

Fr. Perozich comments —

Citing law by a non lawyer never reaches its desired end because study of the law has many aspects.

Still, anyone can read it to learn what it says, even if one cannot appreciate the depth or the fullness of its meaning both validly and invalidly applied to those under its jurisdiction.

*Can. 212 §1. Conscious of their own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, **inasmuch as they represent Christ**, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church.*

§2. The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

Can. 752 Although not an assent of faith, a religious submission of the intellect and will must be given to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by definitive act; therefore, the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid those things which do not agree with it.

Canon 747-755 speak of what is to be taught, who gets to define and teach it, and how it must be received. It seems to give unrestricted power to a pope to declare what he believes.

Thus to question and to analyze the teachings of the pope or of some bishops can result in serious penalties, especially to priests and deacons, and now even to some bishops.

My question is this: just because a cleric holds the office of bishop or pope, does he represent Christ in every utterance when he declares as a teacher of the faith or establishes as a ruler of the church?

Therefore I am not criticizing the Holy Father Francis, rather expressing my personal confusion at statements and methodology that have been attributed to him and to some priests and bishops in interviews and writings.

Carl Olson explains more below.

Who is really trying to replace doctrine with ideology?

The timing of Pope Francis's recent Q&A with Jesuits in Portugal is just as notable as the recycled and now all-too-familiar clichés about those who are “rigid,” “go backward,” and are “superficial”.

[August 28, 2023 Carl E. Olson](#)

Print



Pope Francis addresses reporters on Aug. 6, 2023 aboard the papal flight on his return to Rome from his five-day trip to Portugal and World Youth Day. | Daniel Ibáñez/CNA

“There you go again.” — Ronald Reagan, 1980

Pope Francis, addressing a group of Jesuits recently, said: “When you abandon doctrine in life to replace it with

an ideology, you have lost, you have lost as in war.” He is correct. But not, I think, in the way he apparently thinks.

On August 5, 2023, while in Portugal for World Youth Day, Francis met with Jesuits at the Colégio de São João de Brito. His question-and-answer session with them **was published today** in the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* by editor Antonio Spadaro, SJ, who has a long history of working closely with Francis. There are a number of interesting remarks in the lengthy conversation, providing plenty of red meat for the usual *faux* Catholic crowd—**“Pope Francis blasts reactionary American Catholics who oppose church reform”**—and worthless media outlets—**“Pope Francis blasts ‘backwards’ U.S. conservatives, ‘reactionary attitude’ in U.S. church”**.

The timing of the interview is just as notable as the recycled and now all-too-familiar clichés about those who are “rigid,” “go backward,” and are “superficial”. While Spadaro is **not very adept at mathematics or theology**, he is a crafty operator who is undoubtedly looking toward the upcoming Synod in October in Rome. And I suspect this particular piece is meant to be something of a long stare at any U.S. bishops who might have the temerity to asks difficult questions about **the endless process** of the Synod on Synodality.

Three topics and points stand out to me in this interview.

First, responding to a question from the youngest member of the group about “our formation as Jesuits at the affective, sexual, bodily levels,” Francis remarks that

“it is one thing to prepare for dialogue with the world — as you do with dialogue with the worlds of art and culture — it is another thing to compromise yourself with the things of the world, with worldliness.” Very true. Then, having remarked on the problem of pornography, he says:

I am not afraid of sexualized society. No, I am afraid of how we relate to it. I am afraid of worldly criteria. I prefer to use the term “worldly,” rather than “sexualized,” because the term encompasses everything, for example, the eagerness to promote oneself, the eagerness to stand out or, as we say in Argentina, to “climb.”

There is a genuine insight here; again, it’s made in the context of Jesuit formation. But it seems to get lost later, when Francis takes up the topic of homosexuality in responding to a leading question about the tension between doctrine and what are presented as “loving” homosexual relationships:

It is clear that today the issue of homosexuality is very strong, and the sensitivity in this regard changes according to historical circumstances. But what I don’t like at all, in general, is that we look at the so-called “sin of the flesh” with a magnifying glass, just as we have done for so long for the sixth commandment. If you exploited workers, if you lied or cheated, it didn’t matter, and instead sins below the waist were relevant.

First, if the dominant society, the media, and the powers-that-be continually told us that exploiting workers and cheating them of wages was a wonderful and even necessary thing, Francis would have a point. But, of course, that’s not the case. It is, however, the case with

homosexuality, transgenderism, and any number of other immoral or harmful actions, which are no longer merely tolerated—they are pushed, pimped, and preached with diabolical fervor. And precisely so because the sexual revolution is no longer a revolution but the ruling culture in the West.

Furthermore, practicing Catholics in the West are under continual assault for standing against the flood of sexual depravity and the deeply warped anthropology behind it. They recognize that sexual sin is just as much of an injustice as stealing from workers, but even more deeply personal and destructive. **We are no longer just dealing with adultery or even homosexual acts among consenting adults, but sex trafficking, child pornography, sex abuse, and the mutilation of young bodies. (And, of course, it doesn't help that Francis himself promotes the work of men such as James Martin, S.J., whose supposed pastoral work is mostly pro-“LGBTQ-alphabet” propaganda.)**

Secondly, a religious brother who recently returned from a year-long sabbatical spent in the United States remarked: “I saw many, even bishops, criticizing your leadership of the Church.” The horror, the horror! Say it ain't so. Well, if only this man had endured the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s—you get the idea—when it was commonplace to the point of boredom for Catholic intellectuals, priests, politicians, priests—many of them Jesuits!—and even bishops to openly criticize, attack, and dismiss Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. Of

course, the vast majority of those were angry that those pontiffs had upheld the Church's teaching on sexual morality, artificial contraceptives, divorce and remarriage, ordination of women, and so forth.

One need not agree with various criticisms of Pope Francis to know that many, if not most, of them come from concern that he has caused confusion or even undermined the Church's teaching regarding these same subjects. Sure, there are some traditionalist attacks—which seem to dominate and skew the Pope's view of Catholicism in the U.S.—that are outrageous and laughable, soaked in the sour waters of risible conspiracy theories. But there are plenty of good Catholics who have expressed, for many years, sober and legitimate concerns. As Francis X. Maier **observed** last week: **“Critics are not always enemies. Some speak out of love, even when their words are heated.”**

“You have seen,” Francis says, “that in the States the situation is not easy: there is a very strong reactionary attitude. It is organized and shapes the way people belong, even emotionally.” He's most certainly referring to traditionalist Catholics, but his words could just as easily be applied to “progressive” Catholics of the past sixty years, who are as reactionary and emotional as they come. Suffer through nearly any piece at *National Catholic Reporter* about, say, **women's ordination** and you'll how little respect there is for doctrine, the teachings of Vatican II, and the **emphatic statements** of previous popes.

“I would like to remind those people that *indietrismo* (being backward-looking) is useless...” says Francis, again focused on traditionalists. But, as Stephen White **tweeted**:

A source of fascination (and frustration) is how widespread American Catholic concerns about not wanting to return to 1975 are consistently translated, between here and Rome, into a desire to return to 1955.

Finally, and most significantly, Francis states:

... we need to understand that there is an appropriate evolution in the understanding of matters of faith and morals as long as we follow the three criteria that Vincent of Lérins already indicated in the fifth century: doctrine evolves *ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*. In other words, doctrine also progresses, expands and consolidates with time and becomes firmer, but is always progressing. Change develops from the roots upward, growing in accord with these three criteria.

Let us get to specifics. Today it is a sin to possess atomic bombs; the death penalty is a sin. You cannot employ it, but it was not so before. As for slavery, some pontiffs before me tolerated it, but things are different today. So you change, you change, but with the criteria just mentioned.

Just a few years ago, the Catechism stated that the “traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty...” (CCC 2267). Now, Francis flatly states, the death penalty is a sin. One is reminded of Chesterton’s observation in *Orthodoxy*:

An imbecile habit has risen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma was credible in the 12th century, but is not credible in the 20th. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays

Francis is correct to say “change,” but incorrect to describe this change as “development.” Neither **Vincent of Lérins** nor **John Henry Newman** believed or taught that something could be morally upright and prudent at one time and then later change into something morally wrong and sinful. **Such a transformation is certainly not “progress,” a term used several times by Francis.**

Which brings us back to the fast-approaching Synod. Whatever the motives of Francis, it’s evident that Spadaro—who **recently wrote about** how **Jesus was “healed” from “the rigidity of the dominant theological, political and cultural elements of his time”**—and others have designs on trying to change Church doctrine. After all, if **“for two millennia the Catholic Church** has taught that the death penalty can be a legitimate punishment for heinous crimes” and now that can be completely changed and deemed “sinful”, why not reverse

Church teaching on sexuality, marriage, and more, **in the name of “radical inclusion”**? 1975, here we come!

And yet, ironically, I do take hope in Francis’s remark: **“When you abandon doctrine in life to replace it with an ideology, you have lost, you have lost as in war.”**

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