

# homiletic & pastoral review

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# How to deal with theological dissent

## *Part I*

*By Germain Grisez*

### *I: The Recent Assembly of the Synod and the Crisis of Faith*

■ The recent extraordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops was called to celebrate, confirm and promote Vatican II. The final report shows that these purposes were fulfilled. By way of celebration, the Synod Fathers say that Vatican II was the greatest grace of this century and that it remains the Church's magna carta for the future (II, D, 7).

But my reflections begin from their confirmation of Vatican II. As John Paul II said in his address on December 7, the assembly had seemed necessary so that the Synod Fathers could "express their judgment on Vatican II in order to avoid divergent interpretations." Divergent interpretations arose because many people consid-

ered the Council not as the magna carta for the future, but as the first — and, in their view, much too hesitant — step in a revolution, which they hoped would conform the Catholic Church to the contemporary world.

The Synod Fathers firmly reject such divergent interpretations. They attribute difficulties which have arisen since Vatican II to a "partial and selective reading of the Council" and to the "failure to distinguish correctly between a legitimate openness of the Council to the world and the acceptance of a secularized world's mentality and order of values" (I, 4). To correct these mistakes, the final report not only reaffirms Vatican II but lays down conservative principles for its interpretation: "It is not legitimate to separate the spirit and the letter of the Council. More-

over, the Council must be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the Church" (I, 5).

The Synod Fathers are less optimistic than were the Fathers of Vatican II. The signs of the times have changed (II, A, 1; II, D, 2). So the final document calls for renewed emphasis on "the value, the importance, and the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ" (II, D, 2). *Aggiornamento* does not mean "an easy accommodation that could lead to the secularization of the Church"; rather, it means "a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world" (II, D, 3). And pluralism is rejected (II, C, 2).

Every faithful Catholic should thank God for this assembly of the Synod. Personally, I am happy with its outcome and with one small exception agree with the good things the Synod Fathers say about Vatican II. The exception: I am not sure whether the Council was the greatest grace of this century.

### **Dissent provoked crisis of faith**

No doubt, it was a great grace, but the century is not yet over. Since Vatican II, there has been a crisis of faith in the Church, brought on by widespread theological dissent from many Catholic teachings. The happy resolution of this crisis perhaps would be an even greater grace than the Council itself.

The Synod Fathers hint at the ongoing crisis of faith, when they express "regret that the theological discussions of our day have sometimes occasioned confusion among the faithful. Thus, communication and reciprocal dialogue between the bishops and theologians are necessary for the building up of the faith and its deeper comprehension" (II, B, a, 3).

Frankly, that sounds like Pollyanna, the

heroine of a now unread novel whose name has nevertheless come into the English language as a synonym for blind optimism. Indeed, the documents of this assembly of the Synod sometimes remind one of the conversation of a gathering of family and friends around the bed of a person whom everyone fears to be afflicted with a fatal disease. They attentively note every sign of health, mention some problems which can be remedied — "This room needs light; let's open the shutters." — but carefully avoid talking about what is at the very front of everyone's mind.

The first assembly of the Synod, in 1967, was franker about the crisis of faith, which had already erupted. Its final report said:

In a special way the Fathers deplored the fact that some actually call into doubt some truths of the faith, among others those concerning the knowledge we have of God, the person of Christ and his resurrection, the Eucharist, the mystery of original sin, the enduring objectivity of the moral law, and perpetual virginity of the the Blessed Virgin Mary.

For this reason, there is noted a state of unrest and anxiety in the Church, both among the faithful and among pastors, and therefore the spiritual life of the People of God suffers no little harm.

Among the causes of the crisis of faith, the 1967 report noted failure to distinguish "between those matters which belong to Catholic doctrine and those which are left to the free and legitimate discussion of theologians" and the spreading of questionable opinions "by priests, religious, theologians, educators, and others, without sufficient regard for the way in which the faith is taught."

Among remedies, the 1967 report proposed: "Those who are rash or imprudent should be warned in all charity; those who are pertinacious should be removed from office." By comparison, the 1985 report's

call for increased dialogue between theologians and bishops seems quite weak and deficient.

Even so, the 1985 report includes suggestions which reveal the Synod Fathers' awareness of the crisis. For just as the 1967 assembly called for a declaration concerning questions of faith—Pope Paul VI responded with the Credo of the People of God—so the 1985 assembly calls for the composition of “a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals” and urges that textbooks used in seminaries, “besides offering an exposition of sound theology in a scientific and pedagogical manner, be permeated by a true sense of the Church” (II, B, a, 5).

Moreover, anyone who reads both the final report of the 1985 assembly of the Synod and *The Ratzinger Report* can see how much the Synod Fathers' thinking was influenced by the Cardinal's diagnosis of the Church's present state. Cardinal Ratzinger is no Pollyanna; indeed, his realism led some to accuse him unjustly of being a reactionary and prophet of doom. *The Ratzinger Report* leaves no doubt that the Catholic Church is experiencing a crisis, in which theological dissent is a factor. But the Cardinal mentions several other causal factors, both outside and inside the Church.

While Cardinal Ratzinger's more inclusive diagnosis proved useful, it also will be useful to summarize the range and modes of theological dissent, as a basis for considering how the Church could deal with it more effectively.

## *II: The Range of Modes of Theological Dissent*

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on the inerrancy of Scripture, the permanent truth of dogmas, and the magisterium's authority has made the con-



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tent of Catholic faith seem unclear and unsure. Thus, such dissent has weakened catechesis, both by making catechists' work more difficult, and by depriving catechetical programs of clear content and confident presentation.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on the Trinity and the Incarnation attacks the very heart of the faith. This dissent contributes to movements which transform the substance of Catholic faith and life into some sort of secular humanism, dressed in the clothing left behind by a departed faith.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on the resurrection of the body, heaven,

and hell has tended to make this world seem to be the only reality. Thus, this dissent has contributed to an overemphasis on this-worldly concerns and a loss of the sense of mystery. Many Catholics live without thought — and thus without real hope — of life everlasting, and so understandably ignore their vocation to holiness in this life. This situation underlies both the general decline in prayer and devout reception of the sacraments, and the specific decline in the number of those entering and remaining faithful in the priesthood and religious life.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on original sin, Jesus' uniqueness as mediator, and the importance of Church membership for salvation undermines evangelization and tends to make baptism seem unnecessary. Thus, such dissent has been a factor in lessened interest in missionary activity, the decline in adult converts, and the neglect of baptism by some Catholic parents.

#### **Dissent destroys evangelization.**

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on Jesus' bodily presence in the Eucharist, his redemptive sacrifice, and its sacramental renewal in the Mass has made the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament seem less sacred and less important. Thus, this dissent is a factor in liturgical abuses, reduced Sunday Mass participation, and lessened reverence for the devotion to the Eucharist.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on God's omniscience and omnipotence has tended to weaken consciousness of divine providence and desire to live in response to it. Thus, such dissent is one reason why Catholics pray less, ignore providential signs such as those of one's vocation, and often respond to problems and adversity with either disheartened stodge-

ness or crafty manipulativeness rather than with confidence in God's help together with creative and faithful perseverance in fulfilling responsibilities.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on Mary's perpetual virginity and special graces detracts from her nobility, and so tends to lessen Marian devotion. Since that devotion used to be so large a part of Catholic spirituality, its decline has weakened the spiritual lives of many Catholics.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on the freedom normal people have to commit mortal sins, the duty to struggle against venial sin, the need for confession, and the reality of purgatory and hell has tended to make the sacrament of penance seem unnecessary. Thus, its use has declined drastically. Moreover, general absolution without individual confession often is used as if it were an ordinary rite. Yet for many who participate in that rite, the sacrament is invalid, since they have no real purpose of amendment and no intention of ever making a specific confession of their mortal sins.

Theological dissent from Catholic teaching on sex, marriage and innocent life tends to undermine Christian marriage, responsible and generous parenthood, and the struggle for chastity. Hence this dissent has contributed to an increase in extramarital sexual activity, divorce and remarriage, and the practice of contraception and abortion by Catholic couples, married and unmarried. It has ruined the spiritual lives of many seminarians, priests, and religious.

Theologians initiate dissent in different ways. Sometimes many in a certain field openly reject a whole body of doctrine — for example, many theologians first dissented from Catholic teaching on contraception and then went on to deny all the specific absolute norms of Christian

morality. Sometimes theologians deny doctrines indirectly by proposing theories which are incompatible with them—for example, some theologians explain revelation and dogma in ways which cannot be reconciled with Vatican I's solemn teaching in *Dei filius*. Sometimes a principle is explicitly rejected with important implications—for example, a few Scripture scholars maintain that Scripture contains erroneous assertions. This implies that Scripture is not divinely inspired, and this in turn has further implications. Sometimes theologians ambiguously treat a central doctrine of faith—for example, some seem to deny Jesus' resurrection, yet what they say might admit an orthodox interpretation. Sometimes important doctrines were denied in the past by scholars no longer considered Catholic theologians. Sometimes dissent from Catholic teachings originates in the works of non-Catholic theologians and Scripture scholars, whose opinions some Catholic theologians treat as authoritative.

### Dissent takes subtle forms.

Dissenting opinions are expressed in different ways. Sometimes Catholic teachings are simply rejected as erroneous. Sometimes an opinion incompatible with Catholic teaching is presented as a better "theology" or as a "reformulation." Often, especially in respect to defined doctrines or central truths of faith, dissent takes a subtle form. Neither the Catholic teaching nor its contrary is asserted, but the contrary position is insinuated. The Catholic teaching is ignored or treated perfunctorily. The contrary position is presented favorably and at length; minor objections to it are answered carefully, and major objections ignored.

No matter how theological dissent be-



gins or is expressed, it often becomes blunter and less qualified as it passes from professional theologians to seminarians, priests, teachers, and journalists. Sometimes dissenting theologians themselves start this process by expressing their views more boldly in their teaching than in their publications.

Even sound and carefully presented theology is often distorted in transmission. But errors rooted in dissenting theology are not mere confusions. They are a sickness of faith which is inevitable when the firm anchor of the magisterium is discarded and the faithful are cast adrift on the heaving sea of dissent.

Finally, in homilies and the catechesis of children, where most instruction of the faithful occurs, Catholic teaching is not usually denied outright. Yet even here theological dissent has pernicious effects, for

it leads to confused, hesitant, diffident, and incomplete instruction. For example, catechists seldom deny Catholic teaching on mortal sin but often explain it in such a way that children become sure that one cannot sin mortally without aiming to offend God. Many preachers and teachers who believe in heaven never talk about it. Homilists do not tell people that repentance and good works are unnecessary, but many preach sermon after sermon on God's mercy, without ever mentioning amendment of life, the sacrament of penance, or the availability of God's grace to overcome temptation. Many priests who believe that Catholic moral teachings are correct have given up trying to teach and help the faithful to live up to them.

### *III: How Can So Many Have Gone So Far Wrong?*

Clearheadedness and courage are required to continue to consider theological dissent unacceptable. If a mere handful of theologians dissented, the flimsiness of their arguments would be easy to see. But when one considers the magnitude of the crisis, one naturally hesitates, not only because of practical considerations, but also because one feels a shadow of a doubt. Surely, many dissenting theologians are good Catholics and capable scholars. How can so many have gone so far wrong?

To answer this question, one must recall the state of Catholic theology before Vatican II.

As everyone agrees, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not a golden age for Catholic theology. Theologians ignored much of the Christian tradition; the theological disciplines suffered from mutual isolation; theological method followed inappropriate models from law and rationalistic philosophy; the virtual exclusion of the laity from theological studies limited

the pool of talent available; the direction of most theological work to the formation of seminarians meant that every treatise had to be reduced to its essentials; defensiveness stifled creativity; and a ghetto mentality made the problems posed by modern thought seem unimportant.

Like any other intellectual discipline, theology flourishes only when theologians face difficult questions, enthusiastically develop ideas, freely express themselves to one another, constantly criticize one another's views, and continuously refine both their methods and their theories. But the magisterium and religious superiors generally required theologians to follow safe paths. Censorship guaranteed that the body of published theological writings could serve as a kind of appendix to Church teaching. The magisterium itself taught by referring to "approved authors."

During a century and more preceding Vatican II, both the magisterium and Catholic scholars worked for renewal in theology. These efforts bore fruit, but also had serious limitations.

Catholic Scripture scholars regarded the magisterium as an extrinsic norm or curb on their scholarship; they seemed unable to interiorize this norm and develop a specifically Catholic historical-critical method. Other scholars mined the Fathers and Doctors of the Church; their work revealed the deficiencies of textbook theology. Few, however, had the speculative power to use the riches they discovered to improve textbook theology. St. Thomas had many brilliant disciples, but most Thomists treated his works as a kind of deuterocanon rather than as a model for a return to the realities themselves studied by theology. Transcendental Thomism and various non-Thomistic attempts at theological synthesis used modern philosophies, but often too uncritically, as if

Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and so on were fresh theological sources to be received with trusting faith.

While efforts to renew theology proceeded, various attempts also were made—in France and elsewhere—to exploit Catholic teaching and Church authority for secular political purposes, especially those of the right. Such a political approach cares little about doctrine's truth, but cares greatly about its utility. Thus, well before Vatican II, these political pressures introduced an irrelevant model into almost everyone's thinking about theology and its relationship with the magisterium. The use of this model would lead to the reduction of complex theological issues to the opposition between "integrists" and "progressives," and to attempts to resolve theological issues by political methods, such as counting votes and issuing manifestos, rather than by careful study and clear thinking.

### **Politics introduces irrelevancy**

In this situation, also Church officials since the time of Pius XI, especially those engaged in ecclesiastical diplomacy, understandably formed the habit of preferring moderate policies. Appropriate enough for political problems, such a habit easily causes paralysis when one is confronted with a pair of contradictory propositions and looks for a safe middle way between them. Even worse, if those in authority think of the magisterium in political terms, they will try to defend doctrines with the same methods they use to defend choices of changeable policies: by delay, diplomacy, and discipline rather than by study, reflection, and judgment.

The Modernist crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century accentuated the defects in modern Catholic theology's rela-

tionship with the magisterium. Modernism was not so much overcome as suppressed. In its aftermath, the heavy use of discipline to defend Church teaching both reflected and strengthened the tendency to think of the magisterium as if its task were to legislate and enforce rather than to discern and proclaim the truth. Theologians who did creative work had to be very circumspect and even so were likely to be disciplined.

Theologians who worked secretly for years stored up ideas and unpublished manuscripts. They circulated this material among trusted colleagues. It never benefited from unfriendly criticism. Such theologians reinforced one another and became very sure of their work's soundness and importance. Moreover, many of them were bonded together in resentment and antagonism toward the Church authority which exacted the obedience which inhibited their work.

Under these difficult conditions, renewal in Catholic theology made slow progress. When John XXIII was elected Pope, no contemporary theologian's work approached the quality of the best theology in the Christian tradition—for example, that of St. Thomas. The general level of Catholic theology was more like that of the twelfth century than like that of the thirteenth. Given another century, the renewal might have matured and its results been consolidated. But theological renewal was not yet mature, and the bishops of the world had no theology in common to work with beyond that of their seminary textbooks.

With Catholic theology in this state, Pope John announced the Council. Of course, neither he nor anyone else was clearly aware of the weaknesses of Catholic theology and the restlessness in the theological community. Thus, what happened was largely unpredictable.



Still, the first thing which occurred was necessary and expected: Differing theological views began to be expressed and their expression tolerated. But then, unexpectedly, ideas long nurtured underground, some of them quite strange, began to be brought out into the open. Safe theologians had nothing new to say. The media ignored them or treated them as troglodytes. Over night, theologians saying new things became stars.

As Vatican II approached and began, Pope John exhorted the Church to prayer and penance. But many Catholics — priests, religious, and laity alike — rather than doing as he asked, suddenly began neglecting prayer and relaxing self-discipline. This unexpected response to the Pope's exhortations was an early sign that all was not well with the Church. No doubt, theologians too, especially those traveling a good deal, with money in their pockets, exhilarated by their success, and deprived of the customary framework of their priestly and religious lives, were tempted to follow the trend of the time.

#### **Safe theologians suffered defeat**

Safe theologians prepared the schemata for the Council. But their ecclesiastical superiors could not protect them from critics, especially from bishops whose theological advisors they had once helped to suppress. And so the safe theologians suffered a stunning defeat. Some, by no means all, who helped administer that defeat almost immediately started the revolution of theological dissent. Why did they trigger it?

I recall personally observing an early stage of the theological revolution around the end of 1964, just after the conclusion of Vatican II's third session. It was during a long evening's reception, dinner, and

conversation, at which several of the Council's leading *periti* were guests of honor. As the evening passed and inhibitions relaxed, they became increasingly open and vehement. As I had expected, they were gratified by their successes. But, surprisingly to me, their dominant attitudes were hostility toward their opponents and anger about everything in the emerging results of the Council's work that was not entirely to their liking. For them, Vatican II had no real authority. To the extent that it embodied their views, they would use it. But to the extent that its outcome did not please them, they already rejected it. For Vatican II had committed an unforgivable sin by not giving their work the sort of respect the Council of Trent gave the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas. I was amazed at their arrogance and contempt for the Council's authority.

In the 1960s, every group which felt that it had not been fairly treated was ready to overturn established structures. Thus, for the theological revolution to reach its full intensity, only a few prominent theologians had to begin publicly expressing their rejection of the magisterium. For in the academic world, desire for recognition is a dominant motive. Theologians who became well known before and during the Council received due honor from their peers, who, in turn, were eager to emulate the prominent. So, once began, dissent spread very rapidly.

Thus we see how so many have gone so far wrong.

#### *IV: Dissent Becomes Chronic*

The preceding explanation of how so many Catholic theologians came to reject the magisterium's authority and teaching, and to look elsewhere for their principles of judgment, has been cast in psychological, sociological, and political terms, rather than in terms of intellectual challenges to

faith and conflicting theological proposals about how to respond to them. The terms of explanation are demanded by the facts, which show that what has been happening has not been some mere quarrel between different schools of theology. Indeed, properly theological questions, ideas, and arguments have been quite secondary in the dissent of the past twenty-five years.

As dissenting opinions spread, the Holy See and the bishops around the world were busy. Besides their normal work loads, they had to deal with the Council and the beginnings of its implementation. Moreover, the theological staff available to the Pope was the battered remnant of a defeated battalion, which never had been trained and equipped to deal with the as-

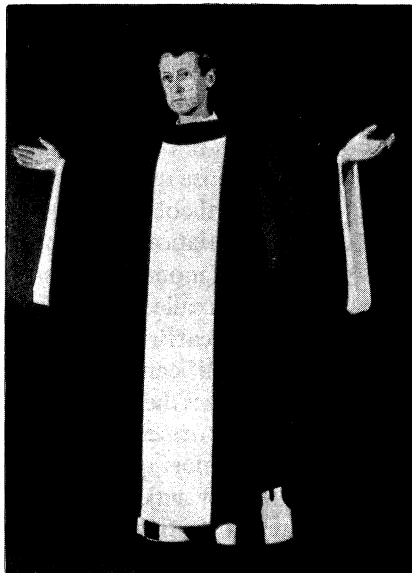
sault it now faced. It would take time to find fresh troops and to develop a suitable strategy to meet the challenge. Meanwhile, there could be no return to the use of discipline to suppress dissent.

Paul VI began by steering a moderate course. Perhaps the dissent was only a passing phase. In any case, integrism had to be avoided, and schism had to be prevented at all costs. Most other bishops waited for the Pope to act; they had no experience in dealing with theological dissent and were not equipped to deal with it. They also excused themselves from acting because the problem extended beyond and, for most, originated outside, their own dioceses.

By 1967, the theological revolution was far advanced. Thus, although that year's

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assembly of the Synod of Bishops acknowledged the crisis of faith and recommended measures for dealing with it, those suggestions were only partly carried out and their effectiveness was limited. The Credo of the People of God and the establishment of the International Theological Commission were positive steps. Without them, the crisis probably would have become worse. But the controversies over the Dutch Catechism and *Humanae vitae* deepened the crisis and established a pattern of conflict, which has been repeated in other controversies — for example, those over *Persona humana* and liberation theology.

Although there are variations, this pattern typically has several moments. First, some Catholic teaching is called into question, and the Holy See reaffirms and insists on it. Second, a significant group of theologians openly criticizes the Holy See's action and rejects the reaffirmed teaching. Third, some bishops support the dissenting theologians, at least by making it clear that they find some part of their view acceptable or worth entertaining. Fourth, some theologians defend the teaching reaffirmed by the Holy See, and show that the principles underlying dissent will have further serious consequences. Fifth, the

Holy See avoids entering into theological controversy and tries instead to resolve the situation by a combination of negotiation and disciplinary measures. Sixth, the dissenting theologians draw out the more radical implications of their views; the bishops who support them either overlook or tacitly approve these radical implications. Seventh, many come to regard the Catholic teaching and the dissenting opinion as acceptable alternative theologies.

Various factors can make it seem that theological dissent is not as bad today as formerly. Despite dissent, sound efforts at renewal often are well received. Thus, today one can easily focus on Vatican II's good fruit and overlook dissent's bad fruit. Again, dissent often is less strident now and no longer has shock value. Thus, dissenting opinions are less likely to be noticed by the media. Further, some dissenting theologians have left the Church.

At the same time, many who once called attention to the intolerability of dissent have grown silent through discouragement, old age, or death. In 1967, Paul VI, plainly anguished by the outbreak of dissent, repeatedly expressed his concern. Today, dissent has become commonplace, and the Church has learned to live with it as a nation enslaved by a totalitarian regime learns to live with its arbitrariness and intimidation.

But despite appearances, the crisis of faith which afflicts the Church is not improving. Few theologians who have taken dissenting positions have retracted them. Indeed, a principle which initially underlies dissent on one issue often is later extended to others. Attempts to justify dissent have led some theologians to take positions in fundamental theology and ecclesiology irreconcilable with Vatican I's definitive teaching.

Thus, the magisterium's effort to teach without straightforwardly confronting dis-

sent have not led dissenting theologians to reconsider their positions. Indeed, they increasingly argue that the magisterium's toleration amounts to approval in practice of dissenting opinions. They say that the "official teaching" is a mere facade, which the magisterium realizes is no longer relevant, but is too embarrassed to abandon openly.

Of course, this view is countered when the Holy See backs up teaching with disciplinary action. However, as a general approach to the problem of dissent, discipline remains quite unpromising. On occasion, it is necessary, but discipline itself neither overcomes erroneous opinions nor leads anyone to better understand and accept the truth of Catholic teaching. Authority's use of discipline also provokes greater solidarity among dissenting theologians, and even gains them the support of those who dislike dissenting opinions but dislike discipline even more.

### **Discipline provokes solidarity**

Then too, on some matters — for example, on the moral norms concerning marriage, sex, and innocent life — dissenting opinions are very widely held. Using cumbersome disciplinary processes against such a tide of dissent is like a Mrs. Noah trying to stop the deluge with mop and pail, slopping up water as it flows into her doorway and throwing it out a nearby window.

Moreover, dissent, is now institutionalized in the Church. Dissenting theologians hold many academic and ecclesiastical positions, control many journals and scholarly associations, and enjoy many opportunities to influence bishops. Dissenting theologians' works often are translated and effectively promoted. Much of the Catholic press publicizes them and popularizes their contents.

At the same time, many who reject dissenting positions are afraid to say so openly; dissent has become a new and oppressive orthodoxy. Many faithful theologians make little use of their professional training; they engage in other activities or limit themselves to noncontroversial matters. Thus, there is little serious debate and mutual criticism in Catholic theology.

Consequently, it is quite unlikely that, left to itself, Catholic theology will ever recover its equilibrium. If the magisterium waits for the theological community to heal itself, it might wait until the Parousia.

Nevertheless, the present crisis cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. Dissenting opinions are corrupting Christian lives and destroying faith. The widespread acceptance of dissenting opinions also is generating a false pluralism or syncretism in the Church, which prevents unified and effective evangelization, catechesis, and the witness of Christian fellowship in charity. Moreover, the magisterium itself is divided and is simultaneously saying "yes" and "no" on essential points of Catholic teaching. This division is plain insofar as some bishops openly support dissenting theologians. But it also, though less plainly, exists when bishops who personally reject dissent appoint or continue in office people who hold dissenting views and openly teach or apply them.

Considered together, the preceding facts about the condition which afflicts the Church make it clear that theological dissent is like a cancer, growing in the Church's organs, and interfering with her vital functions.

*(To be concluded next month)*

\* *A cassette recording of the above article may be obtained from: Cardinal Communications, Box 34, New London, Conn. 06320. Price \$3.50 postpaid (Canada: add 50¢).*

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# How to deal with theological dissent

## Part II

*By Germain Grisez*

### *V: The Right Relationship of Theologians to the Magisterium*

■ Despite its gravity, I believe that the present crisis can be overcome. To overcome it, those who make up the collegial magisterium must begin to work more effectively together, and Catholic theologians must be brought into a new and more appropriate relationship with the magisterium. But what is the appropriate relationship of theologians to the magisterium?

It is neither the relationship which existed before Vatican II nor the one which now exists between the magisterium and dissenting theologians.

Before Vatican II, too much conformity was demanded of Catholic theologians. Their work was so closely integrated with the magisterium's work that there was virtually no room for them to propose views which the magisterium could not at once accept and approve.

Since Vatican II, dissenting theologians have adopted a stance similar to that of Protestant theologians toward their churches' pastoral leaders. Protestant pastoral leaders are not authoritative

teachers. In Protestant theory, every Christian has equal access to revealed truth and must interpret it personally. In practice, Protestant theologians enjoy the authority of scholarship to interpret Scripture, analyze and reason about issues, and formulate judgments. Protestant pastoral leaders speak for their churches, but their statements carry weight only insofar as the leaders follow good theological advice and reflect the faith consensus of their followers.

Similarly, dissenting Catholic theologians treat the magisterium as a nonauthoritative leadership function. It is not clear whether they believe that the magisterium ever speaks with divinely given authority; various dissenting theologians probably would take different positions on that question. But in practice, they all ignore magisterial statements or treat them only as more or less impressive witnesses to the Church's faith, not as norms to which theological opinions must conform. Still, since the magisterium does have a leadership function, dissenting theologians very much desire that it give official voice to their good theological advice



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or, at least, that it not give official voice to their opponents' bad theological advice.

To see how Catholic theology should be related to the magisterium, one must begin by noticing that divine revelation is located somewhere in the world. If it were not, God would not have succeeded in communicating his truth and life to humankind; divine truth and life would remain entirely in heaven. But where in the world is divine revelation to be found? Both Catholics and Protestants agree that it is not to be found in monuments and documents, not even in the Bible insofar as it is a mere book. Rather, divine revelation is located and must be found where it is received, accepted, and held fast: in the faith of believers. And so, divine reve-

lation, as God's successful communication to humankind, is located in this world in believers. It is the content of Christian faith, worship, and life.

But Protestants and Catholics disagree about how revelation is present in believers. For Protestants, it is present primarily in the faith of individual believers, and only secondarily in the Christian community. For Catholics, faith belongs first to the Church as a communion, then to each believer as a participant in this communion. Of course, insofar as the Church is a human society, she has no collective interiority; the Holy Spirit is, as it were, her soul. Therefore, as a communication received from God and available to us, revelation present in the Church's faith can be located primarily in certain official acts—that is, in certain papal and episcopal acts which count not only as their personal acts but as the Church's own acts.

Thus, the Catholic Church believes something only if the pope and bishops acting as such assent to it; the Church worships only if the pope and bishops (or priests ordained to assist them) act liturgically in the person of Jesus; the Church teaches only if the pope and bishops propose something as Catholic teaching. All members of the Church, including popes and bishops themselves, personally share in these elements of the Church's life by participating in the official acts and conforming to their essential requirements. The continuity of these official acts over time is the tradition by which, as *Dei verbum*, 8, says, the Church hands on all that she herself is, all that she believes.

When it is necessary for the Church to rearticulate her faith, to develop it in response to new questions, and to defend it against alternatives, only the pope and bishops can act. No matter what professional theologians say or do, their saying and doing does not mean that the Church

herself has said or done anything.

This leadership office of the pope and other bishops exercised in teaching — their sacred magisterium — enjoys a unique and supernatural authority. Its uniqueness is not in its being given for service; all authority is given for service. Rather, the uniqueness of the magisterium's authority is that it is both similar to and different from two natural kinds of human authority.

One kind of human authority is that of experts and scholars. Because of their experience and training, experts and scholars have special access to a subject matter, and so have an ability to discern truth which less competent people ought to respect. In making judgments, authorities of this sort try to conform to reality; their judgments, if sound, usually can be verified by others.

### Human authorities judge

Another kind of human authority is that of leaders — parents in a family, officials of a government, and so on. Because of their special position and responsibility, leaders have the task of making decisions and giving directions, which other members of the community should obey. Authorities of this sort try to determine what is most appropriate for their community to do. Such judgments involve choices and cannot be verified by others.

The pope and other bishops do have governing authority in the Church, which they use, for example, in making laws, managing Church property, and so on. But that authority must not be confused with their teaching authority. For although the teaching office belongs to the leaders of the Church as such, its exercise is not a matter of choosing among possible courses of action and giving directions. On the contrary, their authority is like that of experts and scholars, insofar as the magis-



terium's judgments seek to conform to the reality received in faith.

Yet the pope and other bishops are not more competent than Christians generally by virtue of some special experience and training; they do not have that sort of special access to the subject matter. Rather, their special power is sacramental. It is like the authority of a proxy or agent appointed to act on someone's behalf. Popes and other bishops speak with authority because they are messengers from God. God's own authority is like that of an honest eye-witness; it is based on his truthfulness and his unique and perfect access to the reality about which he testifies.

When they are about to make fresh judgments in the exercise of their sacramental teaching office, popes and



bishops must look to the normative faith of the Church in the same place every believer finds it—in the Church's official acts. But since they themselves are engaged in such acts—of worship, teaching, governing the community—members of the magisterium can find essentially what they are looking for by immediate reflection. However, present official acts are not isolated; their whole meaning and import can be unfolded only by considering them in the unity of the tradition to which they belong. The rest of tradition can be made present only by examining witnesses, beginning with sacred Scripture. Thus, popes and bishops need access to Scripture and to other witnesses of faith, and the better their access is, the more perfect their judgments will be.

### **Theologians can't judge**

While theologians can contribute in other ways to the Church's life and mission, their proper relationship to the magisterium is settled precisely at this point. Their special competence is to elicit the testimony of witnesses of faith on matters about which the magisterium must judge. Here theologians have scholarly authority, which the magisterium should respect.

However, judgment belongs not to theologians but to the magisterium. Hence, even if there is no theological disagreement, the magisterium must decide whether and when to make a judgment. Obviously, when theologians or groups of theologians disagree among themselves, the magisterium also must decide which body of theological opinion is more acceptable. In making this decision, the magisterium will first exclude theological views incompatible with faith itself and then evaluate the competence of the

proponents of theological views compatible with faith but incompatible with one another.

Theologians often assist the magisterium in another way: by proposing the material or conceptual content for possible judgments by which the faith will be freshly articulated and developed, or challenges to it answered. However, in many cases, those without theological training can speak with greater authority than theologians about the content of possible magisterial judgments. For the faithful at large can propose material from their experience; Christian philosophers can propose material from their understanding of theories and clarification of natural moral knowledge. Christians in the human and social sciences can point out the opportunities and challenges the world presents at a given moment—that is, they can read the so-called signs of the times.

In assisting the magisterium by proposing content, however, the authority of all these groups, including theologians, even more plainly is subordinate to the magisterium's judgment than is the special assistance of theologians when they elicit the testimony of witnesses of faith on matters about which the magisterium must judge. For in proposing content, theologians and others only help the magisterium to formulate propositions; they do not help the magisterium to formulate propositions; they do not help it to discern whether any proposition should be asserted or denied. But in doing their unique theological work, theologians help the pope and other bishops to appreciate the whole meaning and import of the formal principle of their magisterial judgment.

### *VI: The Birth Control Commission as Model and Cautionary Tale*

Is there any promising fresh approach the magisterium might take in dealing with

dissent? To begin to answer this question, it will be useful to reflect upon Paul VI's attempt to deal with the contraception controversy, and to evaluate that attempt in the light of the preceding clarification of the appropriate relationship between the magisterium and theology.

In setting up a commission of theologians and others, Paul VI showed respect for their authority and sought to make use of their scholarship and expertise. In judging between the theological opinions which emerged, he fulfilled the magisterium's duty to judge—in this case, to judge how to answer the challenge which had been posed to Catholic teaching. So far, so good; what Pope Paul did was an experiment with the process the magisterium should use. However, with the

advantage of hindsight, we can see that this experiment can be improved upon in three ways.

First, Paul VI involved other bishops in his judgment, but did not make the judgment collegially. He involved other bishops at three stages. In November 1965, he tried to negotiate some relevant amendments to Vatican II's treatment of marriage. In the spring of 1966, he asked sixteen cardinals and other bishops to review the commission's work. After publishing *Humanae vitae* in 1968, he invited the bishops around the world to explain the encyclical to their people.

But all three times Paul VI failed to form a consensus with other bishops or to persuade them to accept and support his judgment. Bishops who wanted contracep-

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tion approved got Vatican II to leave the door open. Nine of the sixteen cardinals and bishops who reviewed the commission's work approved contraception. And some bishops explained *Humanae vitae* by telling their people they could dissent from it.

Second, Paul VI responded only imperfectly to the challenge to Catholic teaching on contraception. It involved three claims: that the arguments against contraception were not convincing, that couples need contraception to have good marriages, and that society needs it to solve socioeconomic problems related to population growth. *Humanae vitae* says something to each of these claims, but does not respond to any of them straightforwardly. Thus, Pope Paul sounded like a teacher who, lacking the direct answer to a difficult question, answers it only obliquely.

#### **Pope Paul VI pondered the pill**

Third—and most important for the relationship between the magisterium and theology—the commission was not well organized and properly directed in its work.

In June 1964, Paul VI, speaking about the emerging controversy over the pill and birth control, and intending to forestall precipitate abandonment in practice of the received teaching, unfortunately implied that he might eventually feel bound in conscience to change the principles laid down by Pius XII. Pope Paul did not say which principles he had in mind, but obviously meant those concerning the pill, not the Church's teaching on contraception as such. Nevertheless, this statement suggested that the Church's position on contraception was a matter of changeable policy. By the time he published *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul was well aware that the issue was one about which he had no choice. However, his earlier, somewhat confused view had led the commission to focus more on what the Pope should do

about contraception, than on what is *true* about it.

Moreover, Paul VI never made clear to the various segments of the commission what sort of help he expected of them—for example, he did not ask the theologians to elicit the testimony of witnesses of faith, the married couples to explain the challenge which pertained to them and to propose possible responses to it, and so forth. Rather, by seeking consensus from the whole study group, as if he wished the theologians and others to be direct partners in the magisterium's judgment, Pope Paul created the impression that the commission was a panel of judges rather than a body of witnesses called to help him make a judgment.

These defects in the organization and instruction of the commission contributed to the expectation on the part of many theologians and others that its opinion—or that of its majority—would determine the magisterium's judgment. This false impression would have been avoided if the Pope had responded differently to the irreconcilable opposition between theological positions which emerged in the commission. He could have directed the leading theological proponents of the opposed positions to divide the group into two teams, expand each team as seemed useful to them, and submit complete and thorough cases for both views. Instead he allowed the commission to become politicized, with the bad result that its so-called majority report was craftily transformed, even before *Humanae vitae* was ready for publication, into the most important statement of dissent from the Church's constant and very firm teaching on contraception, which Pope Paul reconfirmed, at the end of his meticulous and courageous work of study and clarification.

#### *VII: How the Synod Could be Used to Overcome Theological Dissent*

What can be learned about how to deal

with theological dissent from the preceding reflections on Paul VI's handling of the contraception controversy? Some, who consider the situation virtually hopeless, will say: Nothing. For, they will point out, the theological revolution has made steady gains and consolidated them. Indeed, at present, on some important issues, dissenting theologians claim the support of quite a few bishops.

In reply, one must acknowledge these reasons for pessimism. But there also are factors in the situation, often overlooked, which could be turned to advantage. To see how to do so, one must consider what these favorable factors are, and then think out a new, magisterial process. This process should involve the bishops of the world more fully than the papal magisterium now does, and it should use theologians more effectively than hitherto, according to their true relationship to the magisterium.

### Dissenting vs. faithful bishops

One of the favorable factors which could be turned to advantage is that even where the Holy See is confronted with the theological dissent supported by some bishops, many other bishops agree with the Holy See. But these bishops feel isolated, and see no opportune way to turn their agreement into effective witness to the truth as they see it. A more collegial process would overcome their sense of isolation and provide them with a way to fulfill their responsibility.

Another favorable factor is that wherever the magisterium is confronted with some dissenting theologians, many other theologians support its teaching. But these theologians cannot compel their dissenting opponents to engage in scholarly debate, and often cannot gain a hearing from bishops who support the dissenting opinion. A better process would ensure that the theological case for the teaching reaf-



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firmed by the magisterium would be taken more seriously.

A third factor which might be turned to advantage is that dissenting theologians disagree with one another on many substantive issues, but, at present, tend to avoid mutual criticism. This reflects their solidarity in the common cause of rationalizing their present inappropriate stance towards the magisterium. A better process would encourage all theologians, and especially dissenting theologians, to pay more attention to substantive issues and their disagreements on them, and so to engage in fruitful mutual criticism.

#### **Dissenters avoid mutual criticism**

The fourth, and most important, favorable factor in the situation is the papal office itself. The pope can work towards judgment by collegial consensus or can seek collegial acceptance for a judgment he makes. Much as a scholar does when he leads a seminar with a group of colleagues, the pope can take an active role as leader of the collegial dialogue. He need neither reserve controversial matters to himself, nor sit by silently while the other bishops discuss issues among themselves.

These considerations suggest the main lines of a better magisterial process, centered in the pope, closely involving the bishops, and properly using the theologians. The process should have three features.

First, the pope and other bishops should first listen together to theological debate, then dismiss the theologians and engage in their own reflection. Organizing the work of the theologians and the magisterium in this way, as two separate stages of one unified process, would itself distinguish the role of the magisterium from that of theologians, clarify both roles, and help relate them properly to one another. The very structure of this process would make clear to everyone the quite

limited and relative value of all theological arguments, much as the very structure of a high court's process makes it clear that the arguments of the advocates for each side of a case settle nothing, and that decisions are made only by the judges when they meet in their own conference and dispose of cases.

Second, theologians and others invited to make their appropriate contributions to the theological debate should be instructed clearly regarding what is expected of them. Where opposed views have significant support of theological or other authority, both sides should be given equal and adequate opportunities to present their cases and debate them.

Third, to assure collegial solidarity in magisterial judgments, those which concern disputed questions ordinarily should be made in a collegial manner as the outcome of such a process. The pope should engage actively in the collegial dialogue with his brother bishops, just as Peter did in the Council at Jerusalem.

A process with these three features could be carried on in various ways, either by a general council or by a new and special kind of assembly of the Synod. Since the Synod is a continuing institution which will meet regularly in any case, the possibilities it offers are more immediately interesting.

*My proposal is that at least some assemblies of the Synod, organized in this new and appropriate way, be devoted to the study, discussion, and resolution of particular, very important issues of faith and morals, where there is significant theological dissent.*

Such an assembly could begin with a well-prepared theological debate, which could include sessions in which the bishops, in preparation for their own role, could ask questions and make objections in order to compel both groups of theologians to clarify and defend their views. Then the theologians could be dismissed,

and the bishops, as a panel of judges conferring among themselves, could discuss how to resolve the issue. Initially, their discussion might best be carried on in the small discussion groups, with regular reports to the pope how all the discussions were going, and he could visit and take part in the discussions of some of the groups, if that seemed to him likely to help bring about consensus. But if no consensus among the bishops began to emerge, the pope could convene a plenary session, present his own tentative judgment and reasons for it, and lead all the Synod Fathers together in the work of reaching one judgment in discerning the truth.

### Imagine if Paul VI had done this

Imagine what it would have been like if Paul VI had organized this kind of assembly of the Synod in the spring of 1966 to deal with the contraception issue. Fair and equal time would have been devoted to both theological cases, so there would have been no majority or minority presentation. The Synod Fathers would then have discussed the matter in small groups. Although there is good reason to think that most of the bishops participating would have considered the received teaching true, there would not have been complete consensus. But Pope Paul himself could have conducted a dialogue, which he might have initiated by asking several questions. Why are some of the theologians so sure that contraception is morally acceptable? Because they feel it is? Because many people think it is? Because of philosophical arguments, which, however, prove too much if they prove anything? What sort of reasons are these, and what have they to do with faith? Let us see now: What does faith tell us about marriage, the bodily person, parenthood? What, then, does it tell us about contraception?

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tate this new use of the Synod.

One plainly would be provision of a suitable place for meetings in conclave, so that the pope and bishops trying to reach consensus on delicate issues could work and live together for some days or weeks, with at least temporary secrecy and so without outside pressures on their reflections.

Another desideratum would be a new method of electing bishop participants to ensure that they included those bishops most interested in and well informed on the particular issue to be settled, but otherwise representative of the entire collegium. Perhaps all the bishop participants could be elected by their fellow bishops, using some procedure which would guarantee good representation. For example, all the bishops of the world, regardless of their nationality, present office, and age, might be divided into several large groups, whose members' places of residence and language skills would make it reasonably easy for them to meet and communicate. Then all those in each such group could be divided randomly into small groups of about thirty. Between the sending out of preparatory materials and the opening of the assembly of the Synod, these groups of thirty could meet, pray together, share their thoughts, and elect someone to participate in the assembly.

#### *VIII: The Practicability of the Proposal*

Some will point out that the fatal flaw in the process Pope Paul undertook in dealing with contraception was that in announcing the commission's work, he signaled that the teaching might change, with the result that many Catholics began to think and act as if it had already changed. This observation will lead to the objection that the proposed process would suffer from the same fatal flaw. By initiating the

process, the pope, and now the Synod too, would suggest that the magisterium itself was open-minded on the issue to be settled, and that the dissenting position might be correct. This suggestion, the objector will argue, leads to a dilemma: Either the issue really is open or it is not. If it is, the dynamic of the process, carried on over many months in the full glare of publicity, would further undercut the teaching and nullify the force of any reaffirmation of it, long before the process could be completed. Thus, dissent would be reinforced. But if the issue is not really open, the process would amount to little more than a fraudulent attempt to embarrass and outmaneuver dissenting theologians, who would quickly recognize and reject it as such. Thus, the process would do nothing to bring them into submission to the magisterium. Consequently, the objector's dilemma concludes, whether the magisterium really is open-minded on the issue or not, the proposed process would do nothing to overcome theological dissent.

#### **The Pope and Synod can compel**

But this dilemma, impressive as it is, can be rebutted.

For, on the one hand, if the magisterium is really open-minded on an issue, but dissenting theologians refuse an invitation to participate in this process for settling it, their rejection of their responsibility as Catholic theologians will be clear to everyone, and they will lose their influence in the Church. If, however, they take part in the process, they will by that very fact publicly commit themselves to accepting the magisterial judgment to which it will lead. If they subsequently dissent from that judgment, their bad faith will be evident. Thus, if the magisterium is

really open-minded on an issue, by this process the pope and Synod can compel dissenting theologians to change their stance toward the magisterium.

And, on the other hand, if the magisterium is not really open-minded on an issue, then even if dissenting theologians refuse to take part in the process, it will enable the collegium itself to become fully aware of its own solidarity, and so enable the magisterium to reaffirm with one powerful voice the truth from which there is dissent. The pope can then settle the issue once for all, with the collegial consensus behind him, by solemnly proclaiming the teaching. All faithful Catholics would accept such a definition, especially if it proclaimed a collegial consensus reached after as careful as possible a theological debate—one from which dissenting theologians were absent only because they refused to participate.

Thus, the rebuttal concludes, whether the magisterium really is open-minded about a particular issue or not, the proposed process is a sure way to overcome theological dissent.

This rebuttal is helpful, because it reveals the potentialities of the proposed process if put to work on issues which are extremely open or extremely closed. However, like the original dilemma, this rebuttal, while neat and illuminating, is not entirely in touch with the real situation. And so it is appropriate to escape between the horns of both dilemmas.

For the truth is that many issues are neither entirely open nor entirely closed, either for the church at large or for the magisterium itself.

For, on the one hand, wherever there is significant theological dissent from Catholic teaching, to that extent an issue already has been opened up. If there were no sympathy for the dissenting view within

*If the magisterium is not really open-minded on an issue, then even if dissenting theologians refuse to take part, it will enable the collegium itself to become aware of its own solidarity, and so enable the magisterium to reaffirm with one powerful voice the truth from which there is no dissent.*

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the collegium, it would pose little challenge, but to the extent that there is sympathy, the magisterium itself is open-minded. For it is not necessary that the pope or many other bishops have doubts about an essential matter of faith or morals before the collegial magisterium itself has a problem to whose authentic solution it must be open. Moreover, those who reject dissenting theological opinions can admit that there could be some overlooked truth in their vicinity, and that there is always room for clarification and development of doctrine, so that a collegial effort to settle an issue is likely to have some results unpredictable in advance, to which the work of dissenting theologians might at least make some positive contribution.

And, on the other hand, dissenting theologians claim to be holding to the substance of received teaching, and only rejecting excessively rigid theological interpretations of it. Hence, they cannot take the position that any issue which would be dealt with by the proposed process is open as to its essentials. Rather, they must take the position that nothing more is at stake than optional details of the



teaching and the most appropriate way of expressing its substantial truth. Therefore, in initiating the process, the pope and Synod need not concede that anything essential is open, but only that there is a need to clarify the line between essentials and nonessentials.

It also is important to note that the process proposed here would not aggravate the bad effects of dissent nearly as much as the first horn of the original dilemma suggests. Four considerations tell against that argument.

First, Paul VI signaled that the teaching on contraception might change, not simply by his effort to settle the controversy which was emerging, but by a particular statement he made. To try to resolve an issue on which there is significant theological dissent, the pope and Synod hardly need say they might feel bound in conscience to change received teaching.

Second, open dissent on contraception was not widespread until after Pope Paul announced the study, but it swelled continuously during the four years which passed before *Humanae vitae* was published. But theological dissent on the issues which must be resolved now has been going on for years and has already done its damage. Moreover, the pope and Synod could settle an issue within a year or so after the calling of an assembly to deal with it.

#### **Four considerations tell**

Third, much of the sort of damage which occurred in connection with the birth control commission would be precluded by a process which allowed no opportunity for the official development of theological majorities and minorities, and for the leaking of supposedly secret documents.

Fourth, since *Humanae vitae* lacked

unified collegial support, it failed to resolve the contraception controversy, and so very great damage was and is still being caused by the theological dissent which the encyclical occasioned. But an adequate process should result in the moral unanimity of the collegium itself on any essential question of faith or morals. If that were not sufficient to elicit dissenting theologians' submission to the magisterium, the pope could always take the final step of formulating the collegial consensus as a proposed solemn definition, perfecting the formulation with the appropriate help of the bishops of the world, and then promulgating the magisterium's judgment *ex cathedra*.

Having replied to the objection, it remains necessary to say that the pope and other bishops should face up to and resolve the important doctrinal and moral issues which today divide the Church. In the face of dissent, it is good to teach Catholic truth serenely, over and over, with clarity and firmness. But since that has been done and theological dissent is still advancing rather than retreating, its challenge needs to be countered frontally. One need only recall Matthew's Gospel and the Epistle to the Galatians to know how Jesus and St. Paul answered theological objections to their teaching. Is there any good reason to think that either of them would proceed any differently today?

Moreover, as explained above, theological dissent is a cancer in the Body of Christ. This cancer is interfering with the Church's vital functions, and no treatment attempted thus far has had more than palliative effects. Therefore, new and more effective means to resolve the issues which divide the Church must be found and used, whatever the consequences of using them, to deal with theological dissent.

Nor should anyone fear that a collegial effort to settle essential doctrinal and

moral issues will lead to deadlock in the collegial magisterium itself. If the pope and bishops set to work, one can be sure they will succeed, because Jesus promised to stay with his Church, and he is her faithful Lord. With the pope's leadership, collegial discussion can be expected to lead to consensus, because Jesus prayed for Peter, and so assured him of the power to confirm the faith of his brother bishops.

Besides, the magisterium's task is to make judgments, not on matters about which many views could be well grounded, but on matters of God's truth. That truth is real, present in the faith of the Church, and available to the pope and other bishops in their own official acts. Only one view of it is well grounded. And so, one can be confident that with the Holy Spirit's charism of certain truth, the pope and bishops will meet in this one view, discern God's truth, and so be able to announce: It is the Holy Spirit's judgment and ours too. . . .

### **If pope and bishops fail**

Someone might say: Since the Church is assured of divine help and protection, it matters little what the pope and bishops do about theological dissent. The answer is that while the Church's survival is guaranteed, the Lord's promises were given to encourage his followers to carry out their proper missions, not to lessen their drive and diligence. Being fruitful branches, doing Jesus' works and ones greater still, living one's life of providentially prepared good deeds — these ennobled Jesus' friends. Thus, if the pope and bishops were to fail to treat the Church's present crisis of faith as the disaster it truly is, if they were to fail to seek and try new ways of dealing more effectively with theological dissent, they would fall short of the glory to which they themselves are called, for they would

fail to fulfill their own great responsibility. True, the Church's survival is assured whatever the pope and bishops do or fail to do. But if they were to fail to do their very best, they would miss a splendid opportunity to be forever honored among the greatest of the pastors and doctors of the Church.

The preceding reflections on the recent assembly of the Synod have taken us a long way. Admittedly, my analysis of the present crisis and its causes is drawn with a broad brush, and my suggestion for dealing with it is novel. However, I hope that everyone who agrees that there is a crisis of faith will resist the temptation to brush these reflections aside. Even insofar as the present theological essay is inadequate, perhaps it will encourage others to think about the great matter with which these reflections have been concerned. If so, may their effort help to alleviate the condition of the patient around whose sickbed we have been gathered. For she is our holy mother Church, and though she cannot die, she can suffer, and she is terribly afflicted. ■

*\* A cassette recording of the above article may be obtained from: Cardinal Communications, Box 34, New London, Conn. 06320. Price \$3.50 postpaid (Canada: add 50¢).*

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