



# IN AN AGE OF CONFUSION, THE CHURCH SEEKS CLARITY

## Perspectives on Marriage, Family, and the Synod

As we prepared this issue, the long-awaited October 4-25 Bishops' Synod on the Family was beginning. We decided to offer a number of reflections which would be valid no matter what happened at the Synod, in order to put the proceedings in some sort of context. Therefore, we asked several thoughtful Catholic writers to help us understand the issues.

In the pages that follow, we publish the reflections of canon lawyer Edward Peters; authors Thomas Storck

and Alice von Hildebrand; Director of the apostolate Courage, Fr. Paul Check; and Catholic marriage and family counselor Dr. Gregory Popcak. All offer perspectives on some of the underlying issues affecting the "crisis of the family" — a crisis the Synod convened by Pope Francis will advise him on how to address. These reflections all bear, in various ways, on the basic, fundamental question behind all the debate: How can Catholics — the institutional Church as a whole, but also each one of us individually — best answer Christ's call for us to convert from sin, yet also be merciful to sinners?

## THE CHURCH GRAPPLES WITH THE "GOVERNING CHARISM" OF THE EPISCOPACY

Why "an important chance for bishops to help the Pope" may be lost...

■ BY DR. EDWARD PETERS

September 2015 marks fifty years since the Synod of Bishops first shouldered its way onto the ecclesiastical stage. In the closing weeks of the Second Vatican Council, Blessed Paul VI — preempting what threatened to be a protracted debate on how papal-episcopal collegiality should be structured — established the Synod of Bishops with a strong institutional slant toward helping bishops help popes. The original synodal norms in *Apostolica sollicitudo* (1965) left it for popes to control, for example, the topics discussed by bishops at synods, the manner by which episcopal discussions should be pursued, and what use, if any, might be made of synodal deliberations in ecclesiastical governance. Canons 342-348 of the current Code of Canon Law preserve these papal prerogatives for synods; at times these constraints result in tedium on the synod floor.

But despite the pro-papal bias of synodal regulations, the *episcopal* side of the

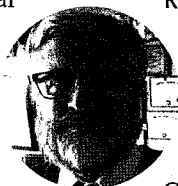


Synod of 2012 on the New Evangelization were those bearing purely episcopal authority) until this episcopal side of the Church's governing charism erupted, most uncomfortably, during the Extraordinary Synod of 2014. While the assembled bishops' objections to what was experienced by them as manipulation by *curialistas* were themselves ultimately a manifestation of episcopal solicitude for the well-being of the

Church, the manner in which this collegial care came across might have startled some into attempting still tighter reins on episcopal initiatives during a synod. And that would be regrettable, as follows.

Whether he meant to or no, Pope Francis has, in regard to some fundamental questions of Church doctrine and discipline, set blocks of bishops against blocks of bishops, and that prelatical clash must now be allowed to play out. Stifle the free expression of desires for a relaxation of Church teaching against civil divorce and

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divinely-mandated, papal-episcopal co-responsibility for Church governance (as recognized in Canons 331 and 336) had lately been coming into greater relief in synodal activity (note, for example, that the only clearly synodal documents to come from the

who are divorced-and-remarried, who because of the needs of their children cannot interrupt their common life, but who can practice continence by the strength of grace, living their relationship of mutual help and friendship. These faithful will also have access to the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, avoiding the provocation of scandal (cf *Instrumentum laboris* 119). This possibility is far from being physicalist and does not reduce marriage to the exercise of sexuality, but recognizing its nature and purpose, is applied coherently in the life of the human person. (...)

The integration of the divorced and remarried in the ecclesial community can be realized in various ways, apart from admission to the Eucharist, as already suggested in *Familiaris consortio* 84.

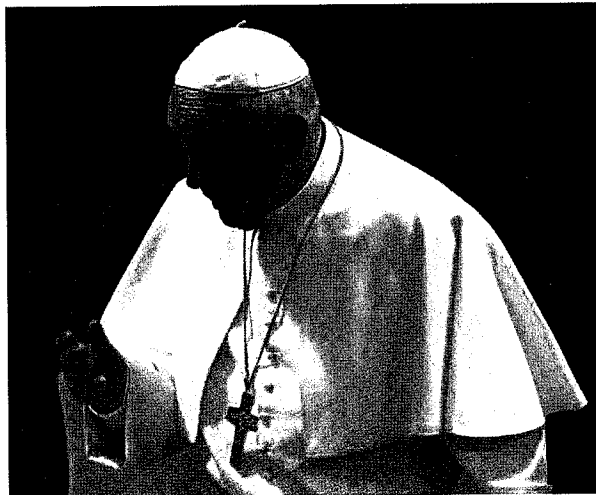
In the traditional practice of the Latin Church the penitential path could have signified for those who were not ready to change their living conditions, but who tried to communicate the desire for conversion, that confessors could hear their confession, giving them good advice and proposing penitential exercises, in order to direct them to conversion, but without giving them the absolution which was possible only for those who actually intended to change their lives (cf RI 5 in VI; F. A. Febeus, S. I., *De regulis iuris canonici Liber unicus*, Venetiis 1735, pp. 91-92).

For what regards the reference to the pastoral practices of the Orthodox Churches, this cannot be properly evaluated using only the conceptual apparatus developed in the West in the second Millennium. It should be kept in mind (that there are) great institutional differences regarding the tribunals of the Church, as well as the special respect for the legislation of the States, which at times can become critical, if the laws of the State are detached from the truth of marriage according to the design of the Creator.

On the search for pastoral solutions for the difficulty of certain divorced and civilly remarried, it must be kept in mind that fidelity to the indissolubility of marriage cannot be linked to the practical recognition of the goodness of concrete situations that are opposite and therefore irreconcilable. Between true and false, between good and evil, in fact, there is no graduality, even if some forms of cohabitation bring in themselves certain positive aspects, this does not imply that they can be presented as good. (...)

There may be a difference between the disorder, ie. the objective sin, and the concrete sin realized in particular conduct that also implies, but not only, the subjective element. "The imputability and responsibility of an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, duress, violence, fear, habits, inordinate attachments and by other psychological or even social factors" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1735). This means that in objective truth good and evil are not given gradually (*gradualness of the law*), while at the subjective level the *law of graduality* can take place, and therefore the education of conscience and in the same sense of responsibility. The human act, in fact, is good when it is in every aspect (*ex integra causa*).

Both in the last synodal assembly and during the preparation of the present general assembly the question of pastoral attention to



persons with homosexual tendencies was treated. Even if the problem doesn't directly affect the reality of the family, situations arise when such behavior influences the life of the family. In every case the Church teaches that "there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Nevertheless, men and women with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, 4, *Instrumentum Laboris* 130).

It reiterates that every person must be respected in their dignity independently of their sexual orientation. It would be desirable that dioceses devote special attention in their pastoral programs to the accompaniment of families where a member has a homosexual tendency and of homosexual persons themselves (*Instrumentum Laboris* 131). Instead, "Exerting pressure in this regard on the Pastors of the Church is totally unacceptable: it is equally unacceptable for international organizations to link their financial assistance to poorer countries with the introduction of laws that establish 'marriage' between persons of the same sex" (*Instrumentum Laboris* 132).

(...)

### III. 6 Human Life, an Intangible Mystery

"Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and

then discarded. We have created a "throw away" culture which is now spreading" (*Evangelii gaudium* 53). "In this regard, the task of the family, supported by everyone in society, is to welcome an unborn human life and take care of human life in its final stage" (*Instrumentum Laboris* 140).

Regarding the drama of abortion the Church reaffirms the inviolable character of human life. She offers advice to pregnant women, sustains teen mothers, assists abandoned children and is a companion for those who have suffered abortion and become conscious of their mistake. Equally the Church reaffirms the right to natural death, at the same time avoiding both aggressive treatment and euthanasia (cf *Instrumentum Laboris* 141). Death, in reality, is not a private and individual fact. The human person is not and should not feel isolated in the moment of suffering and death. In the world today, when families have become small and at times isolated and broken or headed by a single parent, their ability to care for their for their members has diminished, including the elderly, disabled and dying. (...)

### III. 7 The challenge of education and the role of the family in evangelization

A special challenge the family must confront is that of education and evangelization. Parents are and remain the first ones responsible for the human and religious education of their children. (...)

#### Conclusion

(...) To face the challenge of the family today, the Church must therefore convert and become more alive, more personal, more communitarian even at the parochial and small community levels. (...)



children.... To deny this, or to make light of what is equitable, is a grave injustice and is placed among the greatest sins by Holy Writ; nor is

it lawful to fix such a scanty wage as will be insufficient for the upkeep of the family in the circumstances in which it is placed. (# 117)

And the Pontiff continued with the observation that because of a lack of material resources, "it is patent to all to what an extent married people may lose heart, and how home life and the observance of God's commandments are rendered difficult" (# 120).

Human beings are creatures of body and soul, and if we wish to promote family health, we cannot ignore our bodily needs. Since about 1975, wages in the United States have largely been stagnant, and the benefits of productivity have mostly accrued to the very wealthy - the top 10% or even 1%. The eco-

nomie ill effects of this for families have been masked to some degree by the entrance into the paid labor force of wives and mothers, but the social and moral effects cannot be hidden so easily. We fool ourselves if we think that we can remedy these ill effects solely by moral exhortations, or even by private charity, if we do not take steps to restructure the economy so as to "enable every head of a family to earn as much as...is necessary for himself, his wife, and for the rearing of his children."

Pope Francis, like his predecessors, has given considerable attention in his writings, especially in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*, to the injustices and inequalities produced by our economic system.

Thus the Fathers of the upcoming Synod on the Family, if they take a comprehensive view of the state of the family in the world today, cannot avoid paying attention to the economic basis for family life. While suffi-

cient income or resources do not guarantee flourishing families, for most people they are essential prerequisites, and any concern for family welfare that ignores their economic needs risks being hollow and even hypocritical.

For Catholics the question can hardly be clearer. We have a rich tradition of teaching by the Church's Magisterium which tells us how to organize a just social order.

Too few Catholics know that this teaching exists, and, what is much worse, there are some who deny that it has any authority or relevance.

If the Synod teaches with the clarity and authority of the entire line of Popes up to and including Francis, then perhaps it will help focus our attention on the necessary material basis for family welfare, a topic as important as those that have claimed our attention for the last thirty or forty years. ○

## CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE CHURCH'S SEXUAL ETHICS

Men and women who struggle heroically with same-sex attraction are "signs of contradiction" who must be heard

■ BY FR. PAUL CHECK

"N<sup>o</sup>" is the word most often associated, in many minds, with the Catholic Church and the topic of homosexuality. As the civil authority in many countries attempts to redefine marriage, and where terms like "justice" and "discrimination" are not understood according to the natural moral law, the Church faces, at a minimum, a tremendous public relations burden. Her ministers must defend natural and sacramental marriage in the public square, but their sermons may be heard as attacks on people with homosexual tendencies. She begins most conversations about homosexuality on the defensive, facing the difficult task of proving a negative: "The teaching of the Church is not insensitive, homophobic, medieval, unfair, etc."

Many people have, predictably, and regrettably, stopped listening.



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Human nature does not change, as St. John Paul II made plain in *Veritatis Splendor* (no. 53). Therefore, authentic pastoral charity begins with intellectual charity, a proper and precise understanding of the human condition: man is wounded by Original Sin, but redeemed by Jesus Christ. The most quoted line from *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 22) lays the best foundation for pastoral charity in all its forms: "Christ the New Adam fully reveals man to himself and his most high calling." We can only live well if we first know who we are, and only Christ and his Church can fully instruct us in our

identity.

The Cross and the very real challenges of life notwithstanding, peace and fulfillment—not merely satisfaction or contentment—will never be found apart from Christian anthropology and the Gospel. "I have told you these things that my joy may be in you and your joy