

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 42 *After 50 Years: The Living Spirit of Vatican II*

Article 21

9-1-2012

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Recommended Citation

Domas, Peter (2012) "The Future of the Church Lies with Following the Example Set by the Apostles," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 42, Article 21.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol42/iss1/21>

The Future of the Church Lies with Following the Example Set by the Apostles

By Peter Domas

This year the Roman Catholic Church is marking the fiftieth anniversary since the beginning of Vatican II, and with the recent revisions to the mass translation, there is a renewed emphasis on how the church should evolve in response to the ever changing modern society. A significant number of Catholics – clergy and laity alike – are calling for a “modernization” of the church’s teachings to make itself more attractive to a society that sees no problem with abortion, contraception, premarital and homosexual relations, and married or women priests. In doing so, proponents of these changes say we should disregard many of the teachings that the church has held for two thousand years because we, as an enlightened society, now know better.

Meanwhile there have been times in the church’s history in which individuals claiming to act on behalf of the church have ignored Jesus’ most basic commandment that we must love our neighbors as ourselves. This should not serve as justification for us to overlook the core teachings handed down to the church by the apostles. Rather, we should look to early history of the



church to better understand how the church can thrive in today’s society.

For the first three-hundred years of the church’s history, society opposed the teachings of Jesus. However, Jesus’ teachings of love, compassion, respect, and salvation spread from just a handful of supporters to millions of people throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. In the face of such fierce opposition, how did the church thrive then, but is shrinking in both Europe and North America now?

We might ask, if the early disciples of Christ had chosen to incorporate into their faith many of the practices of their society, would there be a Christian faith today? Why would someone believe in a religion that

would disregard its core principles to become accepted? All but one of the apostles, were martyred rather than recant their faith. This example of leadership combined with the fire of the Holy Spirit in their teachings inspired millions to change their ways.

Our modern society today is not that different from the cities of Rome two thousand years ago. However, instead of standing up for principled beliefs and helping people both inside and outside the church overcome their shortcomings and live more fulfilling lives, the pressure in recent years is to say that every act of selfishness is okay. While this “acceptance of everything” culture may make us feel good for the moment because we receive praise from our peers, it is causing incalculable agony demonstrated by the trends with divorce, poverty rates among single parent households, and substance abuse brought about by depression.

As Jesuit universities, we are already doing much to fulfill the mission of Christ. For example, the St. Thomas More Society at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law provides numerous volunteers, who throughout the winter arrive at 6:30 am at the church next to the law school to help provide meals to some of Detroit’s homeless. Furthermore, UDM School of Law provides countless hours of free legal services to the disadvantaged through our legal clinics, and programs like this are present at Jesuit universities all across the country. However Pope Benedict XVI, building upon the work of Blessed Pope John Paul II, has called for a new evangelization, one not only focused upon bringing Christ to those outside the Church, but to strengthen the beliefs and understandings of those within the Church as well. Jesuit universities are in the unique position by being both respected institutes of higher education in a secular society and being built upon a tradition of evangelization. Therefore, the Jesuits and the universities they founded, who brought Christ to the New World, must now bring the New World back to Christ. ■

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