LIFE MATTERS: REFLECTIONS ON THE SYNOD ON THE FAMILY

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Setting the Topic & Predicting the Future Difficulties
A Work in Progress & Hitting a Moving Target!
To begin with one conclusion: surprising little focus on Catholic politicians and voters
Can touch only a limited and quite selected range of topics
Will not be able to “answer” what might happen vis-à-vis Church disciplines
Won’t be able to handle perennial questions such as the high cost of Jesuit education
Greek "σύνοδος" (*synodos*) meaning "assembly" or "meeting", semantically synonymous with the Latin word "*concilium*" meaning "council".

**Etymology:** “*syn+(h)odos*” literally “*(walking)* **together on the way***

**Long history of Synods** throughout Church history, as gatherings for specific reasons and smaller (and less authoritative) than Church councils

**No independent formal teaching authority!**
PREPARATION FOR A SYNOD

- Announcement of the theme and release of a preparatory document, inviting feedback from the world’s bishops
- Feedback compiled into *Lineamenta* and
- A “working document” (*Instrumentum laboris*) is released prior to the Synod
- Selection of *ex officio*, elected, and special representatives (named by the Holy Father), including several lay couples
- USA Hierarchs: *Cardinals* Burke, Wuerl, Dolan and *Archbishop* Kurtz (head of the USCCB)
PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE that Bishops were invited to share “broadly”

Lineamenta and Instrumentum Laboris that acknowledged frankly areas of difficulty and non-acceptance of Church teaching

Frank, and even acrimonious, pre-Synod posturing by members on all points on the ecclesiological spectrum

Far greater secular media attention in the secular press given to the run-up, reporting and post-Synod analysis
DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE ISSUE

81, Theologian, author of *Mercy*, retired head of Pontifical Council for Xitian Unity

66, Current Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura (soon to be replaced)
"Mercy" vs. "Truth"

Personalist Approach

Doctrinal Approach
DISCIPLINE VS. DOCTRINE

- Invested with Tradition
- But are often “juridical” and can change, be suppressed, or added to without modifying the underlying doctrine
- E.g. Friday abstinence or clerical celibacy

- Can Develop
- Grow In Understanding
- But De fide definita (defined articles of the faith) do not “change”
- E.g., the Trinity or the 2 Natures of Christ
SACRAMENTS FOR DIVORCED & REMARRIED: DISCIPLINE OR DOCTRINE?

- The primary role of the Sacraments are to help and heal, and thus Reconciliation & Eucharist can (and should) do this.
- Admission to the Sacraments is a change in Church discipline.
- Sacramental Marriage remains indissoluble to death.

- “Discipline is the mirror of her doctrine”
- Denial of the Sacraments acts as a call to conversion.
- Admission of divorced/remarried would be a sacrilege.
- Changing this practice would attack Truth and would ultimately harm further the couples now barred from the Sacrament.

The Position of Cardinal Kasper et al.

The Position of Cardinal Burke et al.
Kasper: Proposed Practice

- Recognizes that the first union may have been sacramentally valid
- Recognizes that union is irretrievably broken
- Acknowledges culpability, but the penitent(s) are invited to the Sacraments as a form of healing and support
- NO second marriage would be celebrated in the Church

Burke: Current Law

- A sacramental marriage *Ratum et consummatum* is valid in the external forum unless a decree of nullity is issued
- In the internal forum, *coram Deo*, there must be “moral certitude” that evidence has been suppressed that would provide a decree of nullity in the external forum
- In these quite limited cases the couple may receive the sacraments provided no scandal is given
- OR the couple may live as “brother and sister” and receive the sacraments, if scandal is avoided
Told the prelates they should speak openly, without fear of upsetting him or limiting discussions to things he would want to hear.

Using the Greek term *parrhesia* -- meaning to speak candidly or boldly, and without fear --"speak with *parrhesia* and listen with humility."

Working in a synod, the pontiff continued, does not mean prelates should say only what Francis wants to hear. "This is not good!" said the pope.

"A general condition is this," said the pope. "Speak clearly. Let no one say: 'This you cannot say.'"

"You need to say all that you feel with *parrhesia*," he continued. "And, at the same time, you should listen with humility and accept with an open heart what your brothers say."
“RELATIO” after General Meetings Conclude

- Put together by a special Committee appointed by the Pope
- Surprisingly “open” language to those not married in the Church, the Divorced/Remarried, and Gay men and women
- Immediate pushback from a number of Synod Fathers from center to right
- Dispute over the English translation of the Italian original (Translator Traditor “The Translator is the Traitor”)
FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE OR DYNAMIC UN-EQUIVALENCE?

- Accogliere le persone omosessualì
- Welcoming homosexual persons
- Providing for homosexual persons
- ...si prende atto che vi sono casi in cui il mutuo sostegno fino al sacrificio costituisce un appoggio prezioso per la vita dei partners
- it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners
- there are instances where mutual assistance to the point of sacrifice is a valuable support in the life of these persons.
CIRCULI MINORES

- The 10 *circuli minores*: Discussions on a number of issues that emerged during the general meeting; examine the mid-term *Relatio* text to suggest changes, as well as things to add and remove.
- 3 each English & Italian; 2 each French & Spanish (*no more Latin group*).
- Change in method of Input into Final Document (*no more “that’s not in the Final Document”*).
Replace “Listen, Judge, Act” model with “See, Judge, Act”

Take care not to create confusion in the minds and hearts of our people.

Any sex outside of marriage is never permissible

No admission to the sacraments of divorced and re-married people

Be careful not to imply that certain life-styles are acceptable

No GRADUALITY of DOCTRINE of faith and morals
“The Church must … have the courage to knock on forbidden doors”. …[W]hat we discover surprises us: what we encounter inside is the loving presence of God which helps us to address the challenges of today, no longer on our terms, but in new ways which might otherwise have been unimaginable.”

“Knocking on forbidden or unaccustomed doors involves risk and courage. Fear and anxiety of what we think are forbidden doors may mean excluding opening ourselves to the God who always surprises.”
“Examination of possible paths of repentance and discernment by which, in particular circumstances, a divorced and remarried person might participate in the sacraments; and about providing alternatives, such as a deeper appreciation of the classical wisdom and value of spiritual communion.”

Debate over “spiritual communion”: if one can make a spiritual communion with Christ, why not a physical communion?
“the meaning of the law of gradualness, .. should not be understood as gradualness of the law. ...”

“The aim of recognizing gradualness should be to draw people closer to Christ. Truth and mercy are not mutually exclusive terms, and in proclaiming truth we also proclaim the most profound mercy - that of reconciliation and unity with God; on the other hand, it is in mercy that we find truth.”
ITALIAN GROUPS: A,B,C

- Surprise over the public release of the *Relatio*
- Effects of Migration on Family Breakup
- Biotechnologies pose challenges
- “No” to the idea of same-sex marriage, but the Church should appear as an “house open” which appreciates the gifts of everyone of good will who sincerely seeks God.
- Need for further study of the Orthodox and other Churches’ practices regarding Divorced and Remarried.
- Need to re-examine the annulment procedures
- Gregory the Great: “The Pastoral Task is the Proof of Love”
190 eligible to vote; 183 in the Aula (some abstained from certain paragraph votes)

58 of 62 paragraphs approved by two-thirds or higher of those voting. NO single Paragraph got unanimous support!

Though all paragraphs of the Final Report passed with a majority of the 190 bishops eligible to vote, 3 problematic paragraphs failed to reach the desired two-thirds majority

Pope Francis ordered the document with individual vote tallies to be published

It will likely serve as a foundation for discussion in the 2015 “Ordinary” Synod on the Family

The 4 most “controversial” Paragraphs follow →
#41 Placet 125; Non placet 54 (179 total votes with 69.9% YES and 30.1% NO)

 Reached a two-thirds of those voting, but just shy of a two-thirds of those eligible to vote (and so some conservatives report this Paragraph as likewise «failing» to gather the hoped-for two-thirds)

 Those voting «NO» probably resisted the appearance tacit acceptance of non-sacramental unions this paragraph might be «read» as allowing.
#52 Placet 104; Non placet 74 (178 total votes with 59.5% YES and 41.5% NO)

This was probably the clearest «defeat» for the Cardinal Kasper bloc, even though they did garner a simple majority of those voting.

It was also the Paragraph least open to «spin» on its meaning.
SPIRITUAL COMMUNION INSTEAD

53. Placet 112; Non placet 64: 176 total votes with 63% YES; and 27% NO

Here the «NO» votes probably were from the more liberal contingent who argued that if people could be encouraged to «spiritual communion» they should also be allowed to receive actual Communion
#55: Placet 118; Non placet 62: Total 180 with 65.5% YES and 34.5% NO

Probably the “key” sentence was *Nevertheless, men and women with homosexual tendencies ought to be treated with respect and delicacy*

Some probably voted «NO» believing this whole paragraph too watered down; others might have voted «NO» fearing it would signal tacit acceptance of an «intrinsically disordered» orientation

Just one vote switch would have reached Two-Thirds for this Paragraph
THE POPE’S FINAL DISCOURSE

- Termed the process a *cammino* which could be translated as a “road,” “process” or even a “pilgrimage”
- Acknowledged consolations, tensions, and 5 principal temptations faced by everyone present:
  - **Hostile rigidity** to the letter of the law OR to ideological positions rather than leaving ourselves open to the Spirit
  - **Don’t seek to “do good” that puts band-aids** on wounds without first treating or healing them
  - Don’t transform stones into bread and bread into stones to **cast against sinners, the weak, and the sick**
  - Don’t **forsake the Cross** in order to adapt to the world
  - Don’t **misuse the Depositum fidei** either thinking ourselves its “owners” rather than “guardians” OR don’t’ use language in such a way as to employ many words while saying nothing much at all
Media (depending on orientation) list the Final Report as either a major success or resounding defeat for Pope Francis

*Odium theologicum* (theological hatred)

Cardinal Burke acknowledges he’s being removed from his post, and continues to give quite critical interviews to the Press

Cardinals Burke and Muller (CDF) are the only two at the Mass of Beatification for Paul VI who fail to greet Pope Francis with the customary embrace (reported in the Italian Press)
“We have many Cardinals and Bishops of the Holy Catholic Church who publicly put God’s law in opposition to God’s mercy! We have Cardinals and Bishops who say that the very words of Jesus, the same second person of the Trinity who suffered and died so that we might live, insufficiently express love!

“Add to this the daily expressions of indifferentism and every other facet of Modernism (see Pascendi Dominici Gregis) that are promulgated not only without fear of reproach, but with loud praise.

“To say such things and to promote such thinking is cooperation with the devil, the devil that has as its end the destruction of the Church. Whether these persons do this knowingly or unknowingly I cannot say, but I can say that it is evil.” Patrick Archbold National Catholic Register 10 October 2014
“We have a Pope ... whose intentions could not have been more crudely expressed over the past eighteen months of astonishing insults and denigration of practically all the elements of apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition. Francis has clearly been preparing for this moment since the day of his election, if not before, and now it has arrived in all its inglorious splendor.

“Let us call this Synod what it is: a secretive, manipulated, progressive-dominated cabal, led by septuagenarian and octogenarian diehards of the conciliar “renewal,” who are rushing to finish their “work”—so rudely interrupted by Pope Benedict—lest death release the Church from their clutches before they are quite done” Chris Ferrara in The Remnant

“Pope Francis has been authorizing Communion to those in mortal sin for years.” Sandro Magister Espresso

“And as it is Catholic doctrine that the pope is infallible, that he cannot err when speaking ex cathedra on faith and morals, this would imply that Francis was not a valid pope and the chair of Peter is empty.” Catholic politician Pat Buchanan in TownHall.com
“I was very disturbed by what happened ... I think confusion is of the devil, and I think the public image that came across was one of confusion.”

“We also need to thank God for the gift of this present, difficult moment, ... . “Because conflict always does two things: It purifies the church, and it clarifies the character of the enemies who hate her.”

(Clarification of above remarks): “To get your information from the press is a mistake because they don’t know well enough how to understand it so they can tell people what happened. ... In some cases they’re certainly the enemy and they want to distort the Church.”
“In trying to accommodate the needs of the age, as Pope Francis suggests, the Church risks the danger of losing its courageous, counter-cultural, prophetic voice, a voice that the world needs to hear.”

“The concept of having a representative body of the Church voting on doctrinal applications and pastoral solutions strikes me as being rather Protestant.”

“Pope Francis is fond of ‘creating a mess.’ Mission accomplished.”

“Relax. God’s still in charge.”
Surprisingly little “ink” this cycle, except for Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, who states he believes Providence Democratic mayoral candidate Jorge Elorza is an atheist.

Aruges that even if the Republican is “pro-choice” this means “pro-abortion” support for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gina Raimondo would be problematic adding in this case the vote should:

1) Choose the lesser of 2 evils candidate
2) Write in a symbolic choice such as Mother Teresa and St. John Paul II
3) Skip voting in protest

The US Bishops “Faithful Citizenship” though recognizes in fulfilling our duties to vote we must make conscience-based prudential judgments even among imperfect candidates and/or political parties.
NY Times Columnist Ross Douthat “The Pope and the Precipice” (26 October 2014): “[Conservative Catholics] might want to consider the possibility that they have a role to play, and that this pope may be preserved from error only if the church itself resists him.”

Cardinal George Pell: “Doctrine does develop, we understand truth more deeply, but there are no doctrinal backflips in Catholic history. ...The apostolic tradition announced first by Christ and founded in the Scriptures is the touchstone for truth and genuine pastoral practice.”
READING THE ROMAN TEA-LEAVES

- Shifting ecclesial landscape *ad intra* and *ad extra*
- Attitudes toward the “World” & the “Pope”
- Legal vs. Pastoral Paradigms
- Deductive vs. Inductive “Reading” of “Truth”
- Moral analysis of concrete situations
- Gradualism of the Law OR Law of Gradualism
- Doctrine & Tradition: Continuity & Change
- Conflict of Duties & Hierarchy of Truths
- Primacy of Informed Conscience
- “Sensus Fidelium” and the “Magisterium”
The Synod and the Church *ad extra*

The Final *Relatio* will be accompanied by a questionnaire and should serve as a working document for the discussion in the local churches over the next year.

Bishops in particular are to discuss this report not only among themselves but also in their own dioceses, with their priests, the lay faithful and especially with families.

Hopefully a spirit and process similar to the first sessions of Vatican II
"In faith, unity; in doubt, liberty; in all things, charity."

Attributed to St. Augustine, this is an important principle of Christian discernment: unity in faith is important, but in cases of doubt a plurality of opinions and practices should be allowed, and the over-riding principle must always be charity towards each other.
PRAYER OF ST. THERESA AVILA

- Christ has no body on earth but ours
- No hands on earth but our hands.
- Ours are the eyes through which He looks out with compassion on the world.
- Ours are the feet with which He chooses to go about doing good.
- For as He is the Head, so we are the members
- and we are all one in Christ Jesus.