

Catholic Allies in Truth

WHAT HAPPENED TO CATHOLICISM?

by David Rippe

Catholics used to be those reverent people who did penance during Spring, mumbled prayers on beads and abjured meat on Fridays. As kids, they attended austere schools staffed by strict martinets dressed in strange black and white uniforms. They cheered for Notre Dame and made cookies for bake sales. They went to Confession on Saturday, Mass on Sunday. There was no mistaking them - Catholics had an identity. Once viciously discriminated against in America, they had gradually won respect through the seriousness of their faith practices, and they ultimately would have a major and leading influence on American culture.

But those days have come and gone. Today's Catholics look and act much like everybody else. Friday fish dinners are largely just a memory. Nuns, what few of them remain, are mostly septuagenarians or older and dress like ordinary women. Catholics no longer participate in weekly worship services at substantially higher rates than other religions. And the sense of personal sin that used to keep them honest seems to be missing, as well - confessional lines are a lot shorter than in past decades. Even the once fierce pride in the Faith is gone. These days, you can tell a tasteless pope joke to a Catholic with no worry about offending him. In truth, Catholics, who at one time were unique in word and action, have now become little more than fungible jellyfish in the sea of everyman. Catholicism has lost its once powerful influence because, having abandoned so many of its hallmarks, it is becoming indistinguishable from other theaters in the popular culture.

Currently, young Catholics often shack-up before considering marriage, just as Protestants, Jews and nonbelievers do. Catholics now use contraception at rates similar to other folks. Some Catholics get abortions - they even support Catholic politicians and judges who enable such activity. Despite strict admonitions from the Vatican, Catholic pols are at the forefront of movements to legalize gay marriage and treat unborn infants as if they were a disease. Many Catholic lawmakers also rabidly oppose education vouchers which would otherwise bolster attendance at Catholic schools - many of which, along with parishes, have had to close. Concurrent with these changes, Catholic influence on people in general has dwindled. Without the leading light of Catholicism, a secularized society sees fewer good examples, is seldom reminded about sin, eternity and the need for redemption, and subsequently begins to lower its standards. Although a majority of Americans profess a belief in God, it's as if they no longer take Him seriously - a consequence of Catholicism getting soft and neglecting to lead.

Blame for the decline of Catholicism often goes to the Second Vatican Council, since much of the problem seemed to blossom immediately thereafter. Actually, it wasn't Vatican II that precipitated the breakdown (it began decades earlier); it was ignorant and often willful misinterpretations of the council's recommendations that set the wheels of rebellion in motion. Following Vatican II, ideological groups with ambitious political goals seized on the opportunity to shoehorn their agendas into what they saw as the new liberalized Church. Proponents of Marxism, liberation theology, feminism, radical environmentalism, homosexual activism and government-based social justice all now claimed the high ground, leveraging the Catholic Faith as the rationalization for their self-serving, power-seeking, materialist secular agendas. Using moral relativism and specious equivalencies, they blurred the line between right and wrong and in some cases obliterated it. As might be expected, a landslide of nihilism and social pathologies followed in the wake.

Rather than Catholicism influencing the popular culture, it was now the other way around. Pressure was being put on the Church to give in here and give in there, to compromise, to condone weakness after weakness. Sadly, some of the most insidious pressure came from within the Church. Traditional Catholics shuddered following revelations that some seminaries had become brothels of homosexuality. Coming to a head in 2002, a scandal took more than two-billion dollars of Church money donated by the faithful with the intent of aiding the poor and evangelizing, and paid it out instead to plaintiffs' attorneys and their clients who claimed to have been abused.

While all this was developing, Catholic colleges and universities all across America had loosened up and had begun to look very secularized. Their curricula, programs and events, some of which bore intensely sexual, anti-American and even anti-Catholic themes, were virtually indistinguishable from those of secular institutions.

But even in church, the faithful couldn't get a serious dose of doctrine. As the Church unwittingly cooperated in her own reduction, the Faith became diluted with diversions and ideas un-sublime. Upon hearing sermons reminiscent of biased left-wing political rants, many pew-sitters became confused about what it really means to be Catholic. Others just got up and left.

Like a repentant sinner, the Church now enters a chastening period. Mistakes must be acknowledged, not denied. Old habits, comfortable but unproductive, must be abandoned. Unhealthy alliances must be broken.

With fewer men now entering the priesthood, undue expectations cannot be put on the clergy to fix all that is wrong. Priests, bishops and popes have neither the time nor the capacity to become experts on every subject, nor should they try. Still, they must be sufficiently politically astute to avoid the traps of the information

complex which remains a strategic weapon of those who would corrupt the Church. In what is sometimes called CNN syndrome, the Church, like other institutions, merely absorbs and regurgitates what is fed to her by the so-called mainstream media. Unfortunately, the major media gatekeepers select and spin the news with an overwhelmingly left-wing political bias. While misguided and sinister information is being relayed unwittingly to the faithful through trendy programs and anecdotes or applications in parabolic homilies, the agenda of the progressive Left - from which most of Catholicism's recent problems and current attacks originate - is passively seeded and carried out with the Church's innocent blessing.

This is why an informed and active laity is needed more than ever. Among the priorities of Benedict XVI for his papacy is a concept he terms New Evangelization. In the wake of ruthless assaults on Church liberty by the Obama administration and its health care mandate, the Pope, speaking to a delegation of visiting bishops on January 19, 2012, stressed the need for an engaged, articulate and well-informed Catholic laity with the ability to state the Christian vision of man and society.

Will the truth inherent in the Church return as a mainstream current in American thought and culture, or will it languish as a feckless backwater eddy to be mocked by snickering pundits and late-night comedians? The Church must lead the culture, not merely let herself be dragged passively along. To do this, she must be informed and constantly on guard against threats both overt and subtle. She must recognize who her enemies are and neither placate nor enable them.

We of the engaged laity are duty bound to employ our worldly experience and talents in countering the secular onslaught, supplementing the clergy in areas where they lack necessary expertise to discern and identify threats. The Catholic Allies in Truth acknowledge our responsibility and role in promulgating the vision of Benedict XVI in a highly secularized society, and we accept the challenge. As a missionary Church of clergy and laity working toward a common purpose, we bring Jesus to the world, and thus, bring souls to Him.

David Rippe, Co-Founder
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