



Hell was a possibility

It was not too many years ago that the average Catholic tended to have some fear, or at least a concern, for the eternal loss of his soul. This could be seen by the long lines before mass leading to the confessionals. It was evident, also by the conversations of the Catholic that hell was a place he did not want to go.

This fear of hell was not just an accident, it was in no small part due to the stories that parents, as well as, children told. These stories told of the devil with his horns and pitchfork eager to grab the sinner and take him down to hell with its horrible consuming fire.

Priest also struck fear in the hearts of Catholics by their sermons on the parts of Scripture that pointed out the difficult task of saving one's soul. Passages such as, "Jesus went on to say: 'my children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is much harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.'" (Mark 10:24,25), and "Go in through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to hell, and there are many who travel it. The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and few people find it." (Matthew 7-13, 14) One can readily see how the average Catholic could have concern for the loss of his soul in the midst of a society whose conscience had been formed with such a constant emphasis of sin and its consequences.

One may say, yes, but those are bygone days, and thank God for that. No more hell, fire and damnation. We are a more educated and enlightened society. One that operates on love rather than fear, mercy rather than justice, compassion rather than rules and regulations. We are a more loving, caring, and concerned Church, one that loves the sinner and accepts him just as he is, with no strings attached. Yes, the Catholic Church in this good old U.S.A. flies a new banner, and it has love written all over it. This new American Catholic Church has indeed brought a complete turn about in the minds of the Catholic who occupy the pews, or should I say, who once occupied the pews. For today fewer and fewer Catholics are attending mass. This turnabout is very disturbing to our loving, caring, nonjudgmental reformers, who in the past thirty or so years, worked untiringly to rid the Church of the shackles of fear and damnation.

Two Sources of the Problem

One source of our problem today comes from those who are in positions of authority or influence in the Church who do not understand human nature. When this situation occurs, we have the proverbial blind leading the blind, causing both to fall in to the pit. These people, usually, are good and loving people who are sincere in trying to help their fellow Catholics achieve happiness here on earth and eventually their eternal reward with God in heaven. There is no question about their sincerity. It just happens to be that they are sincerely wrong, and we must always keep in mind that error is error whether it is promoted by sincere or insincere people.

The second source of the problem comes from those who do know what they are doing. They know exactly how to divide and conquer and they are very skilled in this art. Occasionally one may have been disgusted with what these people did or said, yet one can also be awed at the brilliance with which they achieved their diabolical goal. One marvels at how they can take a teaching of the Church, which in the past had done so much for the building up of the faith, and ridicule it in such a way that not only the laity, but even priests and bishops are taken in by their crafty arguments. It seems as though they attack everything that builds up a sense of devotion, respect, and awe in the Church and deride it in such a way that it leads one to believe that such a practice is completely naive and ridiculous, something that no educated person in this day and time could embrace.

At the same time, one may wonder why so many leaders in the Church are not listening to what the Pope is saying. Is he not the one to whom our Lord gave the keys to the kingdom of heaven? Is he not the Vicar of Christ, the one to whom our Lord entrusted his sheep? Could it be that they are caught up in the world with all its frills and glamour? Could it be that they, like Luther, have abandoned their prayer life in an effort to be more available, more active and more effective. Like Luther, could they have lost their spiritual sight due to their loss of contact with Him who is the Light of the World. Anyhow, the fact is, it happened and we are suffering the consequence.

Everyone is Going to Heaven

Let us suppose you were starting your own insurance business, and this business sold only medical policies that covered a person's hospital, and doctor bills. Let's also suppose that you hired a young man to sell these policies for you. Let's further suppose that this young man in an effort to be fair and honest with your clients, would tell them that they really did not need to spend their money on this policy, because they probably would not get sick. So to buy the policy would be a waste of money. Now this is my question. Do you suppose this salesman would sell many policies? The answer of course is NO. Who in his right mind would spend his hard earned money on a policy after being told he did not need it, and by none other than the insurance salesman himself. Especially if the client looks to this seller as one who is supposed to know what he is talking about, for in his mind the salesman is the expert.

Now carry this mode of reasoning over to the spiritual realm. Suppose you had a church, and let us suppose that this church's purpose was to sell life insurance, (Eternal Life that is). Let's further suppose that the salesman for this church (the bishops and priest) would tell their customers (the parishioners) that the God, whom they are promoting, loves them just as they are, and that they cannot do anything to merit His love. Many of the "salesmen" would even be critical of their churches teaching concerning certain requirements that would be necessary for one to enter this eternal life, and avoid the eternal death. Let's suppose that at funeral these "salesmen" would tell the parishioners that the deceased was in heaven with God. Now, let's suppose a little further that the parishioners knew the deceased had been breaking some of the laws of the church, such as deliberately missing mass on Sunday, or deliberately practicing artificial birth control, or deliberately living in a marriage outside the church. The question now is, by such statements would these parishioners be encouraged to remain faithful to the laws of the church? The answer as before would be NO.

Again like in the first situation concerning the medical insurance, who in his right mind would go through the trouble of attending mass every Sunday if EVERYONE IS GOING TO HEAVEN; or go through the difficult task of controlling ones sexual passions; or go through the very difficult task of solving marital problems instead of divorcing their spouse and marrying someone else outside the church. Why should we concern ourselves about all this if EVERYONE IS GOING TO HEAVEN? Why should not one just shack up, as they say, instead of getting married? Remember these experts are supposed to know. They are our guides, and we are supposed to believe what they tell us.

Now we must ask ourselves, "Are these things and more really happening?" The answer is, yes, and far too often. And it is done most often by those who promote love and understanding.

Now, one may ask, can we be compassionate if we deliberately destroy people's trust in the Church's teachings? If Christ came to give us the Good News and the Church is His spokesman then the logical conclusion would be that anyone teaching contrary to the Church is denying its members the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Is it possible that these loving and compassionate do-gooders feel that Christ's message is too harsh and unloving? Could they possibly believe that they are more loving than Christ and the Holy Church He instituted?

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that between 1940 and 1960 the Catholic Church in the U.S. almost doubled in membership. During these years convents were being built due to the fact that many young girls were dedicating their lives to God. Seminaries were being built to accommodate the many young boys who were dedicating their lives to God as priest. During these years churches were being built due to the fact that Catholics were going to worship God. Now let's look at what has happened with the dawn of the new American Catholic church. Thousands of priest have abandoned the priesthood. Nuns, in ever greater numbers than the priest, have abandoned their sacred vows and left the convents. Now instead of building seminaries we are selling seminaries; instead of building convents, we are selling convents. Now, sad to say the construction of churches has declined and in some areas of the county we are even closing and selling them due to the fact that many of our faithful are no longer going to church. But what difference does all this make?

IF EVERYONE IS GOING TO HEAVEN?