

Cardinal Burke: Vatican II betrayed by breakdown of church discipline

Francis X. Rocca Catholic News Service | Oct. 25, 2012
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Abandonment of internal church discipline over the past half century has undermined the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, said the American cardinal who heads the Vatican's supreme court.

Cardinal Raymond L. Burke, prefect of the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature and a former archbishop of St. Louis, made his remarks Tuesday in a written submission to the afternoon session of the world Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization.

The cardinal said a secular version of "antinomianism" -- the belief that grace exempts Christians from obedience to moral law -- is "among the most serious wounds of society today," responsible for the legalization of "intrinsically evil" actions such as abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, euthanasia and same-sex marriage, and for the denial of conscience exemptions and other infringements of religious liberty.

"This antinomianism embedded in civil society has unfortunately infected post-council ecclesial life," he said.

"Excitement following the council, linked to the establishment of a new church which teaches freedom and love, has strongly encouraged an attitude of indifference toward church discipline, if not even hostility," he said. "The reforms of ecclesial life which were hoped for by the council fathers were, therefore, in a certain sense, hindered if not betrayed."

The cardinal's remarks to the synod echoed a much longer address he delivered Aug. 30 in Nairobi, to the Canon Law Society of Kenya.

In that speech, the cardinal linked a breakdown in internal discipline with theologians' interpretations of Vatican II as a radical break with church tradition -- an approach that he said encouraged contempt for canon law.

Burke told the Nairobi gathering that ignorance or deliberate neglect of canon law in the years since Vatican II had "reaped gravely harmful fruits in the church," contributing to the clerical sex abuse scandal, abuses of the liturgy, "vacuous and confused, if not erroneous" religious instruction, lack of discipline among priests and seminarians, rejection of tradition by members of religious orders, disrespect for the church's teaching on marriage and a "loss of the identity of charitable, educational and health care institutions bearing the name Catholic."

Burke told the Vatican synod, which has been dedicated to revival of the faith in traditionally Christian but increasingly secular societies, that the new evangelization calls for restoration of the "disciplinary tradition of the church and respect of the law in the church."

"How indeed will we be able to witness our faith in the world," he asked the other bishops, "if we ignore or

neglect the demands of justice within the church?"

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