

May 15, 2008

Fellow Traveler
~~~~~

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CATHOLIC FELLOW-TRAVELER

R. J. STOVE  
GUEST COLUMNIST, *Melbourne, Australia*

He is a vexation to many a priest, an affliction to many a marriage, and (if powerful enough) a scandal to many a diocese. Nevertheless he has been seldom analyzed in pastoral or homiletic literature.

Who is he?

He is the professional Catholic Fellow-Traveler. The menace he embodies could seem a trivial thing, compared with more spectacular crises assailing the Church. Actually it is far from trivial, as the present article attempts to show. On the long-established principle that forewarned is forearmed, discussion may surely be permitted concerning what the Catholic Fellow-Traveler does, what harm he causes to the faithful, and how he can be recognized before he causes more.

At the outset of any such discussion, we must define our terms. In particular we should be clear as to what the Catholic Fellow-Traveler is *not*. He is *not* a practicing Jew or practicing Muslim who temporarily sides with Catholic policy while remaining candid about his Jewish or Muslim allegiance. He is *not* a C. S. Lewis type, completely honest about his Protestantism, although prepared on occasion to drink at the wells of Catholic teaching. He is *not* a Chesterton type, searching wholeheartedly for the Universal Church years before finally finding it.

Rather, the Catholic Fellow-Traveler is one who, without believing a word of Catholic doctrine, ingratiates himself with Catholic individuals, Catholic institutions, and Catholic employers; who has acquired a smattering of Catholic history; who consequently prides himself or possessing Catholic scholarship; who often sets himself up as a spokesman for what he imagines to be Catholic values; who is happy to be mistaken by Catholics for one of them ... and yet who not only never converts, but never seriously considers converting. In short, he fights, and for the most part he cynically fights, under false colors.

The word "he" is chosen advisedly. Usually the Catholic Fellow-Traveler is male, although it could be argued that the all-time champion of manipulative and narcissistic Catholic Fellow-Traveling was a female: Simone Weil, whose last refusal of baptism occurred on her deathbed. Around Weil there grew a widespread and intellectually disastrous cult during the late 1940s and the 1950s, in which cult, sadly, the future Paul VI became caught up. Evelyn Waugh got Weil right, as he got most things right, summing up her coquettish creed by attributing to her a solitary devastating sentence: "the Church isn't quite good enough for *me*, but, of course, if God really insists..." Such, at best, is the Catholic Fellow-Traveler's philosophy; such, the rationalization for his detachment from the Church he flirts with.

It might be asked: how is it possible – indeed, *is* it possible? – for the Catholic Fellow-Traveler to be differentiated from a sincere but reluctant catechumen, hesitating for months or years before being received into the Church? When a priest interviews an inquirer after the Church, how can he tell whether the inquirer's hesitations are the legitimate anxieties of one firmly interested in entering the Faith's household, or the mere fishing expeditions of a time-waster?

Fortunately, the answer is simple. The legitimate catechumen's hesitations always spring from fear. It might be the fear that he will be unable to live up to Church teachings on sexual morality. It might be the fear (especially if he has been absorbing Feeneyite literature) that his deceased non-Catholic relatives are in hell. It might be the fear of hell for himself. It might be the fear of making his first confession. It might be any, or all, of half-a-dozen other fears. But fear, of some sort, there will be.

Contrast this with the Catholic Fellow-Traveler's approach. That approach is fearless. He is not remotely awed by the Church. Far from believing that the Church would be doing him a favor by receiving him, he believes himself to be doing the Church a favor by noticing it. For him, the Church is a club. A club's less complex rules can be memorized with a little effort; they are not binding on his conscience; they need not leave any impact on his spiritual or even his emotional life, and he would think the club rather vulgar if they did. Should he decide to enter the club's guest-room, and stay there, then the club would have the responsibility of trying to expel him, a responsibility which it may well jib at undertaking.

Suppose, moreover, that – as could well be the case – the club does not want to expel him? After all, it may well seem to the club's executives that there is something to be said for the Catholic Fellow-Traveler. To abandon the club metaphor for an avian simile: he might not be a duck, but he sometimes walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, which is more than lots of actual ducks seem inclined to do. However lazy his mind and however spineless his will, he is not stupid. He usually has the gift of the gab, and, if not exactly charismatic, can generally frighten Catholic officials into acquiescence, as genuine Catholics now tend to be conspicuously unsuccessful at doing.

Continued Next Page

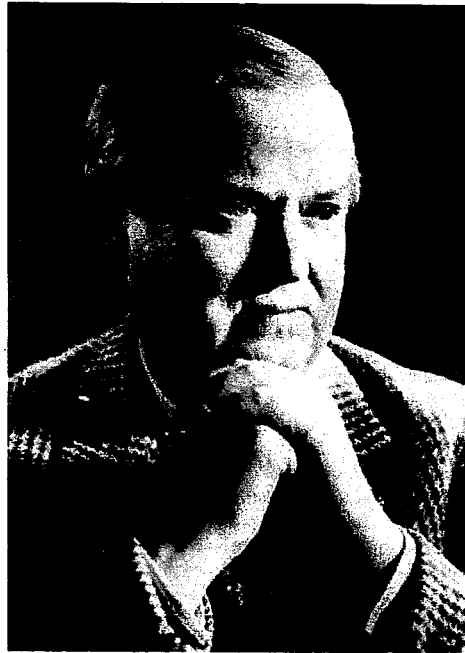
# THE PROBLEM OF THE CATHOLIC FELLOW-TRAVELER

R. Stovel/Continued from Page 7

This might not seem such a problem if his knowledge of Catholic doctrine were not at once scrappy, incoherent, and (in particular) distorted by purely personal obsessions that either are only distantly related to Catholicism, or else blatantly contradict it. In many instances such obsessions take a political shape. After all, party-political activism has become, in modern Western societies, what Russell Kirk called "the preoccupation of the quarter-educated." It has another advantage in the Catholic Fellow-Traveler's eyes: that whereas attending an Ignatian retreat would expose his hypocrisy to one and all, the rhetoric of party-political cheerleading sounds at least as effective on the lips of the spiritually dead as on those of the spiritually alive.

There are several forms such activism might assume. He might combine his fake-Catholicism with, for example, feminism: insisting that what Islam needs – in fact, what will eliminate all Islam's dangers – is its own monstrous regiment of Betty Friedans, Bella Abzugs, and Abu Ghraib's lady sadists. Alternatively, his fake-Catholicism might be mixed up with a drooling enthusiasm for J. K. Rowling's output, against which enthusiasm neither specific Vatican monitions nor the most basic *sensus Catholicus* can avail. Or instead, his fake-Catholicism might ally itself with the Americanist heresy, in all its brazen splendor; he is unlikely to know, and still unlikely to care, that this heresy was condemned by Leo XIII more than a century back.

Possibly the most common and most dangerous correlative for his fake-Catholicism (at least these days) is the neocon-democratist Big Business temptation, made voguish by the Michael Novak school. As an indicator of what grotesqueries this facilitates in practice, the following extract from the March 2008 edition of *The Defendant* – newsletter for the Australian Chesterton Society – deserves note. The extract's author is a Catholic Fellow-Traveler employed at a Catholic university within, and by the Catholic newspaper of, the Perth Archdiocese in Western Australia:



"Come inside. You cannot know what the Church is like from outside. However learned you are in theology, nothing you know amounts to anything in comparison with the knowledge of the simplest actual member of the Communion of Saints." ... EVELYN WAUGH

resembles being required to inculcate rudimentary English into a scribbler conversant solely with Ebonics. By what conceivable authority does this writer presume to judge, in his concluding sentence, what the Church should and should not do? Where did he acquire his surreal notions of scientific history? From the collected screeds of

**Answering this diatribe resembles being required to inculcate rudimentary English into a scribbler conversant solely with Ebonics. By what conceivable authority does this writer presume to judge what the Church should and should not do?**

"Peter Hunt [a lifelong Chesterton scholar based in Tasmania] sneers at 'the so-called "free-market mentality." I would be interested to know what alternatives to the free market he envisages. The only alternatives I know to freedom involve un-freedom. ... The free market was endorsed by Pope John Paul II, who I am told on good authority was a Catholic ... The Church showed itself commendably ready to discard Dark Ages and early Medieval notions of Astronomy and Geography when better paradigms and empirical observations superseded them, remembering Saint Augustine of Hippo's dictum that there can be no conflict between Faith and Reason. It is to be hoped that, following John Paul's example, it will do the same in discarding any lingering notions of Medieval economics."

How should any orthodox Catholic respond to so embarrassing a farrago of intellectual and moral confusion, of lawyerly sarcasms (as about John Paul II), quarter-truths and outright falsehoods? (These last include deliberate concealment of the writer's non-Catholic status, although a Catholic who wrote such nonsense would warrant comparable censure.) Answering this diatribe

Christopher Hitchens in comic-book form, perhaps? What is the above passage's chatter about the "Dark Ages", except an infantile sub-Whiggish, sub-Masonic cliché which automatically proclaims its user's disqualification for any historiographical research whatsoever? Can this Catholic Fellow-Traveler really be unaware that traditional Catholic economic dogma – as explained with the utmost clarity by Leo XIII and Pius XI, to name only two popes – is part of the ordinary magisterium; and that accordingly, it binds Catholics under pain of sin? Has our Catholic Fellow-Traveler really failed to notice the fact that the neocon myth of *Centesimus Annus* as an apologia for Wall Street finance capitalism was demolished as long ago as the October 20, 1994 issue of *The Wanderer*, by Fr. Ian Boyd (of *Chesterton Review* fame) and the singularly non-traditionalist Paul Likoudis?

Only two possible explanations exist for this Fellow-Traveler's supercilious effusions: either they derive from ignorance or they derive from downright mendacity. Which of these explanations would be the more discreditable, in one who is after all a mouthpiece for Catholic officialdom, it would be injudicious to enquire (even if we can all harbor

our own theories as regards the subject).

Nor need the Catholic Fellow-Traveler's capacity for mischief end with mere cafeteria-Catholic verbiage. Given that he trifles with the affections of the Bride of Christ (there is no more polite way to describe his attitude), it should not surprise anyone that he will often bring to marriage the same fundamental frivolity. How many times has a Catholic been lured into marrying a Fellow-Traveler, who makes endless vague assurances about how he will become a Catholic "when the time is ripe"! (The time is never ripe.) How bitter the disappointment felt by any Catholic spouse who believes him! How enraged the subsequent arguments over children's education, and how genuine the horror of the Fellow-Traveler that his children (instead of taking after his own exuberant nihilistic self-esteem) might be taught about social justice encyclicals and ... well, *Catholicism!* From this we can see that the Catholic Fellow-Traveler is not at all an abstract problem, but on the contrary, one whose behavior strikes at the very heart of what it means to be an actual Catholic.

There would appear to be two methods, and two alone, for others to deal with him. First, the clergy should set a good example by firm reminders. If a Fellow-Traveler is still just a fellow-traveler after, let us say, two years of cultivating Catholic employers, he should courteously but firmly be told that his continued employment will necessitate, at the very least, extremely serious catechetical endeavor; and that if he is not prepared to complete this endeavor by a certain date in the near future, he should look elsewhere for work and social life. Secondly, Catholic bureaucracies – especially those whose function involves regular public contact – should make every effort at giving priority to hiring Catholics over hiring non-Catholics. This, of course, has run contrary for four decades to the entire liberal establishment's gaseous "spirit of Vatican II". It is not the less urgent a requirement merely on that account.

By one solitary means can the Catholic Fellow-Traveler cure himself. That means was movingly described by Waugh in 1955: "Come inside. You cannot know what the Church is like from outside. However learned you are in theology, nothing you know amounts to anything in comparison with the knowledge of the simplest actual member of the Communion of Saints." It is the Catholic Fellow-Traveler's tragedy that mere human mechanisms can never effect the humble, penitential submission which true conversion (as opposed to whatever therapeutic rigmarole Tony Blair presumably underwent) entails.

The Catholic Fellow-Traveler has every right to be prayed for. He does not have – and it is false charity for bishops or lay Catholic enablers to imply that he does have – the shadow of a right to control any part of the Church on earth, let alone to speak for it.



**DE Enterprises**  
Buy-Sell-Trade Precious Metals

Finally, a metals broker you can TRUST!  
Owned and operated by Traditional Catholics!

Now is the time to invest in Gold and Silver!

Call us today! 763-444-8214

Visit us online:

[www.deenterprisesmn.com](http://www.deenterprisesmn.com)