

“MISSING THE SIGNALS”: LATERAN V AND AN EPIC FAIL

It may be a piece of family “lore,” but nearly 54 years ago, while hunting for the St. Paul Winter Carnival medallion, someone (ahem, I think it may have been yours truly!) was cold, so the entire family all went home. Turns out, the medallion was found in a spot a **stone’s throw** from where we were digging! It was a **near miss**. For a baseball player, little is more embarrassing than standing in the batter’s box while a runner at 3rd breaks for home. You suddenly realize that you were **supposed to bunt**— but missed the sign from the 3rd base coach! As far as Church Councils go, **Lateran V** (1512-1517) was clearly an “epic fail,” a monumental **mis-read** of the **signs of the times**, a blind eye turned towards ominous clouds on the horizon. “Red sky at morning, sailor take warning!”

This bulletin series has previously broached the topic of Church **benefices**, a term with both spiritual and temporal aspects. It derives from a donor or benefactor. A person of means would **donate** to the Church funds, often given over a period of time (much like an **endowment**), the proceeds from which supported the clergy. A donor might legally assign the rents of a parcel of land to be **given perpetually** to an abbot, or the tolls on a bridge he owned to the Cathedral chapter of clergy, etc. In return, the clergy would **offer Masses** for the repose of the souls of the benefactor’s deceased loved ones or specific prayers for the benefactor himself. Some medieval cathedrals have intact choir stalls adorned with **family crests**; the result of clerics being assigned a seat from where they would regularly pray for the benefactor’s intentions. There is **nothing untoward** about this practice— that is, until it became abused. And it did. What happened?

Certain ecclesial offices were attached to benefices. A monastery Abbot may also have been appointed as a Canon of a Cathedral elsewhere. While he was surely able to **pray** for two intentions, what if that position required **administration**? What if a bishop was appointed to more than one diocese? Today, it is possible for a bishop to be simultaneously named the *administrator* of another diocese (e.g. during an unforeseen vacancy of a neighboring diocese), but that is temporary. Here, it was permanent, becoming ripe for corruption. Some unscrupulous clergy acquired **several** benefices. Lateran V had the chance to stop these abuses in their tracks— once for all. The effort fell short. Plurality of benefice was a huge problem, and the Church lacked the will to eliminate it. **Pope Julius II** convened the Council, yet only **115 bishops** attended, none from the East, a **weak show** of catholicity. Far more should have attended. A bad omen!

Pope Julius II is best known as a **patron** of the arts, establishing the **Vatican Museums** and initiating the **rebuilding** of St. Peter’s Basilica. He established the first dioceses in the Americas and the evangelization of Latin America. But none of that changes the fact that Lateran V was an **object failure**. Julius’ opponents meeting in the illegitimately convened Pisan Council had claimed that a safe and free council could not meet in Rome at that time. Nevertheless, some key theological **errors** were **condemned**, such as the philosophy that held the soul of man is **not** immortal. In session 8 held on 19 Dec. 1513, the Council decreed, “we condemn and reject all those who insist that the intellectual soul is mortal, or that it is only one among all human beings, and those who suggest doubts on this topic. For the soul not only truly exists of itself and essentially as the form of the human body... but it is also immortal.”

Session 10 decreed of bishops that “our care must be exercised over the printing of books, precisely so that thorns do not grow up with the good seed or poisons become mixed with medicines.” This led to the *nihil obstat* (“nothing stands in the way”), ensuring the text is not objectionable on

doctrinal or moral grounds. The Council's final decree (March 16, 1517) paints a **rosy portrait** of bishops "lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, to the greatest satisfaction of everyone." **Not!** It was myopic and monumentally **tone deaf**: "There was peace for the whole church and a resulting union. The moral habits of churchmen as well as of secular and other persons were reformed, insofar as this seemed appropriate, and several matters concerning the true faith were defined...Finally, it was reported to us on several occasions, through the cardinals and prelates...that **no topics** remained for debate and discussion by them, and that over several months **nothing at all new** had been brought before them by anyone...we bring this present council to a close and we discharge it with the Lord's blessing." All the while, **storm clouds** were brewing.

Just **seven months** later, on **October 31, 1517**, an Augustinian monk named **Martin Luther** nailed 95 theses (all in Latin, I might add!) to the door of All Saints' Church, the castle Church at **Wittenburg**. I realize that hindsight is 20/20, but still. Epic.Fail! How could Church leaders have been so mistaken about there being "peace for the whole Church," (*universalis ecclesiae pax*) while the **storms of discontent** had been brewing for so long? What signs did they miss, what voices did they tune out in their failure to inaugurate true reform? There is danger in spouting off as a "Monday Morning Quarterback," and yet this council seemed to miss all the important **signs of discontent** and need for **reform**. What happened next should have surprised no one.

- Speaking of missed signals...construction on **Highland Bridge**, the 3,800-unit development on the site of the old Ford Plant has been **put on hold**. Developers see nothing but **red ink** in the future. Mayor Melvin Carter **supported** the St. Paul strict rent control ballot initiative **imposing a 3%** annual cap, including **new** construction. The U.S. inflation rate **surged to 6.2%** in October. He is now proposing an **exemption** for the project. Couldn't see the obvious implications of the referendum coming, huh?
- "A clean heart create for me, God." (Ps.51:12) It's no surprise that the scourge of pornography increasingly affects our youth, with the average age of **first exposure** now down to **eleven years old!** Visit this **link** to a 2015 statement by the USCCB, as it offers helpful guidance to parents.
- A little rusty! The Cathedral is abuzz, as we recently held our first **Confirmation** in **21 months**, bid Bishop Cozzens farewell, and hosted the Permanent Diaconate ordination. I had forgotten how many moving pieces are in play, but we are delighted to host.
- This coming week is the Solemnity of the **Immaculate Conception**, a **holyday** of obligation. We are offering **three Masses**: Tuesday, December 7 at **5:15 p.m.** (anticipatory); Wednesday, December 8 at **7:00 a.m.** (especially for workers/students); Wednesday, December 8 at **7:00 p.m.**, with Archbishop Hebda as celebrant and Cathedral choir singing. The final Mass "doubles" as the closing Mass for the Year of St. Joseph. Please join us!
- A **nonagenarian** non-parishioner (how's that for alliteration?) has hinted at "fatigue" with my Ecumenical Council series. (18 of the 21 so far). As this individual has known me my entire life– I'll pause for now. ☺ But when I **do** finish, I'll begin a new series– "The **22 Rectors** of the Cathedral." How'd you like them apples?

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector