

POPE FRANCIS & SECULARISATION OF THE CHURCH

In a perceptive article in *Time* magazine reproduced on the website of America's *Ethics and Public Policy Center*¹, Mary Eberstadt, senior fellow at the *Center*, lamented the world's burgeoning atheism and the seeming impossibility of uncovering the cause of its underlying secularism. With great respect the cause, or causes, are clear, and wisdom to address them lies hidden within the doctrine of Christ's Church.

For some fifty years popes have failed to address a reasoned explanation for the folly of atheism and the philosophical aberrations that attend it. For the last twenty five years or so no encyclical has been more important than this, but no such encyclical has appeared. Why?

First, because the defects in their philosophical formation rendered recent incumbents of the papal chair incapable of addressing atheism's folly effectively. And second, because a substantial impediment prevents such a document being published. What is the impediment? The acceptance by the Church's leadership of the licit-ness of the endorsement by the bishops of Vatican II of the Masonic doctrine of 'religious freedom'. Why is it an impediment? Leo XIII explains—

"To hold... that there is no difference in matters of religion between forms that are unlike each other, and even contrary to each other... leads in the end to the rejection of all religion in both theory and practice. This is the same thing as atheism, however it may differ from it in name."²

The rejection, at the instigation of misguided *periti*, by the bishops of Vatican II of this reasoning, and their endorsement of the Masonic folly has served as catalyst for the flourishing of secularism in the Church and in the world. To put it plainly, when the bishops of Vatican II effectively abandoned the claim of the Catholic faith to be the only true religion³ they endorsed the freedom of men to embrace atheism.

Aggiornamento, the catchcry of John XXIII, became a euphemism for bringing the Church into conformity with the mind and mores of the secular world. There can be no vacuum in the life of the human spirit. 'He who is not with me,' Christ said, 'is against me.' Léon Bloy, whom Pope Francis quoted at his first Mass, put it similarly, 'Whoever does not pray to the Lord, prays to the Devil.' Until the impediment of 'religious freedom' is addressed, no pope could issue an encyclical condemning atheism and its attendant evils.

This is the reason the new pope should make it the priority of his reign to establish a commission to report to him on two questions—

1. *How can the worldly principles embraced by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council possibly be reconciled with the formal and infallible teachings of Pius IX and Leo XIII to the contrary?*
2. *If they cannot, how can it be maintained that Vatican II was an 'ecumenical' council?*

Michael Baker

19th March 2013—*Inauguration of Jorge Mario Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope Francis*

¹ *New Shepherd, Same Wandering Flock* at http://www.eppc.org/publications/pubID.4983/pub_detail.asp. A copy is reproduced in the appendix for those content to view it here.

² *Immortale Dei* (1.11.1885)

³ For those who deny the Council bishops did this, see the critical analysis of Fr Brian Harrison's defence of *Dignitatis Humanae* at http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/dignitatis_humanae_response_Harrison.pdf

Appendix

New Shepherd, Same Wandering Flock

By Mary Eberstadt

ARTICLE

Time Magazine

Publication Date: March 14, 2013

On the surface, as the global thumbs-up from excited Christians goes to show, the surprise election of former Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a.k.a. Pope Francis, signals some bold new directions for the Catholic Church.

Geographically, the choice moves the center of gravity away from Europe and into the New World. As a matter of public relations, it re-directs attention away from the Ameri-centric and Euro-centric sex scandals (mercifully, many would say). And the very name "Francis" suggests a papal demeanor arguably more *simpatico* to many of the faithful than the fierce intellectualism of the preceding two popes—a Catholicism of the barrio and not just the *baldacchino*.

In reality, though, and despite the hopes in some precincts for a radically overhauled Church, these departures amount to mere atmospheric. That's because the chief conundrum facing the new Pope is the same as it was for the exceedingly aware emeritus Pope before him. It is a problem as vexatious for Rome whether in the Global South or in the affluent West, and more than any other earthly force it will decide the fate of all the churches: namely, the secularization of large parts of the formerly Christian world.

Evidence abounds that creeping godlessness is not just some European thing. According to Baylor University's Philip Jenkins, one of the foremost authorities on these numbers, across Latin America "signs of secularization appear that would have been unthinkable not long ago." Nine percent of Brazilians now report themselves "nones," for instance, as in "none of the religious above," and as with the "nones" in America, the number is higher among the young. Forty percent of Uruguayans now profess no religious affiliation. Nor is the new Pope's home country exempt from the trend - quite the contrary. Political dictatorship may be over, but the "dictatorship of relativism" deplored by emeritus Pope Benedict is alive and kicking in an increasingly secular Argentina.

Then there is state-of-the-art god-forsaking Western Europe. Across the Continent, elderly altar servers shuffle in empty, childless churches; monasteries and chapels are remade into spas, apartments, or mosques; protests, including violent protests, now regularly greet any Pope who leaves Rome. Yes, there are remarkable renewal movements here and there, for the sheer ferocity of aggressive secularism has inadvertently energized a Christian counter-culture. But the secular forest still grows faster than the religious trees. One recent British survey found that about 20 percent of respondents could not say what event was commemorated by Easter.

As for the United States, it remains true that Americans are more religiously inclined than Europeans. Even so, here too the trend is clear. To judge by statistics on items like attendance and affiliation and out-of-wedlock births, say, America's religious tomorrow is just Denmark's yesterday.

So what's a Pope to do? He can start by understanding one critical truth that has not been well understood so far: the puzzle of secularization is not only his to solve. Secular sociology has written the intellectual script about how godlessness happens but has gotten it wrong.

Secularization is not, for example, the inevitable result of affluence, as many have said; statistically, men and women who are better-off in the United States today, for example, are *more* likely to believe and practise faith than are those further down the economic ladder. The same was true of Victorian England, as the British historian Hugh McLeod has painstakingly shown. Mammon alone does not necessarily drive out God.

Is secularization then the inevitable result of increased rationality and enlightenment, as the new atheists and other theorists claim? Here again, the empirical fact that the well educated Mormon, say, is *more* likely to be someone of faith would appear to confound that theory. Is secularization then the result of the world wars, as still others have supposed? If so, it is hard to see how countries with different experiences of those wars—neutral Switzerland, vanquished Germany, victorious Great Britain—should all lose their religions in tandem, let alone why countries untouched by the wars should follow suit.

And on it goes. Modern sociology can tell us many things, but about the elemental question of why people stop going to church—or for that matter, why they start—the going theories have all come up short. Contrary to what secular soothsayers have believed, evidence suggests that secularization is not inevitable, and neither is it a linear process according to which decline is an arrow pointing ever downward. Rather, and crucially, religion waxes and wanes in the world—strong one moment, weaker the next—for reasons that still demand to be understood.

From the point of view of the new occupant of the Papal Apartments in a time of flickering faith, this is countercultural and potentially excellent news.
