Prior’s Column

ON ‘TRADITIONIS CUSTODES,’ KEEPING CALM, AND CARRYING ON

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). So goes the eighth Beatitude, which is the only one of the eight followed up by an inspired “footnote” at the end: an addendum employing the second person pronoun (more personal than the third), and expanding upon this Beatitude’s “merit” and “reward”:

Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you (Matt. 5:11-12).

Might we traditionalists, who are being singled out by Pope Francis, be recipients of this Beatitude? The answer depends upon the interior dispositions of each one of us, of course — the degree of our cooperation with grace — but the remaining conditions seem to favor it. Bishop Athanasius Schneider summarized the situation when he told Diane Montagna that his “initial impression” of the motu proprio was that “of a shepherd who instead of having the smell of his sheep, is angrily beating them with a stick.” As I argued last week, implicit in Traditionis Custodes is “the terrifying notion that the Roman Church’s own liturgical tradition bears within it the seeds of schism.” That would make those who are faithful to that tradition be virtual schismatics.

If we are having evil spoken about us for Christ’s sake, let us make sure that it is indeed spoken untruly — the critical adverb in verse eleven — lest we simply reap the just payment of our own personal debt of sin.

Cardinal Walter Brandmüller is counseling calmness and patience in an essay entitled, “‘Traditionis custodes’ considered in the clear light of the day.” One reason he is urging this calmness is that a law that is not received is not a law. He cites Gratian (“the Father of Canon Law”) to this effect (source):

Laws are instituted when they are promulgated; they are confirmed when they have been approved by the long standing custom of those who observe them. Some laws have been abrogated by the long standing custom of those who observe them, because laws are confirmed by the long standing custom of those who observe them.

Although he does not say it directly, Cardinal Brandmüller appears to be saying this: “Be at peace, my traditionalist brethren. Just ignore the new motu proprio; keep calm and carry on; if it is not received as law, it will not be law, but will fall into desuetude and ultimate de facto abrogation.” Infected as we are with non-Roman ideas of English Common Law and legal positivism, such an assertion is indeed shocking to many moderns, but it does seem to flow logically from Gratian’s text. On the other hand, as steeped as the good Cardinal Brandmüller’s thoughts may well be in the legal tradition of the Church, the fact remains that brutal enforcement of the motu proprio is already a reality in some places, as in Costa Rica and Washington, D.C. Still, I believe that the advice His Eminence gives is helpful. This moment will pass. Damian Thompson has said (in a tweet I cannot find) that Traditionis Custodes will have a shorter life than Summorum Pontificum. I believe he is probably right. Interestingly, the backlash that the harsh papal document has already engendered is intense, not only from laity and the lower clergy, but also from upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Consider:

- In San Francisco, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone instituted a monthly TLM at the cathedral, as well as new classes for priests in how to offer the TLM. (And this after the promulgation of Traditionis Custodes!
- In Springfield, Illinois, Bishop Paprocki invoked the provisions of canon 87 §1, essentially dispensing his priests from the motu proprio.
- Bishop Kenneth Richards, of Kingston, Jamaica, did the same.
- As did Knoxville’s Bishop Richard Stika. (This does not pretend to be a comprehensive list of bishops who have resorted to can. 87 §1.)
- The above are from diocesan ordinaries, all quite distinct from the following cardinals and bishops, who do not possess ordinary jurisdiction over a diocese, but who are on record criticizing the document: Cardinal Zen, Cardinal Burke, Bishop Athanasius Schneider, and the Dutch Auxiliary Bishop, Rob Mutsaerts.

The evil that hangs in the air of the Church is not entirely offset by these good moves on the part of cardinals and bishops, and there remains so much more that makes us grieve. Moreover, the Church’s liturgy, as critically important as it is, constitutes but one area of ecclesial life that is in sad shape. We cannot forget the host of related crises in fundamental doctrine, theology, philosophy, catechetics, scripture studies, religious life, Catholic education (all levels), Catholic medical institutions, ecclesial governance, clerical formation, the still pandemic problem of sodomy in the clergy, etc. As for conditions in the temporal sphere, they are as bad as should be expected when the salt of the earth is in such an unsavory state: Consider the growing biomedical security state that wants to force upon us an unethically sourced experimental jab for a condition most of us have more than a 99% chance of surviving (see also: Mike Church’s interview with Laurie Calhoun on the ‘Military Medical Industrial Complex’). Meanwhile, many in the hierarchy and in Catholic institutions are offering an incoherent and inconsistent response to this murderous overreach of Big Gov.

Does this moment in Church history make you sad? If so, consider these sobering but illuminating words of Josef Pieper:

…Thomas Aquinas, who so often is quoted in support of practical optimism, also teaches: The truly penetrating knowledge of created things is associated with an abysmal sadness, an insuperable sadness which
cannot be lifted by any natural force of the knowledge or will (according to Thomas it is this sadness the Sermon on the Mount refers to when it is said: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted). [Josef Pieper, The Four Cardinal Virtues, p. 120-121; emphasis mine.]

If you are sad, congratulations! You may well have a “truly penetrating knowledge of created things!” That would distinguish you from a large percentage of our contemporary political, medical, scientific, journalistic, and sadly, clerical luminaries. All irony aside, the sadness of the human heart can be made a pleasing oblation to God, and is, as Dr. Pieper points out, an opportunity to benefit from another Beatitude. In order thus to benefit, we must practice the theological and moral virtues, so that, “doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15).

Does this moment in Church history make you angry? That, too, is appropriate, though the passion of anger must be properly moderated if we are thereby going to achieve a genuine good by its proper use.

If we feel angry, sad, or even persecuted for justice’ sake, we must be careful. For God’s sake — literally! — we must avoid anything resembling that detestable quest for victim status that the cultural Marxists use to tear down society and foment hatreds. We are not interested in “intersectionality,” but in Catholicity, and we are interested in it for God’s glory and the salvation of souls — even the souls of those who are presently our enemies, for genuine Christian charity demands that we will their ultimate good. Catholics cannot pretend to have no enemies; we are commanded to love them supernaturally.

As for the internecine wars in the Church, we must strive to practice that true “obedience of faith” Saint Paul extols, and not obedience to commands that are unjust and antithetical to the theological and moral virtues. In the months and years to come, this counsel may be more important than ever.

If we actually believe that there is no salvation outside the Church — an infallibly defined dogma of our holy religion — then we are aware that we have some serious evangelizing to do. We should also grow in a knowledge and love of our Faith. Current events are forcing a closer look at the limits of the papal office (yes, it has limits!). Concerning papal limits in strictly liturgical matters, Dr. Peter Kwasniewski has recently made this fine contribution to the question. In doctrinal matters, we have the work of Professor Roberto de Mattei, and two works by the Brazilian scholar, Arnaldo Vidigal Xavier da Silveira: Can Documents of the Magisterium of the Church Contain Errors?, and Can the Pope Be a Heretic? Prayer, work, and study. These build civilizations.

Amid all this, we are lost if we are without joy, even if it is “battle joy.” The same Saint Thomas Dr. Pieper cited above about sadness also said this:

Now as man could not live in society without truth, so likewise, not without joy, because, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. viii), no one could abide a day with the sad nor with the joyless. (ST II II, Q. 114, A. 2 ad 1)

Ultimately, the attack on Catholic tradition is an attack on Him who bequeathed that tradition to us. He will avenge His own glory. Meanwhile, let us be faithful to that tradition, thankful for it, and joyful in living it — all for God’s glory and no matter what, per ómnia sæcula sæculórum. Amen. Allelúia!

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CONVENT CORNER

OFTEN, BUT ESPECIALLY

She stated that when enough people pray and make sacrifices, the Pope will Consecrate Russia to Her Immaculate Heart, Russia will be converted and a period of peace will be given to mankind. So, where do you and I come in on this, Dear Reader?

I find it much easier to notice and criticize the fact that the pope is not fulfilling Her requests — especially in consecrating Russia to Her Immaculate Heart in union with all the bishops of the world. Easier than what? Well, easier than noticing what I, myself, am supposed to be doing... and doing it!

So, back to what She said: When enough people pray and make sacrifices...(then) the Pope will Consecrate Russia to My Immaculate Heart.

I certainly pray! So, in pharisaical fashion I will expound. Daily, I attend the Holy Sacrifice, make a visit, pray fifteen decades of the Rosary, morning and night prayers, meditation, the Angelus thrice, grace before and after meals (I am sure there are a few other things I am forgetting). Whew! What more could anyone ask? It makes me happy that I am fulfilling Her requests!

Well, all of those prayers probably amount to a time allotment of about four hours. Impressive! Don’t you agree? (My arm is getting a little sore from patting myself on the back....I bet a person could get a rotary cuff injury this way....)

Just listing all of those prayers is exhausting! Time for bon bons and a siesta. So, I am consoled to know that at least one person in the world (namely, myself) is doing her part to obey Our Blessed Mother. Ah! Too bad the rest of humanity is not doing their part....When, oh when will the peace come that Our Lady promised?

There are 24 hours in a day. I am spending about four hours in formal prayer time. Doing the math, I discover that...I should be more like the publican than the pharisee! Yes, God gives me 24 hours in each day and I spend only 4 hours formally communicating with Him, His Mother and His Saints.

And, what do I do with the other 20 hours? Various things. I work, I sleep, I eat, I study, I daydream, I look out the window, I think, I walk, I speak, I get frustrated, I get anxious, etcetera, etcetera. (Hmmm. I am noticing that the common thread in the 20 non-praying hours is “I.”)

“When enough people pray and sacrifice... there will be peace.” Am I actually doing what She wants me to do if I just spend 4 of my 24 hours in a day praying? The pope will not make the Consecration until enough people are praying and sacrificing — so said Our Lady. My actions and intentions figure into this equation.

Everything can be offered to God through His Blessed Mother — even the most commonplace and lowly actions. The great Saint Teresa of Avila shocked a few people by asserting this boldly in her autobiography. After all, God is always everywhere and there is only one kind of activity which cannot be done to please God: sin. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God.” [1 Corinthians 10:31] No exceptions.

And, here is where Our Blessed Mother’s own plan for me comes in. She gave a very special Sacrifice Prayer to the children at Fatima. She told the children to “say (it) often, but especially when you make a sacrifice.”

Here is the Sacrifice Prayer (one of the versions of it, which I use): “O my Jesus! It (name the action/sacrifice) is for the love of Thee, for the conversion of poor sinners, and in reparation for all the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for our Holy Father, the Pope.”

Ask yourself, “Why am I doing this (whatever “this” is)?” Am I doing it to please myself? Perhaps to please my family? Perhaps I have no real intention for what I am doing? Or, thank God, am I doing this for love of God, ideally through His Blessed Mother? Praying the Sacrifice Prayer after this little examination is a very effective program for super-naturalizing your actions.

We should be praying this prayer “often” as She requested. Isn’t Our Lady a wonderful Mother to give us this special prayer to help us make everything we do an offering to God (yes, a sacrifice)? Although I already have 4 hours dedicated to prayer, I can sanctify the remaining 20 hours by utilizing this Sacrifice Prayer “often.”

Just think, Our Lady told us, “The penance God wants is the performance of our daily duties.” Performing our daily duties these days often requires heroic sacrifice. So, if we make the added effort to pray the Sacrifice Prayer before our major actions, we will be doing much to hasten the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart. We will be taking an active part in the universal battle in which our world is currently engulfed.

Dear Reader, as Our Blessed Mother asked: “Pray often, but especially when you make a sacrifice: O my Jesus! It is for the love of Thee, for the conversion of poor sinners, and in reparation for all the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for our Holy Father, the Pope.”

“Often,” Dear Reader, “but especially, when you make a sacrifice.”

The world-wide scene seems to be quickly evolving into the epic and decisive battle that will usher in the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart. As good children of Our Blessed Mother and good soldiers, we should re-focus our intentions and actions so we do our part in this encounter. “Often, but especially.” Until next we rendezvous at Convent Corner, may Our Blessed Mother keep you close to Her Immaculate Heart.

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The sixties were a rough time to go through Catholic schools, especially after Vatican II. In grade school nuns were modifying their habits, which meant shortening not only their veil, but even their skirts. The modified habit didn’t last long before religious garb went altogether. No need to bring it all up now; it’s really irrelevant today, now that the experiment is over, having failed in whatever the goal was when the novelty was launched.

For almost a generation now, thanks be to God, young women, who feel the calling to religious life, are drawn to orders in which full habits are worn, the hours of the divine office sung in common, Holy Mass is the center of the day, and meals are taken communally. In other words, the espousal to Jesus Christ is now the reason for the resurgence of the consecrated life; and active social work, flows from the religious’ mystic life as a bride of Christ, if the order isn’t cloistered.

I don’t need to mention where I went to grammar school. I was taught by the Sisters of Charity, who went from wearing a torturous-looking wimple, which literally carved itself like a frame into and around their face from chin to forehead, to a regular veil that allowed peripheral vision (but still covered the eyes in the back of their head), to no veil and no habit, all in less than ten years. My aunt, now deceased, was a member of this same order, and wore the same slightly modified habit that the sisters adopted around 1963 when I was in fourth grade. I visited her ten years ago, having had to pick her up for her brother’s funeral. The old sisters at the convent called her the “saint” because she was always joyful and willing to do the most menial of chores. They say this right in front of her, and she just smiles. It helps that she can hardly hear, never remembers to replace the batteries in her hearing aid, and has no clue what her dear sisters are saying about her.

While at the funeral, my aunt informed me that my kindergarten teacher, whom I can never forget, because she was the first “nun” I ever really “encountered” — having had the privilege of her intimate presence from 8:00 to noon five days a week, for all but three months of the year 1957 — was still living. The first day I went to school at five years of age, I remember leaving my mother’s hand and staring at a goldfish aquarium sitting on a ledge as high as my eyes outside a huge playroom. There, standing right by my side, was this very tall sister with a very warm smile who was waiting to give me a seat on a rubber cushion. Her name was Sister Margaret Gregory.

The few memories I have of my early years in grammar school were pleasant enough, and the sisters of the lower grades were all angels. And, actually, so were the laywomen teachers. Even though I had an aunt that was a sister, whom I didn’t see all that much, I really did think these black-robed figures with the scary-looking wimple were — well, not angels — but angelic. You see, they all had this heavenly fragrance about them. I would take in the wafting scent with wonder every time one of them would swoosh past my desk with her rosary rattling against the desk’s metal legs. What a disappointing revelation it was when someone told me years later, upon my reminiscing aloud about the “odor of sanctity” thing, that it was just fabric softener.

Sister Barbara played baseball with the little boys in the school playground at recess. I can remember her showing those who couldn’t figure it out, or had no baseball dads, how to hold and swing a bat. And, no, these angelic sisters did not force lefties to write or bat righty. Sister Barbara, no exaggeration, could belt a hard sponge ball with her fist further than any of the boys even in the older grades. City guys my age may remember “punch ball,” or “curb ball,” when no bats were around?

There are so many memories. Sister Regina Marie was my very pious and sweet sixth grade teacher. She was very much into physical education; and she was German. Of course we had no physical education classes in Catholic grammar schools back then, so she’d improvise. She’d have us stand at attention by the side of our desks and rotate our shoulder cups over and over again. Liebe Schwester Mueller did not like slouching in any form: “Stand up straight!” she’d say, “Hold those shoulders back!” Her favorite exercise was plunging and she would lead the way with gusto. This was an easy one for her, and that’s why she would always push it on us after we did our stretching. Only God knows how many times a pious sister would genuflect during the day, and “plunging” was sort of like genuflecting, only with a forward thrust. I’ll never forget her drills, nor her voice, “Now Pluuuuunngge,” she’d say, and we’d all fall into the rhythm. Whenever I get together with old friends from town, every one who had these Sisters of Charity agrees on who their favorite sister was — Sister Regina Marie, hands down.

Still, there was Sister Leonora, our fourth grade teacher. I could go on writing about all the sisters, but Sister Leonora is the reason why I decided to share these memory morsels with you this morning. She was tough, very tough, but also beautiful. I think, like many other sisters who taught in our grammar school, that she must have hailed from Boston, Massachusetts. (Our school janitor would always tease the sisters from Boston with his hearty greeting “Good maaahnin, Sister.”) If indeed Bostonian, that means she was
probably Irish. Good Sister Leonora gave me the back of her hand once because she thought I was giving my homework to copy to the boy sitting next to me in class. That's another story.

At the start of the school year Sister inaugurated a new seating strategy called “coupling.” Naturally I got “coupled” with the class terror, Steve, a likable guy (once you got to know him), who had been kept back and already needed to shave (well, maybe I’m exaggerating just a bit). That “strategy” of desk coupling would be repeated by our eighth grade teacher, too. And, once again, I got partnered with the school’s other “hoodlum,” Frankie. There were only two of these characters in my class, both prime candidates for the Cosa Nostra, and I got to spend two years of my primary school education shackled to each of them for eight hours a day.

By the way, going back to fourth grade and Sister Leonora, it just so happened that I was innocent of that particular crime of giving out my homework. All I had given my friend Steve was a piece of blank paper, which is what he had asked me for. But, I sure knew how to look guilty. Sister certainly thought so, and therefore, whack, I got it across the kisser, not so much for helping the incubative hood to cheat, but for denying that I was helping him to cheat. Other things (really mean things) that I was guilty of, and got away with, deserved a lot more punishment than a slap. And, as anyone my generation can testify, even if on a rare occasion you were innocent, boys did not go home and tell their parents that they got whacked in school. That would not have been wise.

I don’t want you to get the wrong impression of this good sister. She was really a lovely sister with a heart of gold. But she was not averse to some occasional heavy-handed medicine, if soft words proved futile. Oh, yes, that’s another thing about Sister Leonora: she was strong, but thin and wiry, with the worst kind of hands for dispensing corporal punishment. One must remember that these sisters were dealing with all sorts of little rascals in a class of about thirty: some were good, some naughty; some were respectful, some defiant; some were thoughtful of others, some spoiled; some well-groomed, clean, and hygienic, others, well let’s just say, unhygienic. Order required discipline, and discipline, when there were no more corners to stand in, could often be painful.

One of my fellow fourth graders was the poster child for a spoiled brat. It was during a French lesson, which the class was tuned in to for a half hour a day by way of a Canadian television station, that “Johnnie” finally got what all of his classmates thought he needed. The program on November 22, 1963, was interrupted with a special report that our president had been shot in Dallas. We were all stunned, even at ten years old, and the sister from Boston was having a hard time keeping her emotions in check. Maybe it was the tension that got to the spoiled brat; whatever it was, he started laughing. I remember watching Sister Leonora march down the aisle and wipe the grin off this poor boy’s face. I guess when people asked him in adult life where he was when Kennedy got shot, he got a little nervous. Poor Johnnie. I hope he learned from his mistakes and became a man. As I came to know from someone else (a girl) who met him at a dance ten years later he was still even then a sandwich shy of a picnic. I mean how many sixteen year-old boys do you know who wear a knife strapped to their ankle and show it off to a potential girl friend?

That same year, on a different mission, I remember Sister Leonora running down the far aisle of our classroom. It was to grab a little girl and take her in her arms and hold her while she cried and cried. She held the child’s head against her breast and stroked her blond hair over and over saying, “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry! He’s with Jesus now,” or, words to that effect. The girl’s name was Karen and she had an identical twin sister in the other fourth grade class. You see, Sister Leonora had a woman’s heart, a mother’s heart, besides a heart of gold. Every day — I never could forget this — she would greet the class and then ask Karen how her older brother was doing. She cared for each and every child in her class, but had some special interest in Karen. We all just figured that Karen’s brother was sick. Well, every day Sister would ask about him, and Karen would answer, “He’s OK, Sister.” When Sister asked on this particular day, I remember looking at Karen when she didn’t respond right away. The rule was when a sister addressed you, you stood up when you answered. Karen was standing and her knees were shaking. She began stuttering, “He’s dead,” then she said it again more clearly, “He’s dead.” Sister Leonora ran and caught her as she was about to drop.

The next day, Karen being home with the family, Sister Leonora spoke to us just as if we were adults. She asked us to pray for Karen, for her twin, whom we all knew, for their family, and for Karen’s brother. She told us that Karen’s brother had been in a coma for a number of weeks as a result of a drug overdose. It was the sixties and many of the young were experimenting with very dangerous drugs. We were only ten years old when Sister Leonora warned us about drugs. I always wondered what happened to that angel from Bahston. My aunt told me that she ended up working with the poor somewhere.

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Most people, I believe, think that, if called upon, becoming a blood martyr would be beyond their capabilities. (I prescind from the divine grace of fortitude given to such saints.) In our own lifetimes we can accept that in a small way by mortifying ourselves daily as a sacrifice in our morning offering.

Many saints have desired martyrdom, but did not receive it. Our own superior of fond memory, Brother Francis, desired to be a martyr. The fate of the martyr is Heaven, not Purgatory. It is a great blessing and many, through the ages, were blessed to receive it in the same place Our Lord offers Himself daily in the Blessed Sacrament — Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity — in His Church.

The hagiographer Father Alban Butler tells us the martyrs died as the persona non grata, the pariahs, the rejects, the outsiders of society, of the world, but they receive the immortal honor of being crowned by God. He praise, fame, prestige and honor of this world is untrue, fictitious or, at best, fleeting, short-lived and momentary, and “an empty bubble or shadow. But that of virtue is true, solid, and permanent, even in the eyes of men.” History shows that this is precisely how these men and women died.

We continue our narrative to honor these great saints.

10. Many Martyrs. (356) Feast January 28. At Alexandria, the followers of a philosopher and Arian General, Syrianus, put to death many Catholics, while at Mass in a Church. Some sources say the Mass was offered by Saint Athanasius who managed to escape the massacre. They were put to death in different ways.

11. St. Pretextatus (586) Feast February 24. Pretextatus, also known as Saint Prix, bishop of Rouen, France. At one time, he was exiled from his See. He was a noteworthy character in Saint Gregory of Tours’ Historia Francorum (History of the Franks). This is where most of the information on this saint comes from. Saint Gregory implies that the murder was by the Merovingian Queen Fredegund. He writes that the assassination occurred shortly following a “bitter exchange of words” between the two. She said, “‘The time is coming when you shall revisit the place of your exile.’ He answered, ‘I was a bishop always, whether in exile or out of exile, and a bishop I shall remain; but as for you, you shall not always enjoy your crown.’ He then urged her to repent of her crimes and return to God. This call to conversion fell on deaf ears.” Just after midnight on Easter, as Pretextatus was attending the office of Matins in the cathedral, the assassin stabbed him. The wounded bishop managed to drag himself to the altar and receive Viaticum before dying.

12. Bl. Charles the Good (1124) Feast March 2. He was the son of St. Canute, King of Denmark (who was also martyred in a Catholic church), and was called “the Good” because of his outstanding Catholic virtues. Every morning, he went barefoot to the altar of the Blessed Virgin in St. Donatian’s church to pray. One day while on the way, he was warned of a “conspiracy, but answered; ‘We are always surrounded by dangers, but we belong to God. If it be his will, can we die in a better cause than that of justice and truth?’ While he was reciting the penitential psalms (at the foot of the altar, just after he had received Holy Communion) the conspirators rushing in, his head was cloven.”

13. Martyrs of North-West Africa (459) Feast April 5. The Roman Martyrology tells us several were martyred, “In Africa, during the persecution of Arian King Generic (King of the Vandals). The holy martyrs were murdered in the church in Crotia on Easter Day (while celebrating Mass). The Lector, while singing ‘Alleluia!’ at the stand, was pierced through the throat by an arrow.” Note this is the second entry where the blessed died on Easter Sunday.

14. St. Eric (1160) Feast May 18. Saint Eric (Henry), King of Sweden, was honored as the chief patron of the country. He was called “the Father and Lawgiver of the People.” A man of prayer and great charity, he built many churches, always from the proceeds of his own patrimony. After defeating the Finnish in battle, he worked to convert them to the One True Faith. This holy king was at Mass on the day after the feast of the Ascension, when he was told that the Danish enemy were nearby and on the march against him. “He calmly answered: “Let us at least finish the sacrifice; the remainder of the festival I shall keep elsewhere.””

After the Mass he prayed his thanksgiving, recommended his soul to God, made the sign of the cross, and, to avoid putting the life of his guards in jeopardy, even though they were prepared to defend him, even at the expense of their own, marched out alone. The conspirators rushed him, beat him down from his horse, and cut off his head with a thousand indignities in derision of the true religion.

15. Saint Boniface (755) Feast June 5. Saint Boniface’s name is Winfrid in English, which in Latin is translated into Boniface, and means “he who does good.” He is the apostle of Germany, but was born in England, in 680. At the age of 75, with 52 companions, neophytes whom he was about to confirm, set out to complete the conversion of Friesland. While donning his vestments to say Mass, he, and all his companions, were martyred by the pagans.

Saint Aureus, Bishop of Mentz, Germany, whilst Huns were attacking his city, was driven from his See. His sister, Saint Justina, followed him into exile. When he returned, while celebrating the Mass in his church, Aureus, his sister, Justina, and their companions were massacred by the Huns.

It does not seem possible that these martyrs had no idea that they might be martyred. On the contrary, the evidence suggests they knew they were taking their lives in their hands as there was ample warning of the dangers they might encounter while doing the most important act of their lives: witnessing the actual sacrifice of the Almighty, done to save the souls of all mankind. Being deprived of the Mass was a true suffering for them. In this day and age, we have experienced the taking away of the Mass, albeit, for some, only a temporary matter. Let us pray we have the Mass, now and until the end of time.


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THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE: A MYSTERY OF THE NATURAL ORDER

“P hilosophy begins with wonder,” says Aristotle; and indeed those who have no capacity for wonder, have no appetite for wisdom. But what is wonder? Wonder arises in the mind when, what started to be a problem, turns out to be a mystery. If you are working on a crossword puzzle, you have a problem on your hands; but if you suddenly discovered that the cross-word puzzle is really a disguised message from the one you love, the problem becomes a mystery. In a problem there is nothing to be known besides a solution, but in a mystery there is no final solution, but a continual growth towards contemplation. You face a problem but you plunge into a mystery. When a problem is once solved, you do not want to think about it any longer, but the more you think about a mystery, the more you want to think about it. Mysteries are undeciphered messages from our Eternal lover and the supreme object of our love.

Father Leonard Feeney said once that mysteries are not things we are entitled to change their labels and call them mysteries, which, as soon as you grasp it, has already slipped away and is no increase our knowledge and love of God.

Mysteries may illuminate the central mysteries of the Faith, and the way to our destiny. Mysteries are undeciphered messages from our Eternal lover and the supreme object of our love. Father Leonard Feeney said once that mysteries are not things about which we can know nothing but things about which we cannot know everything, precisely because there is so much to be known. Tides, for example, are a problem, but the sea is a mystery. Making a living is frequently a problem to man, but life itself is always a mystery.

Now the world is alive with such mysteries, and they occur as frequently in the order of nature as they do in the order of grace. We look at the sky and say; what is this apparently limitless expansion of the blue? Is it infinite or is it finite? Is it thoroughly full, or is it partly empty? Is space a substance or is it an accident? Or is it perhaps a figment of the mind? Is it changing or is it changeless? And how about time; where is the past and what is the future? What is even the very actual present, the evasive now, which, as soon as you grasp it, has already slipped away and is no more! Birth and death, food and growth, thought, love, and even sleep; all these are mysteries in the natural order which parallel the mysteries of the Faith and prepare the mind for the message of revelation. The early philosophers called them problems, but we are entitled to change their labels and call them mysteries, having seen so many ages of thinkers throughout history try to sound their depths.

I intend to take up here one sample of a mystery which has haunted the minds of men at all times, and which is partly responsible for the development and growth of philosophy. I mean the mystery of change. I wish to suggest that meditation on this mystery is an excellent introduction to philosophy. I can even promise, that when assisted by the light of grace, such meditations may illuminate the central mysteries of the Faith, and increase our knowledge and love of God.

At first glance, it does not seem as if change is even a problem, much less a mystery. Yet down through the ages, men from all over the earth, have felt that a changing universe could not be the only kind of reality in existence, but that this changing world must have a changeless creator, a Being who can be known by the mind, although not seen through the senses. In other words, men (and I do not mean philosophers only) have always felt that this universe of ours, by being in a state of change, indicates its insufficiency and leads the mind to God. And the fact of change is not something which requires any specialized or expert observation in order to be known; on the contrary, it is overwhelmingly with us all the time. It can be brought to our attention by winds or waves or rain, by the procession of the seasons or the succession of the days, by the movement of the stars or by the growth of a tree. Even things which appear firm and constant, like mountains and rocks, are in fact subject to forces which in time will cause decay and dissolution. At times change seems ordinary and commonplace, but every once in a while we are shocked into a terrific realization of what it implies to us.

The shock might come from the death of a friend, the end of an era, or the sudden realization that we are growing old and that there is no way back to childhood.

In the history of philosophy, the importance of the problem of change was fully recognized when a Greek philosopher of the sixth century before Christ, ventured the daring opinion that all reality is change. This philosopher is Heraclitus, who held that “everything flows like a river.” Ordinarily we talk as if there are things which undergo change. This clearly implies, that while change is going on, something remains the same; for if everything about an object or a being were to change, we could not continue to talk about the same being. If while growing up from childhood, not only my size and weight and ideas change, but even my personal identity, then why keep saying that I was a child and that I am now an adult? What is this “I” which was something and is now something else? How was this “I” identified with childhood without being identical with it? For if it were identical with its childhood, it could never truthfully say about itself: “I am now an adult.” According to Heraclitus, nothing remains the same, and therefore, not only is all the world changing, but all is change! “Nobody jumps into the same river twice,” says Heraclitus, “because the second time he jumps, it is another and a different river.” One of the disciples of Heraclitus went further to say: “Nobody jumps into the same river even once, because even before he touches the river, neither the river nor the jumper remain the same.”

If this doctrine of Heraclitus is true, then neither science is possible nor philosophy. Even when science talks about change it must talk about what is permanent in it. If nothing is permanent about reality, then there can be no scientific knowledge about it. If Heraclitus himself failed to draw all the latent conclusions of his doctrine, his disciples certainly perceived all its logical implications. When one of them, named Cratyles, was asked: “And what then should the philosopher do, if, as you say, all is change?” he replied, “The wise man simply wiggles his finger!” There is no use making any philosophical statements, if before
you finish uttering your assertion, all reality has changed, and
the assertion no longer applies. As a matter of fact, if Heraclitus
is right, morality and moral responsibility become absurd. What,
in that case, would justify condemning a man for murder, unless
we are dealing with the same entity responsible for the misdeed.
If nothing remains the same, then nobody can be held respon-
sible for an act of the past.

The absurdities of the Heraclitian doctrine led a contempora-
neous philosopher, Parmenides, to the absurdities of the opposite
extreme. Parmenides held that change is a mere illusion of the
senses, and that what is really real, must be one and changeless.
All change, says Parmenides, involves being coming out from
non-being or turning into non-being, both of which are absurd
and impossible. Nothing can turn into its other. Being can be
limited only by its only remaining alternative, which is non-
being and therefore nothing. Therefore being cannot be limited,
and must be one continuous whole, remaining for ever one and
the same. Reality, concludes Parmenides, is an infinite, homoge-
neous, and changeless sphere. All else is illusion.

In other words, men have always felt
that this universe of ours, by being
in a state of change, indicates its
insufficiency and leads the mind to
God.

Zeno, a disciple of Parmenides, formulated a number of
arguments which seem to prove the impossibility of movement
and change. The best known of these is the race between Achil-
les and the tortoise. Zeno argues that if Achilles were to give
the tortoise only ten yards advantage, he could never overtake
the tortoise, even though he ran ten times as fast. Before he
can overtake the tortoise, Achilles must first cover the ten yards,
but in the meanwhile the tortoise would have moved one yard
ahead. Achilles must now cover the yard before overtaking the
tortoise, who in turn would have moved one tenth of a yard in
the meantime. It is clear that this process may be repeated ad
infinitum, and so Achilles will never get to be ahead of the tor-
toise. Another argument of Zeno aims to prove that a flying ar-
row could not be in motion, for if it is in motion it should be
in motion at every instant of its flight, but at any given instant
the arrow cannot be moving either in the space occupied by
the arrow at that instant, or in any other space. It could not be
moving in the space of the arrow because this is exactly the size
of its volume and allows no freedom of movement within it;
nor in any other space, because the arrow cannot move where
it is not. Another argument may be stated in this manner: “no
body can be moved from one place to another place, because
there is always an infinite number of positions between the two
terminal places, and no body can occupy an infinite number of
places in a finite time.”

What do the arguments of Parmenides and the paradoxes
of Zeno aim to prove? They seem to show that when we try to
think about change with our intellects we judge it to be im-
possible. You say: But if by our intellects we judge change and
movement to be impossible, while by our senses we see clearly
that things do change and move, why don’t we trust our senses
and disregard the judgment of the intellect? The answer is that
such an attitude is impossible to man, because man’s supreme
and ultimate power of knowledge is his intellectual judgment
and not his sense perception. What appears to the senses is
naturally subordinated to what is evident to the intellect. Even
the choice between the evidence of the senses and the evidence
of the intellect is a matter for the intellect and not for the senses
to decide. But on the other hand, neither can the intellect deny
the testimony of the senses, especially with regard to that part of
reality, the material universe, which falls within the province of
the senses.

It was Aristotle who contributed the right solution for the
problem of change. The solution was already implicit in the
common-sense judgment of men; but when Aristotle succeeded
in drawing from the ordinary discourse about change, the
distinctions and definitions required for a philosophic solu-
tion of this problem, philosophy as a science became possible.
Parmenides had said, as already mentioned, that “being is, and
non-being is not,” that “being can be limited only by non-being,
and therefore, being cannot be finite or plural,” that “being
cannot become non-being, nor can non-being become being,”
and since these are the only possible alternatives, then change
is impossible. But Aristotle denied the dichotomy between being
and non-being; he said, between being in the fully actual sense,
which is God, and absolute non-being, which is nothing, there
is a third possibility, namely, a being in potency, like a seed. A
seed, Parmenides would say, either is or is not a tree. If the seed
is a tree then it cannot change to one, because there is no change
when things remain the same, but if the seed is not a tree, then
neither can it change to one, because the being of a tree cannot
arise from its non-being. But stated in the more common-sense
terminology of Aristotle, the problem can be stated more cor-
rectly in the following manner: a seed is not a tree in act but a
tree in potency and therefore when sufficient causes cooperate
to reduce that potency to act, the seed develops into a tree and
the process of development is what we call change. This is how
Aristotle arrived at his definition of change: “change is the act
of a being-in-potency as long as it is yet in potency.” Potency is
a reality and is different from sheer non-being which is nothing.
Change is the actualization of real potency in beings that are real
but finite.

We cannot leave the problem here without at least suggesting
the way to solve the Zeno paradoxes. The fallacy of the paradox
of Achilles and the tortoise consists in regarding as divided what
is seen to be only divisible. Movement, time and distance, are
different kinds of continuous quantities. Being continuous, each
of them is immediately seen to be divisible ad infinitum. But
divisibility is potential and not actual division. If distance were actually divided into an infinite number of intervals, it would be hard to see how Achilles can ever overtake the tortoise.

Thus as far as philosophy is concerned, the problem of change is solved by reduction to this concept of a being-in-potency. But how about potency, and what report does it give of itself apart from the fact of change? The truth is, that potency as such, can neither exist nor can it be conceived or understood. There is no existing entity which may be called pure potency. Philosophers imply that much when they tell us that prime matter is not a being but rather it is a principle of being. Whenever real potency exists, it exists as the potency of something actual. You should have an actual egg before you can claim to possess the real potency of a chicken, and you must know a real and actual chicken before you can understand what is meant by a potential chicken in an egg. If potency can neither exist nor be understood except in its relation to act, then a being in potency like our universe, is also to that extent a being opaque to our complete understanding. The element of potency in the universe implies an aspect of mystery which will be resolved only when we see face to face the One Eternal Being in whom there is no potency and therefore no mystery. Our senses cannot perceive such a Being who is pure act, but our intellect cannot be satisfied without it. We may be able now to realize a little more fully how both Parmenides and Heraclitus were baffled by the same aspect of mystery in the visible universe which was intended by God to wake them up to a realization, though dark, of the intelligible but invisible God behind the visible universe. Parmenides was looking with his mind on the objects which his senses offer, and insisting on finding in these extended material things the one object which satisfies the intellect. He was looking for the right object in the wrong direction, and the result is his monotonous, uniform, but empty sphere where is neither a good God nor a good universe. Parmenides was staring at time and imagining eternity.

On the other hand, when Heraclitus denied permanence and asserted that all is mere change he was implicitly denying the existence of God and the substantial reality of things. Both philosophers were thwarting the universe regarding its first message as a creature, for when the world changes, it confesses its insufficiency, and points towards God.

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Saint Joseph by Norman Faucheux

Blessed Father Seelos

Saint Joan of Arc
When discussing the Faith with others, we have all probably heard at one time, the expression, “I’m spiritual but not religious”. But what does that mean? And more importantly, does being “spiritual” without being “religious” help us to attain eternal life?

The statement is usually made, not as a real outpouring of the speaker’s spirituality, but rather as a way of deprecating the necessity of any religious duties in one’s life, as if it were within one’s “rights” to do so; but what of the rights of God? Does He have any say so in how He is worshipped?

As unfashionable as it may be in a society built on the supposed irrelevance of God in the governance of a nation or in the lives of its people, the answer is a definite “Yes!” God, the creator of all things, does indeed have the right to receive worship, the right to specify how such worship is conducted, and He has, indeed, done so. To see this, one need only read 1 Corinthians 11:23 et seq., which not only sets out the very words of the Consecration of the Mass, but stresses that Jesus’ actual body is present in the Eucharist to be consumed, but specifically states that anyone taking communion unworthily “shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord” (Corinthians 11:27). In other words, the Blessed Eucharist is an essential part of the worship required by Our Lord. Add to these His words in John 6:54, “Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you,” and there is no doubt that God Himself has specified the type of worship required. Accordingly, neither warm fuzzy “spiritual” thoughts by themselves, nor a glorified bible study, will suffice as the worship required.

A search of the internet for the definition of “spiritual” or “spirituality” will turn up any number of vacuous definitions. For instance, one website, ostensibly devoted to this concept, declares that, “Spirituality is all about the individual. It is about the realization of the supreme self within you. The realization of the innate power within you to combat all situations is the goal of spirituality ... Spirituality is a mind building concept. It shapes the mind of the individual ... Spirituality leads towards enlightenment.”

And that is only one of many similarly viscous statements that can be found on the internet, but it probably coincides with the views that most people have on the subject. In other words, spirituality by itself, outside of the context of Christianity, means, basically, nothing. It is merely a collection of warm egotistical feelings combined with an attempt to reinvent God in a manner acceptable to the particular individual, and thereby to rationalize an infidel status.

But is this concept of spirituality of any value in securing the individual’s salvation? The answer we know is a resounding “No!” While this answer might not be popular in today’s Pelagian view of salvation in which salvation is considered the default to which all are basically entitled (barring some particularly egregious crime), in God’s divine plan, Religion is, and has always been, necessary for the salvation of the individual.

The very essence of religion is giving God His due, including the proper obedience and sacrifice; but not all sacrifice is acceptable to God. We see that exemplified very early in Holy Scripture in the story of the brothers Cain and Abel; one (Abel) had his sacrifice accepted; one (Cain) did not. “And it came to pass after many days, that Cain offered, of the fruits of the earth, gifts to the Lord. Abel also offered of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat: and the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect: and Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell.” (Genesis 4:3-5)

We all know what ensued: the first murder in the history of the world, committed by Cain out of his anger at God’s displeasure with his offering. But why was God displeased with Cain’s offering? And, more importantly, what relevance does this have to us today? Can a person please God and spend eternity with Him by being “spiritual but not religious,” or is that person, in some fashion, just kidding himself?

Religion, unlike mere spirituality, is, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, actually a virtue, one that enables us to render unto God that worship which is due to Him. This particular virtue is one that causes man’s will to incline towards the worship and service of God, thus putting that man on the right path to salvation. In order to save one’s soul, one needs to get closer to God, but that can only be achieved in a salvific manner in the Catholic religion, as can be seen in the words of Our Lord, “Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16)

The virtue of religion consists of a number of acts including devotion, adoration, sacrifices and offerings, but the first one, devotion, seems to be the key to the others. The essence of devotion is the readiness of the man’s will to worship and serve God, and this seems to be the element missing in most modern “spirituality.” If most of what passes for “spirituality” in the modern world leads one to think lofty thoughts...
without bringing one closer to God and making one willing to worship and serve Him, and instead results in a man recreating God in an image acceptable to himself, what we have is simply spiritual poison, no matter how comforting it may seem at the time.

In our time most people feel that they have the right to believe in whatever they want, and that “their truth” is as good, or more probably better, than “your truth.” This opinion will certainly become more prevalent (and eventually far worse) in a society in which the government, the media and a complicit educational system seem determined to alter society’s belief so that recognizing that there is even such a thing as reality is seen as bigotry. Accordingly, we can expect to hear the saying, “I’m spiritual, not religious” on a more frequent basis than we do even now. And respond we must. But how? There are some objections to conversion to the Faith that can be answered in a relatively structured manner; for instance, when debating an evangelical Protestant, who at least believes in the Bible (or in his own truncated version of it), the words of Our Lord quoted above can be set forth and discussed. We have some common ground for discussion. Likewise with a lapsed Catholic we at least can speak somewhat the same language. But this particular objection to the Faith, unlike that offered by the Evangelical, is more often put forward with no discernable belief in Christianity whatever; perhaps no belief in God at all.

And yet respond we must. The lack of religious faith in our country has reached an appalling state. In fact, the Jesuit magazine *America* reported in an article last year that only thirteen percent of American Catholics attended Mass on a weekly basis. Given that dismal statistic, and knowing that many of them are own family members are doubtless among them, what is called for is a more muscular approach to debate. We must all become less complacent and more assertive in bringing up these matters, whether our listener wants to hear it or not.

Too many souls are at stake, and many of them are people we know and love. And we obviously must pray for their conversion and for more laborers (including ourselves!) to enter the vineyard. In the words of that powerful patron saint of missionaries, St. Francis Xavier, let us pray, “O Eternal God, the Creator of all things, remember the infidel peoples whom Thou hast created in Thine own image and likeness. Lord, behold how to thy dishonor, hell is being filled with these souls. Bear in mind that Thy Son Jesus suffered a most cruel death for their salvation. Lord, do not permit that Thy son be further despised by these infidels, but be appeased by the prayers of Thy saints and the Church, the Spouse of Thy most holy Son. Remember Thy mercy, and blot out their idolatries and infidelities. May these peoples be ignorant no longer of Him who is our salvation, life, and resurrection, through whom we have been saved and liberated. To Him let there be glory throughout all ages, Amen.”

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Ex Cathedra: “There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved” (Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council, 1215).

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Ex Cathedra: “The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes, and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity of this ecclesiastical body that only those remaining within this unity can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgivings, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remain within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church” (Pope Eugene IV, the Bull Cantate Domino, 1441).

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