

A Catholic Manifesto

By Greg Witherow

Prelude: Judgment begins with the household of God;¹ the World's turn will come later. Have you ever noticed that Christ never railed against the sins of the Roman Empire during his earthly ministry? And it was not because evil practices were in short supply. Slavery, government instituted idolatry, temple prostitution, homosexuality, abortion, neglect of the poor and the sick, a culture of brutality and gladiator fights were the norm. Yet Christ remained silent about these Roman atrocities. Instead he chose to confront the sins of the Church, in his day the Lost Sheep of Israel. Why? It is because the transformation of society will come about by means of the Great Commission, which he gave to the Church.² Yet a compromised Church veils the gospel. Therefore Christ purifies his bride.³

With the humble, Christ is patient. Consider the woman at the well. At the same time with a disciple's weakness, he is direct. Consider Peter being called "a tool of Satan."⁴ With unrepentant Shepherds, Christ seethes hot. He called the Pharisees liars, murderers, sons of Satan, and children of hell, for example.⁵ On one occasion, he kicked over tables and employed a whip, not worrying that his actions might offend.⁶ His actions, in fact, brought to mind for his disciples the psalmist's words: "Zeal for thy house will consume me."⁷ It was sin within his Father's house that most enraged him.

Christ calls us, too, to be zealous for our Father's house. Today, the laity is mandated to speak prophetically and hold the hierarchy to account. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

904: Christ fulfills his prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy but also by the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the sense of the faith [sensus fidei] and the grace of the word. To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer.

907: In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they possess, [lay people] have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard to the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors and with the consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons.

¹ 1 Peter 4:17

² Matthew 28:16-20

³ There are some who, distorting the Church's social justice teachings, seek societal reform through a mere legal process and appeals to civil rights. In truth, though, genuine social reform cannot come through the law, but only through the gospel. Genuine social reform, therefore, must start from within the Church. Social reform minus the gospel, on the other hand, reduces the Church to a political party or social agency. The Church's work is supernatural.

⁴ Matthew 16:23

⁵ See Matthew chapter 23 in its entirety

⁶ Luke 11:45 and Matthew 15:12-14

⁷ John 2:17; Psalm 69:9

In the book of Acts we are told the Bereans were “more noble” because they measured the teaching of Paul “to see if these things were so.”⁸ Likewise Paul commands the laity to “hold to the traditions which you were taught” and “to destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and taking every thought captive to obey Christ.”⁹ Therefore, armed with apostolic exhortations, daring to be bold, refraining from bitterness, speaking the truth in charity, for the love of Mother Church and the salvation of souls, the following resolutions are set forth.

Resolution 1: Concerning the shortage of priests in America, young men do not reject the priesthood because it is too demanding. They reject it because it is so often presented in feminine terms and seen as irrelevant. But Saint Paul referred to priests as soldiers. And as a priest he beat his body into submission, saved souls from hell, ran the race to win, spoke of destroying arguments, taking every thought captive, crushing Satan, fighting a spiritual warfare, being willing to die, and living for Christ. *This is the priesthood!*

Therefore the following is resolved. Each diocese must re-evaluate their vocations program and make use of all the best practices available today. The appeal for priests must be presented as a “call to arms” for restoring mankind, forgiving sins, advancing the kingdom of Christ, defeating the gates of hell, employing sacerdotal medicines with a martyr’s resolve and a love for Christ.¹⁰ God has not ceased calling men to this service. We must find them. Unsuccessful vocations directors must be removed, and better skilled men put in place. The work must be done with urgency, as though the future of the Church depended on it. *Because the priesthood is non-negotiable this resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 2: Our society today is bombarded with confused messages concerning human sexuality, such as the false claims of the “gay rights” movement which seeks to redefine marriage and undermine long-standing social mores.¹¹ In the interest of reforming and strengthening the priesthood, then, and through it the whole Body of Christ, all self-professed homosexual men must be made to resign from the office of bishop, priest and deacon.¹² Future priestly and diaconate candidates must be examined for the purpose of preventing self-described homosexual men from entering the priesthood; and all seminarians in this state must withdraw from seminary. All men in the seminary should be taught and challenged to live virtuously in a manly way. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 3: No Catholic parish should be permitted to sponsor or participate in “gay pride” events.¹¹ Any bishop, priest or deacon who participates in such events must either repent or resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

⁸ Acts 17:10-12

⁹ 2 Corinthians 10:5

¹⁰ The United States Marines make their quotas. When war comes, enlistments spike. This is due to the fact that men crave a challenge. *Call young men to be soldiers for Christ and watch the ranks of the priesthood swell!*

¹¹ The Catechism (CCC) calls us to regard those who struggle with same-sex attraction “with respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (par. 2358). At the same time it forbids one from engaging in homosexual acts, which are “acts of grave depravity,” “intrinsically disordered” and can be approved of “under no conditions” (par. 2357).

¹² Calling for resignations may sound harsh but it has precedence. Cardinal Schonborn of Austria, in dealing with 300 dissident priests, has demanded they once again conform to Church teaching or else to “travel the way no more with the Roman Catholic Church. I believe and hope, however, that this extreme case does not occur here” (“Dissident priests defy Church discipline,” The Catholic World Report, October 2011).

Resolution 4: All bishops, priests and deacons must acknowledge that “there is salvation in no one else [other than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”¹³ Any bishop, priest or deacon who cannot acknowledge this fact should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 5: All bishops, priests and deacons must acknowledge that all mankind is called to repent of their sins, join themselves to the one true Catholic Church, and obey all of her teachings which are the teachings of Jesus Christ. Forget not The Great Commission. This call for conversion extends to all people in every nations and religious faith, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other religions, with no exceptions. Indifferentism is to be rejected.¹⁴ Any bishop, priest or deacon who cannot acknowledge this statement of faith should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 6: In 1920 Pope Benedict XV authored the encyclical Spiritus Paraclitus, in which he wrote, “[the chair of Saint Peter] also teaches that divine inspiration extends to every part of the Bible without the slightest exception, and that no error can occur in the inspired text. It would be wholly impious to limit inspiration to only certain of Scripture or to concede that the sacred authors themselves could have erred”. The inspiration and infallibility of Sacred Scripture is a firmly established Catholic dogma. Nor is inspiration limited only to certain parts of Scripture.¹⁵ Any bishop, priest or deacon who cannot acknowledge the inspiration and infallibility of all Scripture should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 7: Adam and Eve were real people; and the human race descended from them and inherited original sin. This doctrine is stated clearly in paragraph 390 of the Catechism and its supporting footnotes.¹⁶ Despite this fact, Catholic theologians, including bishops, priests, deacons and numerous Catholic institutions teach the opposite.

¹³ CCC 432 and Acts 4:12

¹⁴ Indifferentism was summarily rejected by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Dominus Iesus (2000). Concerning The Great Commission, CCC 849 states: “The missionary mandate. Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be the universal sacrament of salvation, the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the gospel to all men: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age.’”

¹⁵ Paragraph 105 of the CCC states, “[Holy Mother Church] accepts as canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed down as such to the Church herself.” The papal encyclical Divino Afflate Spiritu (1943) rejects the assertion of those who “ventured to restrict the truth of sacred scripture solely to matters of faith and morals.” Likewise Providentissimus Deus (1893) states, “it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow the inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture or to admit the sacred writer has erred.” To deny these truths is an act of defiance that cannot be tolerated.

¹⁶ Paragraph 390 of the CCC states, “The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents.” CCC 849 states the following: “The missionary mandate. Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be the universal sacrament of salvation, the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the gospel to all men: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age.’”

Fictionalizing Adam and Eve undermines nine New Testament passages upon which doctrinal points are founded. Consider Luke's lineage of Christ to Adam, for example. One reason for this lineage is to prove that Christ was an historical figure and truly a man. If Adam and Eve are mythical characters, then Christ's lineage too is mythical. Other doctrines are similarly compromised if based on fictional characters.

Therefore the following is resolved. Any bishop, priest or deacon who cannot acknowledge that Adam and Eve were real people of history and that all mankind descended from them should resign from his office. Additionally, all bishops must put a stop to the promotion of polygenism in the schools under their care. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 8: The miracles recorded in both the Old and New Testament are historical facts. In the Old Testament the dead were raised, the sick were healed, and the waters parted. And in the New Testament Christ raised the dead, healed the sick, fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish and on the third day physically rose from the grave. To reject the miracles of Christ is to reject his divinity,¹⁷ the Eucharist,¹⁸ and reasons to believe what Christ said was true.¹⁹ To reject the miracles of Christ means our faith is in vain, we are still in our sins and we are to be the most pitied of all people.²⁰ It is to reject Christianity.²¹ Any bishop, priest or deacon who cannot acknowledge these facts should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 9: There are 244 Catholic universities in the United States today. Yet most of these institutions are "Catholic" in name only, secular schools in sheep's clothing. Most Catholic high schools are in the same condition. As a result, thousands of Catholic young people attending these institutions are losing their faith.

¹⁶ Paragraph 390 of the CCC states, "The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents."

This paragraph in the Catechism is footnoted with three sources. The first source is a text from the Council of Trent, Canon 3 [DS 1513] which states, "Original sin is transmitted by propagation and not by imitation". In other words, each person inherits original sin from a common biological parent (Adam).

The second source is Pope Pius XII's *Humani Generis* (1950), which states, "When there is a question of another conjectural opinion, namely, of polygenism so-called, then the sons of the Church in no way enjoy such freedom. For the faithful in Christ cannot accept this view, which holds that either after Adam there existed men on this earth, who did not receive their origin by natural generation from him, the first parent of all; or that Adam signifies some kind of multitude of first parents; for it is by no means apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with what the sources of revealed truth and the acts of the Magisterium of the Church teaches about original sin, which proceeds from a sin truly committed by one Adam, and which is transmitted to all by generation, and exists in each one as his own" (3897).

The third source is from a document produced by Pope Paul VI (AAS 58, 1966). Here the Pontiff says, among other things, "The theory of evolution does not seem acceptable" (p. 654, as sourced in the Catechism). This statement goes beyond the pale of Resolution 7 above, which simply reaffirms Adam existed. But it is noteworthy in that it is a post-Vatican II document that affirms Adam's existence. Its quotation in the Catechism gives it further weight.

¹⁷ CCC 515, 547

¹⁸ CCC 1335

¹⁹ CCC 156

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

²¹ If one denies miracles, one cannot recite the Nicene Creed as it lists miracles in the text (Virgin Birth and Resurrection).

In 1967, a formal breach between Catholic universities and the Magisterium took place with the Land O'Lakes Statement. Signed by many educators of Catholic higher education, including presidents of Notre Dame, Boston College, Georgetown University and others, the document was a declaration of independence from Catholic teaching. In their silence the bishops condoned the statement. Hence today, as documented by the Cardinal Newman Society, there are fewer than twenty universities in America that are authentically Catholic.

The bishops of the Church are armed with Canon law to act. Canon law 810 states:

“It is the responsibility of the authority who is competent in accord with the statutes to provide for the appointment of teachers to Catholic universities who besides their scientific and pedagogical suitability are also outstanding in their integrity of doctrine and probity of life; when those requisite qualities are lacking they are to be removed from their positions in accord with the procedure set forth in the statutes.

“The conference of bishops and the diocesan bishops concerned have the duty and the right of being vigilant that in these universities the principles of Catholic doctrine are faithfully observed.”

Canon 812 states:

“It is necessary that those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority.”

Additionally, in 2009 President Obama gave the commencement address to the graduating class at Notre Dame and was awarded an honorary degree, despite the fact that he has firmly aligned himself with the culture of death. Only 80 out of a total of 456 active and retired American bishops spoke out against this outrage.²² By their silence, the great majority of bishops affirmed Notre Dame's actions. In light of the Notre Dame scandal and general deplorable state of Catholic higher education, the following is resolved.

Therefore any Catholic university or high school not conforming to Church dogma must be de-certified and prohibited from using the name Catholic by the presiding bishop. Any bishop who will not act on this resolution should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Resolution 10: A significant number of Catholics do not partake of the Eucharist because their marital state does not permit it. And yet pro-abortion Catholic politicians continue to freely partake of the Sacrament. Consider the depth of this scandal. The elites who aid and abet in mass murder maintain their full sacramental privileges while a lay person involved (or victimized) in a broken marriage is excluded.

²² The total number of bishops comes from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops web site and as of January 1, 2012.

Public scandals require public remedies. The Catechism states, “Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense.”²³ Additionally canon law 915 states, “[Those] who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion.”

Therefore the following is resolved. All Catholic politicians who persist in publicly defending and supporting through votes the mass murder of unborn babies are not to be admitted to Holy Communion. Any bishop, priest or deacon of any diocese who will not act on this resolution should resign from his office. *This resolution is non-negotiable.*

Conclusion: This Manifesto is not meant to be another “Wittenberg,”²⁴ a flashpoint for schism and greater division. Instead it is meant to give a voice to the great number of laity who are deeply scandalized and wounded by the issues described above. It is meant to press our hierarchy for greater accountability and bold action on these matters.²⁵ Definitive action will make us credible as we go forth with The Great Commission. After all if we Catholics cannot live up to our own standards, why should we expect others to do so? Of course genuine renewal in the Church will require far more than the points outlined here. While this Manifesto is intended mainly for the hierarchy, the laity has its own obligations to be Spirit-filled and authentic. But it is our belief that the fortification of the hierarchy will necessarily lead to a strengthening of the laity. The resolutions presented in this manifesto are neither radical nor unknown. There are no innovations presented here, just age old truths. Each resolution is founded upon the teachings of the Catechism, canon law and other Church documents.

It can no longer be denied that the Catholic Church in America is hemorrhaging, losing tens of thousands of souls, including most of her young people. This is a plain and undeniable fact. Our course must change; otherwise in twenty years American Catholicism will resemble European Catholicism (minus the beautiful churches). *We must not say it cannot happen!* In the spirit of Saint John the Baptist, bold measures, courage, resolve, prayer and repentance are needed to cleanse the Church. Minus such action, the martyrdom of faithful Catholics in the face of persecution may be our only hope. And so, in all humility, charity and for the love of Mother Church, we call on our Shepherds to hold a Yeah or Nay vote on the resolutions presented here. Those placed in their care await a reply.

²³ CCC 2272

²⁴ Luther nailed his ninety five theses on the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517, sparking the Reformation.

²⁵ Our forefathers often demonstrated boldness in maintaining the faith, being willing at times literally to fight for the truth. Describing the atmosphere surrounding the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), which addressed the Nestorian controversy and debated whether Mary should be called Theotokos (“Mother of God”), Phillip Schaff, a Lutheran historian, writes, “The very war upon the favorite shibboleth of orthodoxy [Theotokos] provoked bitterest opposition of the people and of the monks, whose sympathies [were for the title Theotokos]. They insulted [Nestorius, who opposed the title,] in the pulpit and insulted him in the street” (History of the Christian Church, p. 720). There was an “encouragement of, if not an appeal to, the violence of the populace [against the Nestorians]” (n. p. 723). Nestorius had to travel to Ephesus “with an armed escort, as if he was going into battle” (p. 723). This Manifesto does not call for rioting, but does claim precedence for a zealous laity demanding orthodoxy from the bishops. With the Theotokos controversy, the zeal of the laity provided the bishops “greater clarity of thought.”