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Doesn't anybody around here know how to run a church?

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Jun. 21, 2012 Bulletins from the Human Side

Famed baseball manager Casey Stengel was so stunned by the studied ineptitude of the New York Mets in their first season of play that, after his first baseman was hit on the head by the foul ball he was trying to catch, he asked plaintively, "Doesn't anybody around here know how to play this game?"

On the basis of reports over the last few weeks, that might be a question that can be raised of the officials for whom administering the church seems more like a mystery they cannot solve rather than a Mystery they are called to safeguard and celebrate.

What are we to make of the ballroom delicacy with which these administrators have been engaged in a quadrille with the heretical Society of Saint Pius X in comparison with the step-on-your-foot quickstep they employ in dealing with the Leadership Council of Women Religious of the United States?

Remember that the main charge against SSPX is that its members reject the modern world and do not accept Vatican Council II while the central allegations against the nuns seems to be that they want to serve the modern world and that they embrace Vatican Council II. Do you suppose the deference shown to the bishops and priests of Saint Pius X and the mannered hauteur
showered on nuns has anything to do with the former being men and the latter being women?

Although the men's rejection of a General Council of the Church seems, measured in any scale, to be a far weightier matter than the accusations that the nuns discuss feminism and other relevant (read: dangerous, in Vatican-speak) subjects at their conferences, the Pius X crowd has been treated with an indulgence that can only be a function of the common denominator of clericalism shared with church officials.

In May, for example, Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta Ochoa de Chinchetru, head of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, announced that this renegade group that has embarrassed all Catholics with its anti-Semitic asides and beyond-the-law behavior are in the clear, according to CatholicCulture.com. No doctrinal problems exist, the bishop says, that would bar its reconciliation with Rome.

This statement "lent support to the belief ... that Pope Benedict XVI will soon approve a canonical agreement regularizing the status of SSPX, thus ending a split that began in the 1970's and peaked in 1988 when the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, then leader of SSPX, ordained four bishops in defiance of orders from pope John Paul II."

A week later, Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the SSPX, spoke in a way that makes it seem that this society is negotiating whether they will allow the church to re-affliate with it rather than the other way around. He claims that "what has changed is that Rome no longer makes total acceptance of Vatican II a prerequisite for the canonical solution."

This would be comparable to the delegates of defeated Japan standing on the deck of the USS Missouri in 1945 and demanding that the representative of the victorious allies, General Douglas MacArthur, accept their peace

terms.

Indeed, Bishop Fellay insists, "The attitude of the official Church is what changed; we did not." And further: "We were not the ones who asked for an agreement; the Pope is the one who wants to recognize us. ... That is why they (SPXX) declare that Rome must convert before any agreement, or that its errors must be suppressed ... we see that there are widespread errors in the Church ... we are being asked to come and work just as all the reforming saints of all times did."

Le Figaro subsequently reported that Fellay met recently with Cardinal William Levada (whom, following *NCR* 's policy, I again refrain from calling Darth), who gave him the pope's response to what is referred to as the "doctrinal preamble" to reconciliation with Rome. We'll get back to you on this, Fellay in effect responded, saying SSPX leaders will review it, apparently to approve it or not, at their July meeting in Ecône, Switzerland.

Meanwhile, after meeting with the nun representatives of LCWR, Cardinal Levada told *NCR*'s John Allen that "I believe that it [the relationship between Rome and LCWR] can work" and that was his "prayer and hope," but that the Vatican has been in talks with LCWR for four years and, as Allen paraphrased the prelate, "along the way the group has made choices that ... signal that it's not taking their concerns to heart."

Compared to the coddled SSPX's unwillingness to accept a church council, the bill of particulars against LCWR is trifling. Levada cited their publication of an interview with moral theologian Charles Curran in a recent issue of their *Occasional Papers* and their invitation to Barbara Marx Hubbard, supposedly -- oh, sin against the spirit -- a "New Age leader," to speak at their assembly and giving an award to theologian Sr. Sandra Schneiders. The latter's critique of certain Vatican policies irks Levada, but is a misdemeanor compared to the high heretical crime of the outright revolt against Rome of the SSPX bishops and priests. While letting the latter decide whether they approve of the pope's efforts to accommodate them, Levada says that if the nuns do not go along, "... what we'd have to do is say to them, 'We will substitute a functioning group for yours.' "

So the men of SSPX who still reject a general council of the church and have switched sides of the bargaining table with the pope will let him know whether his latest proposal to create a niche of their own in the church is acceptable or not. The women religious who have given their lives to implement the pastoral vision of Vatican II are told, in effect, to shape up or ship out.

This was all topped off with the pope's talk at an outdoor Mass in Dublin in which, speaking of sex abuse among the clergy, he concluded, "It remains a mystery." No, Holy Father, the real mystery is how you continue to coddle the defiantly heretical SSPX crowd while allowing the women who largely built and still maintain the church to be bullied by Vatican administrators. The latter is a classic variation of sex abuse; that is, the use of power by those who possess it over those who do not possess it.

Where is Casey Stengel when we need him? They do know how to play the old clerical culture game in Rome, but the administrators keep getting hit on the head by all the foul balls they have been hitting lately.

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