

The Francis Effect

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Introduction

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty or danger. Medically, it is the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

Bishop Athanasius Schneider has identified four great crises in the Church: Arianism, the Western Schism, the Reformation and Modernism. This last, which the Church has been fighting for well over a century, has managed to get a stranglehold on the Church ever since the close of the Second Vatican Council. St. Pius X called it the synthesis of all heresies.

For the last half century, the majority of Catholics, entrusting themselves to the vigilance of their pastors, have been fitfully sleeping up until now, when they were rudely awakened by the alarm bells set off by the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family. A future Jerome may well lament that “on awaking, they groan to find themselves modernist”. The drama of the Synod played out in the media with cardinal opposed to cardinal, bishop against bishop and national conferences of bishops resisting other national conferences, thus appearing as a literal fulfilment of the prophecy made by Our Lady at Akita on October 13, 1973: “The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church in such a way that one will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres... the Church will be full of those who accept compromises.”

Then suddenly, some shepherds began to speak with a strange voice. With stupefying temerity, Timothy Card. Dolan, commenting on the “coming out” of a “gay” college football star, told NBC’s “Meet the Press” *Good for him... I would have no sense of judgment on him.... God bless ya. I don’t think, look, the same Bible that tells us, that teaches us well about the virtues of chastity and the virtue of fidelity and marriage also tells us not to judge people. So I would say “Bravo”.*

With such statements and actions by prominent and powerful prelates, crowned with the pontifical saw “who am I to judge”, traditional minded bishops, priests and even laity are disarmed and hamstrung. After all, in holding to the traditional Catholic moral teaching and order they would soon be accused of being more Catholic than the Pope. This disarming of the clergy and hierarchy constitutes the Francis Effect.

The Pope

Catholics love the Pope. Whoever he is, wherever he hails from, he always represents for them an evident and effectual sign of the presence of Christ in the world. Even before Our Lady asked the children at Fatima to pray for the Holy Father, repeating this request at Akita on 13 October, 1973, saying “pray very much for the Pope, bishops and priests”, Catholics have prayed for him daily and not only look to him for leadership but also regard him as that firm and sure foundation on which the Church’s teaching authority is built. For Catholics the purity of teaching is so important that it is easier for them to accept the possibility that the ‘pope’ may not, in fact, be the pope than it is for them to believe that a pope could be a teacher of error.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches that the “Gospel is handed on in two ways: orally (Sacred Tradition) and in writing (Sacred Scripture) and is continually proclaimed through the apostolic succession (Magisterium)”. CCC §§76-77. It goes on to define Sacred Scripture as “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” CCC §81, and consequently, being inspired by God, it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”. 2Tim.3:16 In §81 the Catechism affirms that “Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit” and that it is transmitted to the bishops, “the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching.”

Throughout his letters, St. Paul insisted that he had not invented any new doctrine, nor had he deviated from what he himself had received. Regarding the Eucharist, in particular, he stated “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread ...” (1Cor.11:23) and he went on to warn in verse 29 that “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.” Even more forcefully, he told the Galatians there are some who want to pervert the gospel of Christ, and so “even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.” Gal.1:8

In regard to the Magisterium or Church’s Teaching Office, the Catechism in §85 declares that “the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone.” Since the Church exercises its authority in the name of Jesus Christ, it follows that “the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.” Moreover, the Catechism in §86 goes on to point out that the “Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”

The Magisterium has the authority to bind definitively the consciences of the faithful in regard to matters of faith or morals and does so with dogmatic definitions, as CCC §88 makes clear: “The Church’s Magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes, in a form obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith, truths contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes, in a definitive way, truths having a necessary connection with these.”

The Papal Magisterium, according to the teaching of Vatican I (D.3070), was not established to reveal new doctrine but rather to guard and transmit faithfully the truths of faith entrusted by Christ to His Apostles: “The Holy Spirit has not been promised to the successors of Peter to reveal, by His inspiration, a new doctrine, but to scrupulously guard and make known with fidelity, by His assistance, the revelation transmitted by the Apostles, that is, the deposit of faith.”

Whilst the faithful owe obedience to the Pope as the Vicar of Christ, the Pope himself owes obedience to the Word and Apostolic Tradition and, in so doing, facilitates the faithful in their obedience to him. In a world not dissimilar to that when “for a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest,

and without law” (2Chr.15:3), it is necessary that the Pope be wise and clear in his teaching so that those hearing him may avoid the snares of death: “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1Tim.4:16). Pope Felix III, living in a world inimical to the Gospel message, saw the necessity of correcting error and reinforcing truth, saying that an error which is not resisted is approved; a truth which is not defended is suppressed.

Pope Francis

Within the first year of his pontificate, Pope Francis had managed to unsettle even the most uncritical of Catholics, who tried desperately to explain away the ambiguity of his words and actions. The fact that the Church’s traditional enemies approve highly of him raises concerns, not least because of the Lord’s warning that “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.” Jn.15:18-20.

Catholic concerns increased in proportion to the density of the fog covering the pope’s true position on key issues. It is reported that as archbishop in Buenos Aires, apparently wishing to be loved by all and to please everyone, he would send out mixed signals, “so one day he could make a speech on TV against abortion, and the next day, on the same TV show, bless the pro-abortion feminists in the Plaza de Mayo; can give a wonderful speech against the Masons and, a few hours later, be dining and drinking with them in the Rotary Club.” St John records that some of Christ’s followers were Pharisees: “many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jn.12:42-43

To the consternation of Catholics and the satisfaction of the world, Pope Francis, by word and action, has provoked many major controversies, the most egregious of them being the “Who am I to judge?” comment. This pontifical question instantly disarmed all those resisting the incursions of the gay lobby. The Holy Father failed to make the required distinctions, namely, that the Church does not judge persons but that she has the right and duty to judge their actions and teachings. The Church has passed no judgement of the personal morals of even arch-heretics, though she has certainly warned the faithful of the perniciousness of their teachings. In writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul himself sanctions this position: “But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.” 1Cor.5:11-13

Catholics became even more concerned when the papal utterances seem to attack the flock, such as the claim that a “supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism” and the complaint that there was too much talk about contraception and abortion. Who, apart from pro-lifers, could this be directed against? Vittorio Messori in his book *The Defense of Every Life* quoted St John Paul II as saying “It is difficult to imagine a more unjust situation (abortion), and it is very difficult to speak of obsession in a matter such as this, where we are dealing with a fundamental imperative of every good

conscience – the defence of the right to life of an innocent and defenceless human being.” The vast majority of Catholic can testify that the generality of the preachers of the Gospel never broach the issue of contraception or abortion. Yet, about these things St Paul instructs preachers to “be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2Tim.4:2).

The Rabbitgate affair was particularly hard on Catholic mothers worldwide, especially those who, at great personal sacrifice, had given birth to their children. The pope who had said “who am I to judge” now says “I rebuked a woman some months ago in a parish who was pregnant eight times, with seven C-sections (cesareans). “But do you want to leave seven orphans? This is to tempt God! He [Paul VI] speaks of responsible parenthood.” Not content with rebuking this particular woman, he extends it worldwide “God gives you methods to be responsible. Some think that, excuse me if I use that word, that in order to be good Catholics we have to be like rabbits. No. Responsible parenthood! This is clear and that is why in the church there are marriage groups, there are experts in this matter, there are pastors, one can seek and I know so many, many ways out that are licit and that have helped this.”

In the present climate of the pastoral imperative, his position on *Humanae vitae*, the touchstone of Catholic sexual ethics, is uncertain, especially as there is talk of going beyond what it teaches. Equally alarming is his apparent openness to ‘gay marriage’ in form of ‘civil unions’. Most troubling of all is his open support for Cardinal Kasper who, at the 2014 Synod, called for admitting remarried divorcees to the Eucharist without them changing their marital status. This cut Catholics to the bone and provoked concerns about the pope’s orthodoxy.

These ambiguous papal utterances cause not only concern but also confusion among Catholics who, for the most part, are fearful of criticising or judging the Pope. But here, as above, a distinction needs to be made. It is not the person of the pope that is being judged but rather his actions. It must also be stated that the judgement of his actions is not being done with the intention to cause indignation but on the contrary is being done because his actions are the cause of indignation among the faithful and a threat to their faith.

This judgement on the pontiff can be made on the authority of St. Paul who told the Galatians that “when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straight-forward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” Gal.2:11-14

There is also historical precedent for such judgement on papal actions. The theologians of University of Paris, cardinals, bishops and kings opposed John XXII (1316-1334) when, in his Sunday sermons, he incorrectly taught that the Blessed do not see God until after the General Judgement. In the sixteenth century, Melchior Cano, a Spanish theologian at the Council of Trent, warned against obsequiousness regarding the pope “Now it can be said briefly that those who defend blindly and indiscriminately any judgment whatsoever of the Supreme Pontiff concerning every matter weaken the authority of the Apostolic See; they do not support it; they subvert it; they do not fortify it... . Peter has no need of our lies; he has no need of our adulation.” In our time, the 1983 Code of Canon Law also recognises the right of the faithful in

this regard where it states that “according to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess... the faithful have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful...” § 212:3.

Conclusion

The Church now faces the spectacle of cardinals and bishops in open conflict with each other over doctrine and pastoral measures. At the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family the leading members of the Church’s hierarchy, with a few notable exceptions, openly and publicly debated the circumnavigation of the very words of Our Lord Jesus Christ in order to institutionalize the sexual revolution in the Church by the admission of remarried divorcees to Holy Communion. If this is accepted, then Clement VII was wrong in his treatment of Henry VIII and the English reformation was unnecessary. Further, why should cohabiting couples and practising unrepentant homosexuals be denied Holy Communion? There is something déjà vu about all this: “All the leading priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged; he gave them all into his hand.” 2Chron.36:14-17 With Islam growing in strength, could it in our time provide the remedy comparable to that brought by the Chaldean king?

The Francis Effect is the disarming and silencing of Catholic bishops, priests and laity. Holding firm to Catholic doctrine and practise seems like an act of disloyalty to the pope, yet to acquiesce is to betray the Church. Catholics ask with Peter, Lord, to whom shall we go? Jn.6:69. It is imperative that they stay in the Church and stay armed for, if the shepherds have come down like Aaron to join in the Bacchanalia, then the Church needs Levites. “And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.” Ex.32:25-27. Christ had already warned of this time saying “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away, ... And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved” Mt.24:9-13

The Church is facing crisis; a crisis as grave as that posed by the Arians. Its resolution will bring recovery or death. To achieve the former, Catholics must stay in the Church and stay fully armed. For this, five things are necessary.

First, pray. The battle is the Lord’s, “But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man” Lk.21:36. Pray above all for the pope as the early Church prayed unremittingly for Peter. Acts.12:5.

Second, study. Catholics must know the Faith, be familiar with the Scriptures, know the constant teaching of the Church, and understand the principles of moral theology. St. Athanasius stood alone against the world, therefore, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.” Heb.13:7-9

Third, transmit the Faith by teaching and sharing it within the family, by practising and praying together and for each other as a family.

Fourth, support each other and all true and authentic Catholic speakers and organisations. The 500 priests who sign an open letter asking that the Synod on Family promote Catholic doctrine need to be praised and supported by all concerned Catholics.

Fifth, prepare for martyrdom. In the Nobis quoque of the Roman Canon we pray: To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies, graciously grant some share and fellowship with your holy Apostles and Martyrs: with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas... and all your Saints; admit us, we beseech you, into their company, not weighing our merits, but granting us your pardon, through Christ our Lord. Amen.