

EWTN: A Network Gone Wrong

Author: Christopher A. Ferrara

A review by Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

What is good about EWTN? A lot. It is the only world-wide television voice for the Catholic Church, with a potential audience of close to 700 million. It produces uplifting and educational programs. Its people are dedicated Catholics who only want to serve God. I know because I worked with them. I wrote and hosted two television programs for EWTN between 1998-2000, and I was a guest on several other shows, including Mother Angelica's flagship program, *Mother Angelica Live*, before she retired. Even though EWTN ceased airing my programs and cleared my books off their website (due mainly to my criticisms of John Paul II's inter-religious prayer gatherings at Assisi and my articles critiquing Jewish politics and religion), I still believe EWTN is one of the most influential voices of Catholicism we have today.

Most Catholics who watch EWTN are simple, common sense, people who are not privy to many of the critical issues occurring in the Church today, and I don't think they could figure them out one way or the other even if they were included in the debate. They are just happy to be Catholic, and happy that God gave them a very special broadcast medium to spread the Catholic faith. In a land where Evangelical Protestants virtually own the air waves, we have in EWTN one of the best and only opportunities to make a dent for Catholicism in the television market – the market by which most people are influenced. Hence, I believe we should do everything we can to support EWTN.

But now I will let the other shoe drop. Author Christopher Ferrara has done what few others in the publishing world have even dared to consider – write a comprehensive and detailed critique of what goes on in front and behind EWTN's camera lenses. Ferrara is a successful lawyer and polished writer for such venues as *The Remnant*, *The Catholic Family News*, and *The Latin Mass*. In 2002, he published his controversial book, *The Great Façade: Vatican II and the Regime of Novelty*, a penetrating exposé of all the upheaval that has occurred in the aftermath Vatican II. It is Ferrara's considered opinion that EWTN, once a vibrant and faithful voice for the more traditional side of the Church under the helm of Mother Angelica, has now become the megaphone for what Ferrara coins as "Neo-Catholicism," an assortment of modernistic and liberal views of Catholic doctrine and practice.

Prior to the publication of the book in question: *EWTN: A Network Gone Wrong* (Good Counsel Publications, 2006), Ferrara had already made a name for himself as the leader of laymen who champion the Traditionalist view of the Catholic Church, decrying the post-conciliar era as a gargantuan mass of superfluous accretions that have virtually destroyed the Church from within. Ferrara has a lot of evidence he brings to his aid. When one looks at the decimating statistics of the decline in priestly vocations, seminary applications, Catholic schools, Mass attendance, coupled with such unprecedented phenomena as the clerical homosexual and pedophile scandal, the rise of contraception, divorce, annulments and even abortion among Catholics, one would have to be a total

recluse not to have noticed that at least some whiff of the smoke of Satan has found its way into the sanctuary of the Catholic Church. As John Paul II himself once said: “We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think that wide circles of the American society or wide circles of the Christian community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the church and the anti-Church, of the Gospel versus the anti-Gospel” (*Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 9, 1978).

Is EWTN now part of this spiritual decline, and was there, according to Ferrara, a noticeable shift in the network’s approach to the Catholic faith after the departure of Mother Angelica in 1999? I personally think the jury is still out on this question, but there are many things Ferrara points out that would make one wonder whether, in Mother Angelica’s absence, EWTN finds itself traveling down a somewhat different path than what Mother herself would have approved.

Donovan’s Editing of Mother Angelica’s Past Programs

One of the best examples of a sharp divide between the Mother Angelica era and the post-Mother Angelica era is something that Ferrara, unfortunately, only divulges late in his book, but it is probably one of the most glaring and astounding proofs of his thesis. Ferrara reveals that Colin Donovan, Vice-President of Theology at EWTN, is

“...now censoring the tapes of Mother Angelica’s old broadcasts. Dr. Peterson recounts how in the Fall of 2003 he received an email from Donovan advising that ‘before any of Mother’s tapes would be heard they would be edited for theological content by Colin Donovan. Thereafter, when Peterson had to look up things for people from Mother Angelica’s past broadcasts, he would notice red or yellow markings to indicate on the transcript of the broadcast what had been edited out of the tape” (p. 228).

All this clandestine editing is done without even a hint to the 700 million people in the EWTN audience. I dare say that there would be a tremendous outcry if they found out. In fact, so outlandish are Donovan’s attempts at reconfiguring Mother Angelica to his own liking that it would behoove the board of trustees to put a cease and desist order on what appears to be a blatant undermining of the founder of EWTN. To get a flavor for Donovan’s audacity, it would be akin to Dick Chaney editing the speeches of George Washington that do not conform to George Bush’s political agenda.

As one might expect, considering the millions of dollars that Mother Angelica’s memory garners for EWTN, Mr. Donovan has no objections to allowing an endearing picture of her to appear at the top of EWTN’s weekly emails to its world-wide audience, since attached to it is Mother’s now famous financial appeal she used in signing off from her television program: “Remember to keep us between your gas and electric bill.” This is the only statement of Mother Angelica’s worthy enough to be associated with the lineup of new programming that is advertised in the email. All the rest is now under the strict editorial decisions of Colin Donovan. In essence, Donovan, who does not possess a doctorate in any theological discipline, has become EWTN’s sole arbiter of truth. If EWTN intends on keeping Mr. Donovan’s services, perhaps it should stop parading

Mother's image, since we obviously aren't getting the true Mother Angelica any longer, but only the sanitized version, Ferrara tells us, that is allowed by "Mr. Donovan and his theological committee of laymen, the majority of whom are ex-Protestants" (p. 178; NB: 40% of the employees at EWTN are Protestants). Ferrara's short 276-page book contains at least a half-dozen separate instances in which Donovan has engaged in similar intrusive and dictatorial activity since Mother Angelica's departure from EWTN.

Mother Angelica, EWTN, and America's Bishops

Although Ferrara is on track pointing out the disjunction between the pre- and post- eras of Mother Angelica's departure, nevertheless, I must say that it is somewhat disingenuous for him to base his thesis on the additional supposition that he and his traditionalist associates accepted, with open arms, the EWTN era *before* Mother Angelica's departure. Many of the teachings and practices occurring at EWTN that Ferrara decries and regards as either heretical or hurtful to pious ears are the very ones that Mother Angelica either endorsed or politely accepted (pp. 13-15). In the 20 years she hosted the program *Mother Angelica Live*, unlike Ferrara's circle of critics, she never once uttered a disparaging word about John Paul II or criticized any of his beliefs; she never rejected the Novus Ordo Mass; she never rejected or even criticized Vatican Council II; she never held to the idea that only Catholics will be saved; she questioned but never rejected the Assisi inter-religious prayer meetings of John Paul II; she never rejected NFP; and she never invited guests on her show that represent the staunch traditionalists with whom Ferrara rubs shoulders, rather, she only conversed with the very "Neo-Catholics" who Ferrara rebukes. The only issue that Mother Angelica questioned with any particular vigor was how the hierarchy handled Sr. Lucia and the Fatima visions. Thus, far from being in the Traditionalist's camp, Mother Angelica could be considered just another "Neo-Catholic" by Ferrara, albeit a more moderate one than what Ferrara sees occurring at EWTN in the post-Mother Angelica era.

We might also add that, opposed to the company Ferrara keeps in Traditionalist circles, Mother Angelica had a weakness for giving credence to the more questionable, and often the downright fraudulent, claims of Marian apparitions. By the late 1990s, Mother often spoke favorably about the unapproved apparitions of Garabandal and Medjugorje, although behind the scenes she was discouraged from such promotion both by Deacon Bill Steltmeier and Fr. William Most. Steltmeier was, and still is, EWTN's second-in-command, while Fr. Most was employed at the time as EWTN's theological expert. Eventually Steltmeier's objections became less vocal and Most bowed completely to the pressure. E. Michael Jones remembers Fr. Most contacting him for advice on how to handle the situation. Fr. Most did so because it was Michael Jones' book on Medjugorje that Fr. Most would quote in the EWTN *Question and Answer* forum in order to demonstrate the fallaciousness of the apparitions. Jones told Fr. Most not to capitulate. Unfortunately, Fr. Most called back a few days later and told Jones that he had decided to follow EWTN's orders and cease criticism of Medjugorje. One week later, Fr. Most suddenly died. I myself was in contact with Fr. Most at this same time since we were discussing an unrelated theological topic, and I could sense that he was agitated by something that he did not reveal to me. I also know that Mother Angelica claims to have received a vision that told her to build the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament that now

stands in Hanceville, Alabama. Deacon Steltmeier told me during dinner one night that Mother had seen a statue of the Infant of Prague come alive and speak to her about building the shrine. She promptly obeyed. I have no comment on this issue. My hope is that it is as true as the miraculous healing of her legs she experienced after 20 years of excruciating suffering.

Regardless of her penchant for apparitions, since I observed Mother Angelica personally and saw the way she ran a tight ship at EWTN, one of the main differences between the pre- and post- eras of her departure is the manner in which Mother Angelica handled the assortment of high-profile liberal bishops in the United States who mercilessly and relentlessly surrounded her, seeking to bring the whole kit and caboodle down to the ground. In liberal circles, Mother Angelica is known as “the elderly Catholic nun who lectures teens on fornication and bishops on theology” (*Chicago Sun Times* book reviews, Jan. 2005). In a stark contrast to the present leadership at EWTN, Mother Angelica was simply not afraid to do battle with the liberals and modernists in the Church, whether it was with cardinals, bishops or anyone else who sought to reinvent the Catholic wheel. When, 25 years ago, Mother initiated her dream of having a Catholic television station, she was stymied by, who else? – the American bishops. Fortunately, the sane voice of Cardinal Silvio Oddi, head of the Sacred Congregation of the Clergy at the Vatican, gave her the needed go-ahead. Although the bishops were obviously flummoxed by this feisty little Italian nun, they didn’t give up. They couldn’t stop her, so they tried to compete with her. They launched their own television station to spread their modernist views – the now defunct Catholic Telecommunications Network of America (CTNA). Needless to say, it collapsed almost as soon as it got started, and this only raised the bishops’ ire against Mother Angelica to the boiling point.

Next, they asked Mother to run her programming through a new interfaith satellite network, but she flatly refused, stating that her station would preach only the Catholic faith and would never cudgel up to any other. Soon after, the bishops were demanding that Mother allow the USCCB’s chosen speakers to appear on her program, but again she refused. In 1989, the bishops drew up a formal complaint stating that EWTN rejected “one out of every three programs submitted by the bishop’s conference,” demanding that she capitulate to their demands. After Mother reminded the bishops that she “owned the network,” they threatened to wrest EWTN from her control, to which Mother responded with this exact quote in her characteristic Italian temper: “I’ll blow the damn thing up before you get your hands on it!”

The issues Mother Angelica was forced to confront with these liberal bishops were by no means trivial. The USCCB, for example, insisted that Mother air programs that featured a bishop promising that the next pope was going to allow for the ordination of women. In another instance they insisted that Mother promote inclusive language for the liturgy and the catechism. Mother had to deal with the likes of Bernard Law, Joseph Bernardin, Roger Mahony, Rembert Weakland and a whole cadre of lesser-known but equally pernicious Catholic prelates who Bishop Bruskewitz of Nebraska once called, “a bunch of hapless bishops.” As Mother continued to refuse these bishops access to her program, the USCCB began to recall the priests they had previously allowed to work at EWTN. They also attempted to get EWTN eliminated from the programming schedules of diocesan television channels throughout the country.

One of the more intense confrontations that Mother Angelica endured came in 1997 when she, after hearing a homily by Roger Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles that is alleged to have denied the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, she stated on her television program that "...the cardinal of California is teaching that it's bread and wine before the Eucharist and after the Eucharist," adding that she would not hesitate to disobey him or any bishop or priest who held the same. In brief, Mother Angelica knew the Catholic faith, and she was not about to compromise it for anyone. It's the very reason she and her nuns dressed in a formal habit. It was a symbol to the rest of the world where she and her network stood when it came to defending the Catholic faith against the liberal demolition crews. In brief, Mother's verve comes from her unique faith. In a recent interview she states:

"He expects me to operate, if I don't have the money, if I don't have the brains, if I don't have the talent – in faith. You know what faith is? Faith is one foot on the ground, one foot in the air, and a queasy feeling in the stomach....You want to do something for the Lord? Do it. Whatever you feel needs to be done, even though you're shaking in your boots, you're scared to death – take the first step forward. The grace comes with that one step and you get the grace as you step. Being afraid is not a problem; it's doing nothing when you're afraid" (*Crisis*, Dec. 2005, p. 46).

Unfortunately, Mother's last stand came in 1999 when David Foley, the bishop of her diocese in Alabama, demanded that no masses in Mother's new Hanceville shrine (which she built from the ground up with her own money) be celebrated with the priest facing away from the people. As was her common practice, Mother refused to buckle under this flutter of Foley's peacock feathers. Foley responded by calling the *ad orientem* posture an "illicit innovation or sacrilege," implying that those who insisted on doing so were sinning, mortally. At the dedication ceremony of the Shrine, which Foley, being the local ordinary, had to preside over, Mother Angelica refused to attend. Foley, representing himself for the USCCB, then complained to the Vatican, demanding that Mother capitulate to their control. The determined Foley then implored the Vatican to send an envoy to investigate EWTN. The scheme was as follows: if it could be determined that the *Poor Clares* (Mother Angelica's order) owned EWTN, then EWTN would automatically come under ecclesiastical control. Instead of fighting the bishops, the EWTN board convinced Mother Angelica to resign and give full ownership and power to EWTN's lay-run board, precluding any future control by any cleric at any time so as never to come under the thumb of the USCCB.

Who Would Fill Mother Angelica's Shoes?

Needless to say, Mother Angelica left quite a pair of shoes to fill. Who at EWTN could stand up to the pressure from these liberal bishops and keep the station on the straight and narrow? Unfortunately, that possibility severely lessened when Mother gave ownership of EWTN to the lay board. According to Ferrara, that somewhat nebulous entity simply did not have the courage, the resolve, and certainly not the charisma of Mother Angelica to quarantine the modernism and liberalism seeking to enter its doors.

Fr. Mitchell Pacwa, whom I know personally and whom I consider a very faithful priest, took over the media spotlight vacated by Mother Angelica, but he has virtually no say in the major decisions regarding programming and the overall direction of EWTN. As a result of this vacuum of leadership, EWTN has been slowly drifting toward a more modernistic view of the Catholic faith, and on that count Ferrara may have put his finger on the problem.

A good case in point that demonstrates EWTN's reticence to take on the liberal bishops who have virtually destroyed Catholicism in America, is noted, as Ferrara points out, in a glaring imbalance in the controversial issues EWTN decides to address. On the one hand, EWTN has fallen into an obsessive fixation against Fr. Nicholas Gruner, pillaging him with scathing attacks because of his insistence that the complete Third Secret of Fatima was never revealed. On the other hand, EWTN is now virtually silent about the massive corruption in the American Catholic Church orchestrated by the US bishops right underneath their noses. Ferrara, citing a letter written by EWTN supporter Dr. John Turner to an advisor for EWTN, Dr. William Carroll, registers the following complaint:

“What is Fr. Gruner actually doing that is worthy of such high level attention and censure? Mr. Donovan slanders without evidence...Where is the action on gay masses, liturgical abuses, heretical retreat centers, heretical teachers in Catholic institutions, or dare I mention pedophilia in the clergy? Is Fr. Gruner really the leading candidate for excommunication in this troubled time? Where is your outrage at this ludicrous proposition?...When will someone get around to clearing the heretics out of our seminaries and Catholic universities?...Why doesn't EWTN call for action there?...Your and Mr. Donovan's replies on this subject are an outrage to any thinking Catholic...You should be ashamed of yourselves. I am ashamed that I have supported EWTN over the years with my prayers, my funds, and our visits” (pp. 230-232).

The irony of this whole thing is that it was none other than Mother Angelica who sided with Fr. Gruner's view of Fatima on her television program! She specifically said: “I don't believe we have been told everything” in reference to the Third Secret. Yet as Ferrara points out: “EWTN has observed a studious silence concerning Mother Angelica's opinion” on Fatima (p. 221). We can see more clearly why, perhaps, Mr. Donovan is in such a hurry to edit her old programs.

Kneeling for Communion

Ferrara cites many examples in his book but one of the more illustrative of what Mother Angelica would have done in a crisis situation as contrasted to what the present leadership at EWTN practices, regards the case of kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. Ferrara writes:

“The evidence will be augmented by the testimony of someone who knows EWTN from the inside, Dr. William J. Peterson. Dr. Peterson is a

retired medical doctor who was employed in EWTN's Viewer Services Department from October 2001 until February 2004. During his employment, Peterson was asked to join EWTN's 'theological committee,' headed by the layman Colin B. Donovan, which met every two weeks to discuss EWTN's theological positions. The majority of the committee's members at the time, none of them priests, consisted of recently converted Protestants, two of whom were former Protestant ministers" (p. 54).

Moreover, while EWTN may have introduced a bit of Latin into its Novus Ordo Mass, it is fully prepared to adopt whatever liturgical innovation the bishops approve or Rome tolerates – even if these changes lead to or suggest heresy. Peterson's experience on the theological committee confirmed this (p. 61)...[Peterson states]: "I had seen the watering down of the Faith...They were defending the constant ecumenism, the lack of missionary zeal...Before they stopped kneeling for Communion they supported that diligently. As soon as the bishops stopped that, they supported standing for Communion" (pp. 54-55)... "Donovan's position was to stand, and almost everyone started standing at Mass and bowing their heads" (p. 61).

To show the significance of Donovan's caving-in to the whims of the US bishops, Christendom College, one of the few remaining higher-learning institutions seeking to be faithful to the Catholic faith, was confronted with the demand from its bishop, the notorious Paul Loverde (infamous for his protection of the underground network of promiscuous and homosexual priests in the diocese of Arlington, Virginia) to cease kneeling at all Christendom masses. To defend itself, Christendom appealed to the Vatican. The Vatican responded with a polite reprimand to Loverde and issued an allowance for Christendom's students to kneel at the Eucharist whenever they pleased. Besides the fact that Loverde's next move was to seek to remove the kneelers at Christendom's chapel, the fact remains that a faithful Catholic institution stood up to the illicit pressure of an agenda-driven liberal bishop, and won. EWTN could have done the same, but refused. Whereas Mother Angelica would have raised a conniption fit if her followers were told they couldn't kneel at the Eucharist, the present guard at EWTN has simply lost its nerve, or perhaps never had it. The main difference, then, between the Mother Angelica era and the post-Mother Angelica era is that the latter has resigned itself to follow the primrose path of America's hapless bishops rather than fight to preserve the few traditions that remain at EWTN. Although kneeling before the Eucharist could be considered a small issue in the vast scope of things, nevertheless, it is a good example of the larger modernistic mentality and lack of courage that seems to be settling into the thinking of EWTN's present leadership.

Yet, as Ferrara points out, when EWTN profits from promoting the traditional strain of Catholicism, it will not hesitate to do so. This was made clear when Mel Gibson was invited to EWTN for a lengthy interview about his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. EWTN knows that Gibson is even more extreme in his views against "Neo-Catholicism" than Ferrara. Gibson built his own Latin Mass chapel, without any authorization from the

ordinary of Los Angeles, a chapel that Cardinal Mahony says he “does not recognize as part of the Catholic Church.” Gibson’s chapel uses SSPX priests to say mass, but EWTN believes such priests are schismatic. In fact, Gibson does not recognize the validity of either Vatican Council II or the Novus Ordo mass, claiming, “the Church had no right to change anything.” His father, Hutton Gibson, is a sedevacantist, and some suspect that Mel is also of the same mentality, although he has not stated so directly. The upshot is that Mel Gibson has all the trappings of being the total antithesis of what EWTN idolizes, yet this is all laid aside to enjoy his celebrity status and the resulting donations it generates from its 700 million viewers, to the tune of \$2.3 million per month (pp. 248-49). The duplicity speaks for itself.

Contrasting Policies: Greg Popcak and Fr. Groeschel

Although Ferrara himself admits that “EWTN still retains certain elements of good Catholic programming” (p. 8), it is his position that the good programs are engulfed by a prevalent set of bad programs that have virtually changed the face of EWTN. Interestingly enough, we know that EWTN is listening to Mr. Ferrara, at least partially. For example, immediately after Ferrara’s book was published, it could not be coincidental that EWTN eliminated the program hosted by Greg Popcak: *Marriage: For Better, Forever*. I had written an article about Popcak (pronounced: Popchak) a few years ago, outlining his outlandish statements on sex and his dubious theological views, and forwarded the information to Ferrara as he was writing his book. Popcak advocates such things as God having “the cosmological orgasm we call the ‘Big Bang’ through which the entire universe was created” (p. 201); that sexual relations are a prayer (p. 179); that sex is a preparation for the beatific vision (p. 181); that boys should chart their mother’s and sister’s fertility cycle in order to learn how to use NFP; and many other such off-the-wall ideas, including chapter titles to his books such as “Holy Sex, Batman!” and “Der Intimacy is Good, Jah?” EWTN had enough sense to admit that Popcak had crossed the line once it was pointed out to them. But if Mother Angelica were still at the helm, and Popcak were given her scrutiny before airing, his program would never have seen the light of day.

But at the present time, determining who “crosses-the-line” is a somewhat arbitrary exercise in EWTN’s assessment of its television personalities. While a man like Greg Popcak is expendable without much backlash, EWTN would not be so quick to judge a figure as prominent as Fr. Benedict Groeschel. Terminating the program *Sunday Night Live with Fr. Groeschel* would send shockwaves throughout the world, but the truth is, Groeschel has uttered some of the more outlandish theological miscues ever uttered on Catholic television, and all without one word of criticism from the EWTN staff. Popcak’s antics appear like boyish pranks compared to some of Fr. Groeschel’s puzzling statements.

Ferrara makes quite a case against Groeschel. In one instance Ferrara points out that when Groeschel was posed with a question on a call-in program of how we are to understand Jesus’ statement in John 6:53: “*if you do not eat of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you,*” the ecumenically-predisposed Groeschel answered by saying that the verse has a defect in the original Greek and should read: “*If you eat my flesh...you will have life within you.*” In his attempt to accommodate non-Catholics who

don't believe in the Eucharist, Groeschel implicitly denied that the Greek of the New Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit, as well as denying our traditional sacramental theology. Indeed, as Ferrara points out, Groeschel retorted "indeed you don't" in answer to a question by the caller of whether the sacraments were necessary for salvation (p. 87). Groeschel opted to turn Jesus' words into a mere "call" rather than a command, and a call that one could take or leave at his own discretion.

As for the Greek that Groeschel cited, Catholic dogma maintains that, even if Jesus spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic (which is not proven), the Greek of the New Testament is a divinely inspired and totally accurate rendering of his words. In fact, we have no other words to consult. As such, Groeschel's treatment of John 6:53 is erroneous, since the Greek literally says, "If you do not eat of the flesh...you have no life in you." The phrase "if...not" is from the Greek "ean mee," which literally means "if not," not "if." Unbeknownst to anyone at EWTN, Groeschel simply eliminated the word "not" from the Bible and created his own ecumenical theology of the Eucharist. In ecclesiastical terms, Groeschel's error is much more serious than Popcak's, for it hits right at the heart of salvation theology. My guess is that no one on EWTN's staff even had an inkling to question Fr. Groeschel's answer, much less scrutinize it for possible heresy. It would have been much better if Groeschel had simply said, in certain instances of invincible ignorance the sacrament of the Eucharist is not required for salvation, which would have at least been a starting point for discussion. But to impugn the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and twist the words of Scripture in order to give non-Catholics carte-blanche relief of having to submit to Jesus' command is simply beyond the pale. It also shows the lengths that modern thinking will go in order to lessen the authority of tradition and accommodate the clamor for the acceptance of all religions. There are many other such instances Ferrara points out that demonstrate Fr. Groeschel's penchant to reinterpret Catholic doctrine in light of his own personal understanding of theology, but we do not have room to cover them in this essay.

Ferrara is Sometimes Off the Mark

To be fair to Groeschel and EWTN, however, there are instances when Ferrara exaggerates or misrepresents his opponent's view, or perhaps has an erroneous opinion himself (pp. 70-84). For example, regarding the issue of "no salvation outside the church" (hereafter *nulla salus*), although it is true that not only EWTN but many other contemporary Catholic groups often treat that particular doctrine as if it doesn't exist, there is a tendency for Ferrara and other traditionalists to trash any non-absolutistic views of *nulla salus* as heretical, often by implying that people like Groeschel are advocating something close to universal salvation, when, in fact, they are not. First, there has never been an official and binding interpretation of Boniface VIII's dictum, and thus there is still room for intellectual discussion of the issue.

Although both sides agree that the Catholic Church holds the ecclesial authority regarding the means of salvation, the main point of contention between the absolutists and the non-absolutists is whether the people of the world who are not thoroughly educated to the *nulla salus* doctrine, or even those who simply have never heard of it, are culpable for their ignorance; and if they are culpable, is it to the point of eternal damnation? The Catholic Church has always directed the force of such decrees to those

who are thoroughly educated about them, but *deliberately* refuse to accept them. Moreover, Traditionalists assume that the Church prior to Vatican II indoctrinated an absolutistic view of *nulla salus*, but that is simply not the case. She always left room for the exceptions, many of which came from a class of people who were considered “ignorant,” even though its invincibility was not clearly indoctrinated until the reign of Pius IX, in at least two separate encyclicals. Even Archbishop Lefebvre (a man Ferrara much admires), as staunch as he was against the modernist church, understood the issue of *nulla salus* in the non-absolutistic sense, stating:

“This is then what Pius IX said and what he condemned. It is necessary to understand the formulation that was so often employed by the Fathers of the Church: ‘Outside the Church there is no salvation.’ When we say that, it is incorrectly believed that we think that all the Protestants, all the Moslems, all the Buddhists, all those who do not publicly belong to the Catholic Church go to hell. Now, I repeat, it is possible for someone to be saved in these religions...” (*Against Heresies*, pp. 217-218). “Does this mean that no Protestant, no Muslim, no Buddhist or animist will be saved? No, it would be a second error to think that” (*Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 73-74).

Lefebvre’s balance is noted in the following quote:

“No doubt, the graces of God are distributed outside the Catholic Church, but those who are saved, even outside the Catholic Church, are saved by the Catholic Church, by Our Lord Jesus Christ, even if they do not know it, even if they are unaware of it...” (*Sermon, Geneva, 1976*).

On the one hand, Ferrara recognizes that

“the Church allows for the possibility that certain souls who have not become formal members of the Church might in some way short of formal membership be incorporated into her before death. For example, one could, by a special grace, be enabled to make an act of faith together with salvific and sufficient repentance at the very moment of death” (p. 73)

Yet Ferrara omits to tell us whether this “act of faith” requires the words “I want to join the Catholic Church before my death” so as to comply with Boniface’s *nulla salus* dictum. Ferrara merely slips in the pacifying statement: “only God knows, which, if any, are saved *by incorporation* into the Church short of formal membership...” (p. 73), but he fails to tell us *how* these people are “incorporated into the Church,” or even what “incorporation” means if it isn’t “formal membership.” As a result, Ferrara merely proves the difficulty inherent in this subject.

Moreover, if, as Ferrara says, “only God knows” and “we have no right to suppose that there is any great number of people in this category,” this appeal to logic must also apply to the other side of the argument, that is, if we cannot suppose there is a *great* number saved, then we cannot suppose there is a *small* number saved. In fact, we

can't suppose anything, except to suppose that God will be the judge of all human souls and all their "invincible" contingencies. Ferrara's addendum, "For as our Lord Himself has warned us, 'few there are' who find their way through the narrow gate of heaven" (p. 73), doesn't solve the problem either, since the few who will find their way to heaven also applies to the current members in the Catholic Church. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows that one of its major themes is that members of the Church can and will fall away, often in large numbers (e.g., 2Co 12:20-13:5; 2Pt 2:1-22; 1Tm 4:1f; Apoc 2-3), and Ferrara would testify himself that this is precisely what has happened to many, not just a few, in the post-conciliar Church. In fact, nominal Catholicism is one of the Church's biggest problems.

Ferrara on Fr. Levis

On the same subject, Ferrara quotes from Fr. Levis, host of the *EWTN Q&A Forum*. Ferrara prefaces the quote with statements such as "the dogma [outside the church there is no salvation] has died the death of a thousand exceptions" and "EWTN slavishly promotes this grave error," and then records what he considers Levis' worst breach of this doctrine:

"This ancient dogma remains the same, always true, but the Fathers of Vatican Council II interpret it in a much more generous way than their predecessors. And I think of this reason – of the 6,000,000,000 people on earth, only 1 billion are Christian of all sorts. Modern shepherds are concerned about their salvation *and so open up the more closed strictures to permit as many as possible to enter Paradise*, and of course, thru the good offices of the Church. God bless. Fr. Bob Levis."

Seeking to pin Levis down, Ferrara italicizes the statement "*and so open up the more closed strictures to permit as many as possible to enter Paradise*" as the smoking gun of Levis' "grave error." Although there may be a little justification in Ferrara's reaction, the fact is, Vatican II has the right to bring a little more clarity to an issue that other non-dogmatic views from our tradition did not spell out so clearly. After all, it wasn't until rather late in the Church's history that the doctrine of "invincible ignorance" was ever clearly stated by a pope (Pius IX), although it was in seminal form in many previous Church pronouncements and patristic teachings. The dissemination of the doctrine has had a slow but steady revealing in Church history, and was formalized once the population of the world grew way beyond the environs of the Holy Roman Empire. Although Fr. Levis may be beyond his bounds to suggest that proportionately more people will now be saved just because Vatican II laid more stress on invincible ignorance than other traditional teachings did, the fact remains that the Church herself, whether its Nicea, Trent or Vatican II, must admit that there may, indeed, be many more people who receive salvation than she is privileged to know through formal membership in the Catholic Church. In any case, even Fr. Levis acknowledges that Vatican II's interpretation only "opens up" the possibility of salvation, not that Vatican II taught that large numbers of people *will* actually become saved.

In any case, we simply don't know how many people God will save, and it is futile, if not defamatory, to make judgments based on one's perception of that final number. Sometimes traditionalists have such a bee in their bonnet about how many people will be saved that it seems as if they are happy to believe that God will save very few people, and they don't mind closing up all the loopholes, as it were, so that only they and their followers will walk through the pearly gates. The sedevacantists are especially prone to this card-carrying mentality of salvation, and I have often pointed out to them Jesus' warning to the Pharisees in Mt 23:13: "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in." It is God's business, not ours, as to who, in the end, will be saved.

Moreover, if we want to count more feathers in Fr. Levis' cap, he states of *nulla salus*: "This ancient dogma remains the same, always true..." This is precisely how Pius IX, who explained *nulla salus* with the addition of invincible ignorance, stated the case: "But the Catholic dogma that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church is well known..." Fr. Levis also acknowledges that, if any of the 6 billion people now living are saved, it is "of course, thru the good offices of the Church." Now, how is that different from Marcel Lefebvre's above statement, "...those who are saved, even outside the Catholic Church, are saved by the Catholic Church" and which Lefebvre applies to: "Does this mean that no Protestant, no Muslim, no Buddhist or animist will be saved? No..." Notice that Lefebvre even specifies "Buddhists" and "animists" in his list of potential candidates for salvation, two entities that I don't think Mr. Ferrara would be comfortable adding, at least not without a *caveat emptor*.

In another instance, Ferrara quotes Fr. Levis as follows:

"Don, I don't know the mind of God about the salvation of Protestants. But we Catholics for centuries held pretty firmly that one has to be a full-fledged member of the Catholic Church in order to be saved. In more recent centuries, this Roman Catholic position has been lightened, softened so that others in good faith might be saved. Surely the documents of Vatican II are not as demanding as prior documents. And I think the main reason is charity and the tremendous number of souls who never even hear once the sweet name of Jesus..."

Ferrara follows with:

"There we have it: while EWTN's theological 'expert' admits that 'we Catholics for centuries held pretty firmly that one has to be a full-fledged member of the Catholic Church in order to be saved' – i.e., that this is the only known way of salvation – Vatican II supposedly changed all that. The Church no longer hold 'pretty firmly' that one must be a 'full-fledged member' of the Church to be saved."

Although it is true that Fr. Levis didn't answer this question in the most carefully thought out theology (e.g., his error in implying that Vatican II could change Church teaching), Ferrara jumps on his miscue without making the proper distinctions for the

reader. Granted, Vatican II, when it speaks officially on faith and morals, is not going to “change” Catholic doctrine. If it did, the Church would be defectible and the gates of hell would prevail. Yet, “what was held for centuries,” even from Ferrara’s own admission, was NOT that one had, in every case, to be a full-fledged member of the Catholic Church in order to be saved, yet Ferrara persists in appealing to “full-fledged membership” as if it were Church dogma so that he can accuse Fr. Levis of using Vatican II to change Catholic doctrine!

Ferrara’s analysis is made even more suspect in light of the fact that, when Ferrara posed himself with the question about whether “formal membership in the Catholic Church” was required for salvation (p. 75), Ferrara changed the phrase “formal membership” to the clause “*saved by incorporation* into the Church short of formal membership,” but never alerted the reader to the change, or defined the precise distinction between “incorporation” and “formal membership.” In the end, we have two errors occurring here: Fr. Levis’ erroneous suggestion that Vatican II can change Catholic doctrine, and Mr. Ferrara’s erroneous suggestion that the Catholic Church always held to “full-fledged membership in the Catholic Church” for salvation. In the end, we can see from Ferrara’s treatment of both Groeschel and Levis on the subject of *nulla salus* that it reveals just as much about the one-sided thinking of Ferrara and the traditionalist mind-set as it does Groeschel, Levis and the “Neo-Catholics” Ferrara abhors.

Ferrara on Scott Hahn, Jewish Converts, and “Cool Catholicism”

Ferrara cites various other prominent personalities that also seem to get a free pass for innovative yet unorthodox ideas. Ferrara points out for example, that Scott Hahn’s novel ideas on the feminine role and/or identity of the Holy Spirit has been rejected as erroneous by no less than a half dozen prominent Catholic teachers (e.g., Dale Vree, editor of *New Oxford Review*, Karl Keating, director of *Catholic Answers*, Dr. Monica Miller, an associate of Hahn’s, author Edward O’Neill, Chris Ferrara and myself in a published joint-article), yet neither Hahn nor EWTN have acknowledged that error or removed it from Hahn’s EWTN programs (pp. 190-203). Hahn has simply decided not to engage his critics, except to tell the *New Oxford Review* in a letter to the editor that his book “contains an imprimatur,” which is the same defense that Greg Popcak gave to his critics (p. 203), yet EWTN obviously had no problem terminating Popcak’s services for what they perceived as erroneous teaching. Apparently, Popcak is expendable but Hahn is not. Hahn also has unorthodox views about Adam and Eve, the Trinity, the Millennium, “Prima Scriptura,” and some aspects of Justification, but so far EWTN has not censored any of his teachings. The irony is that, Hahn’s errors are much more serious than Mother Angelica’s alleged errors, yet EWTN has made a policy to exonerate the former and censor the latter.

Another source of questionable teaching on EWTN comes from an assortment of high-profile Jewish converts. Similar to Hahn, these converts seem to have been given a free pass to say just about anything they wish, if not on the air, then in their writings, without the least interrogation or censorship from EWTN, or any Catholic apologist, for that matter. One such Jewish convert, Roy Schoeman, claims in his book, *Salvation is from the Jews* (an erroneously anachronistic title in itself) that “two thousand years of Catholic theology” made an “error” teaching us that the “Old Covenant was entirely

replaced, made null and void, by the New.” Along the same lines, his colleague, David Moss, likewise sets aside the Church’s traditional teaching by claiming that “the Church replaced the people of Israel...was an erroneous theology that was taught for many, many centuries...the Church no longer teaches...that the people of Israel, the Jewish people, are superseded” (p. 138). When either Schoeman or Moss are pressed for proof of their claims they are conspicuously silent, apparently wishing to rest on Schoeman’s assertion in his book that “three speeches of John Paul II and *Nostra Aetate*” serve as a defense for his position, but upon close examination of these documents, “none...even explicitly addresses the question of supersessionism, much less ‘definitively’ rejects it,” says Ferrara, and he is correct. These Jewish converts also advocate returning the Seder meal and other Jewish rituals to Catholicism so that Hebrew Catholics can have “their own identity,” seemingly side-stepping St. Paul’s injunction that there is “no longer Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28). Not content to limit their views to the idiosyncratic elements of Judaism, these converts also delve into the geopolitical scene, holding that the “nation state of Israel” is a God-ordained movement of fulfilled prophecy (which is not dissimilar to rabbinic and Zionist interpretations of the Old Testament). In fact, Schoeman holds that those who say that the state of Israel is merely a man-made political movement that has nothing to do with Old Testament prophecy is “of the antichrist.” Again, the irony is that, whereas EWTN’s Colin Donovan doesn’t hesitate to terminate Greg Popcak and censor Mother Angelica, not a word of criticism is given to either Hahn or the Jewish converts.

Ferrara also critiques what he sees as EWTN’s effort to promote “Cool Catholicism.” For example, using a double entendre for the title of one of its programs, EWTN promotes rock music in its popular program, *Life on the Rock*. Its host, Fr. Francis, says things such as “the coolest thing you can do is become a Catholic priest,” while at the same time he shaves syllables to form words such as “talkin’, goin’, and showin’” to demonstrate that priests are hip. Ferrara writes:

“During a recent ‘cool’ episode...a young man sang a rock ditty he had composed entitled ‘These Beads.’ The lyrics (if one can call them that) were set to the tune of ‘These Dreams,’ a Top 40 hit by Heart, a ‘glam rock’ band from the 1980s. [This was] the New Church version of karaoke – he held up Rosary beads in one hand and a copy of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Understanding Catholicism* in the other....Fr. Francis pronounced this ludicrous performance ‘awesome’ – a word he employs almost as much as ‘cool.’ Neither he, nor his guest, nor the live audience seemed to appreciate the irony that nothing could be more suitable for a complete idiot than the image of Catholicism presented by *Life on the Rock*” (p. 205).

Ferrara adds that male guests appear on *Life on the Rock* with ponytails and crucifix earrings. During the commercial break of the same show, Fr. Stan Fortuna, better known as EWTN’s “rapper priest,” is depicted strutting down a street in New York City giving a talk on ‘discipline,’ wearing clothing indistinguishable from the vagrants he passes, while speaking in rap-talk and double negatives – hardly the image of “discipline” that 2000 years of traditional Catholicism has ever promoted. Ferrara writes:

It would require a book in itself to document all of the examples, but one...should suffice to make the point: a performance in a Las Vegas lounge, hosted by...Raymond Arroyo...on Christmas Eve...the lounge act included a comic's impressions of that famous 'Rat Pack' of drunken, womanizing entertainers from the 1960s (Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Dean Martin) (p. 208).

A Root of the Problem: Two Different Views of the Papacy

Ferrara spends a lot of time in the book demonstrating the apparent auto-demolition of the Church after Vatican II. He calls to the witness stand no less a Catholic voice than Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Ferrara quotes from a 1984 speech in which Ratzinger stated: "The results of the Council seem cruelly to have contradicted the expectations everybody had...we have been confronted instead with a continuing process of decay that has gone on largely on the basis of appeals to the Council..." (p. 32), and, in another quote: "The Second Vatican Council has not been treated as part of the entire living Tradition of the Church, but as an end of Tradition, a new start from zero....All of this leads a great number of people to ask themselves if the Church of today is really the same as the Church of yesterday, or if they have changed it for something else without telling people" (p. 35). Regarding the Novus Ordo Mass, Ferrara quotes Ratzinger saying: "I am convinced that the ecclesial crisis in which we find ourselves today depends in great part on the collapse of the liturgy" (p. 35), and that it was "a breach into the history of the liturgy whose consequences could only be tragic." Ferrara adds the words of Monsignor Klaus Gamber, whose book, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, contains a preface from Cardinal Ratzinger, showing his approval for Gamber's statement that in Vatican Council II,

...instead of a genuine renewal in our Church, we have seen only novelties. Instead of our religious life entering a period of new invigoration...what we see now is a form of Christianity that has turned towards the world...there has never actually been an actual break with Church tradition as has happened now, and in such a frightening way, where almost everything the Church represents is being questioned (pp. 38-39).

Ferrara's complaint against EWTN is that it is oblivious, whether by design or by ignorance, to all the problems caused by the novelties of the post-conciliar juggernaut. Contra Mother Angelica who at least stemmed the tide of modernism as best she could, the present guard at EWTN seems all too willing to adopt the stance that virtually whatever our modern prelates dictate, we are to accept it with open arms and with no objections. EWTN apparently doesn't subscribe to the allowance in Canon Law 212, 2-3 which says:

The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires. According to the

knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, *they have the right and even at times the duty* to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons (emphasis added).

At EWTN, critical thinking is allowed only against Protestants and other non-Catholic groups (of which one gets a steady diet in programs like: *The Journey Home*; *The Abundant Life*; etc.) but, in stark opposition to Mother Angelica's efforts, EWTN will no longer allow critical thinking about the Catholic Church.

Perhaps one reason for EWTN's reticence to critique the problems in the Catholic Church is that many on the "theological committee" and the corporate board are former Protestants, and many from this group were born after Vatican II. Not only have they experienced little of Catholicism prior to the Vatican II Church, many of them have lived through the trials and tribulations of the almost total lack of authority in Protestant denominations and the massive confusion that it creates. They know full well the dangers of bucking the reigning authority. They witnessed the splintering of churches every time someone got the notion that he knew more about Christianity than the next guy. And since theological issues can be quite complicated (as we saw above on the *nulla salus* matter), invariably both sides will think they have the truth and the inevitable result is an irreparable rupture. This scenario has played itself out thousands of times over the short 500 years of Protestant history. Protestant converts to the Catholic faith simply don't want to go down that tortuous road again. It's much better to be judicious in the battles one undertakes, and sometimes, barring some catastrophic aberration of faith and morals, it is better to keep silent and bow to the authority, letting the prelature take the responsibility before God for its decisions. The last thing EWTN wants is to give the impression to its audience that it knows more about the Catholic Church than the Catholic hierarchy, or that EWTN is a group of rebels whose main purpose is to act as a policeman over the hierarchy. The 700 million simple-minded Catholics that EWTN reaches, by and large, don't live or think that way. The Church makes the rules and the people follow. Anything else is a form of Protestantism, which result would defeat the very purpose of EWTN's existence. To some in the present leadership of EWTN, perhaps Mother Angelica herself flirted with dissent a bit too much for their tastes.

Mother Angelica was a pre-Vatican II Catholic who knew that form could never have a lasting rule over substance. Sooner or later, a different reality sets in. One begins to realize that keeping the *status quo* and refraining from voicing objections out of fear of causing controversy can often turn Christians into doormats. Along these lines, Ferrara complains about EWTN's penchant to "idolize the pope." This is common among new converts, since they, coming from their bad experiences as Protestants, are looking for that one shining beacon of light that will answer all their problems and solve all the controversies. As a result, they view the man in the papal chair with an awe and fascination that is often divorced from reality. In their eyes, the pope can do no wrong, and if there is something that appears wrong, they just won't talk about it, ever. For example, Ferrara reports that, "Not even John Paul II's well-documented kissing of the

Koran was viewed critically in the committee meetings Dr. Peterson attended.” Peterson writes: “We were told it was just part of the overall plan to get closer to the Moslems and hopefully convert Moslems.” The truth is, of course, that John Paul II never spoke to the Moslems about converting to the Catholic faith, either then or years later; and he didn’t speak about conversion to Christianity to any of the other pagan religions gathered at Assisi. They prayed to their own gods and are presently back in their homelands still thinking that it is proper to do so. In fact, none of the Moslems or the pagans that were called to Assisi have ever reported converting to Christianity. Ferrara continues:

“Peterson observed how ironic it was that Donovan and the other committee members were prepared to defend actions ‘that they would never do’ themselves, but which they try to justify merely because the Pope or some other Church authority has done them. The general attitude Peterson observed during his tenure ‘was almost worship or idolatry of the Pope as opposed to the traditional Faith’” (p. 157).

Even Bishop Bruskewitz, a frequent guest on EWTN, “went on to praise the Holy Father for coming up with beautiful words and noble sentiments, but to fault him for failing to implement them through responsible governing of the Church” (quoted from Rod Dreher, p. 161). Ferrara concludes:

“By wrongly elevating the Pope to the status of an utterly inerrant and impeccable demigod, EWTN and other New Church ‘papalators’ placed upon John Paul II a burden he could never carry, a burden no Pope could carry. Such papalatro sets the faithful up for confusion and disillusionment when a Pope errs, as any human can, in a matter of prudential judgment or in some non-binding statement” (p. 163).

On the other hand, Ferrara communes with people who make criticism of the pope a weekly regimen of newspaper, books and magazine articles. The criticism can range from nit-picking over various gestures the pope makes to outright rejection of his teachings. Many of them are old-school cradle Catholics from the 1930s-1950s who have been predisposed to view the post-conciliar era with a jaundiced eye. For them, they are witnessing firsthand the “diabolical disorientation” prophesied by the Fatima visions in the wake of Vatican II, and suspect that this is precisely why the present prelature is trying to hide the remainder of the Third Secret. For them, the statistics don’t lie. As they see it, there is simply no explanation other than a very weak and poorly run Church to explain why, for example, there were 46,000 priests in America in 1965, but only 11,000 in the year 2000, not to mention the decimating statistics of convents, schools, universities and religious orders. Whereas Mother Angelical spent many programs discussing these problems, the current trend at EWTN is to minimize them or shift the blame on Protestants and other non-Catholic groups, while Ferrara and company, who see the problem at its root, spend most of their time doing critical thinking about the Catholic Church and very little concerning Protestants. We might say that each group has its enemy of choice that best advances its particular ideological view of the Church. But Ferrara’s group is often caught in the quandary of just how much criticism of the pope

they can allow amongst themselves before they cross the line back into Protestantism, or even worse, sedevacantism, of whom some of Ferrara's closest associates have succumbed (e.g., Gerry Matatics), and others who have thought seriously about succumbing (e.g., Thomas Drolesky). In fact, it could be said that one of the major themes in Ferrara's book is: when do we criticize the pope and when do we not criticize him? For Ferrara, this question is much less difficult to answer for the pontificate of John Paul II than it would be for Pius X, since the former introduced innovations of everything from altar girls to allowing prayers to The Great Thumb. In that light, Ferrara closes the book with the rhetorical title: "Did They Love You, John Paul II?"

In the larger picture, although Ferrara's work targets EWTN, his book is really a critique of the entire post-conciliar Catholic establishment. EWTN merely plays the part of the mirror through which the Vatican II Church is now being reflected, just as, I assume, Hollywood claims to be a reflection of society, not a driving force of the culture. (Perhaps, in that light, it is not without warrant that Ferrara often compares EWTN to Hollywood). Ferrara's book could easily be titled, "John Paul II: A Papacy Gone Wrong," or "Vatican II: A Council Gone Wrong," and make just about the same criticisms as he does with EWTN as the main culprit. My guess is that Ferrara feels that EWTN should know better than to follow along with all the foibles of the modern-day ecclesial establishment, since the staff had sufficient training from the inimitable watchdog, Mother Angelica. One of the main theses in Ferrara's book is that, although the current problems at EWTN were brewing while Mother Angelica was active at the station, they boiled over almost instantaneously once she vacated her position, and he implies that Doug Keck, EWTN's executive producer, may have orchestrated the resulting paradigm shift by design (p. 5).

Of course, the issue regarding just when one can criticize the pope has been an age-old question since the reign of St. Peter. On the one hand, Peter holds the keys and he will bind and loose at his discretion and no one can question him. On the other hand, Peter may not live up to his own Christian principles and thus need to be scolded by someone close to the top, as St. Paul did to our first pope for his hypocrisy (Gal 2:1-16). For traditionalists like Ferrara who see in Pius X a man of uncompromising fidelity to the traditional Catholic faith, it is very hard to accept the almost constant barrage of innovations from the modern day popes (changing the mass, introducing ambiguous teachings, failing to consecrate Russia, giving salvation indiscriminately to Protestants, Jews and Muslims; kissing the Koran; inviting pagan religions to pray to their own gods; promoting altar girls; apologizing for Catholic saints, praising Luther and Calvin, etc.). Thus, Ferrara finds himself on the "withstanding Peter to his face" side of the dilemma much more often than he will allow himself, or others, to make excuses for the late 20th century's pontiffs. EWTN, however, has drawn its line in the sand and will not, under any circumstances, criticize, question or in any way imply that John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II had made, or that Benedict XVI will make, any grievous mistakes in their respective papacies. In EWTN's eyes, it would be scandalous to even suggest such a thing. Hence, we have two entirely different views of the papacy, and a dichotomy, unfortunately, that is as old as the papacy itself.

Accordingly, as Ferrara points out many times in his book, EWTN will be forced into situations where, in its gut it knows that some papal action is not quite right, but will be at a loss to say anything critical. For example, on page 151-152, Ferrara points out that

when EWTN covered John Paul II's trip to Mexico City in the summer of 2002, a scene which included men dressed up as Aztec warriors dancing before a pagan altar, hissing like snakes and beating their tom-toms in front of an admiring pope, the only thing Raymond Arroyo could say to this never-before-seen display in 2000 years of Catholic history was: "I love the way they balance the reverence with the indigenous." Never mind, as Ferrara points out, that the Aztecs were one of the most blood thirsty pagan cultures known to man, and who Juan Diego helped to abolish by converting nine million of them out of their pagan religion. Forced by the pope's unconditional acceptance of the Aztecs *as Aztecs*, and without any attempt from the pope to preach the Gospel to them for their conversion, Arroyo, the EWTN spokesman whose job it is to insulate the pope from any criticism and yet make some intelligent recognition of the display before him, could only do so by couching his description with the most carefully chosen sanitized words. Unfortunately, this is the *Catch-22* that EWTN and any other papal hardliners face today when they meet up with the innovations of the post-conciliar hierarchy that were never even contemplated by previous pontiffs, much less acted out on a daily basis.

In another instance, Ferrara remarks about the time in 2003 that Fr. Nicholas Gruner warned the Church that the rector of the Fatima Shrine in Portugal, Fr. Luciano Guerra, was attempting to turn it into an inter-religious prayer center (which included an invitation to a Hindu priest). Instead of admitting that Gruner was right, EWTN dug in its heels and commissioned Fr. Robert J. Fox to castigate Fr. Gruner on live television. When William Peterson presented Colin Donovan with the evidence of Guerra's plan, Donovan simply replied: "Oh no, that will never happen, that will never happen" (p. 212). But it did happen. In fact, it happened so blatantly that the Vatican stepped in and put a stop to it, forcing Guerra to admit that "he would never again permit a visit of the Hindu group" to Fatima. This is just another example among many in Ferrara's book in which EWTN takes the "hear no evil, see no evil" approach to modern Catholicism.

Problems in Ferrara's Camp

Ferrara writes on page 209:

"When an organization like EWTN partakes of the post-conciliar revolution and its revolutionary spirit, and not only refuses to condemn its evils but actively promotes many of them, it will tend inevitably to regard as 'enemies of the People' faithful Catholics, commonly known as 'traditionalists,' who have refused to embrace the revolution."

Although Ferrara does have a point about the extreme dangers of the "revolution," the point also needs to be made that "traditionalists" have their own "revolution" occurring, but they often turn a blind eye toward it. I know firsthand of these problems because, after getting my "sorry, your services are no longer needed" letter from Colin Donovan in 2002, I began to work very closely with many traditionalists. Although I find myself agreeing with the traditionalists on many issues, still, they have the inevitable problems that will occur in any group that determines, to whatever degree, to distance itself from the Holy See. For example, unqualified support is given to the SSPX, with Ferrara and other traditionalists vehemently denying, in the face of John Paul II's clear

words in the 1988 letter *Ecclesia Dei* and the Vatican's recent affirmation of that letter in its talks with Bishop Fellay, that the SSPX is in schism. Or, they obstinately deny that Marcel Lefebvre was wrong in consecrating four bishops against the direct order of the pope. For them, it seems that the ends justifies the means. These same traditionalists strongly discourage Bishop Fellay from reconciling with the Vatican, even in the face of Pope Benedict's pleading to have the SSPX reconcile with the Church. On this issue, Ferrara opposed the views of the traditionalist John Vennari, editor of the *Catholic Family News*, who is one of the voices discouraging a reunion.

Just as the new converts at the helm at EWTN feared, the "traditionalists" have split into a cadre of militant groups, each one rejecting, to its own varying degree, the supreme rule of the Roman Pontiff. Not surprisingly, each traditionalist group thinks that only it has the uncompromised truth of the Catholic Church. Similar to the Protestant mentality, traditionalists continually give excuses for their refusal to bow to the pope's authority or unify with the Holy See. One group will even criticize the other if it sees what is understood as a caving in to the papacy, as occurred, for example, when the Fraternity of Saint Peter capitulated to some of the demands of the Vatican. Not surprisingly, the Pius V Society disagrees with the Pius X Society; the Pius X society disagrees with the Fraternity of St. Peter, and all three have their internal factions that fight against their own leadership. Then there are those who have given up all hope, the sedevacantists, claiming that there has been no reigning pope for the last 50 years, and perhaps longer. Yet even the sedevacantists have various factions, some believing that there is no formally reigning pope, while others say that Benedict XVI is a "material" pope but not a formal pope (figure that one out!), and still others who attend SSPX chapels although they reject the SSPX. Then there are traditionalists, such as Ferrara, who are not formally affiliated with any of the above groups but have become a loosely-fit, eclectic assembly that tries to take the best out of each faction. All in all, these bickering groups who believe very different things about the Church, are a hard package to sell to the typical EWTN follower who prefers the unity engendered by an unswerving loyalty to the pope, regardless of his faults and imprudent decisions. Perhaps Mother Angelica said it best when she concluded:

"I don't want to be conservative and I don't want to be liberal. I want to be Catholic. Now if that offends the liberals, tough. If it offends the ultraconservatives, tough. I can't be influenced by any of them. I want to know what the Church teaches" (*Crisis*, Dec. 2005, p. 46).