

A Late-Night Counsel to the Bold and the Beautiful

A monk's-eye view of things



In the past 24 hours a previous post here, _____

As so often on a wide range of websites, religious or otherwise, the comments' section—the combox for short—reveals a less attractive side to debate and argument. No doubt most of these commenters are decent people of faith, capable of high emotion in defence of the Church and its faith and worship, and brave enough to stand up and be counted for it. However, some of them, invariably laity, while so bold and beautiful in the profession of their faith, sometimes fall into the trap that the internet lays for us: indiscretion.

So to those who perhaps express their opinions with more heat than light, and to those who are merely unable to comprehend the perseverance of those who remain in the heart of the mainstream Church, for want of a better expression, I dare to offer a word of counsel. The counsel comes from one who does not look down on them but stands among them—having been indiscreet in the expression of my arguments once or twice I am loath to cast stones. Instead I cast some context.

Converts and the young are privileged to have entered into the full run of the Church's life in a period of fruitfulness after the rugged and demanding pontificate of St John Paul II and during the consolidation of common sense under Benedict XVI. Older, cradle-Catholics grew up enduring, and some even enjoying, the conciliar and immediately post-conciliar Church. In many ways the 80s were worse than the 70s. These were days when seminaries were regularly purged of the orthodox, liturgies “pastorally” and creatively re-fashioned to suit the taste of the loudest, and when catechesis was comatose. There is a generation of Catholics who grew up knowing almost nothing other than vernacular, often ad hoc, liturgy and the emotive mush of the muzak of the St Louis Jesuits.

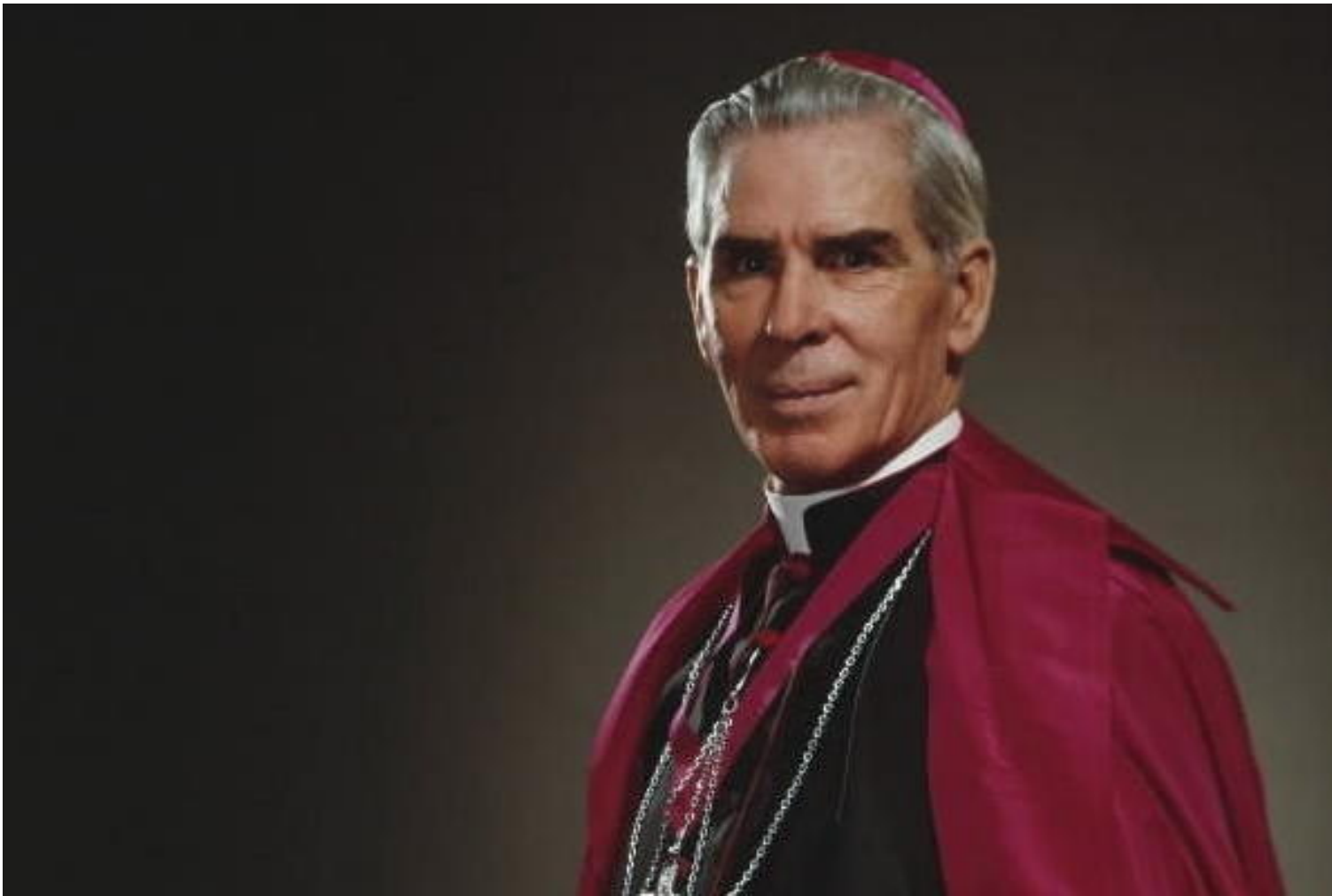
I am one of this generation. After years of experience and education—programming, if you want—it takes even longer to undo the damage, for it is not merely a matter of the intellect but of the heart. We are formed by more than ideas, but also the influence of friends, family and authority figures. What they told us was good and right, so often repeated and so rarely contradicted in public, strikes deep roots especially in the young and those who are disposed to respect the magisterium of those who hold our trust. Even when we found our minds and hearts troubled by the cracks we began to notice in their

arguments, and sometimes even the counter-witness of their behaviour, we had not the tools nor the encouragement to search out other points of view. This was the before the internet age, without the oceans of free information and many forums for free speech and unrestricted listening. There was no support group for those who began to doubt and knew not quite what to do.

It is an easy thing to preach to the converted, but it is the unconverted we need to reach. Most clergy know this need, and this knowledge as well as their office constrains them to a certain temperance and charity of expression. Yet charity is the duty of us all. More than a mere duty, it is the indispensable tool for evangelization. Name-calling and vitriol win no converts, only gratify zealots. Some of us live among those with whom we disagree and who disagree with us. For us the law of charity is the one thing necessary for maintaining community life.

If we view those who do not agree with us with contempt, or even hatred, we will never win them. If we love them, even if only because Christ has commanded us to, then we will treat them with charity. Remember that they may well have been formed at a time when only the voice of post-conciliar excess was audible, its propaganda omnipresent and ceaseless. Years and years of that require a lot of undoing. And those who are older spent their youth in the bright glow of pre-conciliar optimism, that the Council would mark a wonderful moment of grace in the Church. Read Louis Bouyer's memoirs to see how hard it was for a Council peritus to come to grips with the reality of the Council's reforms as they were implemented. He had the advantage of greater first-hand knowledge and monumental learning; how hard indeed must it be for the more humbly gifted to unhitch their wagon from the conciliar train. Look also, if you will, at a certain Joseph Ratzinger. Even a man of his towering intellect and theological common sense needed time to break free from the web cast by the zealous conciliarists.

We must not bludgeon those who cannot see what we see; we must gently guide to them the truth we see, and win them over not only by clarity of argument but also by force of charity. Truth without charity becomes ideology in the eye of those looking on from outside. We have had enough of ideology, surely.



Let's try to do as this guy did.

I honour these counsels more in the breach than the observance myself but it makes them no less true. If Our Lord can see sinners as sick people in need of a doctor, then surely we can those of our fellow Catholics who cannot see what we see as the unseeing in need of enlightening not stoning.

Not all are victims of course, and some are most definitely contumacious in their errors and actions. To pour vitriol upon them will only given them reason to stop listening. Argue the point not the person.

Time for bed, and a prayer to be able to practise what I preach. Let's pray for each other.

Pax.

1 Fr Hugh - Dominus mihi adjutor blog