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Interview With Cardinal Burke . . . Insights On The Church And Modern Society

By DON FIER (*Editor's Note:* Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in Rome, who formerly served as bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wis., and archbishop of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Mo., recently spent some time in the United States. The Catholic Servant was granted the opportunity to interview His Eminence in mid-July on a variety of topics at Eternal Life's The Church Teaches Forum in Louisville, Ky. *The Catholic Servant* — a Minneapolis-based newspaper — gave *The Wanderer* permission to reprint the interview.

(Don Fier serves on the Board of Directors for The Catholic Servant and he writes the *Learn Your Faith* column for *The Wanderer*.) + + +

Q. Six years ago, Pope Benedict issued *Summorum Pontificum*, which allowed for the usage of the Tridentine Mass on a wider scale in the Church. In his accompanying letter to the bishops, the Holy Father stated that "the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching." Do you see concrete benefits that have come to the Church in the past several years because of *Summorum Pontificum*?

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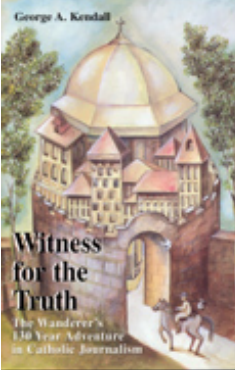
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A. I have witnessed a number of benefits. First, there is now a much stronger sense of the divine action in the Ordinary Form. There was a certain tendency in the celebration of the Ordinary Form to center attention on the priest and the congregation rather than on Christ, Who comes into the midst of the congregation through the ministry of the priest acting in His Person to give the gift of His life as He first gave it on Calvary and to make that sacrifice new for us in each holy Mass.

Another closely connected benefit is an appreciation of the true reform of the liturgy desired by the Council, namely a reform that would be in continuity with the centuries-long tradition of the Church, not a renewal that would be a break from that liturgical tradition. The celebration of the two Forms of the Roman rite have led to a growing consciousness of the need to retrieve some of the elements of the liturgical tradition too quickly discarded after the Council, contrary to the intention of the Council.

In other words, what Pope Benedict XVI had in mind was to promote the reform as it was truly desired by the Council, namely a reform in continuity with the centuries-long tradition of the Church and not a rupture. The renewed

reformed rite of the Mass is not a new Mass, but is in continuity with the holy Mass as it has always been celebrated.

Q. It has been about four months since Pope Francis became the 266th Roman Pontiff. From the vantage point of your office in Rome, have you observed any tangible changes in tone or day-to-day operation in the Vatican? What is the role of the group of eight Cardinals formed by Pope Francis?

A. Certainly Pope Francis, as is the case with every Pope, has his distinctive style which is not the same as Pope Benedict's. Everyone is adjusting to that. It is a style that has very much appealed to the faithful in terms of the number of pilgrims coming to Rome and their positive and overwhelming response to the new Holy Father. He has a way of communicating with people that is direct and which demonstrates his fatherly concern for them as individuals. When people see the fatherly and spiritual care that he gives to others, they understand that he also has the same care for them.

With regard to changes, the Holy Father has indicated that he wants to study a reform of the Roman curia and that would necessarily mean also a reform in his way of relating to the particular churches throughout the world. He is studying all of that at the present moment. Those of us who hold offices in the Roman curia have been confirmed provisionally until he has finished this study. As Pope Francis has himself said, he was not part of the Roman curia and is just now coming to know the operation of the curia, and that takes time. He has only been in office for four months, so we are waiting to see.

The group of eight Cardinals Pope Francis named [to advise him on the reform of the Roman curia] is the result of a suggestion made during the general congregation before the conclave and is actually a suggestion that was discussed some years ago. The norms for the functioning of the body have not yet been published and so I cannot say exactly what will be the scope of the considerations presented to the group or precisely how it will operate. I imagine that that type of document will be forthcoming and then we will know more about it. What seems clear is that the Holy Father wants to have a group of close and highly qualified advisors to consult with in carrying out his responsibilities.

Q. On May 13 Pope Francis consecrated his papacy to Our Lady of Fatima. What is the significance of this action?

A. I think it is deeply significant. First, it is an expression of profound devotion to Our Blessed Mother which clearly marks the life of Pope Francis. From the very beginning of his pontificate, he has repeatedly invoked the intercession of Our Blessed Mother whenever he offers holy Mass. He always reverences the image of the Blessed Mother in the sanctuary, not only by incensing her or praying before her — he will always reach up and touch the image in an act of special affection and devotion.

With regard to Our Lady of Fatima, we know well the prophecies that were given to the three seers at Fatima which have all now been published and what they indicate with regard to the attacks of Satan upon the Roman Pontiff. I am sure that Pope Francis has this clearly in mind and is invoking the intercession of Our Lady for her protection even as she protected Blessed John Paul II from an assassin's bullet. It was on Our Lady of Fatima's feast day that the dreadful attempt occurred, and John Paul was fully convinced that she interceded to save his life. I believe that Pope Francis is imploring that same intercession and protection from her at this time.

Q. Things seem to be declining at an accelerating rate in our country. For example, it is

shocking how quickly things happened in Minnesota. A year ago it seemed almost certain that a November ballot referendum would constitutionally define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Despite a heroic effort by Archbishop John Nienstedt and many other Church leaders, it failed. Just four months later a law was enacted making Minnesota the 12th state to legalize so-called same-sex marriage. How did we get to this point? Aside from prayer and fasting, what can the faithful do?

A. First of all, I would underline the need for much prayer and fasting. The alarming rapidity of the realization of the homosexual agenda ought to awaken all of us and frighten us with regard to the future of our nation. This is a work of deceit, a lie about the most fundamental aspect of our human nature, our human sexuality, which after life itself defines us. There is only one place these types of lies come from, namely Satan. It is a diabolical situation which is aimed at destroying individuals, families, and eventually our nation.

How did we get to this point? The fact that these kinds of “arrangements” are made legal is a manifestation of a culture of death, of an anti-life and anti-family culture which has existed in our nation now for some time. We as Catholics have not properly combatted it because we have not been taught our Catholic Faith, especially in the depth needed to address these grave evils of our time. This is a failure of catechesis both of children and young people that has been going on for fifty years. It is being addressed, but it needs much more radical attention. I can say this because I was the bishop of two different dioceses.

After fifty years of this, we have many adult voters who support politicians with immoral positions because they do not know their Catholic Faith and its teaching with regard to same-sex attraction and the inherent disorder of sexual relations between two persons of the same sex. Therefore, they are not able to defend the Catholic Faith in this matter.

What has also contributed greatly to the situation is an exaltation of the virtue of tolerance which is falsely seen as the virtue which governs all other virtues. In other words, we should tolerate other people in their immoral actions to the extent that we seem also to accept the moral wrong. Tolerance is a virtue, but it is certainly not the principal virtue; the principal virtue is charity. Charity means speaking the truth, especially the truth about human life and human sexuality. While we love the individual, we desire only the best for one who suffers from an inclination to engage in sexual relations with a person of the same sex. We must abhor the actions themselves because they are contrary to nature itself as God has created us.

The virtue of charity leads us to be kind and understanding to the individual, but also to be firm and steadfast in opposing the evil itself. This confusion is widespread. I have encountered it many times myself as a priest and bishop. It is something we simply need to address. There is far too much silence — people do not want to talk about it because the topic is not “politically correct.” But we cannot be silent any longer or we will find ourselves in a situation that will be very difficult to reverse.

Canon 915

Q. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, when recently questioned at a press briefing about the moral difference between what Dr. Gosnell did in murdering a baby born alive at 23 weeks as compared to the practice of aborting a baby moments before birth, refused to answer. Instead she is reported to have responded: “As a practicing and respectful Catholic this is sacred ground to me when we talk about this. I don’t think it should have anything to do with politics.” How are we to react to such a seemingly scandalous statement? Is this a case where Canon 915 might properly be applied? *[Editor’s Note: Canon 915 of the Church’s Code of Canon Law states that those who are “obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion.”]*

A. Certainly this is a case when Canon 915 must be applied. This is a person who obstinately, after repeated admonitions, persists in a grave sin — cooperating with the crime of procured abortion — and still professes to be a devout Catholic. This is a prime example of what Blessed John Paul II referred to as the situation of Catholics who have divorced their faith from their public life and therefore are not serving their brothers and sisters in the way that they must — in safeguarding and promoting the life of the innocent and defenseless unborn, in safeguarding and promoting the integrity of marriage and the family.

What Congresswoman Pelosi is speaking of is not particular confessional beliefs or practices of the Catholic Church. It belongs to the natural moral law which is written on every human heart and which the Catholic Church obviously also teaches: that natural moral law which is so wonderfully illumined for us by Our Lord Jesus Christ by His saving teaching, but most of all by His Passion and death.

To say that these are simply questions of Catholic Faith which have no part in politics is just false and wrong. I fear for Congresswoman Pelosi if she does not come to understand how gravely in error she is. I invite her to reflect upon the example of St. Thomas More who acted rightly in a similar situation even at the cost of his life.

Q. Many faithful Catholics are troubled when high- profile political figures with unconcealed antilife, anti- family positions are honored in such ways as receiving invitations to speak at Catholic university commencement ceremonies and given honorary degrees or memorialized at public Catholic funeral Masses without having renounced their immoral positions. Faithful Catholics, at the same time, are taught they have committed a serious sin if they vote for these same candidates. How are those who are seriously trying to live out their faith to reconcile this apparent contradiction?

A. You cannot reconcile it — it is a contradiction, it is wrong, it is a scandal, and it must stop! We live in a culture with a false sense of dialogue — which has also crept into the Church — where we pretend to dialogue about open and egregious violations of the moral law. Can we believe it is permissible to recognize publicly people who support open and egregious violations, and then act surprised if someone is scandalized by it? For Catholic institutions or individuals to give recognition to such persons, to honor them in any way, is a source of grave scandal for which they are responsible. In a certain way, they contribute to the sinfulness of the individuals involved. There is no way to reconcile it; it simply is wrong.

Mass Attendance

Q. Polls consistently report that only 20- 25 percent of those who identify themselves as Catholics regularly attend Sunday Mass. Consequently, many seem to be unaware of how HHS mandate provisions will impact religious liberty despite the USCCB and bishops being outspoken in their warnings. So even though bishops are trying to get the message out about impending dangers to the family, religious liberty, and so forth, how can they do so in such an environment? How can the lay faithful best assist?

[*Editor's Note:* The "HHS mandate" is the mandate by the Health and Human Services department of the federal government that requires all health plans to provide coverage at no cost for contraceptives, abortion- inducing drugs, and sterilization as part of so- called "preventative health services" for women.] **A.** Sadly, in the time after the Second Vatican Council, there was a reform of the sacred liturgy which made it man- centered and banal. In some cases it actually became hard for people to bear because of illicit insertions, foreign agendas, and imposition of the personalities of priests and congregations into the liturgy to the point that people began to think that the Mass was some sort of social activity. If they did not find it acceptable, they did not go anymore.

If one understands what the Mass truly is — Christ Himself coming down from Heaven to renew the sacrifice of Calvary — how could you possibly not be there on Sunday? In the past people understood this and Mass attendance was in the 80- 90 percent range. We have to restore the sanctity of the celebration of Holy Eucharist so that those who have fallen away will return to the practice.

Secondly, when people are not coming to Mass in great numbers, as is the case, they do not hear the Sunday homily which is the principal means for instruction of faithful adults in the Church. In some places, even where people do attend Mass, they are not being instructed as they should be. The bishops first, and then the priests with them, must be clear and consistent in presenting the truth about the freedom of conscience and the evils of the health-care mandate.

Thirdly, in the situation as it is, which we simply must recognize, lay people giving witness to fellow lay people is the only solution. More and more sincere and informed Catholics must be ready to give an account of their Faith to others even if they are not the most eloquent and articulate. The very fact that they approach and speak with a fellow Catholic about a question like freedom of conscience will not go without a positive effect on that individual.

Q. Are we on the verge of reaching a point when well- educated, well- trained Catholics who are faithful to Church teaching on morality will no longer be hired in fields like health care, education, social services, or counseling where their religious beliefs are at odds with government policies and deviant cultural norms that are considered mainstream in our society? Is widespread persecution imminent? Is it possible to hold the government back?

A. If the present government, which can be described in no other way than totalitarian, is not held back from the course it is on, these persecutions will follow. It will not be possible for Catholics to exercise most of the normal human services whether in health care, education, or social welfare because in conscience they will no longer be able to

do what the government demands: to cooperate in grave moral evil. We are heading in that direction and even see it now.

I receive many inquiries from Catholic owners of small companies who are involved with insurance whose consciences are rightly deeply troubled by the present situation in our country. It is not easy to find a way to operate with reasonable health-care coverage for some of them. This is an intolerable situation in our country and it must stop.

Yes, it can be turned back — we are a democracy. A government like ours can and must be stopped in what it is doing. Polls tell us that the majority of Americans are opposed to procured abortion and also are opposed to the idea of recognizing the sexual union of two persons of the same sex in marriage or the equivalent of marriage. Why then is our government imposing this upon a people who, with rightly formed consciences, oppose these matters?

I never thought I would ever say this, but we should follow the example of France. The French people have a government that is sadly much like our own. In a totalitarian way, it passed and is trying to enforce a bill giving legal recognition to so-called marital unions between two persons of the same sex. The French people are out on the streets in protest — one demonstration had upwards of two million people. There has arisen in France among the people the will to resist the government and that is what we need in this country.

We cannot go along with government policies and laws which are destroying the most innocent and defenseless among us. This will also redound to great harm to those who have grown weak through advanced age or serious illness. This is all a pattern: the complete corruption about the truth of human sexuality which has already wrought such terrible harm to individuals and families and to our society has to be stopped.

Encourage The Young

Q. To close, what have you observed in your travels throughout the world that gives you the greatest reason for hope?

A. The greatest sign of hope for me is the young people I meet who believe more than my generation and recognize how bankrupt our culture is and want the truth. They realize that this whole bill of goods we have been sold with regard to abortion, same-sex unions, and so forth is ultimately destructive. So I would say that is the greatest single cause for hope.

But these young people need the encouragement of those of us who are older. They need to have the wisdom from those of the older generation who have valiantly fought the battle for the truth, for what is truly charitable because it is true and in accord with God's law. Those of us who are older should take great encouragement; at the same time, we must invest ourselves in communicating with the younger generation and helping them to build a better future.

I think of the little ones who are growing up now — my great-nieces and nephews — and I am sometimes filled with much sadness because I see their parents work so hard to raise them in a truly Christian home and are adhering to the truths of the Faith and practicing their faith. But the world which they will enter as adults, if they are going to remain true to their faith, will require them to be courageously strong.



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