

Fr. Perozich comments —

Progress either implies or is inferred as a movement toward something better, thus the word is used craftily to impose change upon people by those with power.

Used in this way to distort God and His teachings, it **REGRESSES** rather than progresses, taking us back to the attitudes in which men rarely reference the Almighty where “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word.” Hebrews 1:1-3

I have heard too much from “progressives” in the world and especially from those in the church. I give them a hearing in order to run in the opposite direction, “Back to the faith that saints believed of old, back to the faith that still that Church doth keep” (Hymn: At That First Eucharist)

The three articles below show how men develop their own ideas departing from what has been handed on, how they attain to power, how they impose themselves upon others to twist thoughts to their regressive thinking, and to dominate and rule those whom they should shepherd to God, as if the flock belonged to them rather than to Jesus.

To you who read this, may you attain some enlightenment as to what is being done to you in order that you keep the “faith that saints believed of old”.

To my brother priests, please, continue to preach the true faith when the progressives have power over you and threaten to silence you for disobeying their personal will while you obey the will of God.

Progressivism and Power

Randall Smith

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

“Know thyself.” These were the words written above the temple doors of the oracle at Delphi. They are words that have remained a counsel of wisdom through the ages. They were the words with which Pope St. John Paul II began his great encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (“Faith and Reason”)

In that encyclical – an intellectual *tour de force* that should have inspired a renaissance in Catholic education, but sadly hasn’t – **John Paul**

II spoke of the “fundamental questions” that “have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart.” The answers people give to these questions, he says, will “decide the direction they seek to give to their lives.”

But what if a person has never considered these questions? Then it’s likely that his life is being determined by the implicit, unreflected-upon-answers given to him by others. He’s likely “living out a script written by someone else.” Hence the importance of “knowing oneself” and of living “the examined life” – becoming aware of the presuppositions that animate one’s beliefs and actions and then having the courage to subject those presuppositions to an appropriate critique.

For Christians, the ultimate touchstone for such a critique would come from divine revelation and the truths of faith. This is what it means to *scrutinize* the signs of the times – not merely be subject to them, but *scrutinize* them – “and interpret them in the light of the Gospel,” as a famous passage from Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* goes on to say.

Among the great gifts that Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI gave to the world was their profound understanding of modernity, both its strengths and weaknesses, and their ability to critique it wisely “in the light of the Gospel.” And one of the great insights of *Fides et Ratio* is John Paul II’s warning that it’s not unimportant the kind of philosophy one seeks to incorporate into one’s theology. Indeed, all philosophy, whatever its source, must be subject to critique by divine revelation. Divine revelation should not be held hostage to the vagaries of whatever happens to be the latest philosophy in vogue, whether it’s Platonism, Aristotelianism, or German Idealism.

In a previous column, “[A Means of Disowning the Past](#) ^[1],” I spoke about how the **modernist, “historicist” presupposition that human nature changes over time has infiltrated itself into the mainstream of modern moral theology, causing many modern moral theologians and their disciples in ecclesiastical circles to conclude that long-standing Church teaching, even principles found in sacred Scripture, can and should be revised to be brought in accord with trends in contemporary cultural self-understanding.**

But there is another interesting feature to this story involving American cultural and political “progressivism.” As Ronald Pestritto and William Atto write in the introduction to their reader on *American Progressivism* ^[2], the “coupling of historical contingency with the doctrine

of progress” – shared by all progressives to one degree or another – is how German historicism, with its assumption that human nature changes according to historical circumstances and culture, was imported into the American political tradition. Most progressives were either educated in Germany in the nineteenth century or had teachers who were.

American progressives took from the Germans, especially Hegel, the “living” notion of the nation-state, from which they developed the idea of a “living” constitution. While early American conceptions of a national government had carefully circumscribed state power, progressives argued that history had brought about changes in the human condition that required new approaches. A whole new host of economic and social ills seemed to call out for governmental remedies, requiring a sharp increase in the scope of governmental power beyond those permitted in the Constitution. Eventually, one of these “changes in the human condition” was a new, “progressive” view of sex.

Achieving the goals and meeting the challenges of the modern world would, it was assumed, **require a new “progressive” approach to educating the young, one emphasizing their freedom to define themselves within a “progressive” culture rather than formation in the time-tested principles and traditions of their forebears.**

American religious institutions also felt the need to respond to these new “scientific” and “cultural” challenges. The result was the Social Gospel movement, which dictated less emphasis on personal holiness and more on social problems, a shift that made them less resistant to the new “progressive” view of sex.

What few seemed to notice is who would be empowered by these progressive political and social projects. Who would have the technical know-how to be the engineers of “progress”? Who would have the high-level vision necessary to sum up the class or cultural consciousness of the age in order to determine the new rules?

It wouldn’t be the poor and uneducated who had always depended on the stable and easily understood principles of the Decalogue and the natural law. Henceforth **we would depend on a highly-trained avant-garde – a new intellectual clerisy – to make the rules and run the ever-evolving, ever-progressing modern bureaucracy according to the rules they themselves have made.**

All to benefit “the people,” of course. Because you know the “will of the people” not by actually talking to them, but by reading the latest articles on “the culture” and “cultural consciousness” in an elite university.

In this light, consider contemporary American “progressive” clerics such as Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, among others, whose respect for the Church’s moral teaching seems no greater than progressivism’s respect for the limits imposed on their will-to-power by the American Constitution. They are the unreflective products of their age. One finds in their formation a “perfect storm” of American political and social progressivism – and revisionist Catholic moral theology, both blowing the same toxic intellectual winds borne aloft from German idealism’s fever swamp.

As Pope John Paul II warned, it is not unimportant what philosophy you incorporate into theology. And this is why *Fides et Ratio* remains the essential complement to *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II’s decisive word on moral theology. Perhaps it’s time for our bishops to revisit both – preferably before the next synod.

You may also enjoy:

Anthony Esolen’s *Progressive Christianity: The Same Old Tides* ^[3]

Paul Kengor’s *The Pope Francis Progressive Set-Up* ^[4]

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The Pope Francis Progressive Set-Up

Paul Kengor

Friday, October 10, 2014

The secular-progressive media is hell-bent on trying to shape an image of Pope Francis as a fellow liberal-progressive, just like them. Give him more time, the media suggests, and he’ll soon be allowing divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Communion, allowing gays to marry within the Church, ordaining gays, ordaining women, endorsing the HHS mandate, praising Planned Parenthood, and who knows what else.

It’s an incessant, incestuous, exasperating image that liberals in the media are pushing with abandon. Almost every one of Francis’ actions or statements is contorted to try to

remake the man, and thus his Church, in their (the liberal media's) own image. He's their personal, papal Vatican II. They are projecting upon him the kind of Roman Catholic Church they want.

It's quite a stunt, often obscene in its crass, laughable obviousness. It flies in the face of a man who, on the whole, is simply and unapologetically a faithful and traditional Roman Catholic. Take just any one of Francis' myriad statements on the devil, on sin, on unborn life, on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, on angels and archangels, or even on gay marriage [as a literal product of Satan](#) ^[1], and we find a man who firmly does not conform to the media's definition of a "progressive."

In fact, to the contrary, Francis has referred disparagingly to what he calls "[adolescent progressivism](#) ^[2]," which, he notes, always suggests that it's right, when faced with any decision, to move along with the tide rather than remaining faithful to one's own traditions. He cautioned against this "spirit of worldliness" to "be like everyone else." That warning by Francis is, in fact, a decidedly *conservative* (and Catholic) one, and most assuredly not a progressive one.

And yet, all such thinking by Francis is eagerly cast aside, ignored by **secular progressives who want the pope to affirm them and to be like them.** (It's not always clear why they want the approval of the leader of a Church they do not much value.) They will appropriate and manipulate his words and intentions in whatever way best suits their purposes.

This bearing of false witness against the person of Pope Francis is bad enough in and of itself. But there are at least two additional ways in which it's especially insidious and is having far-reaching ramifications for the Church and its faithful:

First, as we're already seeing, **loyal Catholic priests and lay people who continue to fight for and bravely defend the Church's teachings on controversial, emotionally charged cultural issues that dominant the day are receiving a lot of flak from liberal Catholics, unfaithful Catholics, and non-Catholics. They are under fire. They are really struggling. They are being told that they're not like Pope Francis – i.e., that they're wrong.**

This is happening right now, and it's a big, big problem.

Frankly, my primary concern with **Pope Francis, if I may say so (he says he's open to criticism), is that not enough has been done – by him, personally, as well as by his closest associates – to rectify such damaging misperceptions of him and how those misperceptions are being exploited to harm and undermine the**

Church's faithful. Surely, he's aware of those distortions and their consequences.

Second is a major challenge yet to come: When Pope Francis leaves the papacy, which [he believes will be much quicker](#) [3] than many of us imagined, his successor is going to be viciously attacked by progressives as the *anti-Francis*.

His successor, being a faithful Catholic, will be portrayed as a reactionary ogre, a retrograde throwback, as Rush Limbaugh's pope, as the Republican pontiff, as a revamped Ratzinger, as a new right-wing Rottweiler, as a new Inquisitor, as initiating a renewed crackdown on gays and women, as narrow and "homophobic" and intolerant. "*It's so sad,*" the progressive media will preach to us, "*Pope Francis was saving the Catholic Church, bringing it into the 21st century, but it was too much for the old white guys. Now they've given us another Pope Benedict. What a shame!*"

The new guy will have his hands full. He'll be in a tough spot. It will be a towering task for him to faithfully advance the Church's historic teachings (as Francis has) and be taken seriously and not ridiculed by the international media. And some liberal Catholics, as we well know, will help swell the chorus.

That's the secular-progressive set-up that's being orchestrated right now. **The progressive painting of Pope Francis as one of them is a genuinely destructive phenomenon with far-reaching consequences yet to come. It can probably only be dispelled and reversed by Pope Francis himself. Unfortunately, I fear that correcting others' misperceptions isn't high on his agenda.**

Dr. Paul Kengor is professor of political science at Grove City College. His latest book is [11 Principles of a Reagan Conservative](#) [4]. His other books include [Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century](#) [5] and [The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand](#) [6] (Ignatius Press).

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Progressive Christianity: The Same Old Tides

Anthony Esolen
Thursday, April 21, 2022

The most noticeable thing about progressive Christianity is how “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable” it is. It hasn’t had a new idea in more than a hundred years. Of itself, this stolidity is not damning. Most new ideas, thankfully, do not survive. But it is another matter when you pride yourself on new ideas that you do not have, even as you toss aside hard-won truths of old.

Take it from Sigrid Undset, the great Norwegian novelist (1882-1949). In her youth, the only socially acceptable religious options were the progressive Christianity on offer from the state Lutheran church, and its friendly cousin, atheism. We see as much in her twin novels, [*The Wild Orchid*](#) ^[1] and [*The Burning Bush*](#) ^[2].

“All I mean,” says the young minister of the Church of Norway, referring to the coeternal begetting of the Son by the Father, “is that what **we must keep a firm hold of is the spirit of the Reformation, and we are not doing so by maintaining dogmas which still had a value for the people of that time as the expression of contemporary religious experience, but which can only act as a hindrance to the thought of the present day.**”

He is earnest, and, if you regard with a kindly eye his ambition and worldliness, he is an upright young man, intelligent and amiable. He means it when he says that he and his fellow ministers “must have the courage to experience Christianity in our own way, by preaching the greatest religious genius who has ever lived, whose sovereign thought was that God is the Father, whose King’s speech was the Sermon on the Mount.”

At that point he is interrupted by another young man, the protagonist of the novels, Paul Selmer. Paul is an agnostic making his slow way, as Undset herself did, into the Catholic faith.

“If he is God’s Son,” says Paul, “begotten from everlasting of the Father, of the same substance as the Father. . .then it’s all plain sailing – **teach me to worship him as God. But don’t come here and ask me to go in for any genius-worship in place of religion.** If he was a

man of genius who felt just as if he might be the son of God and certain that nobody could bring any sin home to him and such a one in whom the Father must be well pleased – then I can only assure you that I don't feel the least desire to work up any analogous feelings in myself.”

As for the Fatherhood of God, Paul will not accept any sentimentality, whether severe or complaisant, about that, either: **“Has God himself spoken and said he is our father and we are his children, or is it only we ourselves who imagine God as a father of supernatural size – each of us according to his own ideas of fatherliness – a universal domestic tyrant who has us by the ears early and late and jumps on us the moment we go the least bit outside his table of rules – or a benevolent old gentleman who pays all our debts and is soft-hearted enough to pull us out of all the tight places we are careful to get into – a glorified noodle?”**

Paul is no saint. He has, sexually, the morals of his place and time – he is what I have called a “nice fornicator,” one who somehow wants the fornication to be on the road toward marriage. He can belong to the Church of Norway, and no one will look askance at him for his youthful indiscretions. He can be respectable, he can adopt the most enlightened opinions about the liberation of women and the inevitability of democracy, he can eat his cake and have it too.

But he is too honest for that, and too skeptical to believe that we are going to be saved by political change. Indeed, the first World War is gathering on the horizon, the disaster that should have hammered a stake through the heart of the undead notion that man can attain perfection on earth.

What does Paul want? We find him, still an agnostic, in the darkness of a Catholic Church, looking at a little red candle-flame flickering before the tabernacle. Suddenly he has a sense of what a **sacrament is: “If it was true that He was here, present in this way and at the same time on thousands and thousands of other altars – then He must also be present in another way everywhere and at all times,** an eye that embraced the beginning of the spheres in space and the interior of the atoms and the secret thoughts of men in one single glance without distinction between past and present, great and small – everything was merely His thought and everything contemporary and everything equally clear and dear.”

There is not a single grain of dust, not a single subatomic particle in all the universe, where God is not wholly present, and which does not belong to God. So too there is not one moment of my life, not one impulse

of my will, not one flicker of a thought, that is not to be subordinated wholly to the will of God.

Human love is timid and keeps things in reserve. Divine love is bold, all-claiming, all-giving, all-demanding. We all wish to say to God what God said to the seas in the beginning, “Thus far, and no farther.” We would be constables swaggering before the king; worse and more foolish, gods over God. **We claim to know where the world is going, politically and socially, and we give God his marching orders, saying that he is going there too. And still more – that he is leading us there, though we can believe such a thing only by listening to one thing he has said, distorting ten, and ignoring a hundred.**

And then we drift with the same old, same old historical tides.

***Image:** *Christ Mocked (The Crowning with Thorns)* ^[3] by Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1510 [National Gallery, London]

You may also enjoy:

Scott Walter’s *Progressives for Change?* ^[4]

Stephen P. White’s *Back to the Future?* ^[5]

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[1] *The Wild Orchid* : <https://amzn.to/3Ex7Rhg>

[2] *The Burning Bush*: <https://amzn.to/3OuKiuq>

[3] *Christ Mocked (The Crowning with Thorns)*: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hieronimus-bosch-christ-mocked-the-crowning-with-thorns>

[4] *Progressives for Change?*: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2008/07/24/progressives-for-change/>

[5] *Back to the Future?*: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2022/04/07/back-to-the-future-3/>

