

How to Be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic
Part Four - How to Be Apostolic

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

How can an ordinary Catholic be “Apostolic”? Isn’t the bishop is the one who is apostolic because he is a successor to the apostles? The faith is apostolic because it is handed down from the Apostles, but how can the person in the pew be “Apostolic”?

Each Sunday we say we believe in “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith” and these weeks in Lent I have outlined some underlying beliefs in our secular society that go against our Catholic faith. These false philosophies are not stated beliefs that we hold. Instead, they are a set of assumptions about the world which lie at the foundation of our world view. They influence us in a subtle way, and they infect our Catholicism so that we have a watered down version of our religion.

Individualism, Sentimentalism and Syncretism are the false “ism’s” that set up the individual as the sole authority, so they are countered by being “One”. If we use the word “Holy” to signal the supernatural aspect of our faith, then being “Holy” defeats Scientism, Utilitarianism and Materialism--the three ugly sisters who stand for the assumption that there is nothing beyond the physical realm. The third set of ugly sisters includes Sectarianism, Nationalism and Elitism. These heresies set people against each other and define our faith according to our own little set of people, beliefs and customs, and they are countered by the Catholic or universal mark of the Church.

The final set of “ism’s” run counter to the Apostolic aspect of the Catholic faith. We often associate “fundamentalism” with Bible bashing preachers in the deep South or extremist Muslim terrorists. However, “fundamentalism” is any kind of mindset that clings to an ignorantly literal understanding of the faith. Fundamentalism distrusts scholarship, human reason and learning. Fundamentalism could also be called Fideism--a trust in personal faith alone--a trust in personal experience that is linked with a willful ignorance.

When we see this wider understanding of fundamentalism, we can see how prevalent it is in our society. There is a trend in secular society to deliberately reject expertise, scholarship, learning, objective facts and knowledge. This fundamentalism rejects any form of authority based on learning and expertise and prefers personal experience and emotionalism.

The second poisonous “ism” in this final set of three is historicism. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* Bl. Pope John Paul defines historicism as, “the belief that the truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose. At least implicitly therefore, the enduring validity of truth is denied. What was true in one period, historicists claim, may not be true in another.”

The historicist believes that institutions and beliefs are simply the product of the circumstances of the times in which they happened to come about. The historicist reduces everything to the product of certain historical events, with no longer lasting truth or significance. Historicism is an insidious form of relativism. For the historicist there is no truth that transcends all ages.

Linked with historicism is progressivism. Progressivism could be called the unshakeable belief in the inevitability of progress. The progressivist believes an idea or an invention or a program is better simply because it is modern. The progressivist believes that mankind is getting better and better simply because he has been around longer and therefore, he must be improving. The progressivist's views are rooted in evolutionary theory--the conviction that all things are naturally moving to a higher and higher form of development. A reverse form of this heresy is believing that something is necessarily good not because it is new, but because it is old. Both are assumptions that undermine the Catholic faith which is, according to St Augustine, "Ever ancient, ever new."

If these three "ism's" are a set of sisters, then fundamentalism is a dull, ignorant and emotional adolescent girl. Historicism is her cynical sophomore in college big sister who has seen it all and knows it all, while Sister Progressivist is a cheerful, naive optimist who sneers at anything old fashioned.

These three assumptions at the foundation level of our secular society mean that many people distrust the Catholic Church without even knowing why. The fundamentalist distrusts Catholicism because it is learned and complex. The historicist because it is rooted and grounded in history and a living tradition, and the progressive hates Catholicism simply because it is ancient and authoritative.

This is where being "Apostolic" corrects the last three poisonous "ism's". The Apostolic faith is that faith delivered to the apostles. This sacred tradition is handed on through the apostolic succession to generation after generation. The apostolic aspect of our faith corrects fundamentalism because it demands that we use our intellects to understand, interpret and pass on the faith. Furthermore, we do not use our intellects alone, but always in harmony and submission to the whole deposit of the Apostolic faith.

Historicism is corrected by the Apostolic faith because, through the relationship of Christ to his apostles we realize that history is not a succession of meaningless events in the past. Instead, we experience continuity from the foundations of our faith in the Hebrew religion to the center point of history the incarnation and the succession of the apostles down to this present time. This gives meaning and direction and purpose to all of history. The apostolic faith is rooted in the past and is alive in the present, and so brings rich meaning and transcendence to all moments of history. Finally, this Apostolic faith also corrects modernism for, while it is ancient, it is also 'ever new'. When our faith is apostolic, we avoid the heresy of thinking a thing is good just because it is old or just because it is new. Instead, we judge it according to the Apostolic faith. Because of the Apostolic aspect of the faith that which is ancient is forever new and that which is new is forever

rooted in antiquity. The false categories of “old” and “new” become meaningless.

How can we be more “Apostolic”? By engaging our intellect. By learning more about our apostolic faith we deepen our understanding and provide deep roots for our life and spirituality. Through the prayerful study of Scripture, the catechism and the lives of the saints we experience the Apostolic dimension to the faith. As we do, we are drawn into a deeper union with Christ and his Church.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker