

Absolute Truth

Edward Stourton

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“The Truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind, at once quietly and with power.” These words from the Second Vatican Council embody what is at the center of the world’s largest institution. How does the Catholic Church arrive at this truth? Drawing on numerous interviews with clergy of every level right up to the Vatican, Stourton succinctly illuminates the method of truth seeking.

He narrates the heated, ongoing battle between the conservatives and the progressives of the Catholic Church, the very source of the perils that this institution faces. His accounts of each side’s reasoning are complete and balanced. He urgently reveals that an organization’s greatest threat often comes from the inside and the Catholic Church is no exception.

To many this may seem a problem only for a small segment of the population (particularly in the U.S.). Stourton exposes the far-reaching affects of the Church on the world with regard to human dignity, liberty, justice, and salvation among others. The Church is a political force that has had positive effects both within herself and in world affairs. This gives Absolute Truth a wider appeal.

Stourton understands that while the Second Vatican Council has allowed the Church to modernize and maintain her place in today’s world, it has also created a slippery slope that continues to move away from the original teachings, from truth. Church teachings on practices such as birth control are still being debated that leaves many conservatives asking, if you don’t like it then why do you stay? Both clergy and lay progressives forget that the Church is a voluntary organization, and it is suggested that it is the insistence on constant revision and not the split itself that causes the real problem.

Truth is not always known. Once it is, however, it is everlasting, even in the face of changing times which translates as changing fads. Even those who are not Catholic have a vested interest in the truth that the Church not only seeks, but seeks to hold onto.

MARY BETH ZELEZNIK (January / February 2001)

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