

THEY MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE

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The day before he was elected pope, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger gave a homily before the College of Cardinals warning of a “dictatorship of relativism” that was sweeping much of the world. Obviously, they liked what they heard, otherwise he would still be a cardinal.

It is also obvious that there are many in the U.S. who reject this notion. What reigns supreme is the idea that each individual possesses his or her own morality. This popular view is not only sociologically illiterate—no society in the history of the world has ever survived without a normative order, that is, without a moral consensus—it is positively pernicious. It is pernicious because it inexorably leads to moral anarchy.

Pope Benedict XVI knows that a society absent moral absolutes is capable of great evil. His homily on the “dictatorship of relativism” owes much to John Paul II’s encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, one of the most brilliant statements ever written on the relation between morality and liberty. In it, the pope said that such things as genocide, torture, mutilation, prostitution, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, slavery and trafficking in women and children were always wrong, and that they were wrong for all people and in all societies. Put differently, these are not matters of conscience. In this regard, it is worth remembering that Jeffrey Dahmer followed the dictates of his conscience, and he ate his victims for lunch.

Ironically, it was Joseph Ratzinger’s fellow Germans who gave us the diabolical idea that moral absolutes are nonsense—nihilists such as Nietzsche and Nazis such as Heidegger. They, in turn, were the intellectual fathers of

Foucault and Derrida, two Frenchmen who corrupted the faculty of reason with their postmodernist assault on truth.

Postmodernist thought, which is fashionable on college campuses, is alive in many ideological isms: subjectivism, historicism, multiculturalism, deconstructionism, moral relativism and nihilism. It is the work of leftist academics at war with the Catholic concept of natural law. But beyond the academy, others have promulgated this invidious idea.

"There is no such thing as truth, either in the moral or in the scientific sense." The author of this sentence was Adolf Hitler, though it could have been penned by any of today's postmodernist intellectuals. History shows that Hitler made good on his beliefs.

Beyond expounding on the wisdom of moral absolutes, Pope Benedict XVI can be expected to hold the line on the Church's teachings on sexual ethics. For 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has taught that the only morally acceptable expression of sexuality is between a man and a woman in the institution of marriage. This teaching is obviously not going to change under Pope Benedict XVI. But do American Catholics agree?

When asked in a survey, many Catholics say they would prefer the Church to change some of its teachings on women and sexuality. However, a recent Quinnipiac poll also shows that by a margin of 80-11, Catholics say that Pope John Paul's strong support of traditional Church positions was good for the Church. In other words, Catholics are conflicted: On the one hand, they want to soften the teachings; on the other hand, they understand the need for moral ordinates.

We found the same thing in the mid-1990s. That was when the Catholic League commissioned a poll of Catholics and learned that although most Catholics expressed a desire for some changes in Church teachings on sexuality, 83 percent said they would be as committed, if not more committed, to the Church if it did not make the desired changes. Again, Catholics seem to

be saying that while they are open to change, they also admire a Church that stands fast against prevailing cultural winds.

That there is no great demand for the Church to change its teachings on matters sexual was proven in 1997. Under the banner We Are Church, a radical group of Catholics announced that its petition drive aimed at securing a million signatures demanding “progressive” changes in Church teachings was a monumental flop: Only 37,000 signatures were garnered. And it certainly wasn’t because of lack of cash—fat cats forked over a small fortune to pay for full-page ads in newspapers, and children were literally bribed a buck a name for every signature they could hustle.

Even if the Church made all the changes that its critics want, there is little reason to think that would bring people back to the Church: The Anglican Church in England, and the Lutheran Church in Sweden, have made the desired changes and their pews are empty.

Granting all this, it remains true that some are very unhappy with our new pope. If they cannot reconcile themselves to the Church, perhaps the time has come for them to join a religion that delivers on what they want. After all, there are plenty of them available, although most are losing members fast. That might end their discontent. It would certainly show respect for diversity.