**Guardians of Doctrine**

*by Stan Cox*

On Thursday, the Catholic Pope released a text giving his view of who should be selected as Catholic bishops as the Catholic church goes forward in the 21st century. Of course, the Catholic church’s concepts of how bishops are to be selected, what their qualifications are, and the nature and extent of their rule are all contrary to what is revealed in the New Testament. In this short article, however, it is our intent to examine one aspect of the Pope’s message. Consider the following quote, taken from a report on the document:

In a nearly 3,000-word text to the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops, Francis tells the office they should not look for bishops based on any “preferences, likes, or trends” and likewise should not seek prelates who are mainly concerned with doctrinal matters.

The church, writes Francis, needs “guardians of doctrine not so as to measure how far the world is from doctrinal truth but to appeal to the world to charm it with the beauty of love [and] to seduce it with the freedom bestowed by the Gospel.”

“The church does not need apologists of its causes nor crusaders of its battles, but sowers humble and confident of the truth, who … trust of its power,” the pontiff continues.

Francis’ words Thursday, made during the congregation’s weekly meeting, mostly reaffirm themes the pope has touched on over the past year when speaking of the role of bishops around the world ([National Catholic Reporter](http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/bishops-need-not-be-crusaders-pastors-francis-says)).

The words are subtle, but the Pope here seeks (as the columnist notes) to deemphasize the importance of doctrinal matters in the appointing of bishops, as well as the work they are to do. This complements his many homilies on the subject of unity. It is, however, a false and misleading view of how unity is obtained.

First, note that a primary work of the bishop in the Lord’s church (an office far different from that found in Catholicism) is to defend the doctrine of Christ. Men are to be appointed who are, *“…able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers…”* (Titus 1:9-10). We do need men who are both apologists and crusaders with regard to the truth, precisely because of the error than men seek to promote.

Second, note that the way unity is achieved is not be deemphasizing doctrine, but by emphasizing it! Paul contended such when he called the Corinthians to *“all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). While the world (and many religious leaders) claims that doctrine is unimportant, the faithful know otherwise. The more attention we give to a study and understanding of the doctrine of Christ, the more militant and steadfast we are in defending that truth against error, the more likely we will be to be of *“the same mind.”* The popular notion of how unity is attained is simply not true.

The pope’s view of doctrine and unity is characteristic of the age, and unsurprising. Unfortunately, it is a fact that many Christians have been unduly influenced by such worldly trends. Too many want to deemphasize doctrine, and are critical of those who defend truth. May it not be so among us!

**Friends in Low Places**

*by Jerry Fite*

No, it is not Garth Brooks, but your new friends at the Southern Hills church of Christ in Abilene, Texas. The elders of Southern Hills are overseeing a new church in town called the “Bar Church.” According to Southern Hills’ own web site, church members will be meeting soon at the Memories Country and Western bar on Sunday mornings to place themselves *“in a position to be in relationship with people who: 1) were fed up with church; 2) had dim views of church and especially church people; 3) perceived themselves to be unworthy or far from God.”* A staff member, Van Conwell, in a newspaper interview said, *“We are trying to be here in a way that communicates acceptance.”*

Alcohol will be present and available though not served until noon. The church says, *“With Bar Church’s stated mission to meet people where they are, we anticipate that alcohol will most likely be consumed during the meeting of Bar Church.”* What acceptance are you communicating? The church will carefully check ID’s, and use a system to identify underage patrons *“to insure they are not served alcohol.”* I did not know that attending church could be so dangerous for those under 21.

The church’s video introduces the Bar Church by stating Jesus did not isolate Himself in a castle, nor *“did He set up shop in a temple.”* True, He was not an “isolationist,” but He did preach and teach in the temple *(Lk. 19:47);* and His church did not fear “setting up shop” criticisms, but continued assembling in the temple for worship *(Acts 2:42, 46).*

Jesus did run people out of the temple who were “setting up shop.” Why? Because, they turned the temple which is God’s house of prayer, into a place of merchandise *(John 2:14-16).* They failed to distinguish between the holy and the common.

Is this not what Southern Hills has done in the name of making people feel “acceptance”? People can drink their alcohol while the church has assembled to “soberly” remember the Lord’s death in partaking the Lord’s supper. Instrumental music will be used in the worship *“for the purpose of making the singing of hymns less threatening and providing a musical sound path for all to follow”* despite the Lord not authorizing such of His followers (*Colossians 3:16).* I wonder if the Lord knew how “threatening” His command to sing by merely speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs would become *(Ephesians 5:19)*?

Jesus met in synagogues, private homes, by the sea shore and in the mountain. But we never see Him creating another barrier to making people holy by meeting in places not conducive for holy living.

Your friends at Southern Hills are coming to create “acceptance” as you sit on your blanket and sip your suds. Don’t worry if you are *“…not big on social graces...”* Come! *“Slip on down to the oasis” (Memories).* Forget those “church people” who intimidate you with “rules” for holy living. Leave them to their high *“Ivory Tower.”* Yes, “*Oh, I’ve got friends in low places.”*