



AD CLERUM

VETUS ROMANUS APOSTOLATUS



"Et nolite conformari"

A PASTORAL EPISTLE TO THE CLERGY

Beloved sons

"And be not conformed to this world" the apostle Paul exhorts the Romans, "but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God." [Romans 12:2] Pope St Pius X in his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis* condemned modernism as "the synthesis of all heresies" and this perfectly summarises the contemporary institutional hierarchy's mindset, which has become beset by progressive secularist values and ideologies as is evident from the agenda they have published for the upcoming synod.

St John Henry Newman in his *Discourse II ('Theology a Branch of Knowledge')* writing against those in his day who wanted to stop theology being taught in the universities, describes the approach of the "religious world" outside the Catholic Church in these words: "The religious world, as it is styled, holds, generally speaking, that religion consists, not in knowledge, but in

Faith is an act of the understanding adhering to Divine Truth by command of the will moved by the grace of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas, STh II-II, 2, 9; cf Dei Filius 3: DS 3010

feeling or sentiment." Here Newman is referring to the modernist conception of "the religious sense" as a mere sentiment. He contrasts this error with the Catholic doctrine that faith is "an intellectual act, its object truth, and its result knowledge." This notion of religion as sentiment is still prevalent today, sadly it seems by many churchmen, but more ironically it is the basis of a contemporary ideology of self-identity that has captured institutions both ecclesiastical and civil to the detriment of all reason and sensibility.

If we are to be effective pastors to the faithful God has seen fit providentially to entrust to our care, we must ourselves pay heed to the apostle's exhortation, "And be not conformed to this world". Many of you have been brought up in the contemporary zeitgeist and are subject to its pull on your emotions. Many of you think it is possible to reconcile secular values and approaches with sacred ministry. While it is true that not everything the modern world has to offer is of itself inherently suspect, nonetheless, some of you are lacking in the prudence and spiritual maturity to distinguish the good from the bad.

That's not your fault! Many of you are of this current generation for whom emotionalism and empathy are valued greatly even to the detriment of fact and sensibility. It is important to recognize that emotions and empathy are valuable qualities that can bring about positive change and understanding in the world. However, it is also important to maintain balance between emotion and reason. While emotions and empathy are important, it is equally

essential to consider facts, evidence, and rational thinking when making decisions or forming opinions.

Many in the institutional Church today exhibit this notion of religion as sentiment and in so doing conflate emotion with vocation. Many individuals within the Church prioritize the superficial emotional aspects of religion over the call to live out one's faith in a tangible and purposeful way. This can result in a shallow understanding of religion, as the focus shifts away from meaningful engagement with religious teachings toward a mere expression of sentiment. Consequently, the true essence of vocation and the transformative power of religious practice may be overlooked or undervalued.

This attitude is particularly dangerous when it comes to vocations to the sacred ministry and religious life. People confuse feelings with a calling and act motivated by emotion. This can lead to individuals entering the ministry or religious life without a genuine calling, which can have detrimental effects on both the individual and the community they serve. When individuals confuse feelings with a calling, they may be driven by temporary emotions rather than a deep-seated conviction. This can result in individuals making impulsive decisions that they may later regret. Without proper discernment and reflection, individuals may not fully understand the commitment and sacrifices required in the sacred ministry or religious life.

Desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither the things they say, nor whereof they affirm.

1 Timothy 1:7

We see this type of attitude especially among the apostates and *vagantes*, those unfaithful characters who betray loyalty, dishonour oaths and example wolves in sheep's clothing [cf. *St Matthew 7:15*]. Who so often are full of enthusiasm but lack commitment. They are wholly driven by emotion, an inflated sense of self, a harmful narcissism betraying their contempt

for proper order and authority, who abuse and manipulate the flock. Full of themselves they pursue their own interests, arrogantly presuming status and privileges undeserved and without compunction. They are betrayed by their whims and fancies [cf. *2 Timothy 4: 3, 4*] their presumption of knowledge and misapplication of truth.

At your reception into our apostolate and prior to your ordination, you swore the *Oath against Modernism*. The fifth term of the *Oath* gets to the very heart of the cancer of modernism, namely its assault on revelation and faith, it states: "*Fifthly, I hold with certainty and sincerely confess that faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths*

Let no man despise thy youth: but be thou an example of the faithful in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity. Till I come, attend unto reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine. Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophesy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood. Meditate upon these things, be wholly in these things: that thy profiting may be manifest to all. Take heed to thyself and to doctrine: be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.

1 Timothy 4:12-16

of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source. By this assent, because of the authority of the supremely truthful God, we believe to be true that which has been revealed and attested to by a personal God, our creator and lord." As traditional Catholic clerics, we understand that our religion, far from being a sentiment, is a response to revealed truth and that our vocation to serve is by conviction.

The state of our increasingly secularised world can be accurately described as a collective loss of sanity. In our modern, fast-paced society, there is a noticeable increase in chaos and bewilderment. The prevalence of social media, fake news, and an overwhelming amount of ignorance and disinformation has resulted in people being bombarded with conflicting perspectives and opinions. This excessive flow of information often leads to cognitive dissonance and a decline in the ability to think critically. Many no longer believe in objective truth nor objective morality and many who think themselves Christian, no longer believe truly in God as He has revealed Himself.

Moreover, the increasing polarization of society further exacerbates the situation, as individuals become more entrenched in their own beliefs and less open to dialogue and compromise. Rational discourse is often replaced by emotional outbursts and irrational behaviour. The consequences of this collective loss of sanity are far-reaching, affecting everything from politics and economics to social interactions and mental health. It is crucial for orthodox Catholics to recognize the importance of maintaining a rational and balanced mindset in order to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

The greatest kindness one can render to any man consists in leading him from error to truth.

St Thomas Aquinas

I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that you also hold the same opinions [as I do]. But I guard you beforehand from those beasts in the shape of men, whom you must not only not receive, but, if it be possible, not even meet with; only you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance, which, however, will be very difficult.

*The Epistle of St Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans
Ch.4 Beware of these heretics*

Overcoming emotions is the only solution to this predicament and as traditionalist clergy, self-control is essential. It is important to note that overcoming emotions does not mean suppressing or ignoring them. Emotions are a natural part of being human, and they serve as important signals and indicators of our physiological and psychological needs and desires. Instead, the goal is to develop emotional intelligence and resilience, allowing us to respond to emotions in a balanced and constructive way. Emotions are unreliable but not unpredictable, keeping them in check, knowing how to control them, as the great teachers of the mystical life have taught for centuries, is to attain mastery over oneself and to become truly able to help others.

There is a tendency by many to confuse the nature of God's love, i.e. sacrificial charity, with contemporary notions of "love" i.e. *eros*, romantic, mutual or singular self-interest. This fundamental contradiction of the Gospel is the cause of so many contemporary ills in society. It's important that as pastors you understand and teach others the fundamental difference between these opposing concepts. It's also important that you apply these distinctions in your approach and attitude to ministry; that you advocate for the supreme good of the other i.e. sacrificial love, the surrendering of self to God and submission in conforming to His laws, and not the rejection of His love which is to prefer that which satisfies and pleases the self.

The divine charity of the Gospel emphasizes the importance of selflessness, urging individuals to put the needs of others before their own. This divine charity teaches forgiveness and reconciliation, encouraging us to forgive those who have wronged us and seek unity and peace. It also calls for acts of service, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick. Religion is not mere sentimentality; real religion is *action*! By its very nature, God's love *must* be shared, *must* be exponentially increased, *must* be expressed and ultimately *must* be lived - and that ***always*** requires sacrifice!

Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head.

St Charles Borromeo

Many of you have much enthusiasm and are full of ideas, yet many of these lack pragmatism, applicability and feasibility. It's equally important to consider how practical and relevant those ideas are in real-world situations. Pragmatism ensures that ideas can be implemented effectively, taking into account the available resources, time constraints, and potential challenges. Applicability refers to how well the ideas align with the specific context or problem at hand. By combining enthusiasm with pragmatism and applicability, you can increase the chances of turning your ideas into tangible reality.

The devil frequently fills our thoughts with great schemes, so that instead of putting our hands to what work we can do to serve our Lord, we may rest satisfied with wishing to perform impossibilities.

St Teresa of Avila

Another important factor is *commitment*. It is common for people to have dreams and ideas but rely on others to make them a reality, or indeed to attempt to realise them without careful consideration. Without personal investment and dedication, progress can be hindered and the potential for success limited. Therefore, it is crucial to not only dream big but also to take the necessary steps to turn ideas into reality. By demonstrating personal commitment and

working hard great things can be achieved and have lasting impact. But personal example, application, is necessary to demonstrate the integrity of ideas and encourage others to support them.

A fundamental component of commitment and dedication and most especially to gain support, is loyalty and trust. The saintly Curé d'Ars was able to achieve his monumental efficacy in pastoral ministry and the conversion of thousands of souls because of his own conviction, his own personal commitment that won over the hearts of the reluctant and disaffected towns-people of Ars who witnessed his resilience and persistence. They trusted him because they could see his commitment to them - to their salvation and his faith; he didn't just speak to them, he lived and demonstrated what he preached, by word and example. He was *faithful*. He was *obedient*. He *never* gave up. He was *true* to his word and to his priestly vows.

Let nothing be done without the bishop. See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles.

The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, Ch.8 Let nothing be done without the bishop

It was in the persistence of his vocation, his unwavering commitment to God, and his unwavering subjection and obedience to his bishop, that St Jean Vianney was ordained despite the challenges of his formation and entrusted a small flock in a forgotten town. Despite the difficulties of his charge, he didn't resign, he remained faithful in obedience and eventually, after a decade of persistent hard labour, began to astonish the world and heaven by his efforts in pursuing souls and converting their hearts and minds to God. Why was he so faithful? He *trusted* God. He was *faithful* to those to whom God had entrusted his vocation to be realised. He was *obedient* to those God had placed him under.

True, the saintly Curé did not have to contend with the heterodoxy of hierarchs in his day, unlike our contemporaries in the institutional Church. But neither do we! By God's providence

Wherefore it is fitting that you should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also you do.

The Epistle of St Ignatius to the Ephesians, Ch.4 Exhortations to unity

we have been blessed to recruit honest and faithful men amongst whom, without seeking it, a few have been made apostles in these trying times. Though each in their turn declined election to the episcopacy, yet in humility they succumbed to the awesome responsibility. They each have wisdom, talents, skills and abilities that God has blessed them with and demonstrably employed them in His service.

More importantly they are humble men who have accepted a great burden to be guardians to the faithful and the Faith.

At your ordinations or reception into our apostolate, after your Oath against Modernism you promised fidelity, like the Curé, to your assigned episcopal administrator and can be sure of their loyalty to you, who maintain your oaths. Trust them demonstrably through regular communication and consultation, and their sincerity will be proven to you. All ideas and suggestions made humbly will be carefully considered, come with solutions. But remember as administrators they have an overview and are aware of the whole of which you are a part, and appreciate their consideration is for the many not just the few. Likewise, share any

frustration or concern respectfully and calmly. Patience is indeed a virtue, a fundamental characteristic of charity and always appreciated, it's manifestation or lack thereof always betrays character.

It is well to reverence both God and the bishop. He who honours the bishop has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, does [in reality] serve the devil.

The Epistle of St Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, Ch.9 Honour the bishop

In conclusion, dearest brethren, conform your mind to God's revelation, bend your heart to His will, be sensible in your actions, exercise prudence in your enthusiasm, example true fidelity to your promises, honour your word, be open to wisdom and guidance from those to whom God has entrusted the realisation of your vocation and trust they always have your best interests at heart.

Oremus pro invicem.

*J. D.
+ Joane Bach*

*Brichtelmestunensis
Ss. Nazarii et Celsi Martyrum, Victoris I Papæ
et Martyris ac Innocentii I Papæ et Confessori MMXXIII A.D.*