

What Should We Make of Assisi 1986?

Archbishop Lefebvre's Letter to Eight Cardinals About Assisi 1986

Your Eminence,
Confronted with events taking place in the Church that have John Paul II as their author and faced with those he intends carrying out at Taizé and Assisi in October, I cannot refrain from addressing you and begging you in the name of numerous priests and faithful to save the honor of the Church never before humiliated to such an extent in the course of her history.
The speeches and actions of John Paul II in Togo, Morocco, and the Indies cause a righteous indignation to rise up in our heart. What do the Saints, the holy men and women of the Old and New Testaments make of this? What would the Holy Inquisition do if it were still in existence?
He who now sits upon the Throne of Peter mocks publicly the first article of the Creed and the first Commandment of the Decalogue.
The scandal given to Catholic souls cannot be measured. The Church is shaken to its very foundations. If faith in the Church, the only ark of salvation, disappears, then the Church herself disappears.
Is John Paul II to continue ruining the Church, in particular at Assisi, with the planned procession of religions in the streets of the town of St. Francis and the sharing out of religions in the chapels of the basilica with a view to practicing their worship in favor of peace as conceived by the United Nations?
It is what Cardinal Etchegaray, in charge of this abominable congress, has announced.
Is it conceivable that no authoritative voice has been raised in the Church to condemn these public sins? Where are the Machabees?
Eminence, for the honor of the one true God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, make a public protest, come to the help of the still faithful bishops, priests and Catholics.
Eminence, if I took the step of contacting you it is because I do not doubt your sentiments in this matter.
I am also addressing this appeal to those Cardinals named below so that eventually you may be able to work together.
May the Holy Ghost come to your aid, and please accept, Eminence, my devoted and fraternal greetings in Christ and Mary.
Archbishop Lefebvre, Emeritus Bishop-Archbishop of Tulle
Econe, August 27, 1986
It is a truism that men come to accept anything if they see it often enough; hence it is good to recall the theological criteria by which to judge this kind of undertaking. The review <i>SISISIVONO</i> published an excellent study in 1986 which is reprinted here because of its timeliness.

What Should We Make of Assisi?

It has been said, with undoubtedly unintended exactness, that the "prayer meeting" at Assisi is a "personal initiative" of Pope John Paul II. In so far as it is only a "personal" initiative, it does not engage his mandate as "pastor and teacher of all Christians" (Vatican I). By conforming itself to the political theme set by the United Nations, which proclaimed the year 1986 an "international year of peace," neither does it concern doctrine.

At Assisi, next October 27, not only will the Catholics gather at Assisi, but also "the representatives of the world's other religions" will join them in an assembly for peace.¹ Those whom Pope John Paul II has called "the representatives of the other religions" the Church has always more appropriately called infidels. "Broadly speaking, infidels are those who do not possess the true faith; in the strict sense infidels are the unbaptized. They are divided into monotheists (Jews and Moslems), polytheists (Hindus, Buddhists, etc.), and atheists."² What Pope John Paul II has called the "other" religions, the Church has more properly called the false religions. A false religion is any non-Christian religion "in so far as it is not the religion that God revealed and wants to see practiced. Moreover, every non-Catholic Christian sect is false in so far as it neither accepts nor faithfully practices the entire content of Revelation."³ This having been said, in light of the Catholic Faith, the prayer meeting of religions at Assisi can be considered tantamount to: *1)* an insult to God; *2)* a denial of the universal necessity of Redemption; *3)* a lack of justice and charity towards the infidels; *4)* a danger and a scandal to Catholics; and *5)* a betrayal of the Church's and Peter's mission.

J) An Insult to God

All prayer, including petition, is an act of worship.⁴ As such, it must be addressed to Whom it is due, and in the right way. To whom it is due: The one true God, Creator and Lord of all men, the one to whom the Lord Jesus Christ has brought them back (1 Jn. 5:20) by confirming the first commandment of the Law. "I am the Lord thy God ...Thou shalt not have strange gods before meThou shalt not adore them, nor serve them..." (Ex. 20:2-5).⁵In the right way: Thus, it must be prayer that corresponds to the fullness of Revelation without admixture of error: "But the hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore him" Jn. 4:23).

Prayer which is addressed to false gods or inspired by religious opinions differing in whole or in part from divine Revelation, is not an act of worship, but of superstition. It does not honor God; it offends Him. At least, objectively, it is a sin against the first commandment.⁶ To whom are the persons to gather at Assisi going to pray, and in what way? Invited in their capacity as "representatives of the other religions," "everyone will pray in his own way and customary style." This was explained by Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions.⁷ This was confirmed last June 27 by Cardinal Etchegaray at a press conference published by *Documentation Catholique* of September 7-21, 1986, under the rubric "Acts of the Holy See": "It involves respecting each one's prayer, and allowing everyone to express himself in the fullness of his faith, of his belief."

On October 27 at Assisi, superstition will be widely practiced in its most serious forms, from the "false worship" of Jews who, during the era of grace, pretend to honor God by denying His Christ,⁸ to the idolatry of Hindus and Buddhists who offer a cult to creatures instead of to God.⁹

The Catholic hierarchy's apparent approbation of this is especially insulting to God, for it supposes and allows it to be supposed that He looks with equal complacency upon acts of true worship and acts of superstition, upon manifestations of faith and manifestations of incredulity, upon the true religion and upon the false religions; in short, upon truth and upon error.

2) Denial of the Universal Necessity of Redemption

There is but one Mediator between God and men: the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and true man (1 Tim. 2:5). By nature, men are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3); by Him, they have been reconciled with the Father (Col. 1:20), and it is only by faith in Him that they can have the boldness to approach God with entire confidence (Eph. 3:12). To Him was given all power in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18), and at His name every knee must bend, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Phil. 2:10,11). No one goes to the Father save by Him (Jn. 14:6), and there is no other name under heaven given to man by which he must be saved (Acts 4:12). He is the Light that enlightens every man who comes into the world (Jn.1:9), and whoever does not follow Him wanders in darkness (Jn. 8:12). Who is not with Him is against Him (Mt. 13:30), and who does not honor Him also dishonors His Father who sent Him (as the Jews do) (Jn. 5:23). To Him has the Father given the judgment of men, but he who refuses belief has already been judged, because he has not believed in the name of the Only Son of God (Jn. 3:18), nor in the Father who sent Him (Jn. 17:3). He is, moreover, the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6),¹¹ for divisions, conflicts, and wars are the bitter fruit of sin from which man cannot free himself by his own virtue, but only in virtue of the Redeemer's blood.

What place will the Lord Jesus Christ have at Assisi in the prayer of the "representatives of the other religions"? None, for to them He remains either unknown, or a stumbling block, or a sign of contradiction. The invitation that was addressed to them to pray for peace in the world supposes, and inevitably allows it to be supposed, that there are people - the Christians - who must approach God by the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ and in His name, and others - the rest of the human race - who can approach God directly and in their own name, without regard to the Mediator; that there are some men who must bend the knee before the Lord Jesus Christ, and some who are exempt; some men who must seek peace in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, and others who can obtain peace outside His reign and even in opposing it.

This is the idea that comes from the declarations of the two cardinals quoted above: "While for us Christians Christ is our peace, for all believers peace is a gift of God" ¹²; "for Christians, prayer goes through Christ."¹³

The "prayer meeting" of Assisi, then, is the public negation of the universal necessity of Redemption.

3) A Lack of Justice and Charity Towards the Infidels

"Jesus Christ is not optional," said Cardinal Pie. There are not some men who are justified by faith in Him, and others who are justified without regard to Him: Every man is either saved by Christ or is lost without Him. Nor are there any purely natural ends for which a man can opt instead of his unique supernatural end. If, gone astray in sin, he finds himself out of Christ, the unique Way (Jn. 4:6) by which to attain the end for which he was created, all that is left him is everlasting ruin.

Real faith, and not mere "good faith," is the subjective condition for salvation for everyone, even for the pagans. Since it is a necessity of means, "if it is lacking (even involuntarily) it is absolutely impossible to effect eternal salvation."¹⁴ Voluntary infidelity, St. Thomas explains, is a fault and involuntary infidelity is a punishment. In fact, the infidels who are not lost because of the sin of incredulity, that is, by the sin of not having believed in Christ about whom they never knew anything, are lost by their other sins, the remission of which cannot be given to anyone without the true faith."¹⁵

Nothing, then, is more important for man than to accept the Redeemer and union with the Mediator: it is a matter of eternal death or life. This is what the infidels have a right to hear announced by the Catholic Church, in conformity to the divine command.¹⁶ And this is what the Catholic Church has always announced to the infidels by praying, not with them, but for them.

What will happen at Assisi? They certainly won't pray for the infidels, thus presuming implicitly and publicly that they no longer need the true faith. Instead of that, they will pray in union with them, or rather, according to the rabbinical subtlety of Radio Vatican, they will pray near them, presuming thus implicitly and publicly that prayer dictated by error is received by God as much as prayer made "in spirit and in truth." "It involves respecting each one's prayer," Cardinal Etchegaray explained in his brief declaration. That means that the infidels who will gather at Assisi, who, let us be clear, are not "savages brought up in the forest" who have "never known anything about the faith," as the theologians hypothesize when discussing the problem of the salvation of infidels,¹⁷ will be "respectfully" left "in the darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk. 1:79).

Authorized to pray in their distinctive costumes as "representatives of the other religions" and in conformity with their erroneous religious beliefs, they are even encouraged to persevere in sins, at least material, against the faith: infidelity, heresy, etc.... Invited to pray for peace in the world, defined as a "fundamental" and "supreme" good,¹⁸ they are turned away from the eternal goods towards a temporal good, towards a secondary natural end, as if they didn't need to procure their supernatural last end, which really is fundamental and supreme: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). For all these reasons, the "prayer meeting" of Assisi is, at least viewed from the outside, a lack of justice and charity towards the infidels.

4) A Danger and a Scandal to Catholics

True faith is indispensable for salvation. Catholics are thus obliged to avoid every proximate danger to their faith. Among the exterior dangers is contact with infidels when it is not the result of genuine necessity. This contact is illicit in virtue of divine and natural law even without considering ecclesiastical law, and even in the case where ecclesiastical law does not prohibit it, for example in social relations: *Haereticum hominem devita* (Avoid the heretic) (Tit. 3:10).

Moreover, out of maternal concern, the Church has always forbidden not only what might be a danger to the faith but also an occasion of scandal.¹⁹ As for the false religions, the Church has always refused them the right to public worship. She has tolerated it when it was necessary, but tolerance always means "in relation to an evil to be allowed for a proportionate reason."²⁰ In any case, she has always avoided and forbidden any apparent approval of non-Catholic rites.

What is going to happen at Assisi? Catholics and infidels "will gather to pray" (even though it will not be "to pray together"....). That simply means that they will pray together at Assisi, first simultaneously in their own residences, and then, by turns when united at the closing ceremony before the basilica of St. Francis. And this is not being done in order to protect the faith of Catholics or to at least avoid scandalizing them. Rather, it is to allow all to pray "according to their own manner and style," and to "respect each one's prayer" and to "allow everyone to express himself in the fullness of his faith, of his belief."²¹ All this constitutes at least an exterior approbation of: *1)* false religions, to which the Church as always denied any right; *2)* religious subjectivism, which she has always condemned under the names of indifferentism or latitudinarianism, and which "seeks to justify itself under the pretended claims of liberty, failing to recognize the rights of objective truth which are made manifest either by the lights of reason or by Revelation."²²

Religious indifferentism, which is "one of the most deleterious heresies" and which "places all religions on an equal footing," inevitably leads one to consider the truth of religious belief as merely a matter of utility for a well-regulated life "One ends by considering religion as an entirely individual thing which can be adapted to the dispositions of each one, letting everyone form his own personal religion, and by concluding that all the religions are good even though they contradict each other."²³ But with this point of view we are outside the Catholic act of faith, and have reached something ...like an act of incredulity towards divine Revelation.

Revelation is a reality, a fact, a truth accredited by God by sure signs, because error in this domain would have had disastrous consequences for men.²⁴ But in the presence of an undeniable fact or of an evident truth, one cannot be tolerant to the point of approving the attitude of those who consider them to be non-existent or false. That would suppose that we do not really believe or are not fully convinced of the truth of our position, or that we are (or deem ourselves to be) dealing with a matter that is absolutely banal or indifferent, or that we would consider truth and error to be purely relative positions.²⁵

And since the "prayer meeting" is characterized by all of that, it is an occasion of scandal for Catholics and of grave danger to their faith. Because of ecumenism, they find themselves united to the infidels, but in their "common ruin."²⁶

5) Betrayal of the Mission Confided to Peter and to the Church

The Church's mission is to announce to all nations that *1)* there is one true God, who revealed Himself for the benefit of all men in our Lord Jesus Christ; *2)* that there is only one true religion, the only one by which God wishes to be honored, because He is Truth, and everything in the false religions which goes against the truth is repugnant to Him: doctrinal errors, immoral laws, unseemly rites; *3)* that there is only one Mediator between God and men, by whom men can hope to be saved, because all are sinners and remain in their sin if they are deprived of the Blood of Christ; *4)* that there is one true Church, the perpetual guardian of this Blood, and that "it is necessary to believe that no one can be saved outside the apostolic Roman Church, which is the unique ark of salvation, and those who do not enter it will perish in the deluge"²⁷; moreover, among their moral dispositions must be the desire, explicit or implicit, to fully accomplish the will of God, if their ignorance is truly invincible.²⁸

The Church's proper mission is to announce all this: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:16).

So that the Church could accomplish with assurance this mission throughout the centuries, our Lord Jesus Christ conferred on St. Peter and his successors the mission of visibly representing Him (Mt. 16, 17-19; Jn. 21:15-17)

The Vicar of Jesus Christ is not charged with establishing a new doctrine with the help of new revelations, nor of creating a new order of things, nor of instituting new sacraments: such is not his function. He represents Jesus Christ at the head of His Church, whose constitution has been finalized. This essential constitution, that is to say, the creation of the Church, was Jesus Christ's proper task which He, Himself, had to conclude, and of which He said to the Father: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 17:4). Nothing more needs to be added; it only remains to maintain this creation, to assure the Church's work and preside over the functioning of its organs. Two things are necessary for this: govern it, and perpetuate the teaching of the truth. Vatican Council I reduced to these two points the supreme function of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Peter represents Jesus Christ under these two aspects.²⁹

There is no power in the Church like Peter's, but it is power as vicar, and as such, is no wise absolute, but limited by the divine right of Him whom he represents. "The Lord confided to Peter, not Peter's sheep, but His own in order to pasture them, not in his own interest, but God's."³⁰ It is not within Peter's power, therefore, to promote initiatives in disaccord with the mission of the Church and of the Roman Pontiff, as clearly is the "prayer meeting" of Assisi. The Vicar of Him who said: "Begone, Satan, for it is written, 'The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and him only shalt thou serve'" (Mt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13), cannot invite "the representatives" of the false religions to pray to their false gods in places consecrated to the faith in the true God. The Successor of him who obtained the primacy by his act of faith when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16; cf. Jn. 6:69-70), cannot authorize anyone to treat Jesus Christ as irrelevant. The Successor of him who received the commission to confirm his brethren in the faith (Lk. 22:32), has no right to be a stumbling block for their faith.³¹

1. Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jan. 26-27, 1986.

2. Roberti-Palazzini, *Dizionario di teologia morale*, p.813.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q.83.

5. Mt. 4:3-10; Jn. 17:3; Tim. 2:5. See also on this topic Pietro Cardinal Palazzini, *Vita a virtu cristiane*, p.52, and Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione* (Rome-Paris: 1918), vol. 1, p.136.

6. Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, QQ 92-96.

7. See *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 27-28, 1986, p.4.

8. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q92, Art.2, ad 3, and I II, Q10, Art. 11

9. Cf. Acts 17:16.

10. Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q94, Art. 1.

11. Cf. Eph. 2:14 and Mich. 5:5.

12. Cardinal Willebrands in *L'Osservatore Romano* cited above.

13. Cardinal Etchegaray, cited above in *Documentation Catholique*.

14. *Dizionario di teologia morale*, p.66.

15. See Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 20:31; Heb. 11:6; Council of Trent in Denzinger 799 and 801; Vatican II, Dz. 1793. Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 11, Art. 1.

16. Mk. 6:16; Mt. 28:19-20.

17. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 14, 11.

18. John Paul II and Cardinal Willebrands in *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 7-8, and Jan. 27-28, 1986, respectively.

19. See the *1917 Code of Canon Law*, canons 1258 and 2316; and *Summa Theologica*,II-II, Q. 10, Art. 9-11.

20. *Dizionario di teologia morale*, p.1702.

21. See the declarations of Cardinals Willebrands and Etchegaray cited above.

22. *Dizionario di teologia morale*, p.805.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Pope Leo XIII, encyclical letter *Libertas*, 1888.

25. *Dizionario di teologia morale*, p.1703.

26. Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 1950.

27. Pope Pius IX, Dz.1647.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Dom Adrien Gréa, *De l'Eglise et de sa divine constitution*; cf. Vatican I, constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, Ch. 4

30. St. Augustine, Sermon 285, No.3.