

that ship has sailed

I don't know whether the above phrase should be labeled an idiomatic expression or a euphemism or something else, but it generally refers to a lost cause; it is something for which any further argument is deemed futile.

The expression occurred to me when sitting with some elders in my family who were lamenting the state of morality in the country: Sex before marriage . . . that ship has sailed. "Gay marriage" . . . that ship has sailed. Obligatory observance of the Sabbath/Lord's Day . . . that ship has sailed. Holy Days of Obligation. . . that ship has sailed.

Many "ships" have sailed; too many to list here. A major contributing factor to this sense is the massive loss of credibility in the clergy and the Church as a result of scandals, hypocrisy, arrogance, and a whole host of other sins which have been gleefully magnified by the secular media. We would like to be able to assert that all of these terrible things like clergy child molestation, fornication, adultery and larceny are sins of individuals, but the apparent cover given by some bishops, (especially where the abuse scandal is concerned) provides warrant for the accusation of institutional corruption and hypocrisy.

Like it or not, this is where we find ourselves at this moment in history. Our credibility to speak on matters of personal morality has been torpedoed and we are limping along searching for repairs to rudder and props, (to continue the nautical theme).

In the midst of this, I wonder if we are just left to observe the slow motion wreckage of personal lives and the life of a society as such choices are made against what we know to be God's law and will for us. We are not, in fact, hoisting a white flag of surrender to the forces of secularism. We still hold

that, (for example), marriage open to procreation is the only proper context for sexual expression and that it serves the actual consummation of the bond of marriage. In simpler language, sexual intercourse is supposed to 'seal the deal' or complete the process of becoming sacramentally married! The marriage can be deemed "null" if, in fact, it was never "consummated" in this way.

Alas, this profound meaning has been lost in the culture of co-habitation before marriage. Pope John Paul II made valiant attempts to express the beauty of Church teaching in this area with what is referred to as "The Theology of the Body." But it remains a "hard sell" in this culture of pragmatism, relativism, and subjectivism. "*After all . . .*" so goes the argument. . . "*if we really love one another and plan on getting married, what harm is done by expressing it this way?*" Well, among other things, one can say that marriage is a very challenging, life-long commitment, and couples need every grace and every advantage to make it work for the long haul. Compare the valuation of routinized, contraceptive practice to what the Church proposes: **When you strip away the essence, you are left with a shell, evacuated of much of its meaning.**

This "ship" seems to have "sailed." Nobody wants to hear it because it is an affront to personal freedom. But, as St. John Paul II was keen to wonder, what sort of freedom is it that is divorced from the truth of things? The philosophies underlying the modern conception of personal freedom seem to be rooted in some sort of deconstructionism; the stripping away of elements as a means to exalt man's freedom to control and define his own life.

In his Theology of the Body, Pope John Paul II could be described as attempting a "reconstruction." In light of our loss of institutional credibility, this is probably the way forward on many fronts. If we don't have the moral authority to assert moral laws or obligations as we once did, perhaps we should attempt to reacquaint our generation with the reconstructed beauty of creation in the manner of the sainted Pope. But it will not be quick and easy: Getting a hearing may only happen when the consequences of deconstruction create a world of desperation. Only time will tell.