

INTERVIEW

Cardinal Burke Responds to Recent Criticisms

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Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke, 66, is troubled by the negative campaign that has been waged against him. Ordained a bishop by Pope John Paul II in 1995, the respected expert in canon law was called to Rome by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 as prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura before being appointed cardinal in 2010. In recent months, critics have described him as an “ultraconservative fanatic,” “anti-

Conciliar,” “in conspiracy against the Pope” and even ready for a schism should the upcoming family synod open up unwelcome changes.

The criticism has been so defamatory that in Italy several bishops have even refused to host his lectures in their dioceses. Where he has been allowed to give a conference — as recently in some cities in the north of Italy — there are invariably priests who oppose him and accuse him of spreading propaganda against the Pope.

“It’s total nonsense; I don’t understand this attitude,” said Cardinal Burke. “I have never said a single word against the Pope; I strive only to serve the truth, a task that we all have. I have always seen my talks and my activities as a support to the Petrine ministry. The people who know me well can witness to the fact I am not anti-papal. On the contrary, I have always been extremely loyal and wanted to serve the Holy Father, as I am doing now.”

Indeed, meeting him in his apartment, a stone’s throw from St. Peter’s Square, with his friendly manner and spontaneity, Cardinal Burke bears no resemblance to that hard defender of “cold doctrine,” as he is described by mainstream media outlets.

Cardinal Burke, in the debate that preceded and followed the first synod on the family, some of your statements did sound like criticisms of the Pope, or at least that is how they were interpreted. For example, quite a stir was caused by your recent remark, “I will resist; I’ll resist,” as a response to a possible decision of the Pope to grant Communion to the divorced and remarried.

That comment was misrepresented, and there was no reference to Pope Francis. I believe that because I have always spoken very clearly on the issue of marriage and the family, there are people who want to undermine what I say by depicting me as an enemy of the Pope or even ready for a schism by using that answer I gave in an interview with a French television channel.

How should we interpret that answer?

Quite simply. The journalist asked me what I would do if, hypothetically, not referring to Pope Francis, a pontiff were to make decisions contrary to the Church’s doctrine and practice. I replied I should resist, because we are all in the service of the truth, starting with the Pope. The Church is not a political body, in the sense of power. The power is Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Therefore, I replied I would resist, and it would not be the first time that this has happened in the Church. There have been several moments in history where someone had to stand up to the pope, beginning with St. Paul against St. Peter, in the matter of Judaizers who wanted to impose circumcision on the converted Greeks. In my case, I am not resisting Pope Francis at all because he hasn’t done

anything against the doctrine. Nor do I see myself in a fight against the Pope, as they try to depict me. I'm not pursuing the interests of a group or party. I am simply trying, as a cardinal, to be a teacher of the faith.

Another criticism made against you is your alleged passion for "lace," a comment used in a demeaning way to criticize your preferred clerical and liturgical vestments as something that the Pope cannot endure.

The Pope has never made me aware that he disapproves of the way I dress, which, anyway, has always been within norms of the Church. I celebrate the liturgy also in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite, and there are vestments for this which do not exist for the celebration of the ordinary form, but I always wear what is required for the rite that I am celebrating. I am not making a political statement against the Pope's way of dressing. It has to be said that every pope has his own style, but he does not impose this on all the other bishops. So I don't understand why this should be a cause for controversy.

But newspapers often use a photo of you wearing a hat clearly out of date.

Yes, I know, but it's just incredible. I can explain: That photo was spread around after *Il Foglio* published it alongside the interview I did at the time of the synod. The interview had been done well, but, unfortunately, they chose a photo that had nothing to do with it, which I regret, because, in this way, they gave the mistaken impression of a person who lives in the past. The truth is that, after being named cardinal, I was invited to a diocese in the south of Italy for a conference on the liturgy. For the occasion, the organizer decided to give me as a gift an old-fashioned cardinal's hat. I have no idea where he got it from. I held it in my hand and obviously had no intention of wearing it regularly, but he asked me to put it on to take at least one photo. This was the only time I put that hat on my head, but, unfortunately, that picture has been published all over the world, and some use it to give the impression that I go around like that. But I've never worn it, not even for a ceremony.

You have also been named as the inspiration if not the promoter of the "Petition to Pope Francis for the Family," which has been circulated to collect signatures by a number of traditionalist websites.

I did sign that petition, but it is not my initiative or my idea. Nor did I write or collaborate in drafting the text. Anyone who says otherwise is affirming something false. As far as I know, it is an initiative by laypeople. I was shown the text, and I signed it, as have many other cardinals.

Another of the charges against you is that you are against the Second Vatican Council.

These labels are easy to apply, but there is no basis in reality. All my theological education in the major seminary was based on the documents of Vatican II, and I am still trying to study these documents more deeply. I'm not at all opposed to the Council, and if one reads my writings, he will find that I quote the documents of Vatican II many times. What I don't agree with is the so-called "spirit of the Council," which is not faithful to the Council texts but purports to create something totally new, a new church that has nothing to do with all the so-called aberrations of the past. On this matter, I wholeheartedly follow Pope Benedict XVI's enlightening presentation to the Roman Curia for Christmas 2005: It is the famous discourse in which he explains the correct hermeneutic, which is that of reform in continuity, as opposed to the hermeneutic of rupture in discontinuity that many sectors promote. Pope Benedict XVI's presentation is brilliant and explains everything. Many things that happened after the Council and are attributed to the Council have nothing to do with the Council. This is the plain truth.

Did Pope Francis "punish" you by removing you from the Apostolic Signatura and entrusting you with the patronage of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta?

In an interview with the Argentine newspaper *La Nacion*, the Pope already answered this question by explaining the reasons for his decision. This already says everything, and it is not up to me to comment. I can only say, without revealing any confidential information, that the Pope has never told me or given me the impression that there was anything he wanted to punish me for.

Perhaps your "reputation" has to do with what Cardinal Walter Kasper called the "synod battle," which also seems to grow in intensity as we get closer to the ordinary synod this coming October. At what stage are we now?

I would say that there is now a much more extensive discussion on the topics covered by the synod, and this is a good thing. There is a greater number of cardinals, bishops and laypeople who are intervening, and this is very positive. Therefore, I don't understand all the fuss last year made over the book *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, to which I contributed, along with four other cardinals and four specialists on marriage.

That was when the theory of a conspiracy against the Pope was born, a view echoed recently by the well-known Italian historian Alberto Melloni, co-author of a famous history of Vatican Council II that pushes for a progressive interpretation of the Council. Melloni wrote an article for the most popular Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, blaming the five cardinals of a conspiracy against the Pope.

It is simply absurd. How can you possibly accuse of plotting against the Pope those who uphold what the Church has always taught and practiced on marriage and Communion? The book was certainly written as an aid for the synod to answer Cardinal Kasper's thesis. But it is not polemical, it is a presentation completely faithful to the Tradition, and it is also of the highest scholarly quality possible. I am absolutely disposed to receive criticism on the content, but to say we conspired against the Pope is unacceptable.

Who is behind this witch hunt?

I do not have any direct information, but there is definitely a group that wants to impose on the Church not only Kasper's thesis on Communion for the divorced and remarried, or for those in irregular situations, but also other positions related to the themes of the synod. I think, for instance, of the idea of identifying the positive aspects of extramarital or homosexual relationships. It is evident there are forces pushing in this direction, and this is the reason why they want to discredit those of us who are trying to defend the Church's teaching. I have nothing personal against Cardinal Kasper; for me, the question is only to proclaim the Church's teaching, which in this case is tied to words spoken by the Lord.

Looking at some of the themes that emerged strongly in the synod, there is talk again about a "gay lobby."

I can't precisely identify it, but I see more and more that there is a force moving in this direction. I can see people either consciously or subconsciously driving a homosexual agenda. How it's organized, I don't know, but it is evident there is a force of this nature. At the synod, we said that homosexuality had nothing to do with the family; rather, a synod should be convoked on the subject if we wanted to speak about this theme. And, instead, we found in the *relatio post disceptationem* this theme which had not been discussed by the fathers.

One of the theological arguments that is frequently repeated to justify Cardinal Kasper is that of the "development of doctrine." It isn't change, but a deeper understanding that can lead to new practice.

Here, there is a big misunderstanding. The development of doctrine, as, for example, Blessed Cardinal [John Henry] Newman put it or other good theologians, means a deepening in appreciation in the knowledge of a doctrine, not the change of doctrine. Development in no case leads to change. An example of this is Pope Benedict's post-synodal exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, where he presents the development of the knowledge of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, also expressed in Eucharistic adoration. There have in fact been some who were contrary to

Eucharistic adoration, because the Eucharist is to be received within us. But Benedict XVI explained — also citing St. Augustine — that if it is true that the Lord gives us himself in the Eucharist to be consumed, it is also true that you cannot recognize this reality of Jesus' presence under the Eucharistic species without worshipping these species. This is an example of the development of doctrine, but it is not the case that the doctrine on the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist changed.

One of the recurring themes in the controversy on the synod is the alleged opposition between doctrine and practice, doctrine and mercy. The Pope often insists on the pharisaic attitude of those who use doctrine to keep out love.

I think you have to distinguish between what the Pope says on certain occasions and those who affirm an opposition between doctrine and practice. The Church can never allow a contrast between doctrine and practice, because we live the truth that Christ communicates to us in his holy Church, and the truth is never something cold. It is the truth that opens to us a space for love; to love, really, you have to respect the truth of the person and of the person in the particular situations in which you find him or her. Thus, creating a kind of contrast between doctrine and practice does not reflect the reality of our faith. One who supports the thesis of Cardinal Kasper — a change of discipline that does not touch doctrine — should explain how this is possible. If the Church allows Communion for a person who is bound by marriage but who is living with another person in a matrimonial relationship, that is in a state of adultery: How can the Church allow this and maintain at the same time that marriage is indissoluble? The contrast between doctrine and practice is a false contrast that we must reject.

But it is also true that you can use doctrine without love.

Absolutely, and this is what the Pope is condemning, the use of doctrine or law to promote a personal agenda in order to dominate people. But this does not mean there is a problem with the doctrine and discipline; only there are people of ill will who commit abuses, for instance by interpreting the law in a way that harms people. Or they apply the law without love, insisting on the truth of a situation of a person but without love. Even when someone is in a state of grievous sin, we have to love that person and help him or her like Our Lord did with the adulteress and the Samaritan woman. He was very clear in announcing the state of their sin, but at the same time, he showed great love by inviting them to come out of this situation. This is not what the Pharisees did; instead, they showed cruel legalism: denouncing the violation of the law without offering any help to the person on how to turn away from sin so as to find peace again.

Translated by Patricia Gooding-Williams

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BURKE: NON SONO CONTRO IL PAPA (versione in italiano)