Assignment: Week 8 essay

Prompt:

Pope Francis refers to the Church as a field hospital in the battleground.

In light of this week’s lesson what does this mean and how is it practically applied in regard to a particular serious sin?

The Church as a Field Hospital

The Church can be described as a field hospital in the battleground. In light of this week’s lesson, this means that the Church is meant to foster and nurture the formation of our conscience. This includes the “convincing concerning sin”, where the Church (especially, through the Holy Spirit) declares Christ crucified (and risen), and “demonstrate[es] . . . the evil of sin, of every sin, in relation to the Cross of Christ.” Such “convincing concerning sin” is needed because “Man cannot decide by himself what is good and what is evil – cannot ‘know good and evil, like God’”, and therefore this convincing concerning sin is necessary for the development of our conscience and our ability to identify and reject evil and choose the good.

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1 cf. Antonio Spadaro, “A big heart open to God: An interview with Pope Francis”, America (September 30, 2013), para. 51, accessed August 19, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis (quoting Pope Francis as stating: “the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.”)


3 John Paul II, Dominum et Vivificantem, §30–31, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 18, 1986), accessed August 17, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21–23 (“God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”) (emphasis added); 1 Corinthians 2:1–2 (“When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”).

4 John Paul II, Dominum et Vivificantem, §32.

5 John Paul II, Dominum et Vivificantem, §36.

This “convincing concerning sin” leads to the healing of the defects in our conscience and the growth of our conscience, thus leading to spiritual health and joy. Furthermore, due to our fallen state and through the influence of Satan, “Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of good.”

The Church corrects and heals this sickness of misunderstanding through her teaching and nurturing of souls.

The Church as ‘a field hospital on the battlefield’ also means the proclamation of God’s mercy and the administration of God’s mercy by the Church. The Church proclaims God’s mercy by announcing God’s merciful love, explaining God’s mercy, and offering God’s mercy to the world. The proclamation of mercy includes the Church embracing the repentant sinner, expressing joy at his return, and reaching out to those who reject God’s mercy. The Church is to call everyone to conversion, and to remind us that although God rejects sin, God “never rejected the sinner.”

The Church administers mercy especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where God’s healing mercy and peace is directly poured out from God, through the Church, onto and into the sinner. The administration of God’s mercy by the Church also includes the granting of indulgences. When we receive an indulgence, we are blessed with the favor of “experience[ing] the holiness of the Church” and granted the privilege of partaking in and enjoying the bountiful “fruits of Christ’s redemption.”

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7 John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §38.
10 Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, §17.
11 Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, §19; This also fits with the idea that God does not send anyone to Hell, rather individuals send themselves to Hell in their choice to reject God. God simply respects their free will honors their choice. “Sin” is the rejection of God, and “Hell” is the permanent separation from God.
The Church’s proclamation and administration of God’s mercy is meant to bring about the healing of wounds, the repair and rejuvenation of the conscience, and the formation of an integrated, whole, healthy conscience in conformity and communion with God. With regard to mercy, “God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. . . . anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end . . . . God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it”. Likewise, the healing brought about through the proclamation and administration of God’s mercy by the Church is growth, and the growth should continue beyond the healing, and should lead one’s conscience (and the person as a whole) to eventually being fully conformed to Christ.

The Church as a field hospital in a battlefield (especially, through the Church’s proclamation and administration of mercy) is practically applied in the mercy and reconciliation extended to those who have been involved in “sins reserved to the Holy See.” Pope Francis has allowed the canonical penalties associated with these sins to be lifted by “Missionaries of Mercy”, thus making it easier for penitents to obtain absolution for these “reserved” sins. Such serious and grave sins “include desecration of the blessed sacrament; physical violence against the Holy Father; a priest’s direct violation of the secrecy of the confessional; a priest’s attempt to grant sacramental absolution to his partner in sexual sin and a bishop’s ordaining another bishop without an express mandate from the Holy Father.” In addition, Pope Francis has also expanded opportunities for reconciliation for those involved in abortion by granting to “all

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15 Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, §21.
16 Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, §18.
priests . . . the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion.”

Prior to this universal granting to all priests the faculty to absolve the sin of abortion, the faculty had previously been reserved to the bishops and those to whom the bishops appointed. By expanding the opportunities for reconciliation for these grave sins, the Church is not only administering mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also acting as the herald of God’s loving mercy. Through these extraordinary measures, the Church is reaching out and offering God’s mercy to mankind, especially to those who have committed these grave sins.

**Conclusion**

The Church ministers as ‘a field hospital in a battleground’ through forming and nurturing our consciences, thereby healing our defects and promoting our spiritual health. This is done especially through ‘convincing concerning sin,’ her teachings, and her sacraments. The Church also ministers as ‘a field hospital in a battleground’ through its proclamation of and administration of God’s loving mercy. The Church carries this out especially through her announcement of and teaching about God’s mercy. Furthermore, the Church also carries out her mission of mercy through the administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the granting of indulgences, and through her reaching out to those who have committed grave sins (e.g., abortion) and offering loving absolution and reconciliation.

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20 Gagliarducci, “Pope Francis: The outcomes of Misericordia et Misera”, para. 4; Cooper, “A penitent’s guide to ‘Reserved Sins’”, para. 12.
References


