

Fr. Perozich comments —

In response to a query as to why someone should stay in the Catholic Church, Dr. Kwasniewski lays out some points which I find cogent. I send it in hope that anyone wavering stay firm in Jesus' One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church.

- ***I cannot leave the Catholic faith where Jesus lives and dwells***

- ***I am not one of those who assumes that the Church is to be equated with popes, bishops, and councils. They obviously play a role in articulating the content of the deposit of faith and condemning errors that threaten her members, but it is a supporting role, not the star of the show. Our hierarchs can also fail in their responsibilities,***

- ***In the best of times, we can and should trust the shepherds, but at the worst of times, such as ours, their dereliction or apostasy becomes apparent and undeniable. Then, we do not trust them or follow them***

- ***so there's not much a pope (or a council, for that matter) could add or change.***

- ***The pope, like the least layman, has to function within the body according to the role he has received from Divine Providence; the pope, like the lowliest sinner, can deviate from the path of truth in all but his most solemn acts of pontifical definition, when he is guaranteed the assistance of the Holy Spirit.***

- ***There is light enough for those who wish to believe, and obscurity enough for those who wish not to believe.***

- ***A traditionalist wants the guidance of the Magisterium—he is not looking to go off Protestant-like into his own sect. He wants to be able to follow the pope, the diocesan bishop, and the local pastor; He would much prefer assenting to and absorbing all that they teach. By the very inclination of grace, he wishes to be a member of the body, a part of the whole***

- ***The trouble starts when the so-called “living Magisterium” seems plainly to be contradicting or muddying the longstanding Magisterium notable for its consistency and clarity, or when disciplinary decisions, so far from honoring and strengthening Catholic practice, take the modern “cancel culture” approach. [as some bishops have done with priests who posit legitimate criticism of church actors, actions, and statements –rp]***
- ***Do we have to be brilliant theologians? No. It is enough for a traditionally catechized Catholic to refuse to assent to or live by anything that savors or smells of novelty, heresy, impiety, immorality. [[have met lay people whose holiness is far beyond the clergy that I know.]***
- ***What we are seeing from the Vatican is a sort of bizarre game in which they hem and haw, ignore doctrines, invent new formulations, and in general try to obfuscate what our tradition has illuminated and clarified.***
- ***All I can do is to remain faithful to the Deposit of Faith and its time-honored theological exposition, as it has been given to me to understand it. My conscience bids me be and remain a Catholic, so I persevere and suffer, and strive to be a saint in the only way that makes sense: by the old pattern.***
- ***[I do not share Kwasniewski’s traditional liturgy vs novus ordo evaluation I celebrate both, and while I feel manifest reverence in the TLM, it depends on how the novus ordo is celebrated. – rp]***



CATHOLIC LIFEFEATURED

Why Remain Catholic, in Spite of Everything



Peter Kwasniewski November 25, 2020

A reader sent me the following question:

Dear Dr. Kwasniewski,

The question that all of Viganò's essays and your own raises is: Why at this point should we remain in communion with the Catholic Church—you know, the one that most people (reasonably?) think is headed by Pope Francis and the bishops in communion with him? If Vatican II was faulty and the popes from John XXIII on have all been Modernists in varying degrees, as you and others convincingly argue; if full-blooded true Catholicism is found elsewhere than in unity with what was, by all accounts, an ecumenical council and the putative popes who have uncritically endorsed it; then why would any right-thinking believer remain in communion with that entity? Why should we rely on councils and popes of said Church if they have manifestly led millions of souls astray? Adopting Viganò's logic and your own, I see no reason to remain in communion with "the Catholic Church" as people today commonly consider it. Can you give me one that is logical?

My response:

"Scio cui credidi..." "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1:12), as the Introit reminds us on the feast of St. Paul's Conversion. Faith is a gift from God: "it is not you who have chosen me but I who have chosen you," says the Lord (Jn 15:16). This faith is directed to the Trinity and the Incarnation, and then to the Church and her "system" as an extension and continuation of these fundamental mysteries. For me, being Catholic is about embracing these mysteries,

holding fast to Jesus Christ, especially in the act of worship and communion. The Church is where He lives and dwells, and where I am joined with Him.

The sacred liturgy is, for me, not just theoretically but quite practically the font and apex (*fons et culmen*) of my life as a Catholic—and by this, I mean the traditional liturgy, since I can no longer recognize in the Novus Ordo a **legitimate liturgical rite** of the Roman Church, even if it is **sacramentally valid** and may serve a temporary purpose, as a rickety life raft aids the shipwrecked until they can be rescued by a proper boat. As Martin Mosebach says: “The liturgy IS the Church—every Mass celebrated in the traditional spirit is immeasurably more important than every word of every pope. It is the red thread that must be drawn through the glory and misery of Church history; where it continues, phases of arbitrary papal rule will become footnotes of history” (*Heresy of Formlessness*, p. 188).

As the foregoing already suggests, **I am not one of those who assumes that the Church is to be equated with popes, bishops, and councils. They obviously play a role in articulating the content of the deposit of faith and condemning errors that threaten her members, but it is a supporting role, not the star of the show. Our hierarchs can also fail in their responsibilities,** as we can see plainly whether we cast our eyes over the pages of ecclesiastical history or simply look around us today. God mercifully provides us with many means of knowing the truth and adhering to it, even when the

shepherds of the Church turn into wolves. **In the best of times, we can and should trust the shepherds, but at the worst of times, such as ours, their dereliction or apostasy becomes apparent and undeniable. Then, we do not trust them or follow them,** unless we want to perish in the destruction God has promised to visit upon hypocrites, heretics, idolaters, and sodomites (to mention the most relevant categories).

Most of what we believe as Catholics—the *substance of our faith*—has already been **solemnly defined or universally taught for centuries, so there’s not much a pope (or a council, for that matter) could add or change.** I cannot think of a single doctrine of any significance that has not already been “nailed down” by now, or the opposite of which has not been anathematized. This fact could be demonstrated, were any demonstration needed, by a cursory **review of hundreds of catechisms** published with ecclesiastical approbation over the span of the last five centuries. Here we see the monumental stability of the Church’s teaching, consistent from one end of the world to the other. For most people, the *Catechism of Trent*, the *Baltimore Catechism*, or the *Catechism of Pius X* would be more than sufficient for acquiring the mind of the Church in her universal ordinary Magisterium.

Now, someone might rejoinder: “Isn’t the papacy and its prerogatives part of that immutable catechetical content?” Of course it is—but according to the **realistic and limited understanding of the papacy** that was given

expression in the First Vatican Council. A Catholic no more rejects the papal office than he expects to find a mammal without a head; yet neither does he think of the head as if it were [monstrously outsized for the body](#), or the only place where the soul of the Mystical Body, the Holy Spirit, dwells. **The pope, like the least layman, has to function *within* the body according to the role he has received from Divine Providence; the pope, like the lowliest sinner, can deviate from the path of truth in all but his most solemn acts of pontifical definition, when he is guaranteed the assistance of the Holy Spirit.** I recall reading in Fr. Garrigou-Lagrance a penetrating sentence about the motives for belief in Christianity. It went something like this: **“There is light enough for those who wish to believe, and obscurity enough for those who wish not to believe.”** Similarly, we might say about the papacy that historical instances of serious deviation have been rare enough to confirm our faith in the divine support of the papal office, yet numerous enough to warn us against a submission unenlightened by the Catholic Faith and the exercise of reason.

Here I think it is high time to clear up an all-too-common misconception, namely, that traditionalists are anti-authoritarians and individualists. Nothing could be further from the truth. **A traditionalist *wants* the guidance of the Magisterium—he is not looking to go off Protestant-like into his own sect. He *wants* to be able to follow the**

pope, the diocesan bishop, and the local pastor; He would much prefer assenting to and absorbing all that they teach. By the very inclination of grace, he wishes to be a member of the body, a part of the whole, a citizen of the celestial commonwealth; individualism is abhorrent.

The trouble starts when the so-called “living Magisterium” seems plainly to be contradicting or muddying the longstanding Magisterium notable for its consistency and clarity, or when disciplinary decisions, so far from honoring and strengthening Catholic practice, take the modern “cancel culture” approach. Such problems are not matters of arcane discernment, requiring gnostic access to hidden wisdom. They stand up and hit you in the face; they bruise faith and batter reason. At that point, what are we to do? Do we just assume that everyone before us was wrong, and that Christianity consists in an evolutionary process with no fixed nature and no definite goal, except perhaps a space-age Omega Point? No, we don’t assume that, unless we wish to barter away our baptism in Christ Jesus, “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8), and unless we wish to cease “contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We hold on to that which is certain, and we question that which is strange or novel against the backdrop of our inherited liturgy, doctrine, and morals (*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*).

Do we have to be brilliant theologians? No. It is enough for a traditionally catechized Catholic to refuse to assent to or live by anything that savors or smells of novelty, heresy, impiety, immorality. We might be mistaken in our judgment of this or that particular matter, but that's hardly a problem, since we can never go wrong by holding to what is known with certainty and confidence, and by following the teaching and example of the great saints of the past, who lived by the same Catholic Faith. It is not up to the sheep to twist themselves into pretzels in order to accommodate modernist teaching; rather, it is up to the shepherds to speak the language of Catholicism.

If Christianity is true, the only serious contenders for its earthly representative are the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox (in all their fissiparous variety). While I admire the Eastern liturgy and find Eastern Christian spiritual writers admirable and inspiring, my study of Eastern theology and history leaves me less impressed. In order to become Orthodox, I would have to expressly renounce the *Filioque*, the Immaculate Conception, Purgatory, and the infallibility of the pope in *ex cathedra* pronouncements. I could not do this, since all of these doctrines make sense to me. That they make sense to me is not (I hasten to add) the reason why I *accept* them; my point is that even my reason sees enough of their profound harmony with the rest of revealed truth that I could not reject them without being irrational.

What we are seeing from the Vatican is a sort of bizarre game in which they hem and haw, ignore doctrines, invent new formulations, and in general try to obfuscate what our tradition has illuminated and clarified. From Vatican II onwards, modern churchmen have consistently *refused* to exercise their authority to the full, preferring to sermonize endlessly in support of their favorite causes. I'm not denying that at some level the Magisterium has been and is being "engaged," but it is at a level compatible with error or just plain stupidity and unhelpful vagueness. There is almost nothing from the past fifty years that will go down in history as a "high point" for the Church. It will be much more like the Dark Ages: centuries of civil and ecclesiastical corruption, barbarian invasions, and a spotty transmission of heritage by a few literate people. The only really important judgments that have been made concern sexual and bioethical issues.

I see no way around the conclusion that we are living in an unprecedented era. Modernity—by which I mean not just a chronological period but a philosophical and anthropological outlook—is not like any phase that has ever occurred in human history, and the crisis in the Church mirrors this uniqueness. The *mysterium iniquitatis* is never far away from fallen human beings (and that applies to the Byzantine court no less than the papal court; rather the contrary). But our current level of chaos and confusion, which has

evolved into a studied program, is something new; I would go so far as to call it apocalyptic.

I see the “neo-Magisterium”—that is, conciliar and papal teaching and legislation, to the extent that it departs from hitherto received tradition—as a cancerous growth or tumor in the body of Christ on earth. I do not know when or how the divine Physician will excise it or dissolve it. **All I can do is to remain faithful to the Deposit of Faith and its time-honored theological exposition, as it has been given to me to understand it. My conscience bids me be and remain a Catholic, so I persevere and suffer, and strive to be a saint in the only way that makes sense: by the old pattern.** It is like what we see in religious communities: in the 1960s and 1970s, most of them abandoned their old habits for new ones, then often gave up any habits, and now these orders have died out. The flourishing new communities have resumed the old habits, and the more traditional they are, the more they have reversed the decline.

As John Henry Newman once said in regard to the Arian crisis, the teaching office of the bishops appears to be “in suspension”: it exists, but the faith is being held and transmitted more by the laity and by the lower clergy than by their shepherds. I do not see how this shakes the foundations of the Church. What it shakes, rather, is overconfidence in mortal men and princes (cf. Ps 145:2–3).

The Bride of Christ on earth is one whose visage has been marred by the sins of her members, especially of her most prominent members. But I love the Bride nonetheless, recognizing that it is in *her heavenly glory* that her full essence is found and her full beauty unveiled. The Church on earth is a passing reality; the Church in heaven is what abides. “Communion with the Church” is first and foremost communion with the saints and angels in heaven, and, secondarily, with our glorified Lord under the sacramental veils here below. Where these are found, *there* is the Church, regardless of the corruption of some of her members or the deviations caused by their laying aside of the exercise of her priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices. This is the profound truth of Augustine’s anti-Donatist polemic: it is not Fr. So-and-so who baptizes, but Christ who baptizes; it is not Fr. So-and-so whom we receive in the Eucharist, but Christ Himself. God so loved the world that He did not send a committee. In that way, my faith in Christ and in the means of salvation He has provided remains unshaken; indeed, it has become even stronger in this time of crisis.

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