



3rd Order SSPX

Letter to Members: District of Australia & New Zealand



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Exclusion Delusion

Dear Postulants and Professed members,

The following passage from the Breviary reminded me of a hazard always threatening preservative groups such as ours. Commenting on the fact that Christ was often found talking and eating with sinners, St Gregory remarks as follows:

'Sinners and publicans approached our Redeemer; and they were welcomed not only to listen, but even to eat with Him. The Pharisees, however, became indignant upon observing such familiarity. You may deduce from the Gospel story, then, that true holiness includes sympathy, while mock piety easily becomes indignant.'

The Pharisees, as their name attests (the Hebrew *parushim* means 'the separated ones') prided themselves on being separated from defilement and stain. But surely separating ourselves from sin, stain and defilement is a good and necessary thing! So where did the Pharisees go wrong, exactly?

They went wrong in avoiding the appearance of sin rather than sin itself. The former in others, the latter in themselves.

There is a spiritual disease which we might term Exclusion Delusion. Although there are various strains and degrees of the basic malady, the core disorder is this: *selective avoidance of people and things so as to avoid spiritual contamination of ourselves or our family.*

So, what sort of people or things are selected for avoidance by sufferers of this disease? A great variety, to be sure. But what the 'avoidables' usually have in common is a certain external unorthodoxy or uncouthness. You know, people with nose rings or tattoos, people with family split-ups, people attending the Novus Ordo or the Fraternity of St Peter, people not interested in or convinced by Tradition, girls who wear pants, movies with swearing, movies without explicit reference to God, etc. I am not saying that all these attributes are ideal or desirable, but I am saying that they are only objectionable in a quite superficial way. Granted, some of those things might sometimes cover genuine evil to be avoided in certain circumstances, but not as they stand.

So what then is the delusion? It is as if people (whether real or in movies) whose lives have been touched or even marred by certain types of sin or error are somehow by the very fact a danger to us or our children. And therefore we should avoid them where possible. Right? Wrong.

To be sure, Exclusion Delusion is not always motivated by pharisaic pride. It may instead be due to a lack of trust in Divine Providence and in the immunity God gives through a loving and devout family. But whatever the motive, ED

has no foundations in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and produces many tragic effects regardless of the motive. Poison still harms even if taken accidentally.

Do we know what an occasion of sin really is? Are we confusing true occasions of sin with the sinful environment or just marred externals inevitable in a fallen world?

There is really a sense in which everyone and everything is a possible occasion of sin. For example, my writing this letter might attract me to vanity or pride. For goodness sake, if the angels could abuse their wonderful gift of free will as an occasion to wreak immeasurable sin and evil, then *anything* can become be an occasion of sin.

But a true occasion of sin is *any person, place or thing which has led us frequently into sin in the recent past*. Thus, if someone wasted half an hour watching useless things on YouTube whenever he used the internet, then using the internet would constitute an occasion of *venial* sin for him. If another looked at pornographic videos instead of just stupid videos it would be an occasion of *mortal* sin. In fact, we are bound under pain of grievous sin to avoid *unnecessary proximate occasions of mortal sin*.

So if a person, place or thing has not led us or those in our care into frequent sins in the recent past, it is normally not an occasion of sin. It may be for *others*, but that is not our business. Granted, a very few things are of their very nature occasions of sin and are to be avoided, such as graphic and gratuitous impurity in words or images.

But to merely hear or see sinful behaviour in others, even mortally sinful, is not as such sinful. Is not Almighty God intimately aware of all the sins of humanity and demons, and yet is this knowledge sinful for Him? Or was Our Immaculate Mother stained by the filth She saw and heard at Calvary? 'But father, they are perfect!' Exactly, and that only makes the argument stronger. Evil and sin in the presence of God or Our Lady is even worse.

Many sinful things take place in Sacred Scripture, even very impure things. Should we then not read these parts? Of course we should. Witnessing sinful behaviour is not in itself sinful, any more than seeing a sick person makes you sick or seeing a deformed person makes you deformed. "It is not that which goes into the mouth (*or eyes, or ears*) that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man" (Matt 15:10). It is our heart and intentions which matter most.

Our Lord was not infected with ED. The portrayal of Christ in the Gospels is unashamedly un-Pharisaic and un-separatist. He excluded *no one* from His company or His conversation, and I mean no one: prostitutes and demons (Judas was possessed in the end) included. When His apostles misunderstood Him, disagreed with Him, even abandoned Him, He always kept contact, made Himself available and listened to them. How many of those in tradition suffering from ED have taken the very opposite approach exemplified by Our Saviour! Shunning 'sinful people', even (I might sadly say *especially*) their very own parents, and reaping the bitter and tragic fruits. "I am *not* praying that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). The only living people of whose spiritual evil we can be sure are the demons, those in league with the chief "evil one". Our neighbour is only ever evil in this way when presently and persistently pushing us towards evil actions. Then we must avoid them. Not otherwise.

If we are to be "the light of the world" we must be in the world. Christ likened His followers to a "city seated upon a mountain that cannot be hidden". Thus, unless we are in a religious order, we may *not* hide ourselves in the dark and protected recesses of the valley below. God has promised His protection. Numerous examples within Catholic tradition have shown that if the family is loving, ordered, truly pious and mostly television-less, the protection of Heaven is guaranteed when members venture out daily to meet the hundreds of 'occasions of sin'. Let us from now on call them what they really are: 'occasions to love', 'occasions to forgive' and 'occasions not to judge'.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Fr Jordie Stephens

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