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Catholic Civil War?

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 19, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

Over at the Guardian [1], Andrew Brown predicts a "Catholic Civil War" is about to break out, noting that the laity in the West are overwhelmingly ignoring the dictates of the Church on various controversial sexual issues, and the complicated positions of Catholic conservatives. Of course, a bit of history would be a useful tonic to these kind of sweeping predictions. The divisions within the Church pale to those core disputes that characterized the Church of the fourth century, or the sixteenth. And, I suspect that until the invention of the telegraph at least, the dictates of Rome were not widely disseminated and, just so, we have no idea the degree to which the average Catholic in the pew followed the dictates of the Church in the matters that Brown sees as so contentious. Certainly, sexual sins are not new in human history.

What is new - actually, much is new but this seems most to the point now - is that a decree from Rome is no longer issued in Latin, sent to a local bishop, translated by him with appropriate tailoring, and then sent on to the clergy and laity of a local diocese. All that layering of pastoral application are gone. Now, when the Pope speaks, the nest day the headlines blare "Pope Bans Pill." In some ways, too, Rome has been taking the bait for the last century and one-half, making it appear as if local bishops were essentially branch managers, answerable to the Vatican HQ for all their decisions. The affirmation of collegiality at Vatican II did not displace this essential dynamic.

These issues are complicated, but I am resistant to the kind of breathless "civil war" scenarios that are sketched, no matter if the sketching comes from the right or the left. What we share in the Church - our commitment to the core doctrines of the faith, our love for the Eucharist, our devotion to the Blessed Mother - these things are more important than condoms and pills.

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Links:
[1] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2013/feb/15/catholic-church-pope-driven-peace