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 4-10 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 address when he comes to the 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 shuddered its way onto the ecclesial 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 people. The original synodal norms in Apostolicae curationis (1965) left it for popes to control, for example, the topics discussed at bishops 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 te- damum on the synod floor.

But despite the pro-papal bias of synodal regulations, the episcopalian 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 un- uncontroversially, during the Extraordinary Synod of 2014. While the assembled bishops' objections to what was experi- enced by them as manipulation by curialists were them- selves ultimately a manifestation of episcopal vocality for the well-being of the Church, the manner in which this collegial care came across might have started some into attempting still tighter reins on epis- copal 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 prettish clash must now be allowed to play out. Stifle the free expression of desires for a relaxation of Church teaching against civil divorce and remarriage or for greater access to the Eu- charist by those living in irregular unions, and the Pope risks, among other things, alienating most of the world's secular media (whose speed and power in shaping global thinking is still under-appreciated to the Vatican), offending a great many Catholics who have been convinced by the secular media that change is coming, and perhaps even provoking a formal schism among Northern European Catholics.

On the other hand, run roughshod over those articulating traditional teachings about marriage, divorce, and holy Communion, and the Pope risks demoralizing great numbers of active, practicing Catholics, especially in America and Africa, two demographics without which it would be hard for any pope to govern a world Church effectively.

Those holding Christ's teachings on marriage and divorce, and the Church's discipline on sin, repentance, and Holy Communion, to be settled matters, regret that the next synod seems destined to be a struggle for the defense of these teachings and disciplines against dilution from within. They would much prefer to see bishops grapple with, say, 'same-sex marriage,' the contraceptive mentality, or even the anarchistic requirement of canonical form for marriage, instead of listening to non-pastoral tries to avoid the plain meaning of our Lord's words on marriage. But Canon 342 directs a synod "to assist the Roman Pontiff with the counsel" by considering "questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world" and, right now, it seems, advice about proclaiming the basic teachings of Christ on the permanence of marriage is of primary concern.

Finally, to this already volatile mix of marriage, divorce, and Communion controversies, the Pope has just added revolu- tionary norms on annulments in his motu proprio Missis Iudaicis. Diocesan bishops, almost none of whom were consulted regarding their ability and willingness to take on direct judicial duties in annulment cases, will soon be expected to judge cer- tain annulment cases personally. Now, hundreds of bishops will be in attendance at the next synod. If they do not ask for, at the least, a delay in the implementation of the more radical aspects of Missis, the changes portended by these procedural de- cisions will no longer be a purely papal pro- ject and, I think, an important chance for bishops to help the Pope will be lost.

More Than One Way to Destroy a Family

There is another side to moral and legal attacks on the family — economic pressure

■ By Thomas Storck

 Economic adversity can eviscerate family life:

Two young girls receive food at an outdoor soup kitchen in Washington. During tough economic times, even children bear some of the heaviest burdens because of increased family stress. According to an annual study of child well-being (civicxpress.com). To the left, Aristotle and Plato (1922-1939)

Since the 1970s, marriage and the family in the United States have defin- itely been under attack. Easy divorce, the ubiquity of pornography, a media culture that does little or nothing to sup- port marriage...these are just a few of the obvious culprits in this attack, all of which have captured the at- tention of Catholic activists during the last several decades. And all of them are worthy of our attention. But there is a serious silence about the fact that whatever moral or legal dif- good laws, all the good examples, all the moral exhortations, will hardly avail much if a family is struggling to obtain its needs of food, housing, medical care and the like.

Pope Pius X's 1905 encyclical Casti connubii is often praised for its outspoken condemnation of contraception, divorce and such evils, but it is not usually remembered that in the same encyclical the Pontiff insisted that...

...such economic and social methods should be adopted as will enable every head of a family to earn as much as...is necessary for himself, his wife, and for the rearing of his children.
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

Human nature does not change, as St. John Paul II made plain in Veritatis Splendor (no. 27): "There is no psychological, intellectual or moral change in human sexuality and love through the years and across cultures, even in the Church's history. In fidelity to the Master, Christians cannot escape being signs of contradiction, but the Master has promised us the peace Simon experienced: the peace the world cannot give or take." (Jn 14:27)

Secondly, when he introduced Veritatis Splendor in 1993, then Cardinal Ratzinger praised chapter three of the encyclical, entitled, "The Cross and Christ Be Emptied of Its Power" (1 Cor 1:17), as among "the great texts of the Magisterium." Chapter three analyses Christ's death, our life in Christ, and our task as authentic Catholics to proclaim the Church's message and to share and live all his gifts.

Today, the Church teaches that every human person has dignity and is called to love and share the fullness of divine life with God and with others. This teaching is rooted in the reality that God has loved us first, that he has called us to love him above all, and that he has given us the grace to love others as he loves us. The Church teaches that the body is a gift from God and that it is to be cherished and protected. The Church teaches that the soul is a gift from God and that it is to be cultivated and developed. The Church teaches that the family is a gift from God and that it is to be cherished and protected. The Church teaches that the Church is a gift from God and that it is to be cherished and protected.

The Church teaches that all of these gifts are to be used for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. The Church teaches that the Church is to be a welcoming and inclusive community that welcomes all who seek to follow Christ and to be his disciples. The Church teaches that the Church is to be a community that is faithful to the teaching of the Lord and to the Tradition of the Church.

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