

Introduction to my Essay on Secularism, our Crisis in Faith  
by Deacon Jack Sullivan

Bl. Cardinal Newman in his sermon "The Infidelity of the Future" attempted to evangelize a society, which at that time was drifting toward worldly skepticism and religious indifference, by warning them of the intrinsic evils associated with the rise of secularism. His premonitions were not only limited to his own time and place, but ours as well. Recently, this insidious movement has crept into our own contemporary culture as witnessed by vast numbers of our laity abandoning the practice of the faith. Deeply concerned about the tragic loss of so many souls adversely coerced by the fallacies of secularism, I've attempted in my essay to pick up where Newman left off, applying his findings to our present-day crisis in faith. His appeal and directives regarding evangelizing souls who have been adversely prejudiced and swayed by the evils of secular worldliness truly represents his most precious gift to our modern world.

But what is evangelization? In November of 2012, Pope Benedict XVI called for a world synod of bishops in response to the "profound crisis of faith, which the Church of our time is experiencing." As a counter measure he inaugurated a special year of reflection for re-discovering our faith through a process which he called "The New Evangelization for the transmission of our Christian faith." The Holy Father described it as a "Summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord." During the synod's opening Mass, he noted in his homily three complementary aspects of evangelization: 1st, the mission of ordinary evangelization within our Christian communities, 2nd, the mission of announcing the Gospel to non-Christians, and 3rd, the re-evangelization of the baptized who have drifted away from the practice of the faith.

To attain the above he advised that in practicing evangelization, "it is essential that we first re-discover and reflect on the meaning of our own Catholic faith, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds, before we can hope to vigorously share Christ and his Gospel with others." The Pope added, "We seek to grow in an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, as well as a greater understanding of the teachings and principles of our Catholic faith. In doing so, we will become better prepared to participate in the work of the new evangelization. In addition, Catholic social teaching helps to properly form our consciences, allowing us to see how our faith can transform the public square for the common good of all. Our Catholic social doctrines such as the right to life, the role of the family, and religious liberty articulates how the Church relates to our society, even in the face of growing discord in both our culture and political landscape. Such a resource is vital."

The Pope concluded that we, as Catholics are called to both learn, reflect upon, and then live the Gospel message. Consistent with Christ's own example, we are then called to zealously share "this good news" with others! I've found that witnessing my faith while encountering the first group or the "ordinary evangelization within our own Christian community" is readily achievable. But I

have experienced serious opposition and major resistance with respect to the latter two categories of peoples, who are either non-Christians or Catholics who have drifted away from the practice of the faith.

How then, do we practice our Christian responsibility of successfully evangelizing those in these latter two groups, which represents by far the largest portion of those described by the Pope? How do we practice this responsibility of evangelizing others when they almost uniformly refuse to even discuss the subject of religion? They protest that the teachings of the Church are not politically correct or relevant, and seriously out of step with modern worldly realities. For them, returning to the practice of the faith, is decidedly out of the question! I've found that most are terribly defensive or even down-right hostile about the prospect, insisting that the practice of their faith is their own, private affair and "I will do it my way!" Some have viewed my efforts at evangelization, in their minds, as actually humiliating them, by questioning the quality of their character, or their sense of goodness, and self-worth. They consider it a personal affront that I should even choose to question their belief system! And their usual abrupt responses are, "why don't you mind your own business!" or with an air of progressive superiority, "your religion is out-of-step with science and reason in our modern, progressive world!" Furthermore, they protest that the Church's efforts at evangelization amounts to a blatant intrusion into their personal affairs or a flagrant meddling into their constitutional rights of free expression! At the heart of their objections is the contrived liberal notion that the Church seeks to impose its archaic rules and obsolete regulations on them, as best characterized by "thou shalt not!" So how then do we evangelize them, as we must?

Prior to my writing this essay, it occurred to me that before attempting to witness and share the blessings of our faith with the latter two groups, we must first seek to understand the rationale and motivations which prompt their attitudes of religious apathy, indifference, or in most cases, down-right hostility! We must first try to explore why they think as they do, the undercurrents of their ideology, before attempting to change their attitudes on the subject. Because secularism is a philosophical, political, and cultural phenomenon, most people are totally unaware that their outlook has been dramatically influenced and adversely prejudiced by its brazen, liberal ideology. As a result, the Church and organized religion generally have lost all meaning for them.

Therefore, before attempting to engage the enemy and neutralize its armament, (as Newman considered secularism the embodiment of the anti-Christ) we must first come to an understanding of just what secularism is; something of its nature and inner workings, which my essay on secularism attempts to do. You see, most people have only a foggy notion of it's precepts. And we can't rationally connect with those dramatically influenced by secularism or bring about some meaningful dialogue, unless we first attempt to study its nature and its principles - what makes it tick! After dissecting its inner workings, we are thereupon in a better position to logically expose

it's deceptions, which have so dramatically impacted their attitudes!

So rather than pointing a disparaging finger of reproach at them personally, doesn't it make more sense to re-direct their attention, in a common sense fashion to the horrendous afflictions and obvious atrocities secularism has visited upon our Church, our culture, and our nation, as witnessed by its deteriorating sense of morality or as Bl. John Paul II called it "This culture of death?"

I believe that the content of Newman's expose on secularism will convincingly speak for itself! And to my way of thinking, his approach is the only instrument capable of breaking down the walls of defiance, which modern man has erected between himself and God's kingdom! I sincerely believe that by first exposing the evils of secularism that influence and direct their attitudes, we will finally begin to break through the belief-systems of so many of our spiritually impoverished brethren. Who, indeed is better equipped to direct us in this spiritually enriching effort than Newman himself, having been personally responsible for the conversions of tens of thousands to the faith! In addition, don't these graced efforts perfectly reflect the salvific mission of Christ Himself, restoring the world of His day and ours from its deeply embedded affinity for self-centeredness and worldliness?

As we read in Ephesians 2:13, "Now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is He who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart." Amen.