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MoDo's Latest Inane Screed

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Maureen Dowd is back in her pulpit. But the once glamorous and sharp-witted writer is now a tired and un-illuminating peddler of invective and stupidity. Her latest column, "Rome Fiddles, We Burn" is, as the title indicates, off-key. Ms. Dowd: if you go to Rome, you can visit the catacombs where the actual victims of Nero's anti-Christian persecutions are buried. Benedict is not Nero, and Dowd is not an early, or latterly, Christian martyr. Martyrs suffer and it is we who suffer Ms. Dowd's prose, not she.

She begins her little essay with this observation: "If the Vatican is trying to restore the impression that its moral sense is intact, issuing a document that equates pedophilia with the ordination of women doesn't really do that." Did she actually read the document? It is available on the Vatican website. Where does it "equate" pedophilia with the ordination of women? This morning, I gave biscuits to all three of my dogs, but that does not mean Bernie is Clementine or Ambrose is Bernie or Clementine is Ambrose. All three constitute a pack, yes, and each got biscuits, but that does not mean that I am suddenly unaware that one is a lab, another is a border collie and the third is a St. Bernard.

Mind you, I think it was a mistake for the Vatican to not deal with the new norms governing the crime of sexual abuse of minors by clergy separate from all other concerns. But, I do not see any attempt to "equate" the issue with that of the ordination of women. Nor do I concur in the argument that Mark Silk made, and which Dowd cites, that the women's ordination issue was really the "main business" of the Vatican document. The other day, I cleaned my desk. While cleaning the desk I noticed that the floor needed to be swept. That is what happened at the CDF. They were dealing with one issue, and realized that they might as well deal with a bunch of issues. That was a mistake, as even many conservative Catholics such as The anchoress have observed. But, there was no ulterior motive at work. I think it is often the case that outsiders assume intent when there is merely incompetence. And, in this event, the incompetence in question does not have to do with the merits so much as with the public relations. That is

an important concern, and one the Vatican needs to pay attention to, but it is not the heart of the matter either.

She calls the document 'casuistic' which has long been a Protestant slur against Catholic moral reasoning. Any reasonably informed Catholic, or student of history, knows that casuistry can be taken to an extreme but that its essential insight is that the law should be applied with as much mercy as possible. But, why be informed when a casual slur will do?

Dowd writes: 'Letting women be priests' which should be seen as a way to help cleanse the church and move it beyond its infantilized and defensive state' is now on the list of awful sins right next to pedophilia, heresy, apostasy and schism.' She evidently missed the news about the Lutheran female bishop in Germany who just resigned because she participated in a cover-up of sexual abuse by one of her clergy. And, incidentally, ordaining women is not 'now' an instance of schism; it was an instance of schism the week before last too.

Dowd finishes with a quote from a recent New Republic article by Garry Wills which was so ridiculous I did not bother to respond to it. Wills, like Dowd, has an axe to grind. They are upset with Pope Benedict XVI because he has not joined them in their desire to become chaplains to the Upper West Side intellectual status quo. Have they ever read anything Benedict has written? I doubt it. It might prod them from their intellectual slumber and none of us likes to be roused from sleep. But, for those who claim to care about ideas, intellectual laziness is also a crime. Intellectual sloth and tendentiousness may not make it on to the CDF's list of graviora delicta, but if there is a hell for journalists, it has spots reserved for the likes of Wills and Dowd. Burn indeed.

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