I might go further. A public reintroduction of the *Pastoral Statement* should, ideally, be prelude to episcopal reconsideration of the *Pastoral Statement*. Well-intentioned though it was, it has proved to be a poisonous bequeathment. It should be abandoned. The American bishops should revoke it and follow their British brethren in returning abstinence to normative status—there is no reason why the aforementioned vegetarians cannot add an additional and appropriate penance—and pastors should catechize and encourage their flocks to return to the practice. We can no longer assume that Catholics will absorb the grout of Catholic praxis—the grout list and more—from their parents; pastors must guide their flocks, and communities must strengthen one another in elements of communal praxis such as public grace and “fish friday.” It is good for us as individuals; it is good for us as a community; it is good for us as a Church.
Catholic social teaching and public policy: Presuppositions, institutional settlement, and the competency of bishops

May 4, 2012

Father Thomas Reese, SJ, appeared on The Colbert Report this week to talk about the budget offered by Representative Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.) and Catholic social teaching:

[Jesus said] that we’d be judged by whether we fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and this budget doesn’t do it. We believe that a budget is a moral document; it represents the values of a country, of a nation, and the values in [Ryan's] budget are that we would rather cut taxes for the rich than help the poor, and that’s just simply unacceptable.”

... .

I think that in the gospel it’s very clear that Jesus reached out and helped the poor, helped the sick, and this is what he calls us to do as his disciples. I mean, we’re to show one another that we love one another and follow Christ in caring for the sick, caring for the poor, giving people a hand up so that they can do these things.

It is true, is it not, that Jesus said “whatsoever you enact statutes forcing others to do for the least of these, you do for me”? Is it not clear in the gospel, as Fr. Reese says, that Jesus “reached out” and
demanded that the Roman government help the poor, help the sick, etc.? And who can argue with Reese when he tacitly asserts that the Church and her action is and should be equated coextensively and inseparably with the actions of the civil government? No unexamined presuppositions here!¹

The fundamental problem with Reese’s remarks is his assumption that the individual commission of Christians (or the Church’s collective commission if you prefer) vis-à-vis the poor may be conflated with the action of government. Acknowledging this tacit claim is not necessarily to say that it’s wrong, but it is an unexamined and arguable assumption that one (only one?) affirmative ecclesial duty should be assumed by the secular state and implemented with the force of law. Despite his authoritative air, and despite the prevalence of the view in the last century, Reese is merely reciting the liberal vision of “social justice catholicism,” which is to say “how liberal Catholics think.” It is not the only lens through which to view the question.

All of us who think about the intersection of religion and politics want to think that our own substantive political views take a back seat to the Church’s doctrine, but we inescapably come to the question of whether and how to import the Church’s doctrine into policy through the lens of our political philosophy and presuppositions.² That is to say, a conservative and a liberal who convert to Catholicism will probably have to rethink their substantive views on the death penalty and abortion respectively, for example, but they will still be a conservative and a liberal respectively, and so they
will think about whether and how doctrine should influence policy through the lenses which conservatives and liberals think about government and policy. One lens, through which Reese peers, sees the government is the juridical representative of society, and in a Christian society (which for these limited purposes I’m sure he would stipulate that we are, pluralism be darned), the most efficient way for the members of that society to fulfill their ecclesial obligations is to organize the carrying out of those functions through government. The conservative view, which is mine and which I’m sure is Rep. Ryan’s, hesitates to uncritically equate government with society, is more anxious about the scope of governmental authority and the danger inherent in it, is more attuned to the structural and moral limits of state authority, and recognizes that (among other things) the more of people’s money government takes, the less able individuals are to fulfill their ecclesial obligations.

When I presented these concerns in another place, Ed Cummings asked me:

Simon, do you support vigorous and clear enforcement of a complete division between Church teaching and government action, or do you support a direct alignment between Church teaching and government policy? Because under the former, Ryan and [former Senator Rick] Santorum should shut up about their religion, and under the latter, they should apologize to us all for lying about their policy advocacy and lying about the Church’s teaching. Which is it?
That’s an important question, and I’m glad to have the opportunity to speak to it.

The short answer is no. While I’m opposed to theocracy, of course, I don’t have any problem with the state implementing policies urged by religious teaching, so long as it’s filtered through the constitutional organs of civil society. For example, I don’t think that the Archbishop of Indianapolis should be able to order Indiana to abolish the death penalty; I do think that Catholic hoosiers should work with folks who oppose the death penalty for other reasons to lobby the General Assembly to abolish the death penalty in this state. (President Obama has, I recall, made similar, if stronger, comments about casting religiously-motivated policy concerns in broader, more pluralistic terms.) I doubt that many progressives are dim enough to say that a vigorous and clear enforcement of a complete division between Church teaching and government action precludes the direct alignment of Indiana’s death penalty policy with the Church’s teaching on capital punishment!6

Here’s a somewhat longer answer. As a Catholic, I obviously believe what the Church teaches, and that she has authority to teach it. And I think that a state, to the extent that it takes actions that implicate the wellbeing of individuals, should act consistently with what the Catholic Church teaches is good for the wellbeing individuals. As a conservative, I think that the extent to which the state acts in ways that implicate the wellbeing of individuals should be confined within traditional bounds, and as an American conservative (for want
of a better description; that is, a conservatism that has absorbed and been modified by libertarian ideas), I think that we should be skeptical of the propriety and efficiency of assigning power to governmental entities. Nevertheless, a traditional function of the state is to enforce certain rules, many of which are moral questions—rules such as “thou shalt not kill.” When the state acts to enjoin conduct that the state has always enjoined in the Anglo-American tradition,\(^7\) I have no problem with it doing so, provided that the policy decision is first filtered through the constitutional organs of civil society, as I said in the short answer above.

The caveat is important. In a liberal, pluralistic society, there has to be a circuit breaker! There has to be an opportunity for the governed to say “wait a second, we didn’t sign up for this.” On the other hand, when Catholics and non-Catholics alike agree that a teaching of the Church is correct, when that coalition thinks the teaching is good for society and is consonant with the traditional scope of government, certainly that group should push for that outcome, and if a majority of the polity agrees, for whatever reasons, whether secular, Catholic, or motivated by any other religious views, that doctrine can be implemented as public policy.

There’s another reason why you need a circuit breaker. Liberal Catholics used to understand that there isn’t always a straight line between the doctrinal teaching of the Church and the formulation of public policy.\(^8\) (They still do when the subject is abortion, of course.) Take contraception, for example. It does not follow from the Church’s
teaching that contraception is *sinful* that contraception must be *illegal*. No one seriously infers from *Humanæ vitæ* that USCCB wants to make birth control illegal, and no one seriously infers from USCCB’s failure to advocate criminalization of condoms that the Church is taking a more diffident stance on the morality of birth control. Everyone intuitively understands that the two issues are entirely separate. Boost the level of generality a little and it becomes apparent that the same principle applies to the issue before us today: It does not follow that those things that the Church requires of her members, whether doctrinally or canonically, must or should be made into obligations of the civil law.

And there may be trade-offs to consider. Even if there is agreement that a given doctrine should be adopted as public policy, at least in principle, there may be good reasons to hesitate, because policy is never perfect and the costs of the policy may outweigh the gains. Importing doctrine into policy may have huge direct and indirect consequences, foreseen and unforeseen, which may or may not counsel against doing so.\(^9\) Suppose that \(A\) is an unqualified good, and we all agree that \(A\) ought to be policy, but the Church teaches that \(B\) and \(C\) are bad things. The political science buffs warn that if we enact \(A\) as policy, \(B\) will follow and \(C\) might also. Do we still impose \(A\) as public policy, or do we leave it as an ecclesiastical question? Judging whether a given line is longer than a given rock is heavy is no more properly ecclesiastical than it is judicial;\(^{10}\) it is a quintessentially legislative judgment, which again
calls for such calls to be made through the filter of civil constitutional organs such as Congress.

What is the role of the bishops in all this? As a general rule, I think that the bishops should present and press the full breadth of Catholic teaching in the public square—what Joseph Cardinal Bernardin called the “seamless garment,” which I support on the understanding that it does not preclude recognition that some teachings are more urgent than others. At the same time, however, for reasons of institutional settlement if nothing else, bishops do best to stick to articulating the Magisterium (in which they are presumptively experts, and on which their comments are privileged) rather than proposing specific policy (in which they do not necessarily have any expertise and on which they enjoy no privilege). Episcopal ordination does not in itself make clerics expert on subjects like economics, politics, or law, even when those issues are relevant to their pastoral mission. (Consider, for example, the responses of Roger Cardinal Mahony and Archbishop Jose Gomez to the Supreme Court’s SB1070 hearing last week!) Unfortunately, a number of bishops don’t seem to understand the limits of episcopal competence. Outside of the triple munera, bishops are just pundits, and one can readily see the limits of their competence in the fact that a number of them still believe that what is happening with the DHHS mandate is an aberration rather than the logical consequence of increasing government involvement in healthcare. (Contrast the rhetoric about the mandate, see MP: The mismatch (Nov. 31, 2011), ante, p. 75. with their ongoing
support for healthcare reform.) They just don’t see the connection.

The Magisterium, in other words, is an entirely permissible input in the legislative process, and it’s one that as a rule, I obviously think ought to have great weight. But teaching is not policy, even when it is correctly represented, which I think Fr. Reese has not done in this case.

Notes:

1. Fr. Reese should be commended for having found a way to get a room full of progressives cheering for the implementation of Church doctrine into positive civil law, and I look forward to the support of the same people if we should implement other pieces of Church doctrine directly into positive civil law, notwithstanding that those folks have previously cried “theocracy” when law tries to so much as discourage murder!
2. This includes, to the extent they are applicable, analytical tools and approaches such as (in my own case) legal process theory, public choice theory, economic analysis of law, and so forth.
3. See generally MP: Philosophy of Philosophies (May 2, 2012), ante, p. 144; cf. SF: Care and feeding of your conservative (Jun. 6, 2011).
4. Cf. Ross Douthat, Government and Its Rivals in The New York Times, Jan. 8, 2012 (“In th[e liberal] worldview, the government is just the natural expression of our national community, and the place where we all join hands to pursue the common good. Or to borrow a line attributed to Representative Barney Frank, ‘Government is simply the name we give to the things we choose to do together.’”)
6. I have encountered one who was willing to take his fairly extreme formulation of the separation of religion and policy to its (il)logical conclusion. I asked him: “So you’re saying that if a legislator votes to abolish the death penalty because they’re a liberal, that’s fine, but if I cast the same vote because I’m a Catholic, my vote is unconstitutional?” You’d think that this was reductio ad absurdum, but to his credit (or otherwise) he conceded that that followed from his premise and didn’t shrink from it.
7. I.e. when it acts within the traditional ambit of the state’s power to regulate, see SF: Regulation (Apr. 6, 2009).

8. See, e.g. RICHARD McBRIEN, THE CHURCH 259 (2008); but cf. Pacem in Terris no. 160 (John XXIII, 1963); MP: Is it time for a Catholic political party (Sept. 22, 2011), ante, p. 43 (discussing the problems of founding a Catholic political party).

9. Cf. Rodriguez v. United States, 480 U.S. 522, 526-27 (1987) (“no legislation pursues its purposes at all costs. Deciding what competing values will or will not be sacrificed to the achievement of a particular objective is the very essence of legislative choice”).


**Personal crest**

*May 22, 2012*

Call it pretentious if you will, but I have created a personal crest:

![Personal crest image]

The design is modeled after the obverse of the Benedictine medal, which I find very appealing; it retains the circular surround, quadrant lettering, and cross, but substitutes a Latin cross for the
The Place of the Curia

May 25, 2012

John Allen reports that the Vatican is being rocked by another bout of administrative turmoil. Calls for change at the Holy See from NCR’s comment section are less “dog bites man” than “man breathes air,” but in this case, as I’ve argued before,¹ I think that the calls are well-taken, although I suspect that I and they have quite different views on what kind of reform is needed.

Benedict has been a great teaching pope. As Allen’s and my previous remarks have said, however, his interest in governing seems relatively limited.² At very least, it does not seem to be his major priority. I’m not faulting either man, because each faced pressing challenges, but while John Paul II did a

benedictine medal’s symmetrical Greek cross. The cross is emblazoned with “Christus Iesu” and the Greek letters alpha and omega; below its crossbeam are images of grape and grain for the blessed sacrament, the venerable Jesuit motto Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam, and my initials (I took Augustine as my confirmation name). In the outer ring, a dove symbolizes Confirmation and the Holy Spirit, and the motto Iesu res omnes dabo, me enim salvavit (“I will give all things to Jesus, for he has saved me”) is emblazoned. The center is set against blue marble for the blessed mother, and the outer ring against granite, for St. Peter (both omitted in the black-and-white “seal” version).
great job of evangelizing, calming the waters and steadying the ship after the postconciliar crisis, and Benedict has done a great job of teaching and reproposing orthodoxy, neither has been a firm hand on the tiller. If the curia isn’t out of control, it looks like it is. The result is inefficiency and scandal, neither of which is tolerable.

There is no curia in the deposit of faith, only Peter. The curia exists because Peter cannot discharge the Petrine ministry personally and alone; “[t]he Pope cannot govern a one-billion-member church by himself,” or even “relate individually to the [more than] 4,000 bishops in the world.” The curia exists to facilitate the Holy Father’s exercise of the Petrine ministry; if it is not serving that goal as efficiently as possible, and *a fortiori* to the extent it is an obstacle to that goal, it should be reformed. It seems to me that the next Pope—and one hates to sound mordant, but Benedict is not a young man and, in a manner of speaking, apostolic succession is not only the lifeblood but the lifecycle of Catholicism—must be a *governing* pope. The analogy is somewhat tenuous, but one can say that John Paul sanctified well, and that Benedict is teaching well; the next pontiff must *govern* well. It seems to me that he must be a man able and willing to set his house in order so that he or his successor can set the Church in order.

**Notes:**

2. This thesis is not undisputed; I have friends who point to *Summorum pontificum*, 99 AAS 777 (Ben. XVI, 2007), Ap. Con. *Angicanorum coetibus*, 101 AAS 985 (Ben. XVI, 2009), *Ecclesiae*
unitatem, 101 AAS 710 (Ben. XVI, 2009), and, most recently, the commencement of a long-overdue overhaul of LCWR (placed, in the characterization of Fr. James Martin, SJ, “into receivership”) as examples of Benedict’s leadership in a governing sense.

3. Thomas Reese, Inside the Vatican 140 (1996); see also MP: Episcopal throughput (July 2, 2011), ante, p. 27.