Despite his penchant for theological innovation, Pope Francis seems to hold some fairly traditional beliefs about the devil. Here's an example from *Gaudete et Exsultate*:

> It is precisely the conviction that this malign power is present in our midst that enables us to understand how evil can at times have so much destructive force… Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea. This mistake would lead us to let down our guard, to grow careless and end up more vulnerable. (160, 161)

It has been said that one of the devil's greatest achievements is to convince people he doesn't exist. Pope Francis hasn't fallen for that deception. He realizes that the devil is no myth. "When we let down our guard," says Francis, "he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families and our communities."

But when it comes to the question of how the devil is most likely to take advantage of us, Pope Francis seems to deviate from the path of tradition. Indeed, he seems to think that the devil does much of his work by making use of traditional pieties. Thus, the pope has frequently rebuked conservative critics of his silence over the sex-abuse scandals with being in league with Satan, the "Great Accuser." On different occasions he has implied that they are "a pack of wild dogs," scandal-mongers, and even collaborators in crucifixion.

So, in the Pope's estimation, traditional Catholics—i.e., those who are more likely to be shocked and outraged by drug-fueled sex orgies in the Vatican and the like—are doing the devil's work by exposing and criticizing such things. If they were good Christians, he seems to say, they would keep quiet and not add fuel to the scandals.

Who is most guilty of sowing division in the Church? Pope Francis seems to suggest that the greater blame lies not with the worldly bishop who takes the sixth commandment as a suggestion, but rather with the conscientious Catholic who takes it seriously and wants the hierarchy to take it seriously as well.

One can see a similar pattern in Pope Francis's response to the migration invasion of Europe and the resulting crime wave. He extends every consideration to those who are directly responsible for the trouble—namely, criminal migrants and their European enablers—while excoriating those Europeans who oppose the migration. For example, he once observed that those who fail to welcome migrants "are sowing violence, racial discrimination, and xenophobia."

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Thus, as in the sex-abuse cover-ups, we see the Pope circling the wagons to protect those most to blame for the crisis, while taking aim at those who are trying to call attention to the crisis. It's a classic case of shooting the messenger.

The Great Accuser and the Great Migration

We don't know what role the Great Accuser is playing in the matter of Muslim migration, but it's worth speculating on the question because Pope Francis has most probably already speculated, and he has quite possibly reached the wrong conclusion.

If he thinks that the devil's strategy in regard to the sex-abuse scandal is to stir up "fundamentalist" Catholics into a frenzy of overreaction, what role does he assign the devil concerning the spread of Islam? Does Francis assume that Satan seeks to disrupt the harmony that would otherwise exist between Christians and the followers of Muhammad by hardening the hearts of fundamentalist Christians and other types of "fundamentalists" such as nationalists and xenophobes?

We know from his various statements over the years that Francis does worry about the activities of Satan. Indeed, the whole final section of *Gaudete et Exsultate* is concerned with "Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment." He speaks of the "constant battle" against the "temptations of the devil" and the "wiles of the devil," and he speaks also of the need for discernment so that we can know "if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil."

But just how good is Francis (and his key advisors) when it comes to discernment? The record suggests that they are not particularly gifted in this respect. The trouble is, it's quite easy to confuse the Holy Spirit with the spirit of the times, and therefore one can be forgiven for thinking that the Pope and his inner circle regularly fall into this trap. The spirit of the times declares that climate change should be our most urgent priority, and Francis and company second the motion. The spirit of the times requests that we take a more relaxed view of sex between consenting adults, and key Vatican advisors seem to be of the same mind. The spirit of the times tells us that the transgender agenda is as normal as apple pie, and leading bishops find themselves in accord. A few years ago, the spirit of the times dictated that the Iranians could be trusted 100 percent not to violate the nuclear deal, and lo-and-behold, that also became the opinion of the Vatican.

So when Pope Francis tells us that the Holy Spirit is prompting us to welcome millions of migrants from Islamic lands, Catholics are justified in wondering whether he hasn't once again confused the Holy Spirit with the spirit of the times. The fact that the Church's stance on Muslim immigration coincides so closely with that of so many secular leaders is cause for

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suspicion. So is the fact that both European leaders and Vatican leaders are agreed—contrary to a mountain of evidence—that Islam is a religion of peace. It sometimes seems that the Vatican's discernment meter is broken, for it always points in the direction of the prevailing winds.

To his credit, Francis tries to discern the devil's machinations—"the wiles of the devil"—but on the debit side he seems to assume that the devil tends to strike from the "right"—by manipulating "fundamentalists" and "rigid" traditionalists. The idea that the devil might strike from the left by manipulating liberals like Francis himself seems not to have occurred to him. Yet that is what seems to be happening. The policies Francis pursues in regard to Islam and immigration—policies that assume a benign interpretation of Islam and its aims—would seem to mesh nicely with the devil's own plans.

A Devil's-eye View

Granted that this business of discerning the devil's motives is a tricky one, let's nevertheless try to look at the matter from the devil's point of view.

To begin with, let's suppose that his main goal is to destroy Christ's Church. If that is so, then a migration-invasion of Europe would suit his purposes very well. Since Islam has been a perennial enemy of Christianity, its implantation in Europe—once the heart of Christendom—would be a great victory for him. Islam has already had considerable success in exterminating Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa. The subjugation of Europe would do much to strengthen the claim that the religion of Allah is the true religion. And it would set the stage for the collapse of Christianity in other parts of the world.

Yet, Francis's policies seem to play into the devil's hands. Against all the best interests of the Faith he is supposed to protect, Francis has energetically promoted the migration of Muslims and, thus, of the Islamic faith into Europe. The only scenario in which this would make sense would be if Europe were a vibrantly Christian continent capable of assimilating masses of Muslims and even converting them. But that is not the case. Christianity has been dying in Europe for decades, and it has been further weakened and discredited by the recent sex-abuse scandals. If anyone is to be converted, it seems likely that it will be the few remaining Christians in Europe (along with a great many secularists).

Naturally, the devil's plan of action would have to be somewhat subtle since a direct invasion by Islamic armies would be unlikely to succeed. A gradual, slowly-boiled-frog approach would have a much better chance of success. It would encounter little resistance and it would appeal to the sense of self-satisfaction that European elites take in displays of tolerance. On the other hand, it's difficult to see why Satan would want to stir up the

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"xenophobic" alarmists and thus take the risk of Europeans being prematurely alerted to the dangers. Continued complacency would better serve his purposes.

From a Satanic point of view, it would also help immensely if the campaign for the Islamization of Europe could be painted in a noble light. If the devil could somehow prompt European elites to promise that immigration would be beneficial in solving both the labor shortage problem and the welfare shortage problem, people would be more willing to adjust themselves to the new situation. If, on top of that, the Pope could be induced to give his imprimatur to the project, so much the better. Of course, in ordinary times the devil wouldn't set his hopes so high, but—*mirabile dictu*—this is exactly what Pope Francis has, in effect, done.

In *Gaudete et Exsultate,* Pope Francis says we must "keep attentive" and be mindful of Scriptural cautions to keep "our lamps lit" and "keep awake." He also reminds us that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." All very good advice. But is the Pope following it?

There is, of course, no way of knowing for certain if Satan has taken a hand in the spread of Islam into Europe. But if he has, he has been very successful in disguising it as an "angel of light" project. In fact, most of the work of sanctifying the migration has been done for him by numerous clerics both Catholic and Protestant. Pope Francis, in particular, has drawn a halo around the immigration project—not only suggesting that migrants will enrich European society, but also that the welcomers would be acting in a Christ-like way. More than "angels of light," the Pope has consistently portrayed migrants as representatives of Christ Himself.

The devil, as Francis points out, is a master of disguise. He can appear as an angel of light. He can quote Scripture. And he is certainly not above taking advantage of a Christian's best instincts—particularly the impulse to charity. But, as I have noted elsewhere:

> One has to wonder about charitable impulses that facilitate the takeover of Europe by a decidedly anti-Christian religious ideology. How charitable is it to consign Europeans, their children, and their grandchildren to a life of bloodshed and civil war, or else to a life of subservient dhimmitude such as Christians now experience in many parts of the Muslim world?

It would be a great triumph for Satan if he could convince Christians that they are doing the will of God when, in fact, they are carrying out his own agenda.

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The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of the Devil?

In speaking against opponents of mass migration, Pope Francis said, "the Holy Spirit will help us to keep an attitude of trusting openness that will allow us to overcome every barrier and scale every wall." It seems, however, that Francis should give consideration to the possibility that it is not the Holy Spirit who wants to open the floodgates of migration into Europe, but the "spirit of the devil." After all, the way that the immigration issue is currently being framed by Catholic leaders is exactly how one would expect a supremely intelligent but "malign power" to frame it. He would present the "welcoming" response as a good and noble act of Christian charity, he would quote the words of Christ, and he would label opponents of immigration as unchristian. As I wrote previously:

> The Church's welcoming response to Islam and Islamic migration can be looked upon as a shining example of Christian charity, or it can be looked upon as an example of stubborn foolishness and presumption in the face of a fast-spreading evil. It's a devilishly complicated situation. And that should make us wonder if the devil himself isn't intimately involved in it.

Rather than let down our guard, Pope Francis suggests that we need to practice discernment:

> We must remember that prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. (Gaudete et Exsultate, 172)

This, too, is good advice, but once again we need to ask if Francis is following it. Does he manifest a "readiness to listen"? It's becoming obvious that Francis does not listen to his critics. He ignores them, fails to respond to their sincere concerns, demotes them, and, in some cases, criticizes them harshly. Does he listen to "reality itself"? Well, that's a matter of judgment. But as I and others have argued, he does seem to be ignoring the reality of the worsening situation in Europe. Just as important, Francis seems to be engaging in wishful thinking about the history and nature of Islam. His declaration that "authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence" is about as far removed from reality as one can get. Instead of allowing himself to be challenged by realities, he seems content to be guided by pleasant but unexamined narratives.

As Pope Francis says: "[Christ] asks us to examine what is within us … and what takes place

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all around us—'the signs of the times.'" But what exactly are the signs of the times that might lead us to believe that Islam has reformed itself, and is now interested not in conquest, but only in harmonious encounter and dialogue? Every day, in Europe, Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Gaza, Pakistan, the Philippines, Iran, Turkey, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere the signs of the times are saying quite the opposite. Figuratively speaking, they are billboard-size signs lit up in neon. Yet they don't seem to figure at all into the Pope's process of discernment. Instead, he studiously ignores them.

Pope Francis has not been very discerning about the men he has elevated to key positions in the Church. Why should we suppose that he has correctly discerned the promptings of the Holy Spirit in other vital matters?

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