

Fatima and the Post-Vatican II Church: Where Do We Go from Here?

Just two weeks after returning home from the Angelus Press Conference in Kansas City, I made my way to Weirton, West Virginia, a city of around 20,000 people located in the northern tip of the state, for what proved to be another exceptional “rendezvous with serious Catholics,” as the Catholic Identity Conference (Oct. 27-29, 2017) was so appropriately advertised. *The Remnant* editor Michael Matt, who helps organize the conference each year and serves as emcee throughout the weekend, graciously invited me to attend and represent *Catholic Family News* in place of our dearly departed friend, John Vennari (*requiescat in pace*), to whom Michael paid heartfelt tribute during the conference (many thanks, as well, to Eric Frankovitch, Director of the Catholic Identity Project, for his annual organizing efforts and hospitality).

This annual rendezvous of serious Catholics in a “Holiday Inn catacomb,” as Michael jokingly characterized it, is unique among Traditionalist conferences in that it seeks to gather in one venue as many representatives as possible of the “loose federation of warring tribes” (as John Vennari used to say) which constitutes the worldwide Traditional Catholic movement. This year’s conference certainly accomplished that goal, hosting under one roof an impressive assembly: two bishops, one Roman and one Eastern rite; priests from the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP), and Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest (ICRSS), as well as diocesan clergy and several religious sisters; and, of course, a large crowd of lay faithful, including a significant number of young people.

No Rose-Colored Glasses

Hosting such a broad spectrum of speakers and attendees is indeed a bold initiative, one that some mistakenly interpret as “Trad Ecumenism.” Michael Matt, however, clearly articulated that such is not the case during his [welcoming address](#) on Friday evening. He strongly emphasized that:

“this Catholic Identity Conference is *not* about some phony ecumenical effort among Traditionalists, where, at the end of the weekend, we’re all going to have a big group hug and say, ‘Oh, you know, nothing matters. The most important thing is unity,’ and we can just go on from there. That’s *not* what this is about. That’s *not* what the Catholic Identity Conference is. Our beloved Church, in her human element, is suffering through the worst crisis in history and, tonight, we

are going to begin a three-day process to discuss how we are going to survive this crisis. ... The organizers of this conference are aware of the strategic differences that have come between us - all of us - and various groups of priests, in particular, over the past 25 years...and those differences are *not* insignificant. We are not up here pretending that we can sweep them all under the rug in one fell swoop. But we all face this dilemma, this dilemma of what to do when rightful ecclesial authority becomes disoriented, as ours most certainly has.”[\[1\]](#)

Such was the true nature and intent of the conference, as evidenced by the content of the excellent talks, some of which we shall now survey.

On the Unchanging Truth of the Catholic Faith

Mr. Matt’s welcoming address also served as an introduction for His Excellency Athanasius Schneider, O.R.C., auxiliary bishop of Astana, Kazakhstan, who presented the first lecture of the weekend. Bishop Schneider, a humble but [firm critic](#) of [Amoris Laetitia](#)[\[2\]](#) known for his [defense of the four Cardinals’ famous dubia](#),[\[3\]](#) addressed the conference - “this clandestine Church,” he said with endearment - on what he described as “the crisis of the Faith in the world today.” His talk, entitled “On the Unchanging Truth of the Catholic Faith,” began by focusing on how the current crisis is fundamentally different than previous doctrinal crises in the sense that past errors typically opposed a single truth of the Faith. Arianism, for example, specifically denied the divinity of Christ. In our times, however, there is a universal attack on revealed truth, in general, and even on reason itself.

The remedy for this crisis, he explained, is to remain firmly rooted in the perennial Magisterium of the Church, particularly as enunciated during the roughly 100 years prior to the Second Vatican Council. He went on to quote at length from three magisterial documents of that time period: (1) Vatican I’s Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (On the Catholic Faith, 1870), (2) Pope St. Pius X’s inaugural encyclical *E Supremi* (On the Restoration of All Things in Christ, 1903), and (3) Pope Pius XII’s inaugural encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* (On the Unity of Human Society, 1939).

Vatican I’s *Dei Filius*, of course, contains this crucial passage:

“Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of ages, but only within the proper limits, in the same dogma, the same sense and the same judgment [*eodem sensu eademque*

sententia].”[\[4\]](#)

In other words, truth is immutable; our understanding of it can and should grow, but this growth never involves an “evolution” or “mutation” of dogma into something contrary to that which the Church has already defined. Bishop Schneider emphasized this point by quoting *Dei Filius* (his rendering):

“For the doctrine of the Faith which God has revealed is put forward, not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated. Hence, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by Holy Mother Church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext of a more profound understanding.”[\[5\]](#)

The false notion of truth “evolving” into something different is the essence of Modernism, the “[synthesis of all heresies](#),”[\[6\]](#) which itself evolved from the errors of naturalism and rationalism condemned by Vatican I. Pope St. Pius X spent a majority of his pontificate battling the Modernist heresy, which by his time had seeped into the clerical ranks. The underlying cause of Modernism is a rejection of the supremacy of God and His revealed truth. As [St. Pius X declared](#) and Bishop Schneider quoted:

“Such, in truth, is the audacity and the wrath employed everywhere in persecuting religion, in combating the dogmas of the faith, in brazen effort to uproot and destroy all relations between man and God!”[\[7\]](#)

Pius XII, in turn, addressed many of the same themes in [Summi Pontificatus](#), as cited by Bishop Schneider:

“The present age, Venerable Brethren, by adding new errors to the doctrinal aberrations of the past, has pushed these to extremes which lead inevitably to a drift towards chaos. Before all else, it is certain that the radical and ultimate cause of the evils which We deplore in modern society is the denial and rejection of a universal norm of morality as well for individual and social life as for international relations; We mean the disregard, so common nowadays, and the

forgetfulness of the natural law itself, which has its foundation in God, Almighty Creator and Father of all, supreme and absolute Lawgiver, all-wise and just Judge of human actions.”[\[8\]](#)

Several times, His Excellency emphasized how timely the magisterial statements he quoted truly are for the present day, as are “some striking affirmations” of Archbishop Fulton Sheen “which confirm perfectly the prophetic voice of the supreme Magisterium.” He was referring to a radio sermon delivered in 1947 by then- Monsignor Sheen entitled “[Signs of Our Times](#).” In that sermon, the future archbishop spoke in detail about the devil, the anti-Christ, and the counter-Church which the devil will establish as “a mystical body of the anti-Christ that will in all externals resemble the Mystical Body of Christ.”[\[9\]](#) Interestingly, it was during this portion of his lecture that Bishop Schneider referred to *Amoris Laetitia*, a “wrong interpretation” of which he said “leads to this consequence, ultimately, to say good is evil and evil is good.”

Bishop Schneider concluded his talk by exhorting all present, in the words of St. Pius X (whom he said deserves to be called “the Great”), to remain always vigilant against the wiles of the devil and to speak out against his false prophets “who call evil good and good evil.”

100 Years Since Fatima; 50 Years of *The Remnant*

In addition to uniting the “warring tribes” of Traditionalists, the Catholic Identity Conference also seeks to foster, as its name implies, a strong *Catholic identity*. For younger attendees, in particular, this requires a review of our roots, as it is written: “Remember the days of old, think upon every generation: ask thy father, and he will declare to thee: thy elders and they will tell thee” (Deut. 32:7). This was the theme of Michael Matt’s talk, “100 Years Since Fatima; 50 Years of *The Remnant*,” during which he recounted for us the history of the Traditionalist movement and his family’s involvement therein.

He began by describing some of the fathers of the Traditionalist movement, men like Michael Davies, Hamish Fraser, William Marra, Walter Matt, and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. “These men,” he stressed, “were not about liturgical preferences. They were not about fighting for the Mass they like. It was about so much more than that.” For these brave men, it was all about holding fast to Tradition, not to their personal opinions. As Michael summed up, “They were in it to win it, and they were in it for the right reasons.”

After detailing a bit about the rift in the Matt family caused by Vatican II – specifically, between his father, Walter Matt, and uncle, Alphonse Matt (Walter’s brother) – Michael

mentioned Dietrich von Hildebrand, a staunch opponent of the New Mass and other post-conciliar novelties. He quoted Dr. von Hildebrand's position [as expressed in a 1970 letter](#) to Alphonse Matt, then-editor of *The Wanderer*:

"You assume that the new *ordo missae* and especially the rubrics constitute for me merely a personally painful change by replacing something very beautiful and perfect with something less beautiful and less perfect. But unfortunately, it is my conviction that the new *ordo missae* is the greatest pastoral mistake and that its consequences for the Church may be disastrous.

I agree, however, completely with you that it is a grave problem, whether one should criticize it publicly or only *intra muros* ["within the walls"]. Concerning this problem every one must follow his conscience. But I frankly cannot understand that you do not only abstain from a public criticism of the new *ordo missae* but make the 'Wanderer' an instrument for propagating and praising the new *ordo*." [\[10\]](#)

Thus wrote the man whom Pius XII called "the 20th century doctor of the Church," much to the chagrin of certain "conservative" (Vatican II-friendly) Catholics.

Turning his attention to some practical takeaways from the history he shared, Michael emphasized the importance of families being animated by a spirit of *crusade*. In other words, it is not enough for parents to simply take their children to the traditional Latin Mass on Sundays and allow the world to influence them the rest of the week. No, we must constantly fight to protect our kids from the world's contagion on all fronts and make our homes domestic churches in which Christ the King lives and reigns. This is the only way our children will keep the Faith.

In closing, Michael made an impassioned appeal for all Traditionalists to defend the true Mass while also reaching out with humility and charity to Tradition-minded *Novus Ordo* Catholics, especially priests. If they are open to Tradition and heading in our direction, we should be welcoming them, not condemning them. I sincerely hope this appeal was taken to heart and will be put into practice.

Fatima and the Theological Virtue of Hope

As 2017 is the centenary of Our Lady's Fatima apparitions, it was most appropriate for the conference theme to include Fatima and feature talks specific to it. One such lecture, entitled "Fatima and the Theological Virtue of Hope," was delivered by Canon Aaron B. Huberfeld, ICRSS. He chose to center his remarks around the "first secret" of Fatima, that is, the vision of hell (July 13, 1917) – not a topic we tend to associate with hope for obvious reasons, but the connection became clearer as Canon Huberfeld spoke.

He explained at length:

"Hope, for us Catholics and in our spiritual lives, is to be sharply distinguished from the virtue of faith. We inherit our proper understanding of these virtues, above all, from the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, who had as his point of departure the study of the soul, as presented to him by the philosopher, Aristotle. And so, we recall that the virtue of faith is to be found, not in the will, but in the intellect. As Bishop Schneider reminded us last night, faith is the assent of the intellect. It is the submission of the intellect to truth revealed by God on the basis of the authority of the One Who is revealing. ... Hope, being seated in the will, is rather a virtue that makes us desire God as our highest good and to expect with firm confidence eternal bliss and the means of obtaining it because of God's goodness and power."

The true, Catholic understanding of faith and hope is fundamentally opposed to the errors of Protestantism, as Canon Huberfeld expounded:

"With the Protestant revolt, faith will become confused largely with hope because faith will become a purely fiduciary faith, that is, a faith that is a mere trust. It is a trusting that we have been saved...Protestantism, then, begins with this sort of blind confidence, whereas the Catholic understanding of conversion and faith begins actually the other way. The Catholic Faith begins, and Scripture invites us to begin, with fear, the fear of the Lord. That is 'the beginning of wisdom' [Ps. 110:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10; Eccclus. 1:16]."

This initial fear, which is a *servile* fear of punishment (rooted in self-interest), is meant to mature as we grow in the spiritual life into a *filial* fear of offending God (rooted in charity).

“And why I quoted for you these words of the ‘first secret’ of Fatima,” he explained, “the revelation of the torments of hell, to the children of Fatima – a great reminder for our time – is that *our* hope is based on this: Hope is – and especially for St. Thomas Aquinas – a *mean*; it is between the vices of presumption on the one hand and despair on the other.” In short, the virtue of hope, properly understood, is an important aid to keep us out of hell.

Canon Huberfeld spent the final portion of his talk discussing the vital importance of ongoing conversion in light of the three ages (or stages) of the spiritual life: *purgative* (elimination of mortal sin), *illuminative* (detachment from all deliberate sin and the things of this world), and *unitive* (habitual contemplation and great longing for Heaven).

In truth, Canon Huberfeld’s talk was like a course on Thomistic philosophy/theology and a spiritual retreat, somehow fit into one hour. Quite impressive and edifying!

The Vatican During Pope Francis’ Pontificate

Perhaps one of the most anticipated talks of the weekend (certainly in my opinion) was delivered on Sunday morning by British Catholic journalist Edward Pentin, a Vatican insider who is the Rome correspondent for the *National Catholic Register*.^[11] Mr. Pentin travelled all the way from Rome, in fact, to give us a firsthand account of “[The Vatican During Pope Francis’ Pontificate](#),” ^[12] a pontificate that has produced “a crisis, by any objective measure, despite the wider Church and the world thinking otherwise.”

Mr. Pentin emphasized that he wanted to give attendees:

“the fullest picture as possible of what’s happening. That means reporting on things that some might find not particularly edifying, but I really just want to expose what’s happening in the hope that it will encourage us to pray for the unity of the Church, especially during this anniversary year of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, because I do believe that only by exposing some of what people I often hear say is a diabolical presence in the Church or ‘naming the demons,’ as it were, can they be properly exorcised.”

Following his introductory remarks, Pentin went on to highlight some of the material found in his 2015 book *The Rigging of a Vatican Synod?* (available from Ignatius Press) in which he documents copious evidence of manipulation of the October 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family (which preceded the October 2015 Ordinary Synod on the Family) for the purpose of undermining orthodoxy.

He mentioned, in passing, the scandalous 2014 mid-term *relatio* (report) “which sought to make homosexual practice vaguely acceptable in the Church...the ignoring of Pope John Paul II and his magisterium, the side-lining of African Synod Fathers due to their conservative voice, the manipulation of various processes that gave prominence to various heterodox voices...the pressure exerted on the General Relator, Cardinal Péter Erdő, [and] the interception of the book *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, which of course was about the Kasper proposal about admitting some remarried divorcees living in adultery to Holy Communion.” Regarding the latter, Pentin reminded us that Pope Francis personally intervened to keep the Kasper proposal alive, despite its failure to garner sufficient support from the Synod Fathers.

All of this background information served to illustrate the true origin of *Amoris Laetitia*, the 2016 post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, which is at the root of the current crisis, as well as the “modus operandi” of Pope Francis and his collaborators.

He went on to state poignantly, in light of the evidence just discussed:

“If the document is all the work of the Holy Spirit, as its proponents often freely insist, and that you have to be converted to understand it, it’s quite legitimate to ask the question: Why the need for such manipulation, heavy-handedness, and underhanded methods? And I put this question to one of the most vigorous defenders of *Amoris Laetitia* and he really couldn’t answer it.”

No surprise there!

Regarding the current state of affairs in the Vatican, Pentin discussed two recent interviews given by Cardinal Gerhard Müller, former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), and Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, one of the two remaining *dubia* Cardinals. Both Cardinals Müller and Brandmüller testify to an unprecedented climate of fear – a “reign of terror,” according to some – suspected surveillance, and even espionage (the threat of being “informed on” or reported) if one is at all critical of Pope Francis or *Amoris Laetitia*. This is no doubt what prompted Bishop Schneider [last December](#) to compare the current climate in the Church with that of the former Soviet Union, in which he was born and raised.[\[13\]](#)

While sincerely trying to give Pope Francis the benefit of the doubt, Pentin was not afraid to report with respectful candor on the alarming state of the Church under Francis, whose pontificate exhibits a “total lack of substance,” according to certain Vatican officials, “some

very high up.” In many ways, there is a profound disconnect between the Pope incessant message of “mercy” and his own merciless treatment of those who disagree with him (otherwise known as *hypocrisy*).

Pentin concluded his remarkable talk on a positive note, sharing with those present some encouraging words spoken to him by one of the Vatican officials he quoted earlier: “Apart from the battle, and because of it, one thing remains; that the most important thing to remember is to pray, perhaps offer sacrifices, knowing that God does not abandon His children or His Church.”

Conference CDs, On-Demand Videos Available

While I would love to present detailed summaries of each lecture, time and space constraints compel to conclude this report by exhorting readers to purchase audio recordings of the conference talks in order to more fully benefit from them. All the lectures were, in fact, recorded by Susan Vennari and are [available from Oltyn Library Services](#). Access to on-demand videos is available for purchase at www.remnantnewspaper.com.

I look forward to attending next year’s Catholic Identity Conference! Until then, keep the Faith!

[1] Michael Matt’s entire welcoming address is available online at [The Remnant YouTube channel](#).

[2] See “[Amoris Laetitia: A Need for Clarification](#),” *OnePeterFive*, Apr. 26, 2016; “[Bishop Athanasius Schneider Replies to The Remnant’s Open Letter on Amoris Laetitia](#),” *The Remnant*, June 2, 2016.

[3] See “[Bishop Schneider Defends Dubia: ‘A Prophetic Voice of Four Cardinals of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.’](#)” *The Remnant*, Nov. 23, 2016.

[4] First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, 24 Apr. 1870), Ch. 4 (On Faith and Reason) (Denz. 1800; D.S. 3020).

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] St. Pius X, encyclical [Pascendi Dominici Gregis](#) (On the Doctrines of the Modernists, 8 Sept. 1907), n. 39.

[7] *Ibid.*, encyclical [E Supremi](#) (On the Restoration of All Things in Christ, 4 Oct. 1903), n. 5.

[8] Ven. Pius XII, encyclical [*Summi Pontificatus*](#) (On the Unity of Human Society, 20 Oct. 1939), n. 28.

[9] See Pete Baklinski, "[Ven. Fulton Sheen lays out the 12 tricks anti-Christ will use to destroy Christians](#)," *LifeSiteNews*, Oct. 20, 2016.

[10] The full text of Dr. von Hildebrand's letter is available to read on *The Remnant* website, "[Our History](#)" page.

[11] To follow Mr. Pentin's work online, [click here](#).

[12] Full talk is available at *The Remnant* [YouTube channel](#).

[13] See Jan Bentz, "[Bishop Schneider likens treatment of four Cardinals to Soviet regime: 'We live in a climate of threats.'](#)" *LifeSiteNews*, Dec. 6, 2016.