

# *Los Pequeños Pepper*

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By Stephanie Block

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# Political Acts

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Consider the following two expressions of civic engagement.

A pro-life group canvasses political candidates for the upcoming elections and, on the basis of their replies and prior voting record (if any), compiles a voters' guide detailing the pro-life positions of each candidate. A strong pro-life record or response implies, in all likelihood, that the pro-life group and its constituency would support that candidate.

An interfaith coalition that desires the passage of certain education programs holds a candidates' forum, asking candidates to publicly state whether or not they will commit to those programs. A strong commitment to the coalition's programs implies, in all likelihood, that the coalition and its constituency would support that candidate.

Which is a political act?

Both are, of course.

The principle distinction between the two is that the former concerns a life and death issue, in and of itself, whereas the latter concerns support of one possible response to an important issue out of many possible responses. That's an important distinction. However, despite their significant differences, both are – as said – political acts.

Enter a religious institution with concerns about retaining its tax exempt status (for shame). Which of these two political acts can it permit on its property without endangering its immortal soul...um, its *status quo*?

Let's look at a concrete example. On October 8, 2010, Archbishop Michael Sheehan of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe wrote to his priests:

Please ensure that you do not give permission to any group to distribute political materials before, during or after Mass or to place materials on cars in our parking lots. I know that many groups, (i.e., Right to Life and New Mexicans for a Moral and Constitutional Government) distribute their materials without our permission. Please monitor their activity as best you can so that we do not lose our tax exempt status.

A few weeks later, October 24, Albuquerque Interfaith held its 2010 Candidates Accountability Assembly at St. Therese Catholic Parish in the same archdiocese. Candidates were asked to ratify an agenda that included support for public schools, for the DREAM Act, and for Lottery/Bridge Scholarships for all students "regardless of immigration status." Candidates were not permitted to discuss alternative opinions. They were only allowed a moment to express agreement (to which the audience responded with rehearsed enthusiasm) or disagreement (which brought about stony silence). This was hardly an unbiased, non-partisan public forum.

So, let's understand this: Right to Life materials clarifying which candidates hold positions compatible with Catholic moral teaching are impermissible politicking, but holding a candidates' forum with the express intention of garnering public funding for the education of undocumented immigrants is not only permissible but *encouraged*. On church property. Orchestrated by an ecumenical group that has been named in the Archdiocese's 5-year pastoral plan for furthering "Gospel Justice."

Never mind that the standing ovations received at Albuquerque Interfaith's 2010 candidates forum – in a Catholic church – were for people with strong pro-abortion voting records. Never mind that Catholics who attended the candidate's forum but who weren't supporters of the Albuquerque Interfaith agenda weren't welcome. One either applauded at the "right" moment, along with Albuquerque Interfaith, or one was – actually, *several* ones were – threatened with expulsion from the building. As has already been mentioned, this was *not* an unbiased, non-partisan public forum.

Oh, the Archdiocese's "Policy and Guidelines Pertaining to Prohibited Campaign Activities in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe" is very clear. Forums, even those with an express political agenda, may be held on church property so long as all the candidates are invited. It doesn't matter that the forum is supportive of candidates with pro-abortion records. On the other hand, materials or statements made in homilies that might indirectly support a candidate, or that so much as identify a candidate as "pro-life," are "not permitted."

If one had a cynical turn of mind, one might wonder if the pro-lifers held candidate forums and the political progressives distributed voter guides, rather than the other way round, would we see a sudden reversal of archdiocesan policies?

You think? ☞

*Excerpts from Raymond Leo Burke, Archbishop Emeritus of Saint Louis, Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura...*

## **Catholic Orthodoxy:**

*Antidote against the Culture of Death*

It is clear that we are presently experiencing a period of intense and critical struggle in the advancement of the culture of life in the world. Many governments and international organizations openly and aggressively follow a secularist, anti-life and anti-family agenda. Even though religious language may be used and the name of God invoked, programs and policies are proposed for the people without respect for God and His Law, in the words of the Venerable Pope John Paul II, “as if God did not exist.”

...A first fundamental presupposition of my presentation is the truth that the struggle against total secularization, which is, by definition, opposed to human life and to the family, is full of hope. It is, by no means, futile, that is, ultimately destined to failure. The fundamental presupposition is the victory of life, which Our Lord Jesus Christ, has already won. Christ animates the Church in time with the grace of His victory over sin and death, until the victory reaches its consummation, at His Final Coming, in the Heavenly Jerusalem. Notwithstanding the grave situation, in our world, of the attack on innocent and defenseless human life and on the integrity of marriage as the union of man and woman in a bond of lifelong, faithful and procreative love, there remains a strong voice in defense of our littlest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters, without boundary or exception, and of the truth about the marital union as it was constituted by God at the Creation. The Christian voice, the voice of Christ, transmitted by the Apostles, remains strong in our world. The voice of men and women of good will, who recognize and obey the law of God written upon their hearts, remains strong in our world.

Living in a totally secularized culture, we must open our eyes to see that many recognize the human bankruptcy of our culture and are looking with hope to the Church for the inspiration and strength to claim anew the God-fearing and Christian foundations of every human society. God has created us to choose life; God the Son Incarnate has won the victory of life for us, the victory over sin and everlasting death (cf. *Dt* 30:19; *Jn* 10:10).

We, therefore, must never give up in the struggle to advance a culture founded on the choice of life, which God has written upon our hearts, and the victory of life, which Christ has won in our human nature. In fact, we witness every day the commitment of God-fearing brothers and sisters who advance the cause of life and the family in their homes, in their local communities, in their homelands, and in the world.

A second fundamental presupposition of my presentation is the essential relationship of the respect for human life and the respect for the integrity of marriage and the family. The attack on the innocent and defenseless life of the unborn has its origin in an erroneous view of human sexuality, which attempts to eliminate, by mechanical or chemical means, the essentially procreative nature of the conjugal act. The error maintains that the artificially altered conjugal act retains its integrity. The claim is that the act remains unitive or loving, even though the procreative nature of the act has been radically violated. In fact, it is not unitive, for one or both of the partners withholds an essential part of the gift of self, which is the essence of the conjugal union. The so-called “contraceptive mentality” is essentially anti-life. Many forms of so-called contraception are, in fact, abortifacient, that is, they destroy, at its beginning, a life which has already been conceived.

...The relationship of the Magisterium to our eternal salvation lies at the very foundation of our life in Christ. In a world which prizes, above all else, individualism and self-determination, the Christian is easily tempted to view the Magisterium in relationship to his individualism and self-pursuit. In other words, he is tempted to relativize the authority of the Magisterium. The phenomenon today is popularly known as “cafeteria Catholicism.”...The Roman Pontiff and the Bishops are servants of Christ and of His holy Word. The Magisterium “teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 10). The Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in communion with him teach only what is contained in the deposit of faith as divinely revealed truth (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 86).

...The response of both Bishop and the faithful to the exercise of the teaching authority of Christ is obedience, for they recognize in the truths proclaimed, regarding faith and morals, the infallible guide to their salvation in Christ Who said to His Apostles: “He who hears you, hears Me” (*Lk* 10:16). The words of our Lord are unmistak-

able in their meaning for us.

....Faith is, first of all, “personal adherence of man to God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 150). When we believe all that God has revealed to us, we place all our trust in Him, in His Providence. Such trust can be placed in God alone. Faith in God the Father and total trust in His promises is clearly faith in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, and in the Holy Spirit Who dwells with us always in the Church (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 151-152). ....The moral life flows from our faith in God. It is the “obedience of faith” in action. The first tablet of the Ten Commandments governs our right relationship with God, which makes possible our right relationship with others and the world, governed by the second tablet. When we fail morally, we also fail in faith (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 2087-2088). I often recall the words of a sage professor of Canon Law, who taught me the Church’s discipline regarding clerics. More than once, he told the class: “Where there are problems of chastity, there are problems of obedience.” Our rebellion against the moral truth is a rebellion against God and all that He teaches us.

....Obedience to the Magisterium is difficult for man in every age. The practice of the “obedience of faith” is difficult to master. The difficulty comes both from within us and from outside of us. We suffer the effects of the sin of our First Parents, which fundamentally was a sin of prideful disobedience, of rebellion against God’s will. The grace of the Holy Spirit, poured forth into our soul through Baptism, strengthened and increased in our soul through Confirmation, and nourished within our soul through the Holy Eucharist, alone helps us to overcome our inherited tendency to rebellion and disobedience.

From outside of us, Satan never rests in proposing to us the same temptation which he proposed to our First Parents, the temptation to act as if God did not exist, to act as if we are gods. The world around us, the culture in which we live, to the degree that it is has succumbed to Satan’s deceptions, is a source of strong temptation for us. Our culture, in fact, has been described as “godless” both by the Venerable Pope John Paul II and by Pope Benedict XVI. Our culture teaches us to act as if God did not exist. At the same time, it teaches a radical individualism and self-interest which lead us away from the love of God and from the love of one another.

Often the lack of obedience to the Magisterium is not total but selective. Our culture teaches us to believe what is convenient and to reject what is difficult for us or challenges us. .... The lack of integrity in obeying the Magisterium is also seen in the hypocrisy of Catholics who claim to be practicing their faith but who refuse to apply the truth of the faith in their exercise of politics, medicine, business and the other human endeavors. These Catholics claim to hold “personally” to the truth of the faith, for example, regarding the inviolability of innocent and defenseless human life, while, in the political arena or in the practice of medicine, they cooperate in the attack on our unborn brothers and sisters, or on our brothers and sisters who have grown weak under the burden of years, of illness, or of special needs. Their disobedience pertains not to some truth particular to the life of the Church, that is, not to some confessional matter, but to the truth of the divine natural law written on every human heart and, therefore, to be obeyed by all men.

....there has developed in many places the false notion that the Christian or any person of faith, in order to be a true citizen of his nation, must bracket his faith life from his public life. According to such a notion, one ends up with Christians, for example, who claim personally to be faithful members of the Church and, therefore, to hold to the demands of the natural moral law, while they sustain and support the right to violate the moral law in its most fundamental tenets. We find self-professed Catholics, for example, who sustain and support the right of a woman to procure the death of the infant in her womb, or the right of two persons of the same sex to the recognition which the State gives to a man and a woman who have entered into marriage. It is not possible to be a practicing Catholic and to conduct oneself publicly in this manner.

While the Church does not propose the imposition of purely confessional practices on the general population, it must foster the teaching and upholding of the moral law, common to all men, which is at the heart of every true religion. What kind of government would require that its citizens and political leaders act without reference to the fundamental requirements of the moral law?

....In the present situation of our world, the Christian faith has a critical responsibility to articulate clearly the natural moral law and its demands. Under the constant influence of a rationalist and secularist philosophy which makes man, instead of God, the ultimate measure of what is right and good, many have become confused about the most basic truths, for example, the inviolable dignity of innocent human life, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death, and the integrity of marriage between one man and one woman as the first and irreplace-

able cell of the life of society. If Christians fail to articulate and uphold the natural moral law, then they fail in the fundamental duty of patriotism, of loving their country by serving the common good.

....Recognizing the responsibility of Christians and of all men of good will to enunciate and uphold the natural moral law, we also recognize the scandal which is given when Christians fail to uphold the moral law in public life. When those who profess to be Christian, at the same time, favor and promote policies and laws which permit the destruction of innocent and defenseless human life, and which violate the integrity of marriage and the family, then citizens, in general, are confused and led into error about the basic tenets of the moral law. In our time, there is a great hesitation to speak about scandal, as if, in some way, it is only a phenomenon among persons of small or unenlightened mind, and, therefore, a tool of such persons to condemn others rashly and wrongly.

Certainly, there is such a thing as pharisaical scandal, that is, a malicious interpretation of the morally good or, at least, morally indifferent actions of another. The term comes from the supposed scandal which Our Lord Jesus caused to the Pharisees by, for instance, healing on the Sabbath the man born blind (cf. *Jn* 9:13-34).

But there is also true scandal, that is, the leading of others, by our words, actions and failures to act, into confusion and error, and, therefore, into sin. Our Lord was unequivocal in His condemnation of those who would confuse or lead others into sin by their actions and their failures to act. In teaching His disciples about temptations, He declared:

Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin (*Lk* 17:1-2).

....When a person has publicly espoused and cooperated in gravely sinful acts, leading many into confusion and error about fundamental questions of respect for human life and the integrity of marriage and the family, his repentance of such actions must also be public. The person in question bears a heavy responsibility for the grave scandal which he has caused. The responsibility is especially heavy for political leaders. The repair of such scandal begins with the public acknowledgment of his own error and the public declaration of his adherence to the moral law. The soul which recognizes the gravity of what he has done will, in fact, understand immediately the need to make public reparation.

....One of the ironies of the present situation is that the person who experiences scandal at the gravely sinful public actions of a fellow Catholic is accused of a lack of charity and of causing division within the unity of the Church. In a society whose thinking is governed by the "dictatorship of relativism" and in which political correctness and human respect are the ultimate criteria of what is to be done and what is to be avoided, the notion of leading someone into moral error makes little sense. What causes wonderment in such a society is the fact that someone fails to observe political correctness and, thereby, seems to be disruptive of the so-called peace of society.

Lying or failing to tell the truth, however, is never a sign of charity. A unity which is not founded on the truth of the moral law is not the unity of the Church. The Church's unity is founded on speaking the truth with love. The person who experiences scandal at public actions of Catholics, which are gravely contrary to the moral law, not only does not destroy unity but invites the Church to repair what is clearly a serious breach in Her life.

Were he not to experience scandal at the public support of attacks on human life and the family, his conscience would be uninformed or dulled about the most sacred realities.

....Finally, in advancing the culture of life, we must be clear about the objective meaning of the common good. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council described the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, "On the Church in the Modern World," 7 December 1965, no. 26). The fulfillment of individuals and societies is not some subjective determination by those, for example, who are in power. It is the fulfillment which is written in the very nature of man, in nature itself. It is the fulfillment for which God has created us and our world, not the fulfillment which, at any given time, we may find attractive or useful. It is interesting to note that the English word, fulfillment, translates the Latin word, *perfectio*, that is, the perfection of the individual or group, according to man's proper nature and end.

In advancing the culture of life, we must be clear about the objective nature of the common good and of the perfection which it makes possible. Not everyone who uses the term, common good, understands its true meaning. A well-known European Catholic theologian, commenting on the Commencement Address of United States Presi-

dent Barack Obama at Notre Dame University on May 17th of 2009, declared:

In fact, the speech to the University of Notre Dame seems strewn with references taken from the Christian tradition. There is, for example, an expression which frequently returns, “common ground,” which corresponds to a fundamental concept of the social teaching of the Church, that of the *common good* (Georges Cottier, O.P., “La politica, la morale e il peccato originale, : *30Giorni*, 2009, no. 5, p. 33).

The common good refers to an objective perfection which is not defined by common agreement among some of us. The common good is defined by creation itself as it has come from the hand of the Creator. Not only does the notion of common ground not correspond to the reality of the common good, it can well be antithetical to it, for instance, should there be common agreement in society to accept as good for society what is, in reality, always and everywhere evil.

....Let us, obedient to the Magisterium, engage with new enthusiasm and new energy in the struggle to advance the culture of life in our world. The struggle is fierce, and the contrary forces are many and clever. But the victory has already been won, and the Victor never fails to accompany us in the struggle, for He is faithful to His promise to us: “[A]nd lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (*Mt 28:20*). ☞

*From a talk given at Human Life International World Prayer-Congress of Life, October 9, 2010*

# Genesis and Regeneration:

## Christmas and the Big Bang

By Marie P. Loehr

*Let there be light . . . – Genesis 1:3*  
*We have seen his star in the East . . . – Matthew 2:2*

What do Christmas and the Big Bang of astrophysicists have in common? They both explode with light. They are both about genesis and regeneration. Several priests, who happen to have also been scientists, figure prominently in both realities.

We all know what Christmas is. It is the feast that celebrates God's birth in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. After nine months in Mary's womb and its darkness, following the Angel Gabriel's Annunciation and his conception by the power of the Most High in the unity of the Holy Spirit, he is born. He is born in the darkness of the stable cave in the hills outside Bethlehem. He is born as the fulfillment of all previous feasts of light that precede his coming.

For the shepherds this is truly a feast of light. The sons of God, *i.e.*, the angels, and the morning stars sing together, revealing his birth and the glory of God to the astonished guardians of the flocks.

The Big Bang too is about light.

The Big Bang is that theory of cosmogenesis, the origin of the universe and all Creation, in scientific terms. It states that "all the matter and energy in the universe originated in a super-dense agglomeration that exploded at a finite moment in the past," according to the *Oxford Concise Science Dictionary*.

We might say, there was nothing, no time, no space, no anything. Then a single densely packed, infinitesimal point popped into being, in the first moment and place of the original universe, Creation. It contained in itself every element necessary to expand into the universe as we know it. That original point then exploded, and that explosion and expansion and creation continues to this day.

In the same way, an acorn contains all it needs to explode into an oak, human seed, male and female, in union contains all that's needed to explode into zygote, embryo, fetus, neonate, infant, adult human in fullness.

The explosion of this primordial atom, as Georges LeMaître himself, the mathematical physicist who developed this theory, described it, expanded from that moment and place. It expanded into light itself, then galaxies, stars, suns, comets, nebulae, planets and their satellite moons . . . In short, the Big Bang is also about light in darkness.

This theory of cosmogenesis first appeared scientifically in a paper that was titled somewhat ponderously "A homogeneous Universe of constant mass and growing radius accounting for the radial velocity of extragalactic nebulae." It was presented in mathematical terms. Fred Hoyle, a secularist British astrophysicist, coined the name "Big Bang" in derision!

For some decades after LeMaître first presented his theory, secular and atheist scientists challenged it. Disturbed by its apparent support for Creation, as described in Scripture's Genesis, they preferred a "steady-state" universe, as championed by Hoyle, one that was infinite, unchanging – not unlike the more primitive concept of the universe found in the great pagan philosophers, especially the Greeks.

So much for the secular science supporting research and discovery! In this case, secular science dragged its heels, and the Church produced a scientist whose work laid the groundwork for the reality of the universe that we know today.

The Big Bang theory of cosmogenesis received tangible astronomical support for the first time in 1927. Edwin Hubble at Mt. Wilson Observatory in California discovered that the galaxies beyond our Milky Way were moving away from us at high speeds. This was shown by what is called "redshift."

This is a displacement of the lines of the spectra of certain galaxies towards the red end of the visible spectrum. This "redshift" means a shift to longer wavelengths, thus a sign of the galaxies receding away from us.

This proved the expansion of the universe, and supported the concept of an explosion outward from a single primordial atom.

In 1964 Penzias and Wilson, working at Bell Laboratories near Princeton, NJ, stumbled upon the "cosmic background radiation" left over from the initial explosion, a background radiation posited by the Big Bang Theory. This was firm corroboration of both the mathematics of the theory and its cosmology. Modern astrophysics continues to discover new corroborations of LeMaître's original insight. This includes the discoveries made possible by the Hubble space telescope, which has allowed us to look back in time to see some of the earliest galaxies in the process of development. This is possible due to the time it takes light to reach us from the immense distances of intergalactic space. Particle

physics has also been a source of corroboration for the theory, working hand in hand with cosmology.

Light and genesis . . . An initial explosion of light from an infinitesimal point, the explosion of Christ into our world as a human infant, the God who made man now God-made-man . . .

Where do the priests enter this reality?!

Georges LeMaître, the man who developed the Big Bang Theory out of his love for mathematics and cosmology, was born in Belgium in 1894. He was ordained a priest in 1923. After his ordination to the priesthood, he studied under Eddington at Cambridge, then continued his studies in mathematics and cosmology at Harvard and MIT. His supervisor at MIT was none other than Harlow Shapley, a well-known name in astrophysics, like Eddington. Clearly the Church encouraged his studies and his work. He spent most of his career teaching at the University of Louvain in Belgium, a university familiar to those who followed the career of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen closely.

Albert Einstein, reviewing the math on which LeMaître's theory relied, commented that the mathematics was correct, but the physics was "abominable"! Nonetheless, in 1933 he and LeMaître presented a series of lectures in California. After LeMaître's presentation, Einstein concluded that "this is the most beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened."

It is thus the Catholic priest and honored scientist who advanced the scientific understanding of the origins of the universe. It was the secular or atheist scientists who tried to cling to increasingly, and now thoroughly, discredited theories of a steady-state universe. We cannot help but conclude that LeMaître's Catholicism and priesthood influenced and encouraged his work and his contributions to modern cosmology and astrophysics.

LeMaître himself was careful to distinguish science from Scripture. Despite the similarities between his theory and aspects of the Creation in Genesis, he understood well that doctrine cannot depend on human science for its confirmation. Scripture deals with the "why" of reality as we know it. Science deals with the "how," and we must be careful not to confuse the two.

And how do the Magi fit into this examination?

The Chaldean wise men were certainly priests, which indicates they were also kings. Kingship and priesthood often went hand in hand in ancient religions and cultures. Beyond that, they would have been the scientists of their day. Chaldeans were reputed for their knowledge of the heavens.

Some claim that the Magi practiced the pseudo-science or superstition of astrology. No doubt—but even astrology requires accurate understanding of what we would call basic astronomy. The ancients knew the heavens. That knowledge was essential science: for any navigation, however primitive; for any agriculture, no matter how basic; for any pragmatic development of civilization and culture, no matter how rudimentary; even for the proper practice of religious ritual and liturgy.

It is appropriate to meditate on this at Christmas.

Christ IS the light of the world. He tells us so himself. The Magi recognized his star and its announcement of that wonder child and salvation that even advanced pagans expected, that mankind longed to see. His birth is the beginning of a new Creation. That new Creation, the transfiguration of our fallen world in and by the Light of the World, will eventually come to an end.

St. Paul says it will end in "a new heaven and a new earth." He tells us that the saints will shine like stars.

Revelation even tells us that the glory of the Lord will be our light in this transfigured Creation in him. But even now, God in his unity and trinity is the source of the light we experience around us in sun, stars, lightning, electricity . . . Even the little bursts of atomic particles into being all around us and in us re-iterate the Big Bang in all its expanding glory.

That glory reveals the true glory, the energy and mass, the light and weight of the fullness of Being, Father, Son, and Spirit. Christ, the true light, explodes into our darkness to regenerate and renew us in that first Christmas, in every Christmas on the calendar, and in our hearts and lives.

Light, genesis, wise men . . .

LeMaître himself insisted that there is no conflict between science and religion. The truth who is Christ cannot conflict with scientific truth. The Creator is not in conflict with his Creation.

An article in the *New York Times* in 1933 noted that: "There is no conflict between religion and science,' LeMaître has been telling audiences over and over in this country . . . His view is interesting and important not because he is a Catholic priest, not because he is one of the leading mathematical physicists of our time, but because he is both."

The light who is Christ, and the light of his Creation, are nowhere more in unison and glory than at this season of Christmas. Georges LeMaître would certainly agree, and wish us all a very merry Christmas! ❧

# Has the Buffalo Dance been Baptized?

By Stephanie Block

This past January, an interfaith gathering was hosted by Monsignor Jerome Martinez y Alire, in downtown Santa Fe's Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi where he is rector. The event celebrated the City of Santa Fe and the Basilica's Quad Centennial Anniversary Year of founding (1610).

The evening program began with a sacred blessing dance by the Native American Santa Clara Pueblo Buffalo Dancers and included music from a 3-faith choir, a Sikh Community Jatha (music group), and readings from Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic sacred texts.

Did the native dancers at this interfaith event represent an ethnic Catholic variant, or were they one of the "other" religious traditions? Every August, in conjunction with the annual Santa Fe Indian Market, Archbishop Sheehan presided over the Annual Native American Mass, celebrated again at the Cathedral Basilica, featuring the Black Eagle Drummers from Jemez Pueblo. Last year, the Mass also "featured" Buffalo dancers.

Two questions rise from such cultural and liturgical mixtures. One is: do such mixtures draw people closer to the Christ and His Truth or are they merely an entertainment that does injustice to both native and Catholic spiritual practice? The other is: what can be "baptized" from another culture's liturgical practices and what can't?

## Entertainment or Edification?

Obviously, people differ as to what edifies or entertains them but Leon Podles, author of *Sacrilege*, "an in-depth look at sexual abuse in the Catholic Church," and *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of the Catholic Church*, gave an entertaining and edifying description of his experience at the "Indian Mass" when he was in Santa Fe attending Indian Market in 2003:

The Indians explained that they would be doing the beginning of the Buffalo Dance of Thanksgiving to the Great Spirit after communion, that this was a prayer, not entertainment, and that the congregation should not applaud. At the end of the mass ... Archbishop Sheehan got up and asked everyone to give the dancers a big round of applause. The Indians were miffed, but Sheehan, like many Catholics, sees the new liturgy as being at least in part entertainment, to which the proper response in our culture is applause. [[www.touchstonemag.com/blogarchive/2003\\_09\\_28\\_editors.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/blogarchive/2003_09_28_editors.html)]

## Native Spirituality or Christian Spirituality?

Podles' comments help to give us some insight into the second question, as well. The Buffalo Dancers in 2003 described their own actions – and we must take them at their word – as a prayer of thanksgiving "to the Great Spirit." Whatever is to be said further, it must be assumed that the dancers themselves were sincere Catholics who understood deeper truths hidden within native "gestures" ... thereby elevating those gestures much as St. Paul, preaching to the Athenians (Acts 17:22-32), recognized the natural piety behind an altar dedicated to "the unknown god." Though it had been intended for pagan worship, that altar provided a means for introducing true worship.

However, since the dancers were, and will probably be again, in the sacred space of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, both native and non-native Catholic worshippers must know for certain that it is in fact the Great Spirit who is invoked – the One Creator God – and no other, such as the spirit of the buffalo. One native website clearly believes the Buffalo Dance signifies the latter:

Like all Animal Dances, the Buffalo Dance is a celebration of thanksgiving. The hunter takes on the spirit of the buffalo he has hunted during the year. *He thanks the spirit of that animal*, and he asks for good luck for next year's hunting. To be asked to dance in the Buffalo Dance is a great honor. Keep in mind that it is also an honor to be able to attend a Pueblo Dance. The Dances are spiritual celebrations, so please treat these celebrations *as though they were taking place in your own house of worship*. [emphasis added. [www.aanativearts.com/article150.html](http://www.aanativearts.com/article150.html)]

Between these two positions – that the Buffalo Dance has been "baptized" for Christian use or that the

Buffalo Dance is a pagan ritual – there is a more complicated and extremely interesting possibility that the dance represents an attempt to culturally bridge the native and European worlds. An anonymous Fox tribal story goes:

Once there was an Indian who became a Christian. He became a very good Christian; he went to church, and he didn't smoke or drink, and he was good to everyone. He was a very good man. Then he died. First he went to the Indian hereafter and they wouldn't take him because he was a Christian. Then he went to Heaven, but they wouldn't let him in – because he was an Indian. Then he went to Hell but they wouldn't admit him there either because he was so good. So he came alive again, and he went to the Buffalo Dance and the other dances and taught his children to do the same thing. [David Hurst Thomas, Jay Miller, Richard White, Peter Nabokov, Philip Deloria, *The Native Americans*, Turner Publishing, 1993.]

Theological confusion aside, this story points to the sad history of native and European relations.

Pueblo peoples, to mollify the Spaniards, at first made token motions of participating in Catholic ceremonies, giving the appearance that they were adopting the newly presented values and forms of worship.” The Church's suppression of native ritual observances only drove them underground, to be performed at night, in great secrecy, beyond the criticism of outsiders. “Today, many key events in the Pueblo are celebrated in both religions, though the two remain very separate and distinct in overall philosophy and forms of expression. .... Where possible, the two are drawn together in one expression, albeit never completely similar.” [Joseph H. Suina and Laura B. Smolkin, “The Multicultural Worlds of Pueblo Indian Children's Celebrations,” *Journal of American Indian Education*, Spring 1995]

In the light of this, another scholar offers a Pueblo legend about the founding of the Buffalo Dance, which according to his sources was a gift of Poseyemu (Mist-rising-from-the-water) – a legendary hero/demigod who, after miraculously killing more buffalo than the more experienced hunter, institutes the Spanish-derived Matachina Dance (or, in other stories, the Buffalo Dance), which must be performed as well as traditional native dance. While there are many tribal variants to these stories:

All Poseyemu's roles can be reduced to a fundamental level: he provides for the general well-being of the Pueblos....The well-being of the Pueblos during the Spanish contact period depended largely on the preservation of native religious rituals. Accordingly, Poseyemu plays the role of ritual leader and teacher in many Tewa variants. ...warning that both the native and the Spanish dances must be performed in order to secure eternal happiness. Poseyemu is here the mediator between the Spanish and native customs. ...Poseyemu is placed at the intersection of two religious traditions...he functions as an “early warning system” for the preservation of native religious ceremonies. [Richard J. Parentier, “The Mythology Triangle: Poseyemu, Montezuma, and Jesus in the Pueblos,” from *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol 9: Northwest, Smithsonian, 1979, p. 609-614.]

If the dancers were engaged in pagan worship or a complex ritualistic appeasement of both traditions is a matter of no small moment – and neither belongs in a Catholic church sanctuary. If they were giving true worship, however, it seems those in attendance required a good deal more explanation. ☞