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Sex abuse doesn't top cardinals' agenda -- literally

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Nov. 11, 2010 Bulletins from the Human Side

The famous management consultant Peter Drucker once suggested that ?You can go to meetings or you can work, but you can?t do both.?

Drucker is guilty of common sense -- against the use of which Vatican officials must swear an oath before taking up their duties -- and Pope Benedict XVI is out to disprove his theory by having two meetings and working magic, all at the same time.

The pope is not only convening a consistory at which -- to use the modest papal vocabulary -- he will ?create? two dozen new cardinals, but he is also calling a day-long meeting of the world?s 200 cardinals at the same time.

In the meeting, the pope will turn the cardinals into seminarians again by placing them on a retreat-like schedule. It should be familiar to anyone who has ever lived in a seminary or a religious house.

The Nov. 19 convocation is billed as an opportunity for these princes of the church to ?reflect and pray? about sex abuse, a subject that -- according to Vatican custom -- is barely mentioned. There may be some Druckerites among the cardinals who are afraid that they can reflect or they can pray, but they can?t do both at the same time.

This cardinalatial quandary is illustrated in the Loyola study of bishops who admitted that they loved answering their mail but that most of them were ill-at-ease praying or meditating.

The cardinals will be turned back into apple-cheeked seminarians again when they gather at the Vatican for a 9:30 a.m. opening prayer, which seems to take care of that activity for the morning. The prayer will be followed immediately by talks by what are described as ?top papal aides? on two topics -- the first on international religious liberty that is under threat in Islamic lands and by secularism in once boldly Christian Europe.

Does the pope really think the cardinals haven?t heard about this? Treating them as if they had not is, of course, the first step in transforming them back into seminarians -- that is, making them receptive and quietly obedient to papal teaching.

The companion lecture is on ?the liturgy in the life of the church today,? which is code for promoting Benedict?s efforts to reform the reforms of Vatican II through an intensive course in giving more CPR to the dead Latin language of the Tridentine Mass.

The cardinals, in short, are, very much like seminarians of another era, being indoctrinated and then given some time to themselves. They will find out if they can concentrate and nap at the same time -- until they reconvene for another seminary replay of Vespers at 5 p.m., after which they will hear yet another Vatican official speak on the 10th anniversary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's declaration *Dominus Iesus*.

How could you forget that document? It reasserted that Catholicism was the only true church that could offer salvation through Jesus -- and that while Protestant churches are ?ecclesial communities,? they are not ?churches in the true sense.?

That was not an ecumenical winner a decade ago, but it certainly fits into Benedict?s plan not only to change men into boys for the day but to proclaim time travel as his legacy.

As shadows fall and the day wanes, William Cardinal Levada, head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, will give two talks -- the first on Benedict?s controversial plan to bring conservative Anglicans who are upset with their own church into the Catholic Church. Then Levada will speak on the ?Response of the Church to Sexual Abuse? -- you remember, the subject on which they are allegedly assembling ?to reflect and pray.?

If the cardinals do reflect or pray they won?t have time to express much concern on what is not just a ?topic,? but is really a wound that remains undiagnosed, largely untreated, and clearly unhealed. Leaving it to the end of the day without a forum for exchange by men who share the solemn obligation to explore and deal with this subject may make them seminarians, but it does something far worse for Catholics in general and sexual abuse victims in particular.

It shows that these princes reduced to seminarians cannot reflect and pray at the same time.

It also reveals that at the same time they can -- perhaps unwittingly and under the cover of papal auspices -- in one and the same day both scandalize and abuse Catholics all over the world.

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