

Pope Benedict XVI's Last Word to the Church

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Sixty years ago this year I was confirmed by His Excellency, Archbishop Richard J. Cushing of Boston. After the Confirmation Liturgy, seventy or so people, myself included, went to the priests' parking area behind the rectory to see the Archbishop's Cadillac. Most of the folks in my parish, including me, had never seen a Cadillac up close. When I got home to the little Confirmation party my Irish relatives were having for me, I asked an aunt—loudly enough so that most of the people could hear me—whether Archbishop Cushing should have a Cadillac, since he was supposed to be the top Catholic in Boston representing Jesus and Jesus was poor? Another Irish aunt who overheard my question responded to me: *“And if the Archbishop rode around in a Ford, what respect would the Protestants have for him?”*

I did not answer her because I knew she was right. The important and powerful people of this world rode in a Cadillac; the unimportant people rode in a Ford. If the Archbishop was an important person, who he clearly was in my mind, then he was supposed to have a Cadillac, and if he did not ride in a Cadillac, people—most especially non-Catholics—would have a much lower opinion of him. The logic of my aunt's position, i.e., that the Archbishop of Boston needed a Cadillac, was to me self-evident, airtight, and unassailable.

Number “1”

Needless to say, the episcopal Cadillac is a non-essential of the episcopal ministry. But in 1952, in my Catholic community, both the Cadillac per se and the episcopal Cadillac were symbols that contained

implicit and explicit layers of mythology about reality, the Christian life, and the Church. This mythological conception of the Gospel, the self, and the Church was by no means merely an abstract notion, something people thought: Rather, it was *lived illusion*, lived by everyone from the Archbishop and his advisors right down to my aunt and me. Parenthetically, this particular mythological understanding of God, of self, and of the Church—so acceptable to all that only an uninformed boy of twelve could even conceive of questioning its Christian validity—was not limited to my Irish-Italian Catholic ghetto outside Boston. In Chicago, the Cardinal Archbishop flexed his political muscles and the Illinois legislature passed a law that gave his Cadillac the license plate number “1,” a number that hitherto had belonged exclusively to the Governor of Illinois.

I mention these little pieces of U.S. Catholic history in order to illustrate and illuminate a solemn and somber issue lurking behind Pope Benedict XVI's resignation from the Papacy. I personally experienced the resignation of Benedict as a melancholy moment. It should not have happened or, more accurately, it should not have been necessary. A Successor of Peter, capable of authoring the “trilogy” on Jesus of Nazareth published during his Papacy, as well as composing the lectures and weekly reflections on the Christian spiritual life that he delivered right up to the end of February 2013, should not have to be leaving the Chair of Peter, even if frail.

The Supreme Law of the Church

The telling issue that Pope Benedict's resignation rationally raises is the need for an earnest assessment

of the *modus operandi* of the Petrine Ministry. Benedict's renunciation of the Petrine office and ministry is sober evidence that the structures, policies, procedures, and protocols presently governing its operation need serious evaluation, specifically in terms of their capacity to effectively translate into reality the "supreme law of the Church, which is the salvation of souls" (CODE OF CANON LAW #1747). Concomitant with this need is the equally important discernment as to whether the present operating structure of this ministry is a substantial help or a serious hindrance for any Pope "keeping before his eyes" (CODE OF CANON LAW #1747), as his highest priority, "the supreme law of the Church." What I am suggesting here is not meant to question, in any way, the Vatican I declaration on Papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction. It is meant to question, because reason demands it under the circumstances, whether the present organization and processes of the Petrine Ministry are serving Jesus and His people as well as they should be.

Except for a few elements, the structures, policies, procedures, and protocols of the contemporary Papacy are entirely man-made and not demanded by the Gospel. The power that erected these structures, enunciated these policies, put these procedures in place, and choreographed these protocols could alter them or remove them tomorrow if it chose to do so. To use a metaphor, the Petrine Ministry could decide to dispense with its Cadillac at any time.

The office of the Papacy has inherited a myriad of structures, policies, procedures, and protocols, from which the Church and its Popes in different eras have selected various pieces they thought suitable for executing the Petrine Ministry in their particular time. Whether these are efficacious today—or even at the time selected—as means for achieving the end for which the Petrine Ministry exists (Canon #1747) is a matter of evaluation and judgment. But, no one should think—simply because some pieces survive—that these non-essential surviving components of the Petrine Ministry are any longer proficient pastoral means for realizing the end which the Petrine Ministry is meant to serve.

A Surprise?

Pope Benedict's "surprise" decision was, as indicated in his resignation "letter," a necessary rational step given the circumstances: "I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine Ministry... In order to govern the Bark of Saint Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary. I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me."

Surprise? Perhaps to the press and to the world it was a surprise. But a man of Benedict's rational competence, theological acumen, and concern for the Church would never make a decision like this without extensive reflection, consultation, and prayer. His decision should not, however, have been such a surprise, at least to the press, after April 29, 2009, when he visited the Abruzzi region of Italy after an earthquake in the L'Aquila province killed 294 people. On this journey, Pope Benedict stopped at the Church of Santa Maria di Collemaggio and prayed at the glass coffin in which the bodily remains of Pope St. Celestine V (1219-1296) have been placed. After praying there, he made a striking gesture. He removed his Papal pallium, which he had first worn on the day of his inauguration as Pope. He placed it on the coffin, then left. Later that year he declared August 28, 2009 to August 29, 2010 the Year of Celestine V. On July 4, 2010, Pope Benedict again went to Pope St. Celestine V's place of bodily internment to pray. Celestine V was the last Pope to resign for personal reasons.

Unable to Rule

Pope St. Celestine renounced the Papacy after five months in office because he felt he was incapable, under the circumstances, of properly executing the duties it prescribed that he undertake. Celestine was a 76-year-old hermit before becoming Pope, renowned for his holiness and Christ-likeness. The ordinary people of Rome cheered his election as Pope. He was well prepared to carry out the essential obligations as the Successor of Peter. But, he was utterly incapable of carrying out all the non-essential obligations that had become attached to the Papacy.

Encyclopedias, Catholic and secular, record that he resigned because he recognized his political and administrative incompetence. This is correct. But, no one suggests that he resigned because, as the Successor of Peter, he was unable to faithfully proclaim the Gospel by his words and his deeds. Celestine freely renounced the Chair of Peter, not because he was unable to authentically announce the Good News or unable to be the *rock* that confirmed and upheld people's faith in Jesus Christ and His Way. Rather, it was because, to use the word from Celestine's resignation declaration, he was unable to "rule." However, as the renowned Catholic Biblical scholar, John L. McKenzie, S.J., stated and in his book *AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH* (Imprimatur, 1966): "*The vocabulary of both Greek and Aramaic is ample enough to permit Jesus, if He had wished, to say that those in authority in the Church should rule with justice and kindness; there are dozens of ways in which this could have been said. But such words as "rule" are exactly the words which He did not use.*"



Pope St. Celestine V laying aside his Papal Tiara.

The Non-essentials

A Successor of Peter can be as helpless and as weak as a man being crucified upside down and still be completely fulfilling the Petrine Ministry. The essential nature of the Petrine Ministry can be carried out completely by silent prayer in the "closet of infirmity" and/or by suffering love lived in anonymity. However, to have to daily walk-through the physical and moral gauntlet of non-essentials that have become *de rigueur* for the person serving in that Ministry, can undermine attention to and execution of the

primary service to which Jesus commissioned Peter and his Successors. Such non-essentials include, but are not limited to, being head of state, head of government, head of a bank, head of a militia; having to meet, daily and perfunctorily, with other heads of states, heads of governments, ambassadors, diplomats, and celebrities; having to personally appoint every Catholic bishop in the world; having to oversee the vast bureaucracy created to supposedly assist in managing the superfluity of the non-essentials; having constantly to preside at Pontifical High Liturgies that last hours, et al.

I submit that Pope Benedict's decision to resign, like Pope Celestine's decision to resign, was made rationally necessary, not by the essential and intrinsic responsibilities that the Successor of Peter is called upon by Jesus to fulfill, but rather because of the plethora of non-essential trimmings and trappings that have been added over the centuries and that today encrust the Petrine Ministry. To return to our metaphor, spending a large part of every day attending to the Papal Cadillac is not an inherent, essential, or necessary element of the Petrine Ministry. Indeed, it can easily become a major impediment to wholeheartedly concentrating on the Petrine Ministry's *raison d'être*.

The Essentials

The Petrine Ministry exists to be the rock of faith in Jesus upon which "*I will build My Church*" (MT 16:18), and to "*Feed My lambs*" (JN 21:15). But to feed what to His lambs? The Petrine Ministry exists to feed the members of Jesus' flock with the Bread of Life, by teaching them by word and deed to become what they receive in the Eucharist—the Lamb of God—and to receive in the Eucharist what they are, the Lamb of God. The flock of Jesus learns what it means to become the Lamb of God, whom they receive in the Eucharist, and to receive the Lamb of God, which they are by Baptism, when Peter and his successors faithfully follow the Commission explicitly given to them by Jesus immediately before His Ascension: "*Baptizing them...and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you*" (MT 28:19-20).

Jesus, the Word (*Logos*) of God Incarnate (JN 1:1FF) is the Bread of Life (JN 6:35, 51, 58) Therefore, what He teaches by word and deed and offers to humanity in the Eucharist is *the* life-giving nourishment. Every human being ultimately hungers for this nourishment, namely, the Way and the Truth unto Eternal Life with God forever—the Way to eternal salvation. The commission to Peter is to give people that nourishment which is needed for “*the salvation of souls.*”

It is not without eternal significance that Peter is to prove his love of Jesus—not his faith—by fidelity to the commission given him by Jesus: “*Feed My lambs.*” Peter proves his faith when he confesses Jesus to be “*the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God*” after which he is made the “*rock*” upon which Jesus will build His Church (MT 16:13-19). But authentic faith in Christ must be manifested, incarnated, by every Christian in acts of Christ-like love. It cannot be otherwise for the legitimate Successors of Peter. “*Feed My lambs*” is the imperative equivalent of “Attend to the supreme law of the Church. Attend to the salvation of souls by being and doing what I commission you to do and be. And by this you will show that you love Me.”

Effectiveness

The question must be asked: Is being the head of state, head of government, etc., intrinsically required to fulfill the command, to “*Feed My lambs*”? Or, are they contemporary attempts to irrationally cling to non-essential structures, policies, procedures, and protocols from another age, that are today only minimally viable, if that, as supportive of the dual commission given to Peter and His Successors by Jesus: Be the “*rock*” “*upon which I will build My Church*” and “*Feed My lambs*”?

A Pope who enters into the worlds of “heads of states, heads of governments, heads of banks, etc.,” can be assured of being a newsmaker. He will, no doubt, “make news” and “make the news.” But will “*My lambs*” be fed the Bread of life in this way? Will the *Good News* of Jesus Christ and the Will of the Father as revealed by Jesus, genuinely enter into the minds and hearts of the people of the world via a

Petrine Ministry operating through the appurtenances and frills, cymbals and gongs that are the bread and butter of heads of states, heads of governments, heads of banks and heads of news corporations who decide what news is fit to print, to hear and to see?

The Temptation

Just prior to his election as the Successor of St. Peter, Benedict published a book, *ON THE WAY TO JESUS*, in which he wrote:

Let us return to the temptation [of Jesus in the desert when He is offered by Satan power over the kingdoms of the world]. Its real contents become apparent when we realize that over the course of history it keeps taking on new forms. The Christian emperors after Constantine immediately tried to make the faith a political factor that would be conducive to the unity of the empire. The Kingdom of Christ was now expected to assume the form of a political kingdom with its splendor. The importance of the faith, the earthly powerlessness of Jesus Christ, was supposedly compensated for by political and military might. In every century, in many forms, this temptation to secure the faith with power has arisen again and again, and over and over the faith has come close to being suffocated in the embrace of power. For the price to be paid for fusing faith and political power, in the final analysis, always consist of placing faith at the service of power and bending it to political standards.

On April 22, 2011, six years into his reign, Pope Benedict proclaimed:

It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces; that he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all! He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the cross. This is what shows us the true face of God: that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right...This is Jesus’ true mes-

sage: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside.

Ends and Means and Illusion

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that a means that cannot achieve its end is an illusion. To live in and by an illusion, a non-reality, is *ipso facto* to live untruth and meaninglessness as a way of life and as a way to eternal life. This is what is at stake when Pope Benedict speaks about the perennial post-Constantinian temptation of the Church to seek secular power in order to carry out the mission of Jesus and His Church: *“The Kingdom of Christ was now expected to assume the form of a political kingdom with its splendor. The importance of the faith, the earthly powerlessness of Jesus Christ, was supposedly compensated for by political and military might.”*

Any group of people who wishes to accomplish anything as a group must organize itself teleologically, according to the ends it desires to achieve. It must choose means that can accomplish those ends. If the end desired is to build cars, a group does not set up an assembly line operation that makes and bakes bread. The means have to be capable of achieving the ends desired. The end determines the means that the group must choose.

The end for which the Church exists is the same end for which God became Incarnate in Jesus, namely, the eternal salvation of all people. The Church, which is to be “an extension of Christ in time and space,” therefore must structure itself in accordance with this end. It must select means that will in fact accomplish this end.

The end for which the state exists is its own temporary physical survival, and possibly the temporary physical survival of those who populate it, or at least some of those who populate it. If this end cannot be achieved, no other goals are achievable for the state. The group of people called the state therefore must organize itself according to this end, which requires selecting means that will accomplish it.

The power of violence is the means the state resorts

to when it thinks it is a necessary means to accomplish its ends, or even just the most expeditious or expedient means by which to achieve its ends. But, violence, as Benedict XVI has taught, is rejected by Jesus as His Way to achieve the end He desires,—eternal salvation for one and for all. Love, a Non-violent Love of friends and enemies as He taught it by word and deed, is His means. No state need survive for anyone to employ the means of Jesus for the ends of Jesus. There is a self-evident abyss between the means and ends of the state and the means and ends of Jesus. To choose one is to instantly abdicate the other.

A Real Danger

Is there any Church ministry that over the last 1700 years has been placed more at the service of political power and relied more on the means of political power than the Petrine Ministry? The aforementioned Biblical theologian, John L. McKenzie, S. J., can say with scholarly certainty in his work, *AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH* “The greatest danger pointed out by Jesus to inhibiting the incalculable resources of the Spirit in the Church is the creeping secularization of authority.” But, for Benedict and Celestine, because they were serving the Church in the Petrine Ministry, this Gospel truth was an immediate, urgent, everyday spiritual and moral issue with eternal salvation of self and all at stake.

When the world saw the content of the so-called ‘Vati-Leaks’ documents, did the world in general and Catholics in particular not see up-close the traditional and inevitable results when a secular *modus operandi* is adopted as the means to fulfill the Supreme Law of the Church? Is this not faith and love being suffocated in the service of power? Is this not the very same situation with which St. Celestine V was confronted seven hundred years earlier? (See *THE STORY OF A HUMBLE CHRISTIAN: POPE CELESTINE V*, by Ignazio Silone.)

A Flight of Fantasy

Any thought that secular power, secular ways of doing business or secular mass media could be an effective means for reaching humanity with the Gos-

pel truth stated by Pope Benedict that Jesus “*came in weakness; came with only the strength of love; came totally without violence [because] violence never comes from God,*” is a flight of fantasy. The General Electric Corporation owns NBC Universal with 14 television centers, nine of which are in top ten markets, and 14 Spanish language television stations, eight of which are in top ten markets. General Electric also owns CNBC, MSNBC, the Sci-Fi Channel, USA Network, Universal Pictures and Universal Studios. Is it reasonable to think that General Electric’s communications empire is going to spread this message of Jesus and His understanding of God, reality and morality, when the General Electric Corporation has been for decades one of the top five most profitable military contractors in the U.S. with sale running into the billions of dollars per year?

But, General Electric’s media operation will miss no opportunity to publicize *ad nauseam* Christians, Christian leaders and Christian Churches that have acted contrary to the teachings of Jesus. It will also hype far and wide Christians, Christian leaders and Christian institution, e.g., universities, that adopt and thereby religiously validate General Electric’s value system. The notion of secular mass media as a means to “*Feed My lambs*” the Bread of life is far-fetched. So also is this the case with any person or institution that operates through structures that require activities that are in contradiction to the teachings of Jesus.

He, Who Lives by the Media, Dies by the Media

What the secular media builds up, when it serves its purposes, the media can tear down when it ceases to serve its purposes. He, who lives by the media, dies by the media. A non-pacific ocean of unpleasant, indeed cruel, words concerning Pope Benedict XVI’s moral rectitude have been published because of the manner in which he handled the long standing Church problem of sexual child abuse by priests, that came to light during his tenure as head of the Congregation of Doctrine and Faith and as Pope. So much of what at first glance were very reasonable critiques of his response to the problem—critiques with which I often agreed—eventually

turned into demeaning *ad hominem* castigations of him as a person.

Yet Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, is, as are we all, a sinful, struggling human being. With his one and only life he labored long and hard as a Christian and as a theological scholar in the service of Jesus Christ. A person can disagree with his theology on this or that—even publicly—as did Cardinal Walter Kasper, and as I myself have done. A person can believe that in the execution of his various ministries in the Church some of the decisions he made were acutely wrong—as I and others do. But, the efforts in print and in electronic media, even by some Catholics, to vilify him as if he were a moral degenerate are humanly reprehensible, and for a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, they are unconscionable.



After all, it was not Pope Benedict XVI who placed an embargo on Iraq that resulted in 500,000 children under twelve years old being destroyed. He did not send troops and drones into Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, killing hundreds of thousand

of human beings and maiming millions more, half of whom were children under fifteen years of age.



The child abuse of war, Iraq, 2005

These are escapades of child abuse in the extreme; war is well documented as always being an event that throws the doors wide open to child abuse on a grand scale. But, immediately prior to the invasion of Iraq then Cardinal Ratzinger said publicly in answer to a reporter's question as to whether the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. would be a just war: "Well, just look in the catechism where it teaches about just war and if you can say it is a just war then you really don't know the Catechism...There's no such thing in Catholic teaching as a preemptive war that could ever be justified...There are not sufficient reasons to unleash a war against Iraq."

Does this public stand morally count for nothing? Is this the activity of a moral reprobate? Secular news reports and commentaries on Benedict's resignation evidently think so. They all but ignore it, focusing myopically on his handling of the sexual abuse of children by priests, while simultaneously lioniz-

ing those who unleashed and those who continue to unleash the dogs of war on the children of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Of course very few in the U.S. media had the courage in 2003 to publicly take the moral position on the invasion of Iraq that Benedict publicly took in early 2003.

The same journalistic double standard holds true in terms of Benedict's unequivocal insistence that the innocent child in the womb has an inalienable moral right to life. He is cleverly, and often brutishly, disparaged for speaking out unambiguously on this critical moral matter. But, those who promote and profit handsomely—politically, financially, or otherwise—from supporting the preemptive violent invasion of the womb in order to destroy innocent human life there, are treated in the media as celebrity moral heroes. And of course, there is no child abuse problem to see here, even if the child is partially born.

The Nonviolent Jesus

To my mind, however, the most important and most ignored spiritual, theological, and moral contribution that Pope Benedict XVI has made to the well-being of the Church and the world is that he has had the moral integrity and courage to state many times over in many settings and in many ways that Jesus, the Word (*Logos*) of God Incarnate is, was, and forever will be Nonviolent. Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II, broached the subject with declarations such as the following: "Violence is not the Christian Way. Violence is not the Catholic Way. Violence is not the Way of Jesus." But Pope Benedict XVI, as the Successor of Peter, embraced it and announced it as the unequivocal truth of Jesus. Consider the following statements by this Pope:

"The truth is that it is impossible to interpret Jesus as violent. Violence is contrary to the Kingdom of God. It is an instrument of the Antichrist" (3/11/12).

"Jesus—the King of the universe—did not come to bring peace to the world with an army, but through refusing violence. This way is the one followed not only by the disciples of Christ, but by many men and women of good will, courageous witnesses of non-violence" (3/29/09).

"What Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, he now does [in His Passion]: he does not offer violence against violence, as he might have done, but puts an end to violence by transforming it into love. Violence is defeated by love. This is the fundamental transformation upon which all the rest is based. It is the true transformation which the world needs and which alone can redeem the world."

EUCCHARIST, COMMUNION SOLIDARITY (2002)

'Love your enemies' (LUKE 6:27; MT 5:44) was something of a "manifesto" presented to everyone, which Christ asked his disciples to accept, thus proposing to them in radical terms a model for their lives. But what is the meaning of his teaching? Why does Jesus ask us to love our very enemies, that is, ask a love that exceeds human capacities? What is certain is that Christ's proposal is realistic...This page of the Gospel is rightly considered the "magna carta" of Christian nonviolence; it does not consist in surrendering to evil—as claims a false interpretation of "turn the other cheek" (LUKE 6:29)—but in responding to evil with good (ROMANS 12:17-21), and thus breaking the chain of injustice. It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behavior but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God's love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the "Christian revolution," a revolution not based on strategies of economic, political or media power. God does not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposes violence precisely with the contrary: with love to the end, his cross. This is a way of conquering that seems very slow to us, but it is the true way of overcoming evil, of overcoming violence, and we must trust this divine way of overcoming" (2/18/07).

The "Do as I Say, Not as I Do" Phenomena

I would submit without fear of contradiction that Saint Peter, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther

King, Jr. or Dorothy Day, four pretty good sinners in their own right, that the culture and press at the moment hold in almost reverential esteem, could have spoken these words—and did speak this truth. I present the issue in this fashion not as an *apologia* for Benedict XVI. I present it as an example of the difficulty, which approaches an impossibility, of convincingly teaching people that smoking cigarettes is lethally dangerous while simultaneously personally smoking and enjoying two packs a day in public.

If the Pope were simply a spiritual leader in the model of Jesus or Peter, he could reject war, reject abortion, reject capital punishment and proclaim by word and deed that Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies is the Way of Jesus and the Will of the Father of all. His communication of the truth could be



Photomontage of heads of state, including Pope Leo XIII, 1889. Yohannes IV (Emperor of Ethiopia), Tewfik Pasha (Khedive of Egypt), Abdülhamit II (Sultan of the Ottoman Empire), Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (Shah of Persia), Christian IX (King of Denmark), Dom Luís I (King of Portugal), Willem III (King of the Netherlands), Dom Pedro II (Emperor of Brazil), Milan I (King of Serbia), Leopold II (King of the Belgians), Aleksandr III (Emperor of Russia), Wilhelm I (German Emperor & King of Prussia), Franz Joseph I (Emperor of Austria & King of Hungary), Victoria (Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland & Empress of India), Jules Grévy (President of France), Leo XIII (Pope), Meiji (Emperor of Japan), Guangxu (Emperor of China), Umberto I (King of Italy), Don Alfonso XII (King of Spain), Oscar II (King of Sweden and Norway) and Chester A. Arthur (President of the United States).

accepted or rejected exclusively on the evaluation of the validity of what he is saying.

But, the Pope is not a spiritual leader in the model of the *"earthly powerlessness of Jesus Christ,"* or in the model of the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels, *"who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and*

truth alone.” The Pope, within the Petrine Ministry as it now is constructed and operates, is literally a sovereign controlling great earthly wealth and political power, as well as, possessing all the perks, trappings and trimmings that attend to such a status.

The Medium Is the Message

When Saint Peter, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day say the equivalent of Pope Benedict’s statement, “*It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God’s love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone,*” it is heard by most people differently than when stated by the Pope. The same words are spoken, but to call upon what has become in the last sixty years a truism of communications theory, “*The medium is the message.*”

The communicator of a message, whether human or non-human, becomes part of the message. The medium of a message affects the reception of the content of a message, the evaluation of the content of a message, the persuasiveness or dissuasiveness of a message, the acceptance or rejection of a message. Peter, Gandhi,



Cesar Chavez, Coretta Scott King, Dorothy Day

King and Day, each of whom rejected unto death violence as an option, saying, “*The Christian revolution is not based on strategies of economic, political or media power. God does not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposes violence precisely with the contrary:*

with love to the end.” are heard differently than the head of a state, a militia, a bank, etc. speaking the same words. Why? Because, all their organizations have violence as an available means to be accessed as a key component of their tactical operations. One cannot effectively teach that Cadillacs are not of God if one is continually choosing to purchase them as his or her means of getting around the world.

The Celestine V Symbol

Pope Benedict XVI—hardly a man of whimsy—places his original Papal pallium on the glass coffin of Pope St. Celestine V; later he declares August 28, 2009 to August 29, 2010 the Year of Celestine V; then he makes a second pilgrimage on July 4, 2010, to the Church where Celestine’s earthly remains lay and where Celestine was crowned Pope. How can these acts be understood except as signs and communications that Benedict XVI was experiencing an intense unity and empathy with Celestine and with Celestine’s spiritual and moral ordeal as Pope? How can they not be interpreted as gestures by a human being in need of a “friend” in the Communion of Saints who truly grasped why he has to do the unthinkable—resign as the Successor of Peter? How can these chosen Celestine-oriented public activities not be seen as Benedict purposely leaving a collage of specific signs and symbols to the Church for the good of the Church and humanity?

And, what message does this series of Benedict-Celestine signs and symbols present to the contemporary Church? I do not think their message is abstruse or complicated. Someone once said, and I paraphrase, “The difference between a good symbol and the perfect symbol is the difference between a lightning bug and lightning!” What Benedict XVI is communicating symbolically, with Celestine V always visible in the background, is straightforward and in thoroughgoing conformity with the centrality of truth in his life. It is lightning:

Peter was not Caiaphas, is not Caiaphas, and must not be Caiaphas. The Church is in urgent need of new forms and new structures for an entirely new operating model for the Petrine Ministry. The new forms and new struc-

tures called for must be in maximal conformity with the end for which the Petrine exists—the eternal salvation of all people. They must be in maximal conformity with the only means, power and ‘modus operandi’ the Petrine Ministry has to participate in the achievement of that end, namely, Christlike love, fidelity to Jesus and His ‘new commandment’ to ‘love one another as I have loved you.’



Pope Benedict places Papal Pallium on coffin of Pope St. Celestine V.

Lest it be thought, that I am manufacturing *ex nihilo* an interpretation of the Benedict-Celestine symbolic symbiosis, consider these strong words of Pope Benedict from his book, *CALL TO COMMUNION*, published before beginning his time as the Successor of Peter:

“The more administrative machinery we construct, be it the most modern, the less place there is for the Spirit, the less place there is for the Lord, and the less freedom there is...We ought to begin an unsparing examination of conscience on this point at all levels of the Church.” In a later collection of essays titled, *IMAGES OF HOPE*, he observes, *“the saints were all people of imagination, not functionaries of apparatuses.”*

Before accepting the Petrine Ministry on April 19, 2005, Benedict is cognitively well aware of the thorny dilemma posed by the questionable acceptability of the present forms and structures of the Petrine Ministry. After April 19, 2005 that dilemma becomes his spiritual and moral crown of thorns. Benedict’s intentional integration of his Papacy with the Papacy of Pope Celestine V is not merely an act of personal piety. It is equally a public sym-

bolic act communicating that something is seriously wrong and what that something is. It is a Biblically prophetic act consistent with the central place that truth holds in his theology. It is an act consonant with the episcopal motto he chose from 3 JOHN 8 when he was consecrated a Bishop in 1977: *cooperatores veritatis*, “co-workers of the truth.”

Perhaps by the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Love and Truth—Pope Benedict XVI’s last message to the Church, his last call to conversion to the Church, his most important service to the Church and his ultimate witness to the truth of Jesus and His Way for the good of the Church and all humanity will be his resignation from the Petrine Ministry. Perhaps, it is for this genuinely needed prophetic communication and warning that he and Celestine V were chosen—albeit seven hundred years apart—by the Holy Spirit to be Successors of Peter.

—EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY