

THE SMOKE OF SATAN

“[T]hrough some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God...”

Pope Paul VI, June 29, 1972

In psalm 95 of the Vulgate we read: *quoniam omnes dii gentium daemonia* “for all the gods of the heathens are devils” (v. 5). The Grail translation of the line is defective. Here is the setting in which the line is to be found:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth;
Sing to the Lord and bless His Holy Name; from day to day proclaim his salvation.
Proclaim His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.
For the Lord is great and worthy of all praise, terrible above all other gods,
For all the gods of the heathens are devils; but it was the Lord who made the heavens...

Consider what the bishops of Vatican II did in the light of this line. They asserted, against all that the Church had taught since her foundation, that men had a right to choose to follow the gods of the heathens, a right to follow the devil and his minions. They justified this lapse by arguing that men have a right to choose even if they are wrong in their choices, which is but a restatement of the oxymoron, or sophistry, attributed to Voltaire (but in fact a summary by S. G. Tallentyre of his attitude over the burning of Helvetius’s *De l’esprit*), “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it”.

At the heart of the error was their failure to distinguish human freedom into its elements, a consequence of a rejection by their advisers (*periti*) of the Church’s teaching on the topic contained in Leo XIII’s encyclical *Libertas* (June 20th, 1888). The very opening lines of that document would have given the bishops pause for thought:

“Liberty, the highest of natural endowments, being the portion only of intellectual or rational natures, confers on man this dignity - that he is ‘in the hand of his counsel’ (*Ecclesiasticus* 15: 14) and has power over his actions. But the manner in which such dignity is exercised is of the greatest moment, inasmuch as on the use that is made of liberty the highest good and the greatest evil alike depend.”

Alone among living creatures does man determine the end of his acts—not just their *execution* or their *form* but their *end*. Man is free of the necessity that rules the brute because he is a subjectively immaterial being possessing intellect and its condign appetite, will. Alone among material creatures, then, man must weigh the issue whether the ends he chooses are fitting to him. He is bound by a standard to which he must conform himself, the rule of morals. His freedom falls, then, into two categories: first, what he is *absolutely* (or naturally) free to do, and, second, what he is *morally* free to do. A duty attends his actions. If he does what he is absolutely, but not morally, free to do he fails in this duty and demeans himself.

Pope Leo wrote:

“Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that because man is free by nature he is therefore exempt from law. Were this the case, it would follow that to become free we must be deprived of reason; whereas the truth is that we are bound to submit to law precisely because we are free by our very nature. For law is the guide of man's actions; it turns him toward good by its rewards, and deters him from evil by its sanctions. [n. 7]

...

“If when men discussed the question of liberty they were careful to grasp its true and legitimate meaning... they would never venture to affix such a calumny on the Church as to assert that she is the foe of individual and public liberty. But many there are who follow in the footsteps of Lucifer, and adopt as their own his rebellious cry, "I will not serve"; and consequently substitute for true liberty what is sheer and most foolish license... [n. 14]

...

“[A]ssuredly, of all the duties which man has to fulfil, that, without doubt, is the supreme and most holy which commands him to worship God with devotion and piety. This follows of necessity from the truth that we are ever in the power of God, are ever guided by His will and providence, and, having come forth from Him, must return to Him. Added to which, no true virtue can exist without religion, for moral virtue is concerned with those things which lead to God as man's supreme and ultimate good; and therefore religion, which (as St. Thomas says) "performs those actions which are directly and immediately ordained for the divine honour" (*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 81, a. 6. Resp.) rules and tempers all virtues.

“And if it be asked which of the many conflicting religions it is necessary to adopt, reason and the natural law unhesitatingly tell us to practise that one which God enjoins on us, and which men can easily recognise by certain exterior notes whereby Divine Providence has willed that it should be distinguished because, in a matter of such moment, the most terrible loss would be the consequence of error. Wherefore, when a liberty such as We have described [religious freedom] is offered to man, the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil; which, as We have said, is no liberty, but its degradation, and the abject submission of the soul to sin.” [n. 20]

What he repeats here is the burden of the condemnation uttered by his predecessor, Pius IX, in the *Syllabus of Errors* attached to the encyclical *Quanta cura* (December 8th, 1864), of this proposition:

Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he thinks to be the true religion. [n 15]

The Pope's rejection of any right to 'religious liberty' expresses the Church's teaching on the subject. It is a teaching the bishops of Vatican II ignored and purported to overturn in their document *Dignitatis Humanae*. Whether explicitly, or tacitly, or merely negligently those bishops gave the devil license to operate among Christ's faithful. It was they who, with the active connivance of Paul VI, allowed Satan entry into the temple of God.

Michael Baker

October 7th, 2020—*Our Lady of Victories (Our Lady of the Rosary)*