

It relieves decisional pressure if there are some things too nailed down to come loose. That way, no matter your woes, at least there's some security, some rock of stability, of safety, of shadow out of the blazing sun of life's untowardnesses. This Thinksheet calls this category of things "The Undiscussable." Since the category is unnatural, as human beings naturally discuss in the language-living of their lives *kata physin* ("according to nature," the Stoic ideal), what account shall we give of the fact that the phenomenon is universal in our species, that everybody "draws the line" somewhere, shutting off discussion? To shift the approach-angle slightly, what is the moral significance--and therefore also the spiritual significance--of this category? "Not to decide is to decide" (which doubtless many before Harvey Cox said), but also: Not to have to decide is to have decided. This Thinksheet is about the potential (and actual!) good and evil of that soul condition & mind position. Its occasion is that we're only hours from the Pope's New Road Show in the USA.

1. Last week, the high-profile US RCC dissidents got together to provide a prophylactic against the popemobile. Feeble, of course: spectacle wins hands down every time against speculation, cogitation, even conscientization. But necessary to clarify, & present, the dissidents' undiscussables over against Rome's untouchables. (I'll not make either list: The Thinksheet is not about the content of the category of the undiscussable but about the category itself.)
2. I'm not entirely unsympathetic with the Vatican's effort to wow the booboisie in all of us; I prefer it to Vanna White, who does the same to 42 million Americans weekly on "The Wheel of Fortune." But as a Christian (not just as a Protestant) I must apply critical consciousness to the un-Jesus-like marriage of majesty & mystery, of spectacle & sacrament, of show & spirituality. And as a political thinker, I'm hopeful that the distance between papal performance & America's daily Catholic reality will be widened (contra Rome's hope for the opposite). The wider it gets, the more the pope becomes a British-monarch-like figurehead master of ceremonies & the stronger become the lesser bishops, who (1) gain authority vis-a-vis the papacy (as, again in the British analogy, the barons vis-a-vis the king in AD 1215) & (2) move toward the day when (Hans Kung et al RCC dissidents) bishops will be elected by their dioceses.
3. As the pope's power declines with the withering of the faithful's belief in the traditional hieratic sanctions (eucharistic discipline, excommunication, the ban), papal pagentry becomes more important; and as media pagentry has less punch in a media world full of other pagentries, the papal presence in pagentry becomes more important. Thus behold the travelingest pope ever. The implicit message is that presence-pagentry-power adds up to conviction: hopefully, the faithful will not listen to the dissidents' countering of the pope's undiscussables, which the pope will preach but (by definition) not discuss. (For the tour, the list of undiscussables has been carefully made; as carefully as, two weeks ago in the pope's reception of American Jewish leaders, the pope said nothing of the Waldheim flap or of the Vatican's continuing nonrecognition of Israel.)
4. What is the status of truth vis-a-vis undiscussables? To have decided is not to have to discuss-&-decide again: truth is implicit in & assumed by the undiscussables. Our Federalist Papers well show that this way of honoring truth also, as we say now "on the down side," enshrines error & even horror (eg, the horror of an involute-sacred-undiscussable dogma of sexuality in conflict with the human womb run wild).
5. But thank God the pope stands over against the moral relativism that threatens the fabric of our society, as placarded in the Poixdexter-Ollie & Hart-Rice Affairs.