NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Contra Mary Hunt

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 15, 2014 Distinctly Catholic

Mary Hunt?s latest article at Religion Dispatches [1] displays both Francis Derangement Syndrome (FDS) and If Only Pope Francis Knew What I Know Syndrome (IOPFKWIKS). It is one more piece of evidence of a trend I predicted shortly after Pope Francis? election, an increasing divide between the Catholic Left that is thrilled with the pope?s emphasis on the Church?s social doctrine and the Catholic Left that, like its conservative counterparts, reduces Catholicism to a laundry list of neuralgic, mostly sex-related, issues.

Hunt?s commentary perfectly exemplifies this latter camp in all of its myopia. It is stunning to me that she can commend the pope for his humility but then complain that he has not exhibited what would be a rather stunning lack of humility towards 2,000 years of Church tradition. It is good the pope moved out of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican, where popes have only lived since 1870. That is good humble. But, he shows no signs of accepting the proposition that women should be ordained, instead recognizing that renouncing an unbroken practice of the Church is no small matter. That is bad humble in Hunt?s view.

Humility is a virtue. It should extend to the entirety of a person?s life and, in the Holy Father?s case, it clearly does. That is why he resonates with so many people who had previously not paid any mind to the Church or the papacy. I loved Pope Benedict, but there was a remoteness to him. Francis is accessible. He more easily touches people?s hearts. They see a humble, loving pastor and respond. But, this is what worries Hunt. She writes, ?All of the enthusiasm about Francis? style does not change the fact that the institutional Roman Catholic Church is a rigid hierarchy led by a pope?the warm feelings in response to Francis shore up that model of church by making the papacy itself look good. To my mind, this is a serious danger.?

One shudders to think what kind of leaderless Church she imagines. Certainly, one does not need much in the way of cultural insight to recognize that a more democratic model of Church governance would hardly be the panacea Hunt fancies: Fundamentalist churches elect their pastors after all. But, most disturbing is Hunt?s complete lack of awareness that the liberal temperament is never so dangerous as when it speaks breezily about overturning institutions. Ms. Hunt cannot want the Church as it exists to succeed because this would only strengthen the hierarchy she deplores is, as a matter of logic, no different from the Pentagon?s willingness to destroy a village in Vietnam in order to save it. Her worldview, so lacking in humility, is chilling. One easily imagines her knitting at the foot of the guillotine.

The real problem here for Hunt, once she gets past her cant about patriarchy, is that she is disappointed that Pope Francis does not share her agenda. This misunderstands the nature of the papacy and the nature of the Church and makes her arguments different in accident, but not substance, from those arguments from conservative critics of the pope who object that the pope is not sufficiently minding their agenda. Both she and they dissect the pope. Hunt writes, ?Of course there is a difference between a person and a role. But in this case, I daresay most people outside of Argentina would never have heard of a certain Jorge Mario Bergoglio if he had not been elected pope. It is the person *in* the role that matters.? This is true, but not in the sense that she fancies it. The man has, by reason of his office, been given the task of sanctifying and governing the universal Church. But, what is most attractive about the man in the role is that there is not a glimmer of disconnect between the

man and his office, still less between the man and his words. There is no hint of inauthenticity in Pope Francis. He cannot be reduced to an agenda, not even his own, indeed, I think it misunderstands this papacy to conceive the Holy Father as having an agenda of his own. He has said, repeatedly, that his reform efforts are in response to what the College of Cardinals said they wanted. And, just as obviously, he believes he is carrying out the divine mission entrusted to him, the most important aspect of which is fidelity to the Gospel.

We are Catholics, not fundamentalists. We believe the Lord Jesus entrusted His Church to people, most especially the apostles. He did not draft a constitution for the Church. He did not write His own version of ?What Then Must Be Done?? The Master was certainly aware of the shortcomings of His apostles. But, He promised to send His Spirit upon the Church. The Church is itself seized by the Incarnation, the inexplicable admixture of the divine and the human. Those who want the Church to be perfect lack faith, which is why Pope Francis constantly tells us not to worry so much about making mistakes. We will all of us rely on the mercy of God at the end of our days. Besides, Ms. Hunt does not want the Church to be perfect. She wants the Church to be an extension of her ideology. She wants a pope who would fit in neatly with the prejudices of early 21st century, affluent, educated, liberal Americans. How sad for poor Pope Francis that he can?t be enlightened by the literati.

I will stipulate that the Holy Father, like all the baptized, must come to grips with the role of women in the Church. We are all of us, to a degree, trapped in history and our Catholic history is mostly, certainly not exclusively, a male-driven narrative. Of course, the way the Church liberates Herself from history is by fidelity to Christ. Tradition is one of the surest antidotes to the grim slavery of being a child of one?s own age. Such a thought, I fear, is lost on Ms. Hunt. Who needs the Council of Nicaea when you have the latest issue of The Nation?

If you think I am being unduly harsh, I call your attention to this sentence: ?All of the efforts at church reform?whether the ordination of women, married clergy, acceptance of divorced and/or LGBTIQ persons as full members of the community, and many others?are based on the assumption of widespread lay participation in an increasingly democratic church.? Certainly the reforms of Trent were not based on this assumption, nor the reforms of Vatican II. The issues she lists are not really like one another in their theological significance: Our Orthodox brothers and sisters, whose Churches are as apostolic as our Roman Church, permit married clergy and also bless a second union of those struck by the tragedy of divorce. And, what to make of the acronym? I confess, I had to look up what the ?I? stood for ? it stands for ?Intersexual.? At what point do we get to stop adding letters to the acronym? I asked my housemate, who is gay (?G?), about this new acronym and he replied, ?Oh, it?s just ridiculous.? It is a specific kind of ridiculous, the kind found among academics whose penchant for intellectual fads is as laughable as it is sad. In her defense of sexual libertinism, Hunt shows herself to be an intellectual libertine. That is not a compliment.

Those who genuinely care about the role of women in the Church, or about developing the Church?s admittedly inadequate theological reflections on homosexuality, should understand that Hunt damages their cause, she does not advance it. Reading her writings about the Catholic Church, I entertain the thought that an alien from outer space could, within a few minutes, develop greater appreciation for the Catholic intellectual tradition than Hunt will permit herself.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2016 - 20:10*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/contra-mary-hunt

Links:
[1]

http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/sexandgender/7484/the_trouble_with_francis__three_things_that_worry_me/