

Fr. Perozich comments —

Certainly Catholics must be involved in the christianization of the culture, bringing Jesus and the Catholic faith to the nations.

Politics has its place in election season to guide us in the truth of Jesus, but not to blot out the faith in Jesus for the rest of the year.

Freedom from sin, caring for the poor, rooting out abortion, unchastity, euthanasia, providing for personal defense, uplifting the individual against the state, undergirding the family as the cell of society, the dignity of work, are part of salvation.

The constant drumbeat from Rome and the USCCB such as “resist Trump”, open immigration of masses of people with no order by the states to which they come, gun control, income redistribution, and so forth are not the essence of Jesus’ message, rather a desire from the confused hearts of those with the bully pulpit.

Jesus did not leave us politicians, rather shepherds of His own message of salvation from sin toward goodness and eternal life. He told us to preach His name and all He taught, not our personal interpretations in the political realm. Shepherds have been replaced with politicians in our church at this time of history. Thus we must go directly to Jesus to hear His voice of truth while engaging in the liturgy to hear the word and receive the Eucharist and tolerating the distraction of politics at times.

These desires distract from conversion of heart in Jesus which will lead us to peace in our hearts during our lives in this imperfect world.

It will always be a world of rich and poor, of advantaged and disadvantaged in economics and other worldly values. One only has to look to the law of Moses to see how the advantaged themselves were to provide for their disadvantaged brothers and sisters, not some state effort toward collectivism which erased the dignity of the individual.

Worship of God is essential to this, particularly of the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, the essence of our Catholic faith.

Yet still, even with faith, it will be a world of rich and poor, each person with the power of faith in Jesus, marching with Him toward holiness and eternal life in the situation that God has planted each of us in this life until He grants us eternal life in the heavenly kingdom to come.

MATER ET MAGISTRA OR POLITICO AND IDEOLOGUE?

Why is the Church taking sides in European politics and not focusing on the rampant secularization and the dilution of Europe's Christian roots?

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Pope Francis greets Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 17, 2019. In a new interview on the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Amazon, Pope Francis praised the increased awareness and efforts among young people to seek action on climate change. (CNS photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters)

How does it feel to go to Church to celebrate the Assumption of Our Lady—or, as Byzantines say, the Dormition of Our Lady—and hear politics?

I am back from a splendid pontifical high Mass in a very special Marian shrine with an overwhelmingly large number of pilgrims overflowing the church, which is

unusual in northern Europe (Germany). The local bishop seemed more like a politician preaching in favor of a political party than a bishop teaching the faith. The homily started with a statement in support of the European Union, bashing nationalists and populisms, while praising partnerships and advocating for protecting the environment. Only after this diatribe did all who were gathered, having traveled miles to attend, hear about the Assumption of Our Lady.

Why are our clergy and bishops not teaching what they are supposed to teach, instead becoming entangled in contemporary politics and ideology—and worse, taking sides in current politics and with certain politicians and sharing the same script of their political agenda? Don't we have enough of politics already, as we are bombarded from every direction? Why isn't the Church being the Church, a teacher—a *magistra*—of faith? Why aren't our bishops teaching?

Obviously, I was disappointed, to say the least. However, the homily for the Feast of the Assumption reminded me of the August 9, 2019, *La Stampa* **interview** of Pope Francis. The topics covered seemed almost identical to those included in the homily. In fact, when I first read the Holy Father's interview, I thought it to be probably one of the most political interviews in his pontificate so far. The themes explored in the interview are hot buttons, highly contested in both European politics in general and Italian politics in particular: European Union integration, sovereignty, immigration, globalism, populism, nationalism, and the environment.

Where is Christ and the Church as *Mater et Magistra* in all this? Why are the priorities shifted to an ideological-political platform? What has the Church to offer that is different from what the political parties and political contestants are offering to the faithful and to the lapsed Catholics who on Holy Days make an effort to return? In what ways, exactly, is the Church qualified to make judgments on political parties and policies?

The August 9 interview seems to show no boundary between the secular realm and the preaching of the Kingdom of God. The Church's involvement in politics—and worse, taking sides in political debates and highly contested matters—can cause dangerous misunderstandings and exclusion of people, including the faithful who do not abide by what they hear coming from the altar. By involving itself in this way in politics, the Church also misses out on teaching opportunities, as was the case of the homily of the bishop on the Feast of Mary's Assumption.

Pope Francis is the pope of the peripheries, bringing the peripheries and the plight of the peripherals to the center's attention, as he is constantly doing with immigrants, the poor, and the marginalized. Additionally, Pope Francis is the pontiff who greatly values the vitality and the particularities of the periphery. According to his theology of the peripheries, the periphery and the peripherals can both enrich and challenge the center's perceptions. In the 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis made an important distinction between globalism and Europeanism on the one hand, and sovereignties, nationalisms, and populisms on the other by using the model of a sphere versus a polyhedron, explaining: "... the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead...the polyhedron... reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness."

In other words, the pontiff is making a distinction between the global, which in his model is a sphere (which does not value the particularities of different cultures) and the specific, which is a polyhedron (which values the particularity of every culture).

However, the August 9 interview is very different from *Evangelii Gaudium* and the sphere-polyhedron model—the global versus particular—when the Holy Father talks about the global European Union. In the interview, the

pontiff rightly emphasized how important dialogue is between different countries and parties and among people in the European Union. He explained that integration and unity of European identities is important, and the way to accomplish this oneness is through dialogue.

However, immediately after making this statement of global Europeanism (the sphere) which is “the dream of the Founding Fathers [which] had substance because it was an implementation of this unity [of different identities/peoples/countries],” a contradictory argument is laid out condemning the sovereignty of each nation (polyhedron): “Europe first, then each one of us. Each one of us is not secondary, it is important, but Europe counts more.” Does this sound like America First or Italy for the Italians? Why the change for the global Europeanism—the sphere? The European Union’s “unity has weakened over the years, partly because of administration problems and internal disagreements. But it must be saved,” the pontiff remarked, adding unreserved approval of the newly elected Ursula Gertrud von der Leyen as President of the European Commission, saying “because a woman can be the right person to revive the strength of the Founding Fathers. Women know how to bring people together, unite.”

Why is the Church or the Pope taking sides and supporting politicians who still have not proven their worth in their new political positions? Why alienate the men here, who make up half of the population? Are not men capable of establishing unity? There is much more to say about the difficult transition of countries to the European Union and the yet unresolved and highly contested issues between member countries. Much remains to be seen in the relations between the powerful-axis countries Germany and France and the second-class European Union citizens, or the newcomers to the European Union, and how these countries are treated—or how the countries leaving the union or those aspiring to enter the union are treated.

Again, why is the Church taking sides in European politics and not focusing on the rampant secularization and the dilution of Europe's Christian roots? Teaching the faith is urgent, and this is what the Church, *Mater et Magistra*, is called and expected to do.

As for the homily of the bishop in the Marian shrine on the Feast of the Assumption, I am not sure if the faithful in the congregation brought any uplifting Christian message to home; they all probably, like me, left thinking of politics as usual.