

LETTER FROM ROME

Special commentary by Robert Mickens

An outstanding record of the developments
tensions and achievements in the last two years
with Pope Francis



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PREFACE

The term 'Vatican-watcher' might have been invented especially for Robert Mickens. One can only admire the fervor of his attention towards everything that happens at the Holy See. Few Vaticanisti deploy such a keen focus to decrypt what goes on behind the walls of the Città Leonina.

But Robert is not writing only for fellow specialists, those 'lucky few' able to read between the lines and catch subtleties the general reader might miss. On the contrary, the author of the 'Letter from Rome' takes the trouble to make his missives accessible to all, and to carefully build his arguments with documentary precision.

So we are particularly pleased that Robert's letters have been assembled in this e-book. As well as the aforementioned qualities, readers of La Croix International will find in them a rare freedom of tone, one that some may find surprising, and even disturbing at times.

But this vividness is in fact to be cherished. A writer's frankness is, in the end, a sign of great respect for the reader.

Thanks, Bob!

Guillaume Goubert
Editor-in-Chief
La Croix & La Croix International

FOREWORD

I first arrived in Rome in late August 1986. Except for several months while working as communications director for Franciscans International and Dominicans for Justice & Peace at the United Nations in Geneva, the Eternal City has been my home these past thirty-one years.

Initially studying for the priesthood as a seminarian at the North American College and a theology student at the Pontifical Gregorian University, I discerned that ordained ministry was not my vocation. But I stayed in Rome and, for another eleven years, worked at Vatican Radio.

It was during that time that I learned the trade of being a “vaticanista” from the very inside of the organization. This unique perch gave me the privilege of travelling abroad with Pope John Paul II and getting a close-up look at the pontificate and the Church from behind the scenes. Eventually, I left the Radio and began looking at the Vatican from the outside when for nearly fourteen years I worked as the Rome correspondent for the London-based Catholic weekly, the *Tablet*, interrupted only by my time in Geneva.

It was during the second period at the *Tablet* that the editor suggested I write a weekly column, called the “Letter from Rome”. The very first letter appeared in early 2005 as the now-Saint John Paul was dying. The format of the

column was initially conceived as a sort of “Triptych”, an article of about 900 words in length, divided into three separate parts. A veritable pot pourri, it was a mixed-bag of news, an occasional “scoop”, gossip picked up from the corridors in and around the Roman Curia and, every once in a while, it tried to serve up a slice of life in one of the world’s most fascinating and charming cities.

When my time at the Tablet came to an end in the spring of 2014, I took a brief sabbatical before beginning, about six months later, a new adventure as the founding editor-in-chief of Global Pulse Magazine, the precursor to La Croix International.

This new e-book is a small selection of the various editions of the “Letter from Rome” that have appeared these past three years in my new capacity.

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The Roman Catholic Church continues to implode

In some ways, Francis seems to be deliberately hastening its inevitable collapse by implementing the principles and methods outlined in "Evangelii gaudium" (EG), his vision and blueprint for Church renewal and reform.

July 28, 2017

Some five years ago I was invited to speak at the City Club of Cleveland, Ohio.

“Since 1912, the City Club has served as one of the (United States’) oldest, non-partisan and continuously **operating free speech forums**,” says the organization’s website.

The topic of my talk was the Vatican implosion and, as a result, the long and gradual collapse of the Catholic Church’s monarchical structure of governance and ministry.

I argued that as the last absolute monarchy in the West (and most anywhere else in the world) the organization of the Roman Church has become an anachronism. It made sense when monarchies were a fundamental feature of human society. But no longer.

This outdated model of the Catholic Church's structure no longer incarnates the reality of the lived experience of believers, the staggering majority of whom live in societies that are becoming more and more, and to varying degrees, participatory and representative democracies.

A Church where the most important decisions are made almost exclusively by a celibate male clergy, and where bishops are held to little or no accountability, is unsustainable in a world where patriarchal and monarchical societies – begrudgingly, but steadily – are ceding rights and duties to those who are not part of the nobility, the clergy or one specific gender.

My talk in November 2012 came during the height of the so-called VatiLeaks Scandal. For more than a year the leaking of sensitive Vatican documents and the private papers of Benedict XVI had caused deep embarrassment to the still-reigning German pope and his top aides – especially Tarcisio Bertone SDB, the Cardinal Secretary of State at the time.

It was a mess. And today one could look back and say: “Sure, it was easy back then for someone to spout off about a supposed Vatican implosion.”

Indeed, some people have since told me that the election of Pope Francis has revealed that my analysis was way off base.

But nearly half a decade later, I'm convinced that the thesis argued on that November morning in Cleveland still holds. Because it was not based on what did or did not transpire in Benedict's pontificate.

Even despite the *kairos* – the special, providential moment – that the overwhelming number of Catholics believe we're experiencing after the election of the first-ever Jesuit pope, the Church continues to implode.

In fact, in some ways, Francis seems to be deliberately hastening its inevitable collapse by implementing the principles and methods outlined in *Evangelii gaudium* (EG), his vision and blueprint for Church renewal and reform.

Let's be clear, we're not talking about the demise of the Catholic Church. God is not dead and the Holy Spirit will never leave Christ's faithful people. This we all believe.

No, it's about the crumbling of the present governing and organizational structure, which continues to mirror certain features of the Roman Empire more than it reflects the organizational model of ecclesial life that is found in the New Testament or was experienced in the first couple of centuries of the Christian Church.

Francis is effectively laying the foundation for the “deconstruction” of the current model by patiently planting

the seeds for the Church's structural conversion by "baptizing" and employing four, key sociological principles (EG 222-237):

- Time is greater than space
- Unity prevails over conflict
- Realities are more important than ideas
- The whole is greater than the parts

Ultimately the pope's goal is to make the structures and mentality of the Church more reflective of the Gospel and person of Jesus Christ and to liberate it from a codified system of rules and philosophical ideas still deeply wedded to the culture of the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Through the process of synodality, he is opening up spaces for dialogue and discussion that involve all the Holy People of God and not just the male clerics.

He is not democratizing the Church, but he is creating a large and indispensable forum for all voices to be heard through the classic, but too often forgotten, process of discernment.

It is still a fledgling – and for many, frightening – process that was revived with preparations for the last two gatherings of the Synod of Bishops on marriage and the

family where all Catholics were given an opportunity to make their views known to the Church's pastors.

The process of discernment has been further expanded in the run-up to the next session of the Synod, which will be convened in the autumn of 2018 to reflect on young people, vocations, and faith. The pope ordered that a survey be made available on-line where all young people – even non-Catholics – can share their hopes and concerns.

Francis has also begun laying the foundations for Church decentralization by restoring to local bishops or regional episcopal conferences their rightful authority that, over the centuries, had been taken from them and given to offices in the Roman Curia.

For example, he's done this by streamlining the marriage annulment process and giving almost exclusive judicial authority to individual diocesan bishops.

And it is reported that the pope is also considering calling a special Synod assembly exclusively for the bishops in the Amazon region, which will allow them to discern pastoral (and doctrinal) solutions to urgent problems particular to their part of the world.

One of them, though this is not just an issue for the Amazon, is the acute lack of ordained priests. Francis has

indicated that he would grant the bishops authority to ordain married men to the priesthood (that is, restore the more ancient tradition of married clergy) if they should discern this is the way forward. This, in turn, could give courage to bishops of other regions to seriously consider a similar move.

It seems more and more clear that the 80-year-old pope favors the possibility of married priests, at least under certain circumstances. One thing is for certain; he believes it is a decision the bishops (at least of a particular region) should make, not just he and his collaborators in Rome.

A key development along this path came in mid-June at the latest round of talks on Vatican reform that Francis held with his advisory Council of Cardinals (C9).

It was announced that the C9 proposed the possibility of allowing national bishops' conferences the authority, now held by the Congregation for the Clergy, to decide whether or not to ordain an unmarried or widowed permanent deacon to the priesthood or to allow a widowed deacon to remarry.

The proposal is the first step towards opening up a small space for bishops of a nation or region to decide, without the need for Vatican approval, on the dispensation of certain current restrictions on priestly ordination. It will

take time, but it is a beginning that could lead to further development. The principle is there.

And if the whole is greater than its parts, the Church will not splinter if one section of it should decide to revive the ancient tradition of married priests – or to ordain women deacons or find other pastoral/doctrinal solutions to particular problems.

The most important issue is that these “creative” solutions, as the pope likes to call them, do not stray from the *kerygma* – the essential kernel of the Christian faith.

Ironically, the greatest evidence that the Church continues to implode is the silent and not-so-silent opposition to Francis’ vision for reform that is found among the clergy, “both high and low”, as a recent article in *L’Osservatore Romano* stated so clearly.

This is ironic because the priests and bishops that oppose the Jesuit pope’s call for pastoral change and conversion believe they are the bulwark of the Church’s stability.

They believe that they, and they alone, can stop the pieces and chunks of this anachronistic structure from caving in simply by a strict and rigid adherence to moralizing norms and liturgical rubrics, an obsession to control and rule

Christ's faithful and an insistence that only the ordained can decide the ordering of ecclesial life.

They, too, are hastening the implosion. And, in a paradoxical way, they may be helping Pope Francis more than one can even imagine.

After all, it's a long game.

And, in the end, time is greater than space.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-roman-catholic-church-continues-to-implode/5616>

Will Cardinal Pell's exit advance Pope Francis' financial reforms?

The Bishop of Rome appears determined not to allow internal battles over the management of the Vatican's material resources to derail his more ambitious reforms - that is, bringing about a colossal change in the attitude and ethos of what it means to be a Christian.

June 30, 2017

Cardinal George Pell's time at the Vatican is over.

You can bet the Holy See's huge financial and real estate assets that, de facto, he is finished as Prefect of the Secretariat of the Economy, the office that monitors those vast resources.

Pope Francis granted Pell an extended "leave" from his Vatican post this past Wednesday so the cardinal could return to his native Australia and face "multiple charges in respect of historic sexual abuse".

The 76-year-old cardinal must appear before the Melbourne Magistrates Court on July 26th when it is

expected that the exact nature of the abuse charges will be made public.

Accusations against the cardinal have circulated for many years but they have never stuck. Pell has always insisted on his innocence and this past week vowed to clear his name in what he's called a "relentless character assassination". Evidently, he's hired Melbourne barrister Robert Richter, known as a "standout celebrity criminal advocate", to defend him.

This will likely require a long and drawn-out courtroom battle that will last at least a year or more. And that's far too long for a major Vatican office to be left without its head.

Or without the head's right-hand man.

In Pell's case that was Libero Milone, an Italian financier born in Holland and educated in England and the United States. The 67-year-old Milone was hired as the Vatican's first-ever Auditor General. But he abruptly resigned without any explanation just a week before Pell took his leave. It is still a mystery why the auditor stepped down.

Milone was only two years and Pell a bit more than three years into five-year appointments.

Now that one has left permanently and the other at least temporarily, two minor officials at the economy secretariat will be in charge. One is Mgr Alfred Xuereb, 58, a Maltese priest who served as a private secretary to Benedict XVI and briefly to Francis. He is currently the department's prelate secretary general.

The other is Mgr Luigi Mistò, 65, a former high-level finance officer in the Archdiocese of Milan under Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini. He presently oversees the administrative section of the economy secretariat.

Many Vatican watchers and commentators are predicting that these recent developments spell disaster for the pope's efforts to reform the Holy See's financial operations.

But Massimo Franco, a respected political commentator for the Milan-based daily, *Corriere della Sera*, believes it actually provides a new opportunity to get the reforms back on the right track.

Paradoxically, he said, the likelihood that Pell will make a permanent exit from the stage could actually advance the financial reforms rather than bring them to a halt. "The way in which Pell managed them was considered both costly and ineffective," Franco claimed.

“His secretariat clashed with most of the other Vatican departments. And in this conflict people noted his cultural prejudice against everything that was Italian,” he pointed out.

The cardinal insisted on using English as the official language of his office and he more than insinuated that corruption was inherent in the Italian methods of financial management.

“Pell was heavy-handed in imposing the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon legal system on a world about which he knew little and which he quickly rejected,” Franco said.

The Italian commentator noted that after the cardinal brashly announced that he would make sure there were no more cases “like those involving Michele Sindona and Roberto Calvi” (a reference to the Vatican Bank scandal in the early 1980s), some people in the Vatican exclaimed, “Archbishop Marcinkus was hardly from Viterbo!”

Marcinkus, of course, was the Chicago area prelate who headed the Vatican’s bank (formally called the Institute for the Works of Religion or IOR) when the scandal unfolded.

People like *Corriere della Sera*’s Massimo Franco believe Pell’s gruff manner and cultural superiority were a major obstacle to his efforts to push forward an agenda of

financial reform. But will the eventual appointment of his replacement, even if the new prefect is more diplomatic and culturally sensitive, be able to effectively and positively change the way Vatican institutions handle money?

It bears repeating what has been written here before – Pope Francis’ preferred way of dealing with Church financial reform has always been to get out of the banking or money management business altogether.

On numerous occasions during his first several months as Bishop of Rome, he said, only half in jest, that St Peter never had a bank account. It was clear from the beginning that he would have opted to simply close the IOR and the Vatican’s other quasi-banking and real estate management departments, such as the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA) and the section within the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (“Propaganda Fide”) that handles the congregation’s vast property holdings.

He seemed to have every intention of doing at the Vatican what he did in the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires shortly after becoming archbishop – divesting the Church from any direct financial management and entrusting its funds to reputable banks.

And, as if in an effort to further disassociate himself from the Holy See's sometimes-scandalous dealings with money, Francis this year ordered that his image would no longer be on the euro coins that the Vatican continues to mint.

No pope in modern times has ever been so clear and probably so ignored as Francis when it comes to denouncing the idolatry of money.

But the 80-year-old Bishop of Rome appears determined not to allow internal battles over the management of the Vatican's material resources to derail his more ambitious reforms – that is, bringing about a colossal change in the attitude and ethos of what it means to be a Christian and engendering a poor Church for the poor that is like a field hospital after a battle and open and inclusive of all people.

Perhaps Pope Francis will just have to accept that an imperfect financial reform may end being the price he'll have to pay to achieve this much more important goal.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/will-cardinal-pells-exit-advance-pope-francis-financial-reforms/5453>

Whom will the Holy Spirit prompt to speak up?

The fact of the matter is that there really is no lack of vocations to priestly service. It is merely that the Church authorities refuse to admit those who have the charism and feel the call.

April 14, 2017

Easter is the “most solemn festival” on the Church’s calendar.

But this yearly commemoration of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – stretched over a three-day period within Holy Week known as the Sacred Triduum – actually happens every single Sunday.

“By a tradition handed down from the apostles, which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day... the Lord’s Day or Sunday.”

That’s from the Second Vatican Council’s (1962-65) document on the liturgy, [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#).

It notes “Christ’s faithful are bound to come together into one place” each Sunday “so that, by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus”. (SC, 106)

The Council stated clearly that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church’s life and all its activity.

And in its decree on priestly life and ministry Vatican II said it’s impossible to truly build up a Christian community “unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 6).

Hence, the need for priests, more properly known as presbyters; persons ordained and sanctioned by the Church authorities (the bishops) to preside at the Eucharistic liturgy, the Mass.

But the Church has a serious shortage of ordained presbyters in almost every part of the world, except in some countries in Africa and Asia. And this “vocations crisis” is not something new. The first signs of it started appearing even before Vatican Council II got underway.

But Paul VI (pope from 1963-1978) stifled any serious discernment on how to effectively respond to the problem when he forbade the Council Fathers from questioning

mandatory priestly celibacy or deliberating over the possible ordination of the so-called *viri probati* – married men of proven virtue.

In fact, the Council never had a serious discussion on the much larger and important issue of ministries (in general) in the Church or how we discern, recognize, distinguish and verify the different charisms (spiritual gifts) Christ bestows on the Holy People of God.

“To some, his ‘gift’ was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; to knit God’s holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ,” St Paul says (Eph 4,11-12).

The diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate are a necessary, but only a very limited manifestation of these charisms. And down the centuries Church authority has tried to circumscribe all these gifts within these Holy Orders. And, in doing so, it may have limited and/or resisted the working of the Holy Spirit.

In the immediate decade following Vatican II, there were many theologians and even a good number of bishops that tried to keep the discussion alive as they explored some of those questions that were off-limits or never mentioned at the Council.

However, that was all brought to an abrupt halt shortly after the election of Pope John Paul II who quickly imposed lock-step discipline throughout the hierarchy and it was directed from the centralizing offices in Rome.

No more discussion of the possibility of ordaining the *virī probati*. Absolutely no questioning of mandatory celibacy. Woman priests? Forget about it, and your Church job (or even your membership in the Church), if you as much as broach the topic.

Then in 1990 the Polish pope and his Vatican aides strong-armed the Synod of Bishops into rubberstamping his firm reinforcement of the Tridentine paradigm of the priesthood and its model of seminary formation.

The ethos and basic structure of priestly formation and ministry, all dating back to the 16th century, was repackaged with contemporary semantics and the ever-so-lightly seasoning of an updated psychological and sociological pedagogy.

The document John Paul issued two years later as a recapitulation of that Synod assembly, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, was disturbingly backward looking. It even endorsed the re-opening of high-school seminaries, most of which had long been shuttered for very good and sane reasons.

Yet the vocations crisis continued. While there was a steady, though a modest rise in the number of major seminarians during John Paul's pontificate, it was not enough to replace an aging clergy – or keep pace with the growing number of Catholics.

We all know what happened next. Bishops started closing or merging parishes. And it soon became clear that the Eucharist-centered communities that Vatican II said were imperative had succumbed to being (or, in reality, had always been) priest-centered communities.

And, of course, the priest at the center had to be a man – and only a man who was willing to make a promise to live celibately and be obedient to his bishop.

Without other possibilities, what was a bishop to do? He could not ordain married men or reinstate priests who had left to get married. What bishop in his right mind would even dare to try that in the long reign of *Il Santo Subito*?

A growing number of bishops from countries where the shortage was growing more and more acute (especially in the United States, Australia and parts of Europe) began “importing” foreign priests.

Some of these clerics came from dioceses in India and Africa, places Rome hailed as being “blessed” with

numerous vocations. But others were young men from countries (such as in Latin America) where the priest-to-people ratio was even higher than in the places abroad that were recruiting them.

There are all sorts of sensitive issues connected to these “imports” that have to be very carefully worked out.

What is their true motivation for leaving their native country, especially those from underdeveloped or impoverished areas? How willing and capable are they to adapt to a new culture?

And then there are the normal verifications that must be made of anyone who believes he is called to the priesthood – his psychosexual maturity, commitment to serve and not be served, and so forth.

Sometimes imported priests work out fine, but in many cases, they do not.

Just last week Archbishop Tommaso Valentinetti of Pescara-Penne had to suspend a priest from India who is incardinated in his central Italian diocese. Fr Edward Pushparaj, 40, was ordained just four years ago.

Parishioners had been complaining to the archbishop for several weeks because the priest was constantly criticizing Pope Francis.

Things reached the boiling point on Palm Sunday when Fr Pushparaj used his homily on the Feast of the Passion of the Lord to attack the pope. Some worshippers even stormed out of church in protest, yelling, “Shame on you!”

According to Archbishop Valentinetti, he was serving up the usual anti-Francis fare that one finds in “clericalist and pseudo-traditionalist circles”.

What is so disturbing about this story is that this man was obviously not well vetted before being ordained. A simple background check, much of which could be done through the Internet, should have set off alarm bells immediately.

Pushparaj went to the seminary in his hometown in southern India, beginning at the age of fourteen. He continued up through the study of philosophy and theology, but then discontinued his path towards priesthood – for about six years.

“God wanted me to continue my formation outside the seminary,” he said in [a recorded interview](#) in January 2013 just hours before Archbishop Valentinetti ordained him a deacon.

Pushparaj actually came to Italy in the autumn of 2008. Because? “God wanted me here,” he said again.

As a newly arrived 31-year-old, he joined the Olivetan Benedictines in the northern Italian city of Ferrara, eventually moving to another monastery in Bologna. He said it was an elderly priest of Pescara-Penne, now dead, who got him to join the archdiocese.

No bishop is beyond criticism – not even the Bishop of Rome. But priests have no right to use the homily during the celebration of the Eucharist – especially during Holy Week – to have a go at the pope!

But even if Fr Pushparaj was a great devotee of Pope Francis, there is something that is not right about his profile or the way he and many other foreign-born priests are imported to places with dwindling vocations. They are pawns in a cynical stopgap strategy that the bishops have employed.

The fact of the matter is that there really is no lack of vocations to priestly service. It is merely that the Church authorities refuse to admit many of those who have the charism and feel the call.

Married men or those who would like to marry; women in any category; those who for whatever reason resist making

a lifetime commitment to ministry, but would be willing to serve for a time and a season – all these are disqualified as candidates.

This has to be re-thought because a Church that sticks stubbornly to the non-divine rule of mandatory celibacy when there is such a severe priest shortage deprives the Holy People of God of the Eucharist for which they rightly hunger. This is not only an injustice, but it might also be an act of opposing the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis has signaled his willingness to allow for the ordination of, at least, the *viri probati*. But people close to him, such as Cardinals Walter Kasper and Christoph Schönborn, say the pope wants the national episcopal conferences to take the initiative.

In fact, Francis was as clear as he could be in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, that it is not the role of the papal magisterium to give “a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world”.

He said: “It is not advisable for the pope to take the place of local bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’” (EG, 16)

Francis is begging the bishops and all the faithful to join together in reforming and renewing the Church. “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities,” he says (EG, 33).

But too many bishops seem incapable of what the pope is asking of them, especially regarding the priesthood. For far too long they have been afraid to ponder any change to the criteria the Tridentine paradigm imposed on how the Church identifies and selects its presbyters.

And it is a bitter irony that the now-sainted pope, John Paul II – the very one who began his pontificate by saying, “Be not afraid!” – was the man who instilled that fear in the bishops (and all who aspired to become part of the episcopate) when he forbade any discussion or discernment, any creativity or boldness in exploring possible changes.

But this is exactly what Pope Francis is now calling for – bold and creative solutions to all the problems that inhibit the Church’s ministry and mission. And the vocations crisis is one of the most glaring of them all.

Despite his prodding, too many bishops remain paralyzed by fear. They and far too many priests remain immobilized

in the clerical club of their celibate, all-male fraternity or caste.

But not all of them.

There are those for whom Francis' pontificate has offered encouragement and granted permission to speak up. And you can bet that at least one of them is likely to raise his voice when the pope convenes the Synod of Bishops in October 2018 to discuss young people and vocational discernment.

Maybe it will be a Vatican official like Cardinal Kevin Farrell. Or perhaps it will again be a leader from the German-speaking Church or someone from Latin America.

It's even quite possible that the prophetic call for a creative and bold solution to the crisis will come from a prelate from the United States, someone such as Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark.

Or perhaps... just perhaps, it will come from a future cardinal, like Robert McElroy in San Diego.

Whom will the Holy Spirit prompt to speak up?

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/whom-will-the-holy-spirit-prompt-to-speak-up/5026>

Hundred and fifty-three big fish

Why the pope needs to expand the College of Cardinals.

March 31, 2017

Pope Francis has spent his four years as Bishop of Rome steadily and tenaciously waging a campaign to change the mentality of individual Catholics and the ethos of the entire Church, which he dreams of being an outward-looking, accident-prone and getting-its-hands-dirty community that is “on the move”.

In fact, the 80-year-old pope’s “attitude adjustment program” is gradually reshaping the very identity of global Catholicism, even though it’s not to everyone’s liking.

Just as he hinted he would do **when he addressed** fellow cardinals just four days before they elected him, Francis has been trying to liberate Jesus Christ from a Church that, increasingly in the past three or so decades, had become a sick, self-referential and theologically narcissistic institution living only for itself.

“In (the Book of) Revelation, Jesus says that he is standing at the threshold and calling,” the future pope said in a pre-Conclave meeting on March 9, 2013.

“Evidently the text refers to the fact that he stands outside the door and knocks to come in... But at times I think Jesus may be knocking from the inside – so that we can let him out. The self-referential Church presumes to keep Jesus Christ within itself and not let him out,” he said.

In that short address, the then-Archbishop of Buenos Aires said:

“The Church is called to come out from itself and go to the peripheries, not only those that are geographical but also the existential ones: those of the mystery of sin, suffering, and injustice; those of ignorance and the absence of faith, thought and every form of misery.”

Pope Francis has been bringing forth just such a Church.

And there is ample evidence that this renewed way of being a Christian community has been embraced, by and large, at the grassroots. The vast majority of lay people, as well as folks who are not even Catholic, have been energized by this change of tone, emphasis, and way of mercifully walking with all humanity.

But it seems just as evident that the reception has been much more tepid among a significant number of bishops (mostly appointed by Francis’ two most recent

predecessors), younger priests and many of the men aspiring to be ontologically changed by priestly ordination. These types within the clerical caste are gritting their teeth and consoling themselves with the assurance that this pontificate will not last forever.

They believe they just have to “wait out” the old Jesuit and then hope that the cardinals will come to their senses at the next Conclave and choose a more prudent and less disruptive man of unquestionable orthodoxy to be Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. Once that happens, they believe, their lives will finally get back to normal.

It is not a far-fetched thought.

So what can Pope Francis do to change attitudes at the top of the Church? It is something he must ponder if he wants to make sure the renewal and reform he has begun actually continue beyond his pontificate.

Back in November 2013, shortly after he announced his first consistory (some four months in advance) it already seemed clear that he would have to modify the number of electors if he wanted to significantly re-shape the College of Cardinals with men on board with his vision for the Church.

“He likely will want to make a body that is now top-heavy with Europeans and North Americans more reflective of the ‘peripheries’ of the Universal Church,” I wrote in the November 9th issue of *The Tablet*.

“If Francis wishes to alter this geographical configuration, he may have to formally change the rules to increase the number of cardinal-electors beyond one-hundred-and-twenty,” the article continued.

Since the College of Cardinals is a human invention its existence and number of members are completely arbitrary. Pope Paul VI fixed the current limit on the number of electors, but there is nothing stopping Pope Francis from changing it.

It is his prerogative and his alone. In fact, John Paul II derogated from Paul’s legislation several times and after consistories in 2001 and 2003, for example, there were as many as 135 electors.

It seems that the Argentine pope has been entertaining the idea of formally boosting the ceiling for some time.

And, in fact, just several days ago an article by a writer close to the retired Benedict XVI suggested the current pope is likely to name a large group of new cardinals next

June by doing that very thing – issuing a *motu proprio* to formally increase the papal electors to 150.

“If he really increases the number of cardinal electors,” said the article, “Pope Francis would have 30ish ‘cardinal slots’, and with these new red hats he would profoundly reshape the geography and orientation of the College of Cardinals.”

Now, the author of this piece of speculation is known to be a useful scribe for the information Benedict’s trusted aide Archbishop Georg Gänswein wants to put in the public domain. So perhaps the article should be taken with a grain of salt.

But Francis has been encouraged in the past to expand the number of electors, even by some of the most unsuspecting men in the hierarchy.

One of them was Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, the Spaniard who served as prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship from 2008-2014 before Francis sent him back home to lead the Archdiocese of Valencia.

Evidently, the man known as the “little Ratzinger” urged Francis back in late 2014 to raise the number of cardinal electors to 140 in order to create a greater geographical representation in the body that elects the Bishop of Rome.

But, as we know, the pope has so far maintained the 120-limit set by Paul VI.

A more forceful argument to increase the number of voters was made in [this column](#) exactly one year ago when it was speculated that the pope would create new cardinals in June 2016.

“If he adheres to the 120 ceiling, that gives him only eight slots to fill. If he waits until November – say, the Feast of Christ the King on the 20th of that month – he could add another five for a total of 13 new cardinals,” the column said.

In fact, the consistory was held in November, as the Letter from Rome had surmised.

“It is important to note that the thirteen new electors will not significantly tip the balance – either geographically or ecclesiologically / pastorally – in the College of Cardinals,” [it was pointed out](#) once the names of the new electors were announced.

“More significantly Pope Francis will have named only 44 of the electors, compared to the 55 created by Benedict XVI and the other 21 by John Paul II,” the article noted.

In a few weeks when Cardinal Lluís Martínez Sistach of Spain turns 80 there will be 116 papal electors, giving the pope only four slots to fill if he maintains the current limit.

No other cardinals turn 80 until next year when seven others age out by the end of 2018.

This earlier observation continues to hold:

“All things remaining equal, Francis will still have appointed only 55 electors over this period. If he wants to continue to make the College of Cardinals more reflective of the universal complexion of the Church and – more importantly – ensure that this illustrious body is fully on board with his vision for Catholicism’s future, he should seriously consider raising the ceiling to a larger number.”

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, one must repeat that it is vital for the pope to carefully consider which and how many men he puts into the red-hatted college.

That’s because this body elects his successor. And it will be up to that man to decide whether and how to proceed with the renewal and reforms that Francis has painstakingly begun.

Also, cardinals cut a high profile and wield considerable influence on the rest of the Church. They often set the tone and agenda for other members in the hierarchy, as well as the rest of the clergy and baptized faithful.

But unless he lives and remains Bishop of Rome for several more years perhaps the best thing Francis can do to make sure (though without any guarantees) that a man is elected to continue his vision for the Church is by significantly expanding the number of cardinal electors.

The figure has varied widely over the centuries, but in 1587 Pope Sixtus V set it at 70, apparently to reflect the number of elders Moses chose to help him govern the Israelites.

That held until 1958 when Pope John XXIII increased the electors to 75, then 88 (1960) and 90 (1962).

It's not clear if Paul VI had any biblical imagery in mind when he fixed the number of electors at 120, but the Acts of the Apostles (1,14-26) recounts that after Jesus' ascension into heaven there were some 120 disciples who chose the successor to Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve.

No matter which number Pope Francis chooses, it must be significantly greater than the current limit.

If he is looking for a clue from scripture he might consider the scene from the last chapter of the Gospel of John. The resurrected Jesus is standing on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius. The apostles are out on the water, fishing from a boat.

Jesus called out, "Haven't you caught anything, friends?"

And when they answered, "No", he said, "Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something."

So they threw the net out and could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." At these words, "It is the Lord," Simon Peter tied his outer garment around him (for he had nothing on) and jumped into the water.

The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net with the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it.

Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." And here's the punch line:

Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many, the net was not broken.

In the Church's hierarchy, at least, the cardinals are the "big fish".

May Pope Francis increase their number so they and the next man who wears the Shoes of the Fisherman might keep alive the evangelical momentum the current Successor of Peter has begun.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/hundred-and-fifty-three-big-fish/4942>

Is this a golden age of Vatican diplomacy?

This was basically the question Cardinal Pietro Parolin was asked this week at the 47th World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

January 20, 2017

Pope Francis is a man of discernment. And he believes all Christians should be, too.

This is essential to understanding what motivates him and how it effects the decisions he makes.

“This discernment takes time,” he said in [the lengthy interview](#) he gave to *La Civiltà Cattolica* (then reproduced by other Jesuit publications) just months after his election as Bishop of Rome.

“For example, many think that changes and reforms can take place in a short time. I believe that we always need time to lay the foundations for real, effective change. And this is the time of discernment,” the new pope said.

“Discernment is always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor,” he continued.

And then he added, “The wisdom of discernment redeems the necessary ambiguity of life and helps us find the most appropriate means, which do not always coincide with what looks great and strong.”

When it comes to discerning the big picture – that is, the road the Church is being called to travel at this time in history – Francis has no doubts. He believes it is the path of synodality.

“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium,” he said in a major address in October 2015.

“A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn,” he said.

The occasion for **that talk** was the 50th anniversary of Blessed Paul VI’s institution of the Synod of Bishops, which he decreed at the very start of the fourth and final period of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The commemoration took place while the Synod was actually in session. For the second time in two years, Francis had called the bishops together to openly and frankly discuss issues related to marriage, family and human sexuality.

In his extraordinary address, he told them he was convinced that the Synod of Bishops and synodality at every level needed to be further “enhanced”. The goal is to better develop episcopal collegiality, soundly decentralize governance and connect more effectively with the “base”.

“The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time – as Successor of Peter – to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches,” Francis said.

And he believes his leadership is more genuinely in conformity with the Gospel and the design of authority Jesus granted to the apostles when he exercises leadership with all the bishops.

But will he be able to institutionalize this form of collegial governance through a reform of the Synod of Bishops?

If that is his goal, he has a very long way to go.

The first thing he has to do is wash some people's mouths out, because right now the language being used by too many church folk belies either extreme carelessness or utter ignorance of the Synod's true nature.

Paul VI **decreed** that the Synod of Bishops would be a Rome-based "permanent Council of bishops for the universal Church".

Note the term permanent council.

"The Synod of Bishops is directly and immediately subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, whose responsibility is... to call the Synod into session... in General Session, in Extraordinary Session, and in Special Session," the papal documents says.

Called into session.

Thus, the Synod – like a country's parliament – is a permanent institution. It always exists, whether or not it is in session.

It is just as incorrect to say the pope has called a synod for 2018 as it would be to say that the US president has called a senate for next month. The only difference is that – at least up to now – parliaments and congresses are more permanently in session than the Synod of Bishops.

It is not a good sign when even the Synod’s secretary general constantly refers to “last year’s synod” or “the two synods on the family”, as Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri did last week when he unveiled preparations for the next session of the Synod in 2018.

Words shape reality. The men of the Holy See know this better than anyone. St Thomas Aquinas knew it, too, insisting that we use words carefully and precisely to define our terms.

If the pope wants to transform, enhance and reform the Synod of Bishops he might start by insisting that people clean up their language.

Are we currently witnessing a “golden age” of Holy See diplomacy?

That was basically the question Cardinal Pietro Parolin was asked this week at the 47th World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

The Vatican's Secretary of State blushed a bit before then admitting that the Church's diplomatic activity had certainly "increased a lot" in the current pontificate.

"First of all, because of the personality of Pope Francis – this is clear! He's taken on a very great role of leadership concerning the global issues of the present world," the cardinal said.

As just one instance, he pointed to the 2015 Paris Agreement to combat climate change, but without going into the extensive background of how the pope – through his encyclical, *Laudato si'*, and his various envoys – helped influence the accord.

What Cardinal Parolin did not say was that he, as the No. 1 papal envoy, is also one of the major reasons why the Holy See has become much more engaged in international diplomacy than it was during the eight years when Benedict XVI was pope.

Parolin, who just turned 62 last Tuesday, was appointed Secretary of State by Pope Francis in October 2013 precisely in order to revive the world's oldest diplomatic corps and bolster its efforts at peacemaking and human development.

But the cardinal, self-effacing as ever, attributed all this to the pope. He noted that shortly after Francis became Bishop of Rome he told Vatican diplomats their main priorities must be fighting poverty, building bridges through dialogue and working for peace.

Cardinal Parolin made his comments in [an extensive interview](#) (in English) with WEF's Philipp Rösler, a Vietnamese-born German politician who was Angela Merkel's vice-chancellor from 2011-2013.

The interview is not riveting, as far as entertainment value goes. But it's definitely worth having a look for a number of reasons.

Firstly, because the Secretary of State offers some important insights into the underlying principles that are currently driving the Holy See's efforts in the field of international diplomacy.

For example, he said the main point of Vatican diplomacy is to defend the human person based on the centrality of the person, the multi-faceted dimension of the person (especially transcendence) and the notion of solidarity/fraternity.

“If we do not understand clearly that we are brothers and sisters and that we are responsible for each other, I think other objectives will prevail and we will end up destroying the person and the community,” he warned.

Then he revealed (at least to those with eyes to see) perhaps the most important difference that distinguishes the current pontificate from the one that immediately preceded it – and not only in the field diplomacy, but also in the most basic approach to life, faith, and all reality.

“I also want to say” – the cardinal began – “that, as Pope Francis has said, it is important not to talk about mankind in general, as an abstraction, but to look into the eyes of every person and to be a spokesman for the individual person, especially the poor and most vulnerable. And so I think Holy See diplomacy should be very concrete diplomacy.”

Astonishingly, the man who preceded Parolin as Secretary of State – Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone SDB – had zero diplomatic experience or skills.

(It is still a mystery why Benedict XVI appointed someone so unqualified to such a sensitive and important position. And even more mysterious is why the professor-pope did not replace Bertone when he turned out to be such a disaster.)

Bertone, under instructions of his boss in white, systematically disengaged the Holy See from cooperating with any international or state entities – on any topic – if they did not obey the Vatican’s line (directly from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) on the so-called “non-negotiable” issues such as abortion, euthanasia, same-sex unions and artificial insemination.

The Holy See stood aloof, in self-righteousness and with clean hands, leaving the messy and fallen “world” to sort out its mess all on its own.

But there is also another reason to have a look at Cardinal Pietro Parolin’s recent interview in Davos.

He stands to be a major figure at the next conclave when there will surely be a hotly contested debate over the future direction of the Church and who is best suited to

lead it. The northern Italian, who is a native of the Veneto Region, has been one of Pope Francis' most essential collaborators in his effort to renew and reform the Vatican and the entire Church.

But the cardinal has done so in a quieter and less exuberant way than the charismatic pope. And that is much appreciated by those who find Francis a bit "out of control". And, yet, Parolin completely shares Francis' vision for a transformed Church, as the pope outlined clearly in his blueprint document, *Evangelii gaudium*.

The cardinal also has been uniquely prepared, at least academically, to carry forward the most foundational reform that Francis has tried to set in motion.

When the young Fr Pietro Parolin did his doctoral thesis at the Gregorian University in 1986 he focused on... the Synod of Bishops.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/is-this-a-golden-age-of-vatican-diplomacy/4539>

Roman reforms have just begun

Pope Francis' reform of crusty old Vatican has only just begun

December 23, 2016

He's closing in on the fourth anniversary of his election as Bishop of Rome.

And, yet, Pope Francis has frustrated many so-called "reform-minded" Catholics by making only relatively few structural changes up to now – both in the Church at large and at the Vatican. That's despite taking up the papal office with a broad mandate to reform the Church's central bureaucracy, known as the Roman Curia.

Those who have been disappointed up to now should take heart. And the obstructionists who think they've successfully stymied his reforms should start to worry.

History's first Jesuit pope, who only last week hit the august age of 80, made it crystal clear on Thursday that he's got plenty of gas left in his tank. And in **an annual Christmas address** to top Vatican officials, he signaled that he's willing to spend some of it to streamline, modernize and bring to heel a curial apparatus that has often overstepped its limits and trod on the rightful authority of individual bishops and national episcopal conferences.

But before getting into the nitty-gritty, Francis prefaced his talk with a brief reflection on the meaning of the upcoming celebration of the Nativity of Jesus.

“Christmas is the feast of the loving humility of God,” he said.

Then he offered the first of several quotes from Paul VI, the pope who oversaw the Church reforms stemming from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) despite stiff opposition by some – including a number of curia officials.

“There was on God’s part an effort to plunge himself, sink himself into us, so that each of us – I say each of you... might have intimacy (with Him), might draw close to him, might feel thought of by Him and loved by Him,” Francis said, citing a homily the late Italian pope gave at Christmas in 1971.

Then he added his own commentary, saying, “God chose to be born small, because he wanted to be loved. This is how the logic of Christmas is the turning upside down of worldly logic, the logic of power, the logic of command, the pharisaic logic and the casuistic or deterministic logic.”

This logic of the loving God who makes himself small is what the Latin American pope wants to be at the heart of Church renewal – from the papacy, to Vatican and the Church throughout the world.

But on Thursday he focused specifically on reforming the Roman Curia.

Francis, a Vatican outsider who never worked or studied in Rome, told cardinals and bishops (and a handful of laity) that his ongoing curia reform would be more than mere face-lifting or a matter of bringing in new blood (that is, changing personnel).

Instead, he promised it would include the “eventual suppression of offices that no longer respond to the current needs” and the combining of or “reduction of commission, academies, committees, etc.” in order to reflect an “indispensable sobriety that is necessary for a proper and authentic witness” of Gospel service.

Many of the cardinals sat stone-faced and looked nervous as the pope stood before them in the “splendid Clementine Hall” – as Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the 89-year-old dean of the College of Cardinals, put it.

Francis said reducing the number of offices “would allow more individual prefects (office heads) to have more frequent and systematic meetings with the pope and efficient meetings between dicastery heads, seeing that they cannot be such with too large a group.”

Then he spelled out twelve guiding principles of his reform.

- Individual responsibility (personal conversion)
- Pastoral concern (pastoral conversion)

- Missionary spirit (Christo-centrism)
- Clear organization
- Improved functioning
- Modernization (aggiornamento or up-dating)
- Sobriety
- Subsidiarity
- Synodality
- Catholicity
- Professionalism
- Gradualism (discernment)

Under the principle of subsidiarity, Pope Francis said upcoming changes would include “rearranging the specific competencies of the various dicasteries (bureaus)” and would likely mean “moving them, if necessary, from one dicastery to another.”

He said the Secretariat of State would be at his “direct and immediate” service and once again have the power of coordinating the curia’s work, as Paul VI had designed it to do so after Vatican II.

Francis also promised to make the curia’s work more “synodal” by presiding over more frequent and “regular meetings of dicastery heads.” And he said he would mandate that the individual dicasteries also hold continual coordinating meetings that include their entire staff and members, given that some – such as the Congregation for Divine Worship (CDW) – are notorious for lacking such sessions.

The pope's reform-minded critics have lamented the fact that he has not replaced more officials – such as the CDW prefect, Cardinal Robert Sarah, among others – who seem to be opposed to the direction in which he's trying to move the Church.

But Francis said personnel changes would be useless unless the mentality inside the Vatican changed. Surely, the structural alterations he has in mind will be conducive to creating an overall attitude of humble, simple and truly pastoral service among curia officials.

“The work of all in the curia must be animated by a pastoral sense and a spirituality of service and communion, because this is the antidote to the poison of vain ambition and illusory rivalry,” the pope said.

He then repeated a warning that Paul VI issued only three months after his election to the papacy and just a week before he re-convened Vatican Council II for its second session:

The Roman Curia is not to be a bureaucracy, as some have wrongly judged it – pretentious and apathetic, merely canonistic and ritualistic, a gymnasium of hidden ambitions and veiled competitiveness, as others accuse it; but it is to be a true community of faith and charity, of prayer and action; of the pope's brothers and sons (sic.) who, with respect to their separate competencies and with a sense of collaboration, do everything to serve him in his ministry of

service to his brothers and children of the universal Church and all the earth. (Paul VI to the Roman Curia, 21 September 1963)

Amazingly, Pope Francis never once uttered the word “clericalism” in his Christmas talk to curia officials, something he has consistently railed against throughout his pontificate. However, he implicitly stated that another guiding principle for his curial reform, “catholicity”, would be of prime importance in excising clericalism. And that includes bringing more lay people – including more women – to work in the Vatican’s central offices.

“Among the collaborators, in addition to priests and consecrated persons, the curia must mirror the catholicity of the Church by hiring people coming from the entire world, permanent deacons and lay faithful, whose selection must be attentively made on the basis of their exemplary spiritual and moral life and their professional competence,” he said.

“Of great importance is the enhancement of the role of women and the laity in the life of the Church and their integration into leading roles in dicasteries, with a particular attention towards multiculturalism,” he added.

Pope Francis still has a long way to go before he is able to bring forth these reforms. But he looks every bit determined to get there.

He also has no illusions about the opposition he's facing.

"It's normal, even healthy, to come up against difficulties, that, in the case of reform, one could describe as different types of resistance," he said.

The pope noted that there was a type of "open resistance", often born of "good will and sincere dialogue." On the other hand, there's also a "hidden resistance" that is waged by those with "fearful hearts" who say they are in favor of the reform but then try to keep things from changing.

And then there is what Francis calls a "malicious (or malevolent) resistance" to reform that "germinates in distorted minds" and is the fruit of "bad intentions."

"This last type of resistance is hidden behind justifying words and, in many cases, accusations (that) take refuge in traditions, appearances and formalities..." the pope said.

He claimed not to be overly concerned by those who continue to resist his reforms. In fact, he said it would actually be "a sign of death" if some people did not react in this way.

"Therefore, good (attitudes of) resistance – and even those less good – are necessary and should be listened to, accepted and encouraged to be expressed, because it is a sign that the body (of the Church) is alive," he stressed.

Pope Francis knows very well that reforms do not come quickly and that it will take time before words and intentions align with real action.

An anecdote puts the situation starkly in perspective.

The pope began his address on Thursday with the usual, “Dear brothers and sisters;” very odd, since there appeared to be only men in the room.

And then when he personally greeted those present at the end of the gathering, they filed up to him, one-by-one, according to their rank – cardinals first, then archbishops, bishops, priests and laymen.

And, of course, there was not a woman among them.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/roman-reforms-have-just-begun/4411>

The real reason behind the opposition to Pope Francis

Retired Vatican Cardinal Paul-Josef Cordes has added his name to the list of churchmen who have publicly expressed doubts about Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

December 16, 2016

Their number has risen to five.

And there are surely many others who remain in the closet, quietly hiding their grave concerns about the direction in which history's first Latin American pope is leading the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes this past week became the fifth and latest member of the illustrious group of churchmen in scarlet to publicly express doubts over the clarity and orthodoxy of Pope Francis' recent document on marriage and the family, *Amoris Laetitia*.

The 82-year-old German retired in 2010 after having spent the last thirty of his then 49 years of priesthood as a Vatican official. He has now voiced support for four other "princes of the Church" who last month published a [letter](#) that challenges the pope to prove his fidelity to prior

Catholic teaching on five moral issues relating to marriage and sexuality.

The four authors who made the clamorous demand for clarification are by now well known.

Cardinal Raymond Burke, 68, patron of the Order of Malta, former head of the Vatican's highest court and Archbishop-emeritus of St Louis.

Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, 78, Archbishop-emeritus of Bologna and founding president of the John Paul II Institute on Marriage and the Family.

Cardinal Joachim Meisner, 82, Archbishop-emeritus of Cologne.

Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, 87, a teen-aged convert from Lutheranism and former president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences.

But they are not the only Catholics to publicly express alarm by some of the points found in *Amoris Laetitia*.

Forty-five self-described "Catholic theologians and philosophers, church historians and pastors of souls" sent a letter last June to the dean of the College of Cardinals, Angelo Sodano, asking him to urge all his confreres to "take collective action to respond to the dangers to Catholic faith and morals posed by the apostolic exhortation".

They included a **13-page document** containing “theological censures” of eleven points in *Amoris Laetitia*. The signatories believe these are “heretical” statements, while they point to another eight they see as less serious, but still scandalous and tending towards error.

Eighteen of the people that signed the June letter then joined with five others and, earlier this month, issued **another text** calling for clarification.

They upped the ante significantly by claiming that the papal document on marriage had not only caused “widespread confusion and disunity”, but that it had actually plunged the universal Church into “a gravely critical moment in her history that shows alarming similarities with the great Arian crisis of the fourth century”.

The mind boggles that so-called “Catholic scholars” could so grossly exaggerate.

The Arian crisis was a theological dispute over the understanding and articulation of belief in Christ’s divinity.

It was indeed serious and threatened a core dogma of the Christian faith that we profess in the Nicene Creed – belief in Jesus Christ as “true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father”.

But marriage and sexuality? There is not a single article in the Profession of Faith that says anything about it. That’s

because those issues are not part of the central tenets of the faith, they are second- or even third-level teachings

Pure and simple, they do not and cannot substantially alter one's Christian faith. They are of a different category altogether.

Catholics who believe that *Amoris Laetitia* is a serious threat to Catholic faith or its teaching on the indissolubility of marriage are actually using this issue as an excuse or an example of a much more fundamental disagreement with Pope Francis.

As I alluded to in an article published over three-and-a-half years ago ("Francis' new world order", *The Tablet*, 1 June 2013), their real concern is the pope's radical rejection of "the mentality of the *ancien régime*, which still inhabits the minds of many conservative European churchmen of his generation".

The article went on to say that, in this regard, Francis "stands in stark contrast to his immediate predecessor" who "lamented the loss of the old world order where the noble classes (bishops among them) brought stability to society and age-old protocols helped preserve an eroding Euro-Catholic ethos and culture".

Benedict XVI, albeit with inspiring spiritual language and clever theological arguments, waged a losing battle to re-establish and firmly impose a eurocentric model of the

Church built around a distinct and classic culture – of art and architecture, literature, philosophy and political engagement.

Most conservative-leaning bishops and priests – even those who are not European – have continued this futile attempt to preserve the last vestiges of Christendom despite the indisputable fact that such an effort has been rejected by the current pontificate.

And therein lies the real reason for their opposition to Pope Francis.

They are horrified that he does not share or approve their conviction that the Catholic Church must stand obstinately and unsullied as a bulwark against a changing, secular society. Francis has, instead, called for an “accident-prone” Church which is not afraid of making mistakes.

“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security,” the pope declares in the blueprint document of his pontificate, *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Joy of the Gospel).

“I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures,” he continues in this 2013 text (cf. par. 49), which too many bishops continue to ignore.

“More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: ‘Give them something to eat’ (Mk 6:37),” warns the pope.

Catholics that are unsettled or befuddled by Francis (I continue to submit that they are a tiny, but vocal and well-organized minority) find their identity, in large part, in the unchanging customs and laws that the Church upholds, even if they do not (or cannot) follow them.

The pope is a threat to their sense of security and Catholic identity when he says, “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG, 27).

This is a clear call for change, something traditionalist Catholics abhor.

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’,” says the pope.

“I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities,” he adds.

He then encourages all Catholics – especially the pastors – to “apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear” (EG 29).

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) attempted to bring the Catholic Church finally and fully into the post-Christendom era. It sought to break out of its centuries-old Euro-centric paradigm and inculturate the Gospel – God’s incarnate Word – in all peoples and cultures through their indigenous idioms, philosophies, sociological developments and other local ways of expressing and understanding life and faith.

Unfortunately, the Council’s project was thwarted in the very place where its documents and “spirit” had so dramatically come to life – at the Vatican and in Rome.

Now a Jesuit from Argentina, a man who never studied or worked or even spent much time in this clerical hotbed of the Church’s central bureaucracy, has begun to right this wrong.

He has refocused the entire Church on the Gospel and the basic essentials of what it means to be a community of Christ’s disciples. And he’s begun dismantling all that

hinders that community from offering God's mercy and forgiveness to all people with lavish generosity.

"The Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives," Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium* (par. 43).

He sees the need to modify or put aside such rules and the *ancien régime* in which they were once so securely anchored.

And that is what so upsets his critics.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-real-reason-behind-the-opposition-to-pope-francis/4377>

The illness of clericalism

Those who are still not able or willing to understand the current pope should read the transcript of a free-flowing discussion he had in late October with fellow Jesuits.

November 25, 2016

Pope Francis' plan for reforming and renewing the worldwide Catholic Church is becoming clearer by the day – except, perhaps, for those with “minds closed” or those who are “stupid, brainless people who have eyes and do not see, who have ears and do not hear” (cf. Jeremiah 5, 21; Mark 8,18).

The pope's plan for reform is rooted in one simple, yet very profound notion – God's mercy.

In fact, Francis dedicated an entire year to the theme, the recently concluded Holy Year of Mercy.

Now one could argue that, like most Holy Years of the past, it really was not that effective, at least in the original sense of the “jubilee”, as spelled out in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The very first verses of Chapter 61 in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah describe it this way:

“The spirit of the Lord God is on me for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vengeance for our God.”

The Book of Leviticus (Chapter 25) is even more explicit in describing the Jubilee as the favorable time to forgive debts, rest the land and make right all fractured relationships.

Some countries, including Communist Cuba, freed many jailed inmates, explicitly in the spirit of the Jubilee. Yet Pope Francis did not even pardon his only “prisoner” – Mgr Lucio Vallejo Balda, a Spanish-born Roman Curia official who is currently serving an eighteen-month prison sentence inside the papal enclave for leaking confidential documents on the Vatican’s financial reforms.

And neither did the pope forgive other debts or punishments the Church has imposed on certain of its members. For example, there are numerous priests who have been suspended from ministry and theologians who have had their necessary teaching mandates revoked or denied.

These were not restored during the Holy Year of Mercy.

And there are other Catholic individuals or categories of people who are officially separated from the Church or

held at arm's length by ecclesiastical authorities. Despite the Jubilee, they remain so.

However, it can also be argued that the Holy Year was only the briefest, even if intense, prelude to a whole new season for the Church to more lavishly offer mercy to wounded and frail humanity. In fact, that is exactly the case Pope Francis seems to be making in his latest document, the post-Jubilee apostolic letter called *Misericordia et misera*.

“This is the time of mercy,” – writes the pope – “the path we are called to follow in the future.”

“Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father,” he writes.

“Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace,” the pope exclaims in his new document.

This has alarmed a number of bishops, priests and lay people who believe “mercy” is just Pope Francis’ secret codeword for relaxing Church rules and discipline, especially those concerning human sexuality and other so-called “pelvic issues”.

What is absolutely astonishing, though, is that those most zealous in sounding the alarm bells are unmarried men (both clerics and laymen) who, if they are as faithful as they insist, have never had sex... with a woman.

No need to name them. They have prominently and proudly identified themselves.

They know, probably better than most, that Pope Francis is serious about unleashing the creativity of mercy and bringing about any number of new undertakings. And the pope's steely determination to do so is what frightens them most.

Those who are still not able or willing to understand the current pope should read [the transcript](#) of a free-flowing discussion he had in late October with fellow Jesuits who were participating in their order's 36th General Congregation.

Here are just a few excerpts to whet your appetite for a very interesting read:

Moral Questions

“It is evident that, in the field of morality, one must proceed with scientific rigor, and with love for the Church and discernment. There are certain points of morality on which only in prayer can one have sufficient light to continue reflecting theologically. And on this, allow me to repeat it, one must do «theology on one's knees». You cannot do theology without prayer. This is a key point and it must be done this way.”

Discernment vs. rigidity in moral reasoning

“Discernment is the key element: the capacity for discernment. I note the absence of discernment in the formation of priests. We run the risk of getting used to 'white or black,' to that which is legal. We are rather closed, in general, to discernment. One thing is clear: today, in a certain number of seminaries, a rigidity that is far from a discernment of situations has been introduced. And that is dangerous, because it can lead us to a conception of morality that has a casuistic sense.”

Accepting criticism

Critiques also depend on who makes them. We should discern where they come from. I think that sometimes even the most malicious critic can say something that helps me. I think we have to listen to all the critiques and discern them, and not close the door to any criticism, because we risk getting used to closing doors. And that's not good.

After discernment one can say: this criticism has no foundation and I can set it aside. But we must submit to discernment all of the criticism that we hear, I would say daily, personally, but always with good will, with openness of heart and before the Lord.”

The illness of clericalism

“Clericalism, which is one of the most serious illnesses that the Church has, distances itself from poverty. Clericalism is

rich. If it is not rich in money, it is rich in pride. But it is rich: there is in clericalism an attachment to possession. It does not allow itself to be nurtured by mother poverty, it does not allow itself to be guarded by the wall of poverty. Clericalism is one of the forms of wealth that we suffer from most seriously in the Church today. At least in some places of the Church.

“Clericalism does not allow growth, it does not allow the power of baptism to grow. The grace and evangelizing power of the missionary expression comes from the grace of baptism. And clericalism controls this grace badly and gives rise to dependencies, which sometimes have whole peoples in a state of very great immaturity.

I remember the fights that took place when I was a student of theology or a young priest and the base ecclesial communities appeared. Why? Because the laypeople began to have strong leadership, and the first ones who felt insecure were some of the priests. I am generalizing too much, but I do this on purpose: if I caricature the problem it is because the problem of clericalism is very serious.”

The most important document of the pontificate

“I believe that *Evangelii gaudium* has to be deepened, it must be worked on by groups of the laity, of priests, in the seminaries, because it is the evangelizing breath that the Church wants to have today. In this we have to move forward. It is not something finished, as if we were to say,

«that's over, now comes *Laudato si'*. And then, «that's over, too, now it is on to *Amoris Laetitia*. » By no means! I recommend *Evangelii gaudium* to you as a framework. It is not original, in this I want to be very clear. It puts together *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Paul VI) and the Aparecida document (CELAM). Although it came after the Synod on Evangelization, *Evangelii gaudium's* strength was to return to those two documents, to refresh them, and to offer them again in a new presentation. *Evangelii gaudium* is the apostolic framework of the Church today.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-illness-of-clericalism/4262>

Civil war in the global church?

Is there really a war in the Church between "loyal Catholics" committed to upholding the unchanging traditions and teachings of the Church and "progressives" who have watered down Church doctrine and practice?

October 21, 2016

If you've been following the politically conservative press (and, even more, if you surf the Internet) you might easily have come to the conclusion that a civil war has broken out in the global Catholic Church.

Here's the scenario that has been put forth: loyal Catholics, committed to upholding the unchanging traditions and immutable moral teachings of the their beloved Church, are pitted against progressives who, while professing to be Catholics, have watered down Church doctrine and practice by capitulating to the demands and false values of secularism.

A civil war usually means a country (in this case, the Church) is divided into two, more or less equal factions. If you really believe this is the case in Catholicism today you would be wrong.

The people who are painting this dark picture are not only and predominantly traditionalist-minded Catholics, they also tend to be, in many cases, staunch laissez-faire capitalists and social conservatives. They occupy a large space in social media that is oversized compared to – I would contend – their miniscule numbers.

Some of these are members and supporters of an intransigent cluster of new religious orders attached to (or, at least, supportive of) the Tridentine Mass. As you can imagine, they have a less than rosy view of the Second Vatican Council and the reforms that followed from it. (Most Catholics, by the way, take Vatican II as part of what it means to be... Catholic.)

It should be made clear that the vast majority of these new clericalist communities are inward-looking and involved in minimal, if any, pastoral outreach. They tend to find their comfort zone in the sanctuary and one gets the impression that they just love to “play church.” Additionally, they have no visible ministry to the poor and marginalized, those whom Pope Francis says are on the “peripheries” of existence.

But that’s another of their problems – the pope himself. These Catholic neo-Tridentinists, culture war traditionalists and their sympathizers are not exactly fans of the current Bishop of Rome. Their reaction to him ranges

from open hostility and disdain to passive-aggressive non-compliance with the reform and renewal of the Church he's trying to bring about.

It is difficult to say with any real precision how many bishops (and cardinals) back the views and efforts of this (again, I would contend) tiny segment of the Catholic faithful. But one's sense is that, proportionate to the general Catholic population, these hierarchs actually constitute a higher percentage of those who are uncomfortable with the Jesuit pope.

A leading paper in Italy (La Stampa), which also owns the Vatican Insider website, recently ran a lengthy “survey” of groups it describes as “Catholics who are anti-Francis but love Putin.” That would be Vladimir Putin, the despotic president of Russia.

The authors of this long article are two serious and normally well-informed journalists, Giacomo Galeazzi and Andrea Torielli.

But, curiously, much of their overall analysis of their survey rests on the testimony of a man named Massimo Introvigne. He's a 61-year-old Rome-born sociologist and intellectual property lawyer who's known to be close to Italy's former premier Silvio Berlusconi.

Introvigne specializes in tracking new religious movements, but he's also emerged in the past several years as one of the leading watchdogs of "persecution" of Christians in Europe. He's done this as a leader of continental-wide and Italian organizations that monitor religious hate crimes.

Mr Introvigne agrees that the size of the "dissidents" opposing Pope Francis is "overestimated." But he also notes – and I disagree – that of the "more than 5000 Catholic bishops in the world, only about ten of them are active in their opposition, many of whom are retired."

In any case, he stresses that the opposition to the pope is not substantial because the disparate groups Galeazzi and Tornielli identify in this camp are "not united."

But my eyes popped in disbelief when I read the concluding lines of the La Stampa-Vatican Insider expose.

Introvigne pointed out a surprising trait that many of these circles share: "It is the mythical idealization of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is presented as a "good" leader in contrast to the "bad" leader, the Pope, because of his stance on homosexual people, Muslims and immigrants. Russian foundations that have strong ties with Putin co-operate with the anti-Francis opposition.

I seriously doubt that.

But, then again, I can't see any truth in the claim that there is a civil war underway in global Catholicism. That is merely a claim being made by a small, but very vocal number of people (and bishops). Yes, they are adverse to Francis and are angry that he's stopped them from being that tail that wags the dog.

There has been no suggestion that it had anything to do with the much-touted opposition to Pope Francis, but on Wednesday a very strange and rather disappointing thing happened near the Vatican.

The city of Rome's so-called "decorum cops" swiftly removed a mural that had been pasted on a wall overnight depicting the pope as a mischievous graffiti artist.

A "street artist" who signs his work "Maupal" put a playful image of Francis on a stepladder painting a tic-tac-toe above a shop window. The artist had the pope drawing peace signs in place of the round circles, while an image of a Swiss Guard keeps look-out around the corner.

One of my friends who works in the Vatican saw the mural on his way to the office and sent me a photo of the thing early Wednesday morning. Before long, crowds of

onlookers were gathering in admiration while others were sharing the playful image on Twitter.

It was cute and harmless. And it seemed to give most people a good chuckle.

But only a few hours later, when the city's anti-graffiti squad swooped in to destroy the good-humored piece of street art, people began tweeting their disbelief and anger.

Especially those of us who live in Rome.

They (we) thought it was outrageous that the “decorum cops” should be wasting their time on “cleaning up” something so good-humored and well-done when too many buildings of the city continue to be blighted by the ugliest and most meaningless graffiti and garbage, which is collected only sporadically, piling up around overstuffed trash bins.

However, I suspect there are some folks in the Vatican who were glad to see the mural of the prankster pope disappear.

But they are among those who would also like to see his entire pontificate pass into oblivion.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/civil-war-in-the-global-church/4095>

Be holy priests or pack up now

“Be holy priests,” Mother Teresa advised American seminarians in 1986. And she punctuated that advice with this warning: “Or pack up and get out now.”

August 31, 2016

Church officials in Rome are calling it the biggest public event of the current Holy Year of Mercy.

Pope Francis this coming Sunday will officially canonize Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an iconic figure whom many considered a saint even during her lifetime.

The ceremony, which will take place within the context of an outdoor Mass in St Peter’s Square, comes just a day before the 19th anniversary of the Albanian-born founder of the Missionaries of Charity’s death on September 5, 1997. And it marks nearly 13 years since John Paul II declared her “blessed” in October 2003.

In many ways Mother Teresa, who is often called the “saint of the gutters”, is model saint for the “poor Church for the poor” that Pope Francis is trying to engender.

And although she did not escape criticism and controversy for some the methods she employed to fulfill her religious order’s fourth vow of giving “wholehearted free service to

the poorest of the poor,” this 1979 Nobel Peace Prize winner was an remarkable woman.

My first of several encounters with Mother Teresa was thirty years ago, not long after arriving in Rome as a seminarian at the North American College (NAC). As the college’s “new men” we were asked to select an apostolate – that is, some sort of pastoral work to be involved in once or twice each week.

Several NAC-sponsored apostolates were available at the time, including doing service work with the Sant’Egidio Community in Trastevere, teaching catechism to high-school students at Marymount Academy and accompanying families with seriously ill children at the Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital adjacent to our college.

We also had the option of working with the Missionaries of Charity at their hospice for homeless men (mostly immigrants). It was located on the Celian Hill in a large, dilapidated building near the order’s international headquarters next to the famous Church of San Gregorio Magno (St Gregory the Great).

The NAC formation staff encouraged us to try out two or three of these apostolates before making a definitive choice. In the end, I opted for the children’s hospital. But I’ll never forget my brief experience with the Missionaries of Charity.

One afternoon – it was probably in November 1986 – an older seminarian who had been working with the nuns his entire four years in Rome took a few of us “new men” over to San Gregorio. I remember us chatting excitedly (and, for sure, overly romantically) about doing “real ministry with the poor.” This, we reasoned, would balance out the lectures, seminars, workshops and so many of the other seemingly ivory tower activities that were required of us.

Well, my excitement quickly evaporated. Instead of being allowed to heroically tend to the needs of the poor, as we knew Missionaries of Charity did, we were shown to a musty room filled with piles and piles of used clothes. Our task was to sort through this mess and separate trousers from shirts, undergarments from socks, coats from hats and so forth.

After about an hour of this mindless task – which, at the time, I could not see as making any great contribution to my “pastoral” formation – two sisters came and took us to another, larger work room. Here, for a further 45 minutes or so, we were to help reupholster old chairs.

When it was time to go back to the college I remember feeling quite disappointed. But one of the nuns told us something to the effect that this tedious, behind the scenes work we had just done was crucial to helping them carry out their ministry. And that was that. Or so I thought.

“If you’d like, we can now go see mother,” another nun said. I blurted out, “Who is mother?” That’s how much this entire experience, with my ridiculous and inflated notion of performing heroic ministry to the poor, had left me deflated.

“Mother Teresa.” – the nun replied – “She happens to be here in Rome right now.”

I was once again excited. I would meet the famed living saint!

But as we entered the convent, we were asked to remove our shoes and ushered into a chapel full of nuns. They were all sitting on their knees, praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

And there we were left with them for some fifteen minutes. It was just enough time to bring me to my senses and make me realize how stupid had been my grandiose notions about doing ministry. This also helped me realize – and I’m sure it’s why Mother Teresa always made her guests wait for a period before the Blessed Sacrament before seeing them – that I had made an idol out of another person when, in fact, the real object of my devotion could only rightly be Jesus.

When we actually met Mother afterwards, I kissed her two wrinkled hands. She seemed older than her 76 years. But

she radiated a certain aura, which made her craggy face and stooped frame seem almost beautiful.

“Be holy priests,” were her words to us seminarians that day back in 1986. And she punctuated that advice with this warning: “Or pack up and get out now.”

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/be-holy-priests-or-pack-up-now/3775>

What gives with Cardinal Sarah's commission?

Did Pope Francis really 'ask' Cardinal Sarah to set up a commission on reforming the Vatican II liturgical reform?

July 6, 2016

Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the [Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments](#) (CDW), has announced that he's setting up a commission aimed at overhauling the liturgical reforms that followed from the Second Vatican Council.

And in an effort to give the project added momentum he's reiterated an earlier call to all priests around the world to start celebrating Mass versus orientem (towards the East) – that is, priest with “his back to the people”, as was the norm before Vatican II.

“I can say that when I was received in audience by the Holy Father last April, Pope Francis asked me to study the question of a reform of a reform [of the liturgy] and of how to enrich the two forms of the Roman rite,” said the 71-year-old cardinal on Tuesday at [a conference in London](#).

“This will be a delicate work and I ask for your patience and prayers. But if we are to implement [Sacrosanctum](#)

[Concilium](#) [Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy] more faithfully, if we are to achieve what the Council desired, this is a serious question which must be carefully studied and acted on with the necessary clarity and prudence," he told the conference's mostly neo-Tridentinist participants.

He then made "an appeal to all priests" to "return as soon as possible to a common orientation, of priests and the faithful turned together in the same direction... when we are addressing God". He said it was "permitted by current liturgical legislation" and was "perfectly legitimate in the modern rite". He urged the priests "to implement this practice wherever possible" and suggested that the First Sunday of Advent (November 27th) "may be a very good time to do this".

He quoted the Hebrew Scriptures completely out of context to drive home his point.

"Dear Fathers," he said, "we should listen again to the lament of God proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah: 'they have turned their back to me' (2:27). Let us turn again towards the Lord!"

This is just the latest effort to keep fresh the divisions in the Church that Benedict XVI inadvertently fomented in 2007 when he issued [Summorum Pontificum](#).

That document made it possible for the near-unrestricted celebration of the pre-Vatican II liturgy throughout the world. And in doing so it empowered a tiny minority of Catholics, many of them reactionaries and Vatican II sceptics.

These “retrodox” Catholics – some notoriously sympathetic to the Lefebvrist schismatics (Priestly Society of Pius X) – gained so much prominence in the Church that they became the tail wagging the dog.

Sadly, Cardinal Sarah is an enabler of this group.

So what gives?

Did Pope Francis really “ask” Cardinal Sarah to set up a commission on reforming the Vatican II liturgical form? Or was it, in fact, the 71-year-old cardinal who initiated this development by asking the pope’s permission to form such a study group?

We still don’t know.

But as the saying goes, there is a grain of truth in every joke. And thanks to a quip the pope made on his return from Armenia last month, we know something of what he thinks about setting up commissions – according to his aside, they are often used as a way to kill an idea or proposal.

Is that what Francis is doing by allowing a CDW commission to start looking at how it can make the current Mass more like its unreformed, Tridentine version?

Because, make no mistake, that is the objective of Cardinal Sarah and his cohort.

Or is the pope merely allowing the rigid ultra-conservatives (“those who say no to everything”) to “do their work” while he – without looking over his shoulder – gets on with doing his own, as he suggested in [a recent interview](#)?

One thing is certain, though, if this is more than just “busy work” to keep the CDW prefect occupied until his 75th birthday in June 2020 – and if it really does lead to some sort of “reform of the reform” – then the fault will rest with no one but Francis.

After all, the Jesuit pope appointed the Guinean cardinal as head of the Church’s worship office in November 2014 after an unprecedented three- month vacancy. Francis had sent the previous occupant, Cardinal Antonio Cañazaris, back to a head a diocese in his native Spain.

There is evidence that he wanted to replace the man known as “Little Ratzinger” with Archbishop Piero Marini, an unflinching supporter of the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms and former papal master of ceremonies.

But people in the Ratzinger camp ominously warned Francis not to do it, some alleging that it was even the

former pope himself who intervened to block the Marini appointment lest it unleash a “war” in the Church.

“I reject conflict,” Pope Francis said in the recent interview concerning the opposition he faces from ultraconservative bishops and Vatican officials. He also added that he does not like to fire people (“chop heads off”), but prefers to wait until they reach the retirement age and then remove them.

So is there hope for Vatican II Catholics that the pope will firmly resist any attempts to roll back the clock on the reforms that were begun by the Council, either in liturgy or other areas of the Church?

Because there are those in the Roman Curia, like Cardinal Sarah, who might not “say no to everything” the pope is doing to renew and reform the Church, but are clearly trying to move it in another direction.

What’s the pope to do?

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/what-gives-with-cardinal-saraha-commission/3510>

July 23, 2016

In [last week’s Letter from Rome](#), I questioned Cardinal Robert Sarah’s claim that Pope Francis had asked him “to study the question of a reform of a reform [of the liturgy] and of how to enrich the two forms of the Roman rite”.

I also wondered – as did many of you – whether the pope really supported the prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship’s appeal that all priests around the world “return as soon as possible” to the pre-Vatican II practice of so-called *ad orientem* worship; that is, celebrating Mass with their back to the people. The Guinean cardinal suggested bishops implement the change on the 1st Sunday of Advent (November 27).

My questions arose from a deep skepticism. Because, although Francis has never made matters of liturgy a major focus of his pontificate, he has been clear that there would be no going back on the liturgical reforms that stemmed from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The skepticism was merited.

A well-informed Church official told me that a lot of bishops and cardinals (“some you might never expect”) were “terribly upset” by Cardinal Sarah’s “clarion call” for *ad orientem* worship (as some of his neo-Tridentinist supporters called it) and they contacted the Vatican for clarification.

Well, they got it. And it came in record time.

Just a few days after the cardinal-prefect made the above-mentioned remarks at a conference in London (<http://sacraliturgiuk.org/>) Pope Francis summoned him

for a private meeting (last Saturday) and effectively slapped him down.

Unsurprisingly, the Holy See Press Office issued a [statement](#) (initially only in Italian, then with English and Spanish translations) that described what happened in a more gentle and classic Roman Curia way in order to allow the cardinal to save face.

But, nonetheless, the communiqué made it clear that the pope had never “asked” for a new study on the liturgical reform, as Cardinal Sarah had described it. And neither does he support a return to ad orientem celebration of the Mass. “New liturgical directives are not expected from next Advent,” said the statement, in its mediocre English version.

Leave aside the fact that Monday’s statement on the papal audience was overly kind to the cardinal by blaming others for having “incorrectly interpreted” “some of the prefect’s expressions”, as if they were intended to change current liturgical rules or practices.

The truth is no one misinterpreted the cardinal’s words or expressions. They can be found in their entirety (specifically on pages 19 and 21) in [his lengthy and factually dubious text](#).

The Vatican statement also made it crystal clear that Pope Francis is not interested in – to cite Cardinal Sarah – how a “reform of the reform” might “enrich the two forms of the Roman Rite” (a linguistic and juridical fiction that Benedict XVI imposed on the entire Church in 2007 in his official act of overturning Paul VI’s abrogation of the Tridentine Rite).

In fact, the statement says people should stop using the term “reform of the reform”, since it is too often the source of “misunderstandings” (equivoci in the original Italian). And it stresses that the post-Vatican II rite, with Mass facing the people, remains the norm.

I cannot remember a pope calling in a cardinal prefect so quickly and then issuing a public “correction” of his words and ideas that – gee wiz – we all had merely misunderstood.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/cardinals-wings-quickly-clipped/3547>

When a retired pope interferes

"And that's not even the worst of it. It certainly appears that Benedict (or the person that wrote the book afterword in his name) is still trying to bind the hands of Francis."

May 19, 2017

"If I were Cardinal Robert Sarah, I'd be worried."

Thus begins a [brief article](#) by Andrea Grillo, a well-known Italian layman who teaches sacramental theology the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo in Rome and liturgy at the Abbey of Santa Giustina in Padua.

It is titled, "An afterword without discretion: Ratzinger persists in promoting Sarah."

Sarah, of course, is Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW). And Ratzinger... Well, we all know him.

He's Joseph Ratzinger, the man whose theological views became normative on the rest of the Catholic world over the course of his many years as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

And the same one who then tried to re-cast his “doctrinal inquisitor” image during the eight years he served as Bishop of Rome under the name Benedict XVI.

In this [new article](#) Grillo quite justifiably takes aim at the former pope for an afterword that he (or one of his minions) penned for future editions of the cardinal’s latest book, “The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise”.

Grillo bristles especially at these lines the Bishop-emeritus of Rome writes:

“We should be grateful to Pope Francis for appointing such a spiritual teacher as head of the congregation that is responsible for the celebration of the liturgy in the Church... With Cardinal Sarah, a master of silence and of interior prayer, the liturgy is in good hands.”

Pope Francis surprised many people when he named ultra-conservative Guinean as CDW prefect in November 2014.

As I have noted on several other occasions, Sarah, who will be 72 next month, was not the pope’s first choice. Francis had decided on Archbishop Piero Marini, a strong proponent of the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council and the long-time master of papal ceremonies under John Paul II (and briefly under Benedict).

But the former pope's inner circle (and Grillo suggests Benedict himself) balked when they got a whiff of this and they warned Francis that he'd cause "a war" by appointing Marini as head of the congregation.

Instead, it is Cardinal Sarah who has been causing consternation throughout the Church. He has tried to sandbag Pope Francis' quiet, but clear support of the post-Vatican II liturgical reform.

For instance, he dragged his feet on issuing a decree to formalize the pope's wish for women to be included in the Holy Thursday feet-washing ceremony.

And, even worse, he has continued to urge for changes that the pope, in very clear terms, has refused to endorse, such as the cardinal's personal crusade to get all the world's priests to "say Mass" *ad orientem* (with their back to the people).

"Sarah has demonstrated, for years, a substantial inadequacy and incompetence in the area of liturgy. His outlandish theories and rigidity have impeded the CDW from doing its ordinary work," Grillo says.

The cardinal has been peddling his eccentric liturgical proclivities – which one can only describe as neo-Tridentinist – in books and articles, as well as by going around the world giving lectures. And it appears that he's

used so-called liturgists (of questionable scholarship) as ghostwriters for at least some of those talks.

In a recent one for a conference in Germany, the cardinal (or his suspected scribe, Fr Uwe Michael Lang) again called for a “**Reform of the Reform**” – that is, re-doing the post-Vatican II liturgical reform by restoring certain elements from the Tridentine Rite.

Of course, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI has encouraged such an effort and, naturally, the cardinal quoted him extensively in his talk.

No one should be surprised that Sarah continues to do the former pope’s bidding. Yes, he’s part of the crowd that’s pushing what Massimo Faggioli has called the “**Benedict Complex**”.

And why not? Benedict gave Sarah his red hat and then made him a key ally in a hapless pontificate, which – de facto – appeared increasingly as promoting an inward-looking, ritually pure Church obsessed with the great moral evils linked to the so-called “pelvic issues” related to sexuality.

So, yes, Cardinal Sarah owes a lot to Benedict.

“And we also know that Pope Francis chose Sarah [as CDW prefect] on the advice of his predecessor [Benedict]. This is why the predecessor’s praise of his successor – on an

issue in which he played such a decisive role in causing this ‘flop’ – sounds very strange,” Grillo rightly notes.

But, according to the liturgy professor, this is not the worst “indiscretion” Benedict XVI has committed by writing the afterword in Sarah’s book. Rather, it’s the former pope’s concluding words.

“His affirmation that ‘the liturgy is in good hands’ appears, clearly, as the bishop-emeritus’ self-defense in respect to the worrying result of choosing Sarah,” says Grillo.

And that’s not even the worst of it.

It certainly appears that Benedict (or the person that wrote the book afterward in his name) is still trying to bind the hands of Francis.

“One must say that the move appears all the more serious if, in the meantime, (Francis) is planning an inevitable and healthy change of (CDW) prefects. It is a sort last ditch effort (*difesa in extremis*) to defend a prefect who is about to be fired,” says the professor.

But back to Grillo’s opening salvo. Why should Cardinal Sarah be so worried by Benedict XVI’s afterword in the book?

Take it away, Andrea Grillo:

“It’s not the first time for J. Ratzinger to write a foreword or afterword for questionable books and authors.

"I recall, for instance, his preface for such a scarcely credible author as Alcuin Reid, whose theories and personality have raised scholarly and ecclesiastical concerns halfway around the world. And yet Ratzinger tried to promote him as practically an authority."

It's not surprising. Ratzinger is in love with all things liturgical, but he never did formal, advanced studies in the liturgy. However, one does not need to be a trained liturgist to understand – which the former pope, Cardinal Sarah and their little band of neo-Tridentinists evidently do not – that there is a profound difference between communal worship and private prayer.

The Church's public liturgy is not the place for a Catholic to have his or her "personal quiet time" with Jesus. It is where the community of believers proclaims, acclaims and adores the Lord together – in word, song, symbols and gestures. Silence is also an essential part of that. But it is meant to punctuate the choral praise, not completely suppress it.

But back to Grillo's main point, which is that Benedict XVI committed an "indiscretion" by publicly backing a cardinal that is clearly on the outs with Pope Francis.

Remember when Benedict vowed of his own free will and by no one else's order that he would live out his retirement in a monastery and would be "hidden from the world" in prayer and quiet?

Yet, according to Grillo, he has violated this vow of discretion and humility by once again weighing in on internal Church matters in a way that could be seen as trying to force Francis' hand.

This is extremely serious, as Grillo states forcefully in the **conclusion of his article**:

"One thing is certain. As it was already noted a month ago the interference that an intervention of this type exerts on the successor's free exercise of authority constitutes a grave interference and an alteration of ecclesial equilibrium.

"The choice of discretion and humility, absolutely necessary for one who has chosen to the 'renounce the exercise of ministry', thus seem profoundly undermined.

"Beyond the institutional questions, there is just one consideration regarding the *res liturgica*. And here we must observe that, as always, the praise of someone incompetent renders the praise incompetent.

"We need to entrust the liturgy to very good hands; which, God willing, should be defined and determined without an obsession to impose on the Church a 'Reform of the Reform'.

"For this Cardinal Sarah is totally inadequate. Even if he comes recommended by the Bishop-emeritus of Rome."

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/when-a-retired-pope-interferes/5209>

Is the pope following a “good cop-bad cop” strategy?

Ratzinger's secretary said the former pope was not competing with Pope Francis

May 25, 2016

“Seek and strive after peace,” says a line in Psalm 34, a canticle that extols the blessedness reserved to those who place their complete trust in God.

And that would have been a perfect episcopal motto for Pope Francis, had he not already taken, long ago, *miserando atque eligendo*, a clunky phrase that basically expresses his belief that it was only through God's mercy that God chose him to be a bishop.

Nonetheless, “seek and strive after peace” (*inquire pacem, et persequere eam*) could still be used as an unofficial motto for his pontificate.

If you step back and survey Francis' first three years in office you can see through so many of his initiatives and actions that he has tried to forge peace among broken families, bickering Catholic factions, divided Christians,

folks of other religions and no religion at all, and even among rivaling world leaders and society figures.

But it is the manner in which has tried to bring about peace in all these areas that is most striking and which marks a shift from the style of his most recent predecessor.

Pope Francis has sought and pursued peace through *encounter* and *dialogue*.

The latest example came this past Monday when he held private talks with one the world's most important Muslim clerics – Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the first-ever Grand Imam of Egypt's prestigious Al-Azhar Mosque and University to come to the Vatican.

There was no such encounter and dialogue when Benedict XVI was pope. In fact, dialogue became a dirty word during his pontificate. The overarching concern was preaching and spreading the fullness of “truth”, which the former pope and his adoring retrodox disciples believed (or at least gave the very clear impression that they believed) could be found only in the Catholic Church.

Thus the desire to engage in real dialogue – that is, really listening to another viewpoint – was considered as being weak, as selling out the truth. No matter the consequences, Benedict believed truth trumped all else. Including human lives. Including peace.

Even after he abdicated the papacy in 2013 and promised to live “hidden from the world” in self-imposed silence and prayer, he spoke out a year-and-a-half later to warn again that the truth – specifically, the missionary spreading of the Catholic faith – was endangered by calls to dialogue.

“Many today ask, inside and outside the Church... is the mission still relevant? Would it not be more appropriate between religions to meet in dialogue together and serve the cause of peace in the world?” [he said in an October 2014 talk](#) that his private secretary, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, delivered for him at the Pontifical Urban University.

“The counter-question: can dialogue replace the mission? Today, in fact, many people have the idea that religions should respect each other and, in the dialogue between them, become a joint peacekeeping force... The question of truth, the one that originally moved the Christians more than anything else, here is put in parentheses,” he said.

“This renunciation of the truth seems realistic and helpful for peace between world religions. And yet it is lethal to the faith.” That was Benedict’s conclusion.

Pope Francis does not “renounce” truth, but puts it in a context of relationships with God and with others.

And, yes, he does so for the sake of peace – between world religions and between all people in the world.

Speaking of Archbishop Gänswein...

The former pope's personal secretary and housemate recently made the unbelievable claim that Benedict XVI never really abdicated the Petrine Ministry when he resigned, but merely chose to exercise it in a different way.

The Catholic Herald's Rome correspondent, Edward Pentin, explains:

"Speaking at the presentation of a new book on Benedict's pontificate at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome May 20, Archbishop Gänswein also said that Pope Francis and Benedict are not two popes 'in competition' with one another, but represent one 'expanded' Petrine Office with 'an active member' and a 'contemplative'.

What?

First of all, let's be clear. There is only one pope and his name is Francis.

Secondly, Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) is a former pope who should more correctly be called Bishop-emeritus of Rome and not pope-emeritus.

Only the Roman Pontiff is called "pope" in the Catholic Church and Benedict no longer holds this position.

Then there is the archbishop's kooky syllogism that Benedict is somehow a "contemplative" member of a two-man team that is currently occupying the Petrine Office. This is yet a further 'ultramontane' exaggeration of the true nature of the papacy, which is Bishop of Rome.

When Pope Francis stresses the fact that he is Bishop of Rome it is not because this is the most humble of his titles, as some people continue to say incorrectly.

No! It is the most important.

Every other title flows from that, because Rome is considered the primatial see that "presides in charity" over the Catholic Church. And its bishop, as successor of the Apostles Peter and Paul, enjoys special jurisdiction and historical prerogatives of governance over the worldwide flock.

Archbishop Gänswein's theological musings seem to be part of a quiet campaign among devout Ratzingerites to stave off Benedict XVI's increasing irrelevance.

Why else would the cardinal prefect and entire staff of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith make a recent pilgrimage to Joseph Ratzinger's birthplace in Germany and celebrate Mass in his hometown?

Catholics of a more traditionalist stripe have been extremely critical of Pope Francis for what they perceive as his wishy-washy theology.

He seems, to them, to be soft on doctrine. And that is putting it mildly.

On the other hand, many “progressive” Catholics and those Christians not in communion with the Roman Church actually like this seemingly non-doctrinaire aspect of the Jesuit pope. For them he is a breath of fresh air.

Interestingly, Francis has been able to keep people with both points of view relatively happy.

So what’s his secret?

It may be the “good cop-bad cop” scenario that, if not an explicit strategy, has certainly worked as an effective, de facto modus vivendi.

Here’s how it seems to be working. Pope Francis plays the good cop, that character who is always the darling of the “trendy lefties,” the “anything goes” types and people who just don’t believe the rules are all that important.

And then he has kept in or appointed to key posts a number of “bad cops” who appeal to the doctrinal hardliners, rule-bound Catholics and traditionalists.

These include several cardinals like Robert Sarah (the Vatican’s liturgy chief who recently said the United States

was “insidiously hostile” to Christians); Kurt Koch (the top ecumenical officer who believes Christians have the “duty” to convert all people to Christ except Jews); Gerhard Müller (the doctrinal czar and editor of the complete works of Joseph Ratzinger who just keeps on being Müller...); George Pell (head of the Secretariat of the Economy who is on the opposite side of the pope on just about every issue except, perhaps, finances); and the list goes on.

“Good cop-bad cop” must be the only logical reason Francis tolerates these and many others who are in direct service to him in Rome and yet seem to work against him in so many different ways.

And if that’s not the reason, then what is?

Maybe it has something to do with that line in Psalm 34...

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/is-the-pope-following-a-good-cop-bad-cop-strategy/3240>

Pope Francis reopens a question many thought had been closed

And the Italian parliament voted 369-193 to legalize same-sex civil unions

May 18, 2016

In a [recent article](#) on women at the Church's leadership and decision-making levels I argued that Pope Francis "has been all talk and no action" when it comes to advancing the full participation of women at the Church's leadership and decision-making levels.

"It's time the pope remove the stained glass ceiling that, for too long, has deprived half the Church's population from fully sharing its hopes, wisdom and talents," I concluded.

Just six days after that article was published Francis effectively agreed with my assessment.

"It's true that women are excluded from decision-making processes in the Church," he admitted to some 900 heads of women's religious orders around the world.

"Well, not excluded," he continued, "but the insertion of women in decision-making processes is very weak. We must make advances."

The mothers superior – who had just begun a closed-door, question-and-answer session with the pope – were delighted.

And then, a few minutes later, Francis made some brief comments that would soon reverberate through cyberspace, provoking a flood of comments, articles and debate similar to that which followed his now trademark statement, “Who am I to judge?”

What had he done? He agreed to one of the superior generals’ suggestions to create a commission that would “study the question” of women deacons or deaconesses, as we find in the New Testament.

Immediately, all sorts of people put the cart before the horse and began making wild speculations.

“Pope opens door to women deacons” was a typical headline.

Hardly.

He said he would form a commission to study the history of women deacons. He did not say he was in favor of ordaining them. In fact, he expressed his own perplexity over what exactly their role was in the past and how reinstituting them might lead to the clericalization of women.

But that did not stop some very bright and **otherwise reliable pundits**, who should know better, to leap so far ahead themselves (and the pope!) and begin speculating that Francis had just taken the initial steps towards ordaining “women priests!”

Obviously, there’s still a lot of confusion about the *permanent* diaconate – an ancient servant-leadership position that had largely fallen out of use but was revived at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) – and how it differs from the *transitional* diaconate, the step before one becomes a presbyter (that is, a priest).

But that’s not to say Pope Francis has done nothing. As he so often does – he’s once again given papal permission for the people in his Church to start another process of discussion and discernment on an issue the hierarchy has generally shied away from or ignored.

Now it’s up to him to actually form the commission he’s promised.

Pope Francis told the women superiors general that “above all” he would like a commission to “clarify” the exact nature of the role women deacons held in the early Church.

It’s an interesting idea, but one that has already been taken up. And not too long ago.

The International Theological Commission (ITC), a 30-member study and advisory group under the auspices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), pondered the question just as we moved into the new millennium.

This high-level theological think-tank, which was set up by Paul VI after Vatican II, issued a lengthy document in 2002 called, "[From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles.](#)"

One chapter of this text looked specifically at women deacons in the early centuries of Christianity.

The document concluded that "the deaconesses mentioned in the tradition of the ancient Church... were not purely and simply equivalent to the deacons" (i.e. the men). It also stressed that there is "the clear distinction between the ministries of the bishop and the priests on the one hand and the diaconal ministry on the other."

After providing its "historical-theological research" the ITC text said it was now up to "the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church to pronounce authoritatively on this question."

Here's how the ITC works: under the presidency of the CDF prefect, theologians and scripture scholars serve for at least one five-year period (or *quinquennium*); sometimes they are renewed. And during their term they usual focus,

as a body, on one or two “doctrinal questions of major importance.”

The group that undertook the study of the diaconate – the Sixth Quinquennium (1997-2002) – was led by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then head of the CDF, and included some people who are lot more famous today than they were two decades ago.

Two of them have gone on to become cardinals (Luis Tagle of the Philippines and Willem Eijk of the Netherlands) and two others are now archbishops who have had significant positions at the Vatican (Jean-Louis Bruguès OP a Frenchman who heads the Vatican Library; and Bruno Forte, an Italian who was secretary at the last two Synod assemblies on the family).

Another – Archbishop Roland Minnerath of Dijon (France) – is currently a member of the CDF.

Not so surprisingly, there was **not a single woman among the members**, although the ITC homepage erroneously has “Mrs” before the name of Gösta Hallonsten, a male professor from Sweden.

But the most famous members of the ITC’s Sixth Quinquennium now work just a short walk from Pope Francis’s residence and occupy the top three posts at the CDF – Cardinal Gerhard Müller (prefect) and Archbishops

Luis Ladaria SJ (secretary) and Augustine DiNoia OP (adjunct secretary).

Interestingly, when he was speaking to the mothers superior about women deacons, the pope said: "I think I'll ask the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to tell me if there are some studies on this issue."

Is it possible that he knew nothing about the ITC document from 2002 or that the men who are now running the CDF were directly involved in its genesis?

It's more likely that he knows all this very well, but thinks the issue needs to be looked at and studied again.

This is not the first time the Jesuit pope has reopened a question many thought had been closed.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the blueprint for his pontificate, Francis says the doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences "has not yet been sufficiently elaborated."

That would be news to Pope John Paul II who intended to resolve the issue in 1998 with a "motu proprio" called *Apostolos Suos*, a document that emasculated the bishops' conferences.

Pope Francis surely knows about this text and the ITC paper on deacons - both issued when he was still Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Or is it possible that they got lost in the Argentine postal system?

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/pope-francis-reopens-a-question-many-thought-had-been-closed/3201>

The Church's elder sons don't like this merciful pope

Especially some decisions concerning liturgy are questionable

May 4, 2016

On the night of his election Pope Francis had dinner with the cardinals that had just elected him.

“May God forgive you for what you have done,” he said during the toast, causing uproar of laughter.

Three years later many of those cardinals are no longer laughing. And it would seem that some of them cannot forgive themselves for choosing Jorge Mario Bergoglio SJ as Bishop of Rome.

Several days ago one of the most prominent Catholic laypersons in Europe told me that a cardinal working at the Vatican recently confided that 85% of the people in the Roman Curia are opposed to the pope.

That figure was not surprising. The fact that a cardinal cited it was.

The opposition is on many fronts and to different aspects of this pontificate.

For example, Francis' challenge that Europe do more to accept refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa – a large proportion who are Muslims – has not gone down well with many bishops on the Old Continent.

Chief among those who have taken issue with the pope's open door and migrant integration policy is the outgoing two-term president of the Council of the Episcopal Conference of Europe (CCEE) – Hungarian Cardinal Péter Erdő.

The Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest was in Rome this week with the CCEE leadership team for meetings with the pope and other Vatican officials.

At a press conference on Tuesday he carefully, but clearly, took issue with Francis' insistence that Europe devise a common, continent-wide policy for receiving and integrating immigrants.

“Up to this point there are no walls in Europe,” he said, claiming that the razor wire fences erected to keep out illegals by countries like his Hungarian homeland were somehow less pernicious.

The soon-to-be 64-year-old cardinal, who has been a strong supporter of Hungary's nationalist government, exonerated Prime Minister Viktor Orban's anti-immigrant policies, saying bizarrely, "In a county of transit you can't talk about integration and acceptance. This is a limitation of freedom."

What freedom would that be? The freedom to exclude?

No matter what the issue – whether inside or outside the Church – it is Pope Francis' desire to be inclusive that seems to really irk so many people.

Like the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, they don't think it is fair that, like the welcoming father in that biblical story, the pope – or God – has any right to be so merciful. Especially to outsiders.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/pope-francis-is-not-beyond-reproach/3117>

The Pope's family document continues to cause a stir

'Amoris Laetitia' has a lot of doctrinal hardliners in a bad mood

April 13, 2016

Cardinal Raymond Burke has written a **most curious article** in which he goes to great lengths to show that Catholics are under no obligation to accept anything in Pope Francis' new exhortation on the family that has not already been codified as doctrine by the Church's magisterium.

The 67-year-old American cardinal basically says Francis' effort to develop the current teaching and the way it's applied is nothing more than the pope's personal opinion.

Papa Francesco must be laughing his head off or scratching it in disbelief. Or, just maybe, he's doing both at the same time – laughing with one of his heads, while expressing befuddlement with the other.

Didn't you know? The pope has two bodies. And we can thank Cardinal Burke for pointing that out in his article:

“According to a traditional understanding, the pope has two bodies, the body which is his as an individual member of the faithful and is subject to mortality, and the body which is his as Vicar of Christ on earth which, according to Our Lord’s promise, endures until His return in glory.”

You don’t say, Ray...

“The first body is his mortal body; the second body is the divine institution of the office of St Peter and his successors,” he does say.

From which “traditional understanding” did the cardinal cherry-pick this piece of medieval theological speculation? Perhaps he’s been checking out library books at [Ecône](#) again...

We can thank Benedict XVI for making Burke a cardinal. That was in 2010, two years after the ex-pope called the illustrious doctor of the law to Rome to oversee the Church’s “supreme court.”

But Pope Francis discerned that the talents of the cardinal (also known as [the high priest with the long red train](#)) could be better utilized elsewhere. So in the autumn of 2014 he relieved the Wisconsin native from the burden of overseeing the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic

Signatura and made him cardinal-protector of the Knights of Malta.

Perhaps, the pope should now give the cardinal an extended vacation. Or at least hire a nurse to make sure he's taking his meds.

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, has a lot of other doctrinal hardliners and doctors of the law like Cardinal Burke in a bad mood these days.

Those already in the episcopate are either biting their tongues or downplaying the significant shift in direction the pope is obviously trying to bring about with the document.

Many have talked about the methodology Francis used to arrive at this point of the discussion on marriage and the family.

It is called "synodality" in the broad sense – the entire Church, pastors and people, walking and dialoguing together to discern the way forward on certain issues and challenges. The exhortation marks just one more step on the way. And you can bet that if the pope has anything to

say about it, this document will not be the final word on all the topics it looks at.

But what about the Synod of Bishops? Is Francis really serious about further reforming it so that it becomes an even more dynamic and regular organ of his ministry in governing the universal Church?

There have been many signs that he is moving towards this. But if he is really intent on beefing up the Synod he's got to be better at watching his tongue.

At the very start of *Amoris Laetitia* (in paragraph 4, to be precise) he speaks of "the two recent Synods on the family". Later on, in paragraph 39, he again refers to "the last two Synods."

Unfortunately, this is incorrect.

There is only *one* Synod. It is a permanent institution with its secretariat (or coordinating office) located in Rome. The use of the word "synods" actually refers to the "assemblies", those fixed moments when the pope calls the Synod of Bishops into session.

The bishops who are voting members at those assemblies are representatives (through election by their confreres or

appointment by the pope) of the entire, worldwide episcopate.

The Bishop of Rome is the Synod's president. Up to now he has called this body into session at regular, but infrequent intervals (every couple of years), in order to get the other bishops' advice on particular issues and problems facing the Church. He is free to accept or reject any proposals they give him.

When a particular assembly is over, the Synod does not end. Rather, it is simply no longer in session until the pope convokes it again.

Pope Francis is not the only one who erroneously talks about the various "synods" that are held in Rome. Most people at the Vatican – even in the Synod's secretariat – do so as well.

This is not being nitpicky. Using the wrong words will only perpetuate muddled thinking. And there's enough of that already.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-popes-family-document-continues-to-cause-a-stir/2993>

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone: a lightning rod for controversy

The pope's missive on love overshadowed by yet another financial scandal

April 6, 2016

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, as everyone knows, is a lightning rod for controversy.

The Italian Salesian, who is now 81, was the man that Benedict XVI made Secretary of State (and then Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church).

The theologian-pope's choice of his former assistant at the doctrinal congregation for this crucial post (despite protests from the previous Secretary of State and many others) was arguably the worst of his many bad appointments.

And when the Bavarian pontiff angrily refused the pleas of his most loyal aides to sack the disastrous Bertone, it was virtually the end of his hapless pontificate.

Well, the cardinal has been retired since October 2013, but the cloud of controversy that seems to follow him around

ala Charlie Brown (the cartoon character, that is; not the papal nuncio in Ireland) is still casting a long shadow. And it's the Vatican that's being engulfed by it once more.

The latest mess revolves around the astronomic costs Bertone has shelled out for renovating two penthouse apartments that he's joined together to be his retirement home. The irony, of course, is that his new digs are located in a building next to the priests' residence (and visitor's hotel) where Pope Francis lives spartanly in a couple of small rooms.

It seems he gave the renovation job to some friends in a firm from Genoa where he served as archbishop from 2002-2006. And apparently his buddy ole pals double-charged for their work, which – by the way – they never completed because they went out of business.

Vatican City's civil magistrates have opened up an investigation, but Cardinal Bertone is not the one being looked at. The subjects of the ongoing inquiry are two men, formally president and treasurer of the nearby Bambino Gesù pediatric hospital, who paid €422,000 (app. US 480K) for the renovation.

Why did they pay? They said the cardinal had agreed that such a luxurious setting next to the pope's residence would

be a great venue for schmoozing and making more money off the hospital's generous benefactors.

Bertone has denied any wrongdoing, including that he agreed to take the hospital's cash. Granted, the apartment is not his, but the property of the Vatican. And someone else will use it when he's long gone.

In any case, the investigation is just one part of this story. What's more amazing, and it's something few people seem to have reflected on, is that Cardinal Bertone said he paid for the renovations out of his own pocket (hence, the double billing).

The real question a whole lot of people should be asking is where did he get such deep pockets?

We're talking about €330,000. That's about 375 grand in US greenbacks.

Personal funds?

When Cardinal Bertone joined the Salesians at age of sixteen he took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Yes, it's true that when he became a bishop in 1991 he was released from his vow of poverty. But he has always said that, despite being raised to the episcopate, he has remained a religious and closely kept his Salesian identity.

Evidently, just not all the vows.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/cardinal-tarcisio-bertone-a-lightning-rod-for-controversy/2936>

Pope Francis preaching a compelling message

A message that brings comfort to the poor, the suffering and the marginalized

February 17, 2016

This week's Letter is sent from the town of San Cristobal de las Casas (Chiapas) where Pope Francis visited on Monday as part of his five-day, whirlwind tour through four different states of Mexico.

The 79-year-old pope has knocked himself out during this trip, spending long hours each day individually meeting and embracing hundreds and hundreds of people. That's when he's not been celebrating mega-Masses, giving talks to large groups or standing atop his open-air pope mobile for lengthy rides through streets lined with raucous crowds.

His fatigue has been obvious, but it has not stopped him from giving yet one more greeting each night before going to bed. He has not disappointed the throngs of people that wait for him in the dark outside the apostolic nuncio's residence in Mexico City, which he's made the base for his various jaunts elsewhere in the country.

It was never to be taken for granted that Papa Francisco's twelfth foreign trip in less than three years would be a

cakewalk. Those who understand a bit about Mexico and Latin America knew he was facing some daunting challenges by coming here.

But no one who has been closely following his pontificate has been surprised by how masterfully he's handled it.

First of all, he came here in the shadow of John Paul II, whom the Mexican people deeply loved and, oddly enough, considered as one of their own. That's because the Polish pope made Mexico the destination of his very first trip as Bishop of Rome, returning here several more times during his long pontificate. His legacy still looms large in this vast country.

Mexican Catholics, who form the largest group of Spanish-speakers in the pope's Latin American flock, were hurt that Francis did not come here earlier.

But judging by the reception he has received so far, people here obviously believe he's earned some of that same deep affection that they've always reserved for his now sainted predecessor.

Secondly, most Europeans and North Americans (that is, folks from Canada and the USA) generally think that because Francis is from Argentina he must be an instant hit with everyone in Latin America.

That's not quite true. For one thing, Papa Jorge Mario Bergoglio may have been born in Buenos Aires, but his

DNA is 100% Italian. He hasn't got a drop of indigenous blood in his veins, as so many in Mexico have.

And it shows.

The pope's very white face was baked to the color of a ripe tomato on Monday under Chiapas' scorching sun. Someone obviously forgot to apply the sun block!

And without getting into polemics, let's just say the very fact that Francis is an Argentinean does not immediately gain him extra points anywhere in Latin America. It's probably the opposite. But again he's earned them and exponentially.

The pope, as expected, has been preaching a compelling message that brings comfort to the poor, the suffering and the marginalized. But – is anyone surprised? – he has not failed to forcefully call to account the powerful, corrupt and selfish – especially those among them who wear the mantle of religious authority.

The colorful little town of San Cristobal de las Casas is a real gem. It is a gentle, safe and entertaining oasis in the predominantly Mayan-inhabited state of Chiapas, a place that be can be dicey and dangerous in its more rural outposts.

San Cris, as the locals sometimes call it, is absurdly inexpensive for Europeans and Americans. Its brightly dressed (and mostly) Indian residents – surrounded by broods of tiny children – sell handcrafted textiles and jewelry in makeshift markets or along sidewalks and squares.

There's plenty on offer by way of street food, family-run cantinas and even up-scale restaurants, while the young (and not so young) can enjoy a pulsing nightlife that features lots of watering holes with live music from jazz ensembles to mariachi bands.

Yes, this town does a thriving tourist business.

But it also attracts lots of religious pilgrims, especially those interested in Catholic social teaching and Latin America's theology of liberation.

These come to visit the tomb of Dom Samuel Ruiz, bishop of the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas from 1960-2000, and see the indigenous people whom he empowered with ownership of their local Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

There is no need to spill lots of ink on Dom Samuel in this space. Much has already been written about his legacy and how the Vatican during the time of John Paul II did everything to make his life difficult.

The Saint never came to San Cristobal during his several trips to Mexico. That's why it was so remarkable when Pope Francis did and even prayed at Dom Samuel's tomb. This came exactly five years and three weeks after the revered bishop's death at age 86 in 2011.

There are two other graves that Dom Samuel's indigenous followers, but few others even in the area, consider sacred here. They are located in the main cemetery on the outskirts of town.

There, under a large fir tree, lie the simple gravestones of two Catholic missionary sisters from Belgium who came to Chiapas in the late 1970s to work with Bishop Ruiz in accompanying the Mayan people and standing up for their rights and dignity.

Sr Béatrice Regnier and Sr Danièle Sienard were killed in a mysterious auto accident on May 4, 1983 while driving back to the Indian village where they lived following a meeting in San Cristobal with the bishop.

Henchmen for the region's wealthy landowners and oligarchs had long harassed and bullied these two courageous women – who died at ages 42 and 43 – because of their untiring work among the exploited Mayan people.

Sr Béatrice, it turns out, was the niece of Archbishop Jean Jadot who was apostolic delegate to the United States

from 1973-1980 and later president of the Vatican office that eventually morphed into the two present-day pontifical councils for interreligious dialogue and culture.

The Belgian sisters are just two of many foreign missionaries – and countless local religious and lay catechists – that have suffered these past decades for trying to make the Gospel of mercy, justice and solidarity become flesh in Chiapas and all of Latin America.

“O how I desire a Church that is poor and for the poor.”

Pope Francis made the proclamation on March 16, 2013, just three days after being elected Bishop of Rome.

And like we sometimes do, even with words attributed to Jesus, many Catholics – including too many clerics – have tried to soften and reinterpret the true meaning of the pope’s manifesto.

Events of the past several days, especially those dramatically unfolding during the papal visit to Mexico, should clarify any doubts about what kind of poverty and what sort of poor Francis is calling his Church to embrace.

Certainly, he is summoning us to generously carry out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. But it’s clear he also believes that it’s not enough for us to be charitable towards the materially or morally impoverished if we do not give up

our own societal privileges, false sense of security and, yes, over-reliance on material resources.

Among the ways he spelled this out here in Mexico was through a forceful address on Saturday in which he told the country's bishops what kind of leaders the Church does and does not need.

"We do not need 'princes'," he told them, "but rather a community of the Lord's witnesses."

He then warned them not to allow their vision to be "darkened by the gloomy mist of worldliness" or to be "corrupted by trivial materialism or by the seductive illusion of underhanded agreements".

He's been even more case-specific on this theme with bishops back in Italy. For example, Francis has made it clear that the Church's pastors should stay out of politics, a place where some of the country's most important bishops have comfortably made a nest.

An explanation point was put to that this past week when it was announced that Papa Bergoglio would forego a planned trip to Genoa next September, becoming the first pope in twenty years not to attend Italy's national Eucharistic congress.

Could it be a mere coincidence that the Archdiocese of Genoa is headed Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, lame duck

president of the Italian bishops conference and a strong advocate of the Church's involvement in political affairs?

But I would suggest that it was Pope Francis' meeting in Cuba last Friday with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow that showed in a strange way that most people have probably failed to grasp just how exigent it is to being a poor Church.

The pope made no demands and set no pre-conditions for the historic meeting with the leader of the world's largest Orthodox Church. He could have, because that's exactly what his predecessor always did.

There was good reason for that – to avoid showing weakness, allowing the Russians to take advantage of any good will or naïveté and having to pay too high a price without first securing specific guarantees.

The Vatican's traditional way of engaging with other churches, religions, governments and peoples has been, whenever possible, to operate from its position of strength and wealth, whether that be cultural, spiritual or material.

It has followed an Italian type of political pragmatism summed up in the idiom, *forte con i deboli e debole con i forti* – basically, “be strong with the weak and weak with the strong”.

But Pope Francis does not buy into this mentality. And the meeting with Russian Orthodox Patriarch – as well as his visit to Mexico – has illustrated that.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/pope-francis-preaching-a-compelling-message/2650>

The pope's Polyhedron ecumenism

Christians, despite their denomination, are fundamentally united by their common baptism

January 20, 2016

During this week's general audience, Pope Francis reminded the several thousand people gathered in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican that all Christians, despite their denomination, were fundamentally united by their common baptism.

That's because "God's mercy, which is operative in baptism, is stronger than our divisions", the pope said.

"In the measure in which we accept the grace of mercy, we become ever more fully the people of God and are also able to proclaim to all people God's marvelous works, precisely because of this simple and fraternal witness of unity," he noted.

Therefore, Francis said, the "concrete witness of unity" among Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics existed in proclaiming the power of the Gospel and carrying out the "corporal and spiritual works of mercy".

This is just another example of one of the Jesuit pope's favorite principles – that reality is greater than ideas. In other words, Christians might belong to different branches of what was originally a single, united Church, but that original unity is still intact. And it is intact, not by adhering to a strict doctrinal or liturgical uniformity, but by living out the simple vocation of baptism – proclaiming the Gospel and serving the needs of others.

Francis is likely to have more to say about this in his annual message for Lent, which will be released next Tuesday. Its theme is from Matthew 9,13: “Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.”

The pope has already shown that, at least for him, that includes the holy sacrifice of the Mass. How else would one put it, considering he has gone further than any pope before in engaging with non-mainline Christian groups such as Evangelical and Pentecostal groups with a minimal sacramental structure.

Francis has visited such a community in Southern Italy and has sent messages of prayerful support to several others. He even went so far as to record a homemade smart phone video for a convention of US tele-evangelizers in which he asked them for their blessing.

This unconventional gesture and a recent visit to the Lutheran community in Rome – in which he told a congregant married to a Catholic that she could decide, in conscience, whether it was right to receive communion in her husband’s Church – have alarmed the self-styled defenders of Catholic orthodoxy.

They do not like the pope’s idea of, let’s call it, “polyhedron ecumenism”.

And here’s why. A polyhedron (or, better, a polytope) is a geometric figure with different angles and lines in which each component retains its own peculiarity while forming one, united whole.

To what extent Francis is trying to make the analogy an operative paradigm is not yet clear.

But Catholic traditionalists are convinced that, on principle, it cannot be squared with Church teaching. At least in the way they interpret it.

Let’s face it, Pope Francis has set off all sorts of alarm bells for people who do not like change.

And since the Catholic Church is, by nature, a pretty conservative organization and community, many Catholics are unsettled by the pope's challenging message to make changes to our lifestyle.

Change, renewal, conversion. These words or concepts set the tone of the most important document he has issued to date – *Evangeliium Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel).

In paragraph 42 of that apostolic exhortation the Pope writes:

“In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them.”

What about the law of celibacy for ordained priests of the Latin Rite? It has deep historical roots and may be beautiful. But the same goes for the married priesthood, which has always been maintained even, if limitedly, in the Roman Church.

But it is impossible to argue convincingly that prohibiting married men from the priesthood is directly connected to the Gospel.

In fact, Pope Francis has indicated that he would consent to a general opening up of the priesthood to married men. And some are convinced that this is the next issue he has decided to put before his Synod of Bishops for deeper discernment.

As was the case at the last two general assemblies of the Synod, which focused on marriage and the family, there are those who don't want to even discuss the topic of married priests.

And so it was interesting to [read the news](#) that a married, permanent deacon in the Diocese of Kansas City-St Joseph was "removed" several weeks ago for violating his marriage vows.

Don't be surprised if this sort of thing is given a lot more attention as the rumors circulate about the pope's intention to push the bishops to ordain married priests.

Those opposed to such a move will want to show that a married clergy brings its own set of problems.

And highlighting the faults of married deacons would be part of the “no” camp’s effort to try to scare Francis away from opening what they see as another can of worms.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/2497>

Pope's amazing Synod talk

“We’re still only half-way there to realizing real episcopal collegiality.”

October 21, 2015

A number of bishops voiced surprise – and some even great delight – at the address Pope Francis gave last Saturday at a special event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

Indeed, it was quite the talk!

The Pope further elaborated on one of the key themes from his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) – the need to reform the mentality and structure of Church governance.

He probably felt he had to since so few people seem to have studied and meditated on the nearly two-year-old document, which Francis continues to see as the most important of his pontificate.

In his [talk last Saturday](#), the soon-to-be 79-year-old Pope spoke again of the need for a “healthy decentralization” of Church authority, a further development of synodality at all levels of the Church and a new way for the Bishop of

Rome to exercise papal primacy for the sake of Christian unity.

The Pope also indicated that developing episcopal collegiality through “ecclesiastical provinces and ecclesiastical regions, particular councils and, in a special way, conferences of bishops” was of extreme importance in this project and might require “integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization”

He said, “The hope expressed by the (Second Vatican) Council that such bodies would help increase the spirit of episcopal *collegiality* has not yet been fully realized.”

Then in an adlibbed remark he said, “We are still on the way – *half-way* there”. The translation provided by the Vatican rendered that “part-way”. No matter, the point is that Francis believes there is still a *long* way to go.

Unfortunately, if collegiality is ever going to work effectively and “feliculously” (to use a bit of curial-speak), the Church has to have better bishops than those in the current crop.

The latest proof of that came at the beginning of this Synod assembly when thirteen cardinals sent a private letter to the Pope. In it they raised alarming questions over the

Synod's methodology and its personnel – as were approved and desired by Francis.

Now, no one contests the duty of a cardinal (or any bishop) to speak honestly with the Bishop of Rome, and even the prerogative of respectfully disagreeing with him at times.

But these thirteen men did so in a duplicitous way.

They had hoped their ploy to “right” the Synod would remain secret and they were furious – probably deeply embarrassed, too – when the other bishops and the whole world quickly found out. That's because (no honor among thieves!) one of their own leaked the letter to someone else and it ended up in the press.

This incident underlines one of the problems Pope Francis is facing – that even among the Church's most senior bishops there are those who act like schoolboys, going behind the backs of their peers and tattling to the teacher.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/synod-of-the-family-part-ii-draws-to-a-close/2052>

Francis in the United States

A social doctrine pope who's not impressed by big money.

September 23, 2015

New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan says he can't wait to take Pope Francis down Manhattan's glitzy Fifth Avenue and show-off the newly refurbished St Patrick's Cathedral.

The Pope goes to the Big Apple on Thursday evening local time and St Pat's will be his first stop.

"He's going to drive up to it, and I hope he's going to say, like more and more New Yorkers are saying, 'wow,' when he sees the splendor and the radiance of this magnificent structure," said the gregarious cardinal.

Well, good luck. But I doubt the Irish-American cardinal is betting the archdiocesan cemetery fund on getting such a reaction from the Pope of the Poor.

But you can't blame him for hoping.

After all, the restoration of the 135-year-old neo-Gothic temple cost \$175 million. (That ain't exactly chump change; it's more like Trump change!) And given that only \$100

million has been raised so far, the cardinal is no doubt praying that Francis will at least refrain from repeating some of his anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist admonishments that have dismayed wealthy Catholic donors.

No matter what the Pope says, it's hard to imagine him getting overly excited about the glories of St Patrick's. He is drawn more toward disfigured people than sumptuous church buildings.

"We're not talking about luxury," said Cardinal Dolan in defense of the cathedral's expensive restoration project. "We're talking about repair. Literally, stones were falling. And literally, our insurance people were saying, 'If you don't do some repair, we may have to close it'."

The 65-year-old St Louis native and "creative conservative" has been in New York since 2009. He launched the cathedral restoration three years after his arrival in Gotham.

That was just a month after he got his red hat at the February 2012 consistory in Rome, an event that launched him as an international media superstar and led many to begin calling him the "American Pope."

But Cardinal Dolan's star began plummeting spectacularly just a month after the 2013 conclave. That's when the newly elected Pope Francis skipped over the former North American College rector and 2010 usurper of the national bishops' conference presidency and, instead, chose Boston's Cardinal Sean O'Malley as the US member of his C8 group of special advisors.

Luckily for Cardinal Dolan the United Nations is in New York. Because speaking at the international body is the main reason why the Pope is coming to his diocese.

In the famous interview with *Civiltà Cattolica* and other Jesuit publications just a few months after his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis said he had "never been a right-winger."

He obviously felt he needed to say that because at the time the impression a lot of Church watchers had (and even more so many of his fellow Jesuits) was that the new Pope was extremely conservative, especially in Church matters.

His disavowal of that was a great relief to so-called Vatican II Catholics and the overall content of the interview was a masterstroke that won him the near unflinching support of once skeptical Jesuits all over the world.

Now thirty months into his pontificate, Francis is trying to shuck off another label that some have affixed to him – that he’s a Marxist, or at least a very liberal Socialist. Of course, in the United States the only thing worse than that is being called a “commie”.

Why is the Pope suspect?

It’s because he continues to condemn the “unbridled capitalism” and the global financial model, which he calls “an economy that kills”. He has put forth a moral case for a “more equitable distribution of wealth” and has made all sorts of other statements that aren’t exactly a ringing endorsement of venture capitalism or the consumerist society on which it thrives.

On his plane from Havana to Washington on Tuesday, Francis said: “Maybe there’s an impression I’m a little bit more leftie, but I haven’t said a single thing that’s not in the social doctrine of the Church.”

That explanation is unlikely to convince people who have criticized the Argentine Pope for the economic and political views he’s articulated – even the Catholics among them.

But perhaps their real beef is with the Church’s social doctrine. Francis is just an easier target for that.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/pope-francis-has-finally-arrived-in-the-usa/1914>

Inter-Synod happenings

The pro- and anti-Kasper camps get down to work.

May 27, 2015

The Jesuit-run Gregorian University here in Rome was the venue of a major, closed-door symposium on Monday that discussed some of the more thorny issues that the Synod of Bishops will continue debating in October at its next general assembly on marriage and the family.

The presidents of the national episcopal conferences of Germany, France and Switzerland brought together some 50 theologians, bishops, Roman Curia officials and lay experts for a “day of study.”

It seems most of the focus was on proposals to help bring divorced and civilly remarried Catholics back into the full sacramental life of the Church, as indicated by Cardinal Walter Kasper.

Synod delegates for the above-mentioned bishops' conferences joined the discussions.

Some reports labeled the encounter as a secret strategy meeting for “progressives” that are trying to undermine longstanding Church teaching.

But one of the theologians who attended rejected that.

According the French news agency iMedia, lay Biblicist Ann-Marie Pelletier – who, incidentally, was last year’s recipient of the Ratzinger Prize in theology – described the participants as people “faithful to Christ” who were searching to make the Church’s teachings better understood and more credible. Most of them are believed to be supportive of the Kasper proposal.

A statement afterward by the German bishops’ conference said the first part of the day was dedicated to reflecting more in depth on the Gospel injunction against divorce.

“The words of Jesus concerning marriage and divorce have to be interpreted in the context of his entire proclamation and of the tradition of the Church,” it said, while also noting that doctrine develops.

Some of the participants apparently argued that the Church needs to re-evaluate and update its teaching on human sexuality.

“A further development of the theology of love is necessary, which follows up on the tradition of the moral-

theological differentiations and which integrates new insights from anthropology, as well as from sociology,” said the communique.

But conservative commentators lambasted the gathering, saying it was “obsessed with same-sex caresses and marital infidelity.”

Indeed, there are secretive meetings and initiatives going on in the run-up to the next assembly of the Synod of Bishops. But they concern a group of traditionalists and other defenders of the Church’s status quo who are working overtime to block any development of doctrine or pastoral practice in the field of marriage and sexuality.

The core of this group is based in Rome. And its most ambitious project to date has been the publication of a book last year aimed at countering at the so-called Kasper proposals (mentioned above).

Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church (Ignatius Press, 2014) is edited by Fr. Robert Dodaro, an American Augustinian who has been in Rome since the 1980s. A brilliant scholar and an authority on the writings of St. Augustine, he is currently president

of the Patristic Institute (*Augustinianum*), probably the most serious of all the pontifical faculties in Rome.

Fr. Dodaro enlisted five cardinals, three other clerics and a lay professor to contribute essays for the volume.

They include Cardinals Walter Brandmuller (retired president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences); Raymond Burke (patron, Knights of Malta; Carlo Caffarra (archbishop of Bologna and founding president of the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family); Velasio De Paolis CS (canon lawyer and former papal delegate charged with reforming the Legionaries of Christ); and Gerhard Muller (prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

The other contributors are Archbishop Cyril Vasil' (Eastern Rite Jesuit and secretary of the Congregation for Oriental Churches); Fr Paul Mankowski SJ (an Oxford-trained classics scholar at the Lumen Christi Institute in Chicago); and Professor John Rist (philosopher and patristic scholar at Catholic University of America).

There are other leading clerics in Rome (and elsewhere) who are also part of this group and who are worried that Pope Francis is sympathetic, if not supportive, of the Kasper proposals.

They include big names like Cardinals George Pell (prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy) and Robert Sarah (prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship).

And there are not only men involved.

A key component to this *semper idem* crowd that will countenance no change is Professor Marguerite Peeters, a Belgian that teaches at the Pontifical Urban University (*Urbanianum*). She is Cardinal Sarah's and some other Vatican officials' go-to "expert" on countering gender theory.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-culture-wars/1304>

Maker of saints & pope of the people

Despite opposition from the high clergy, Francis is getting lots of support.

May 20, 2015

The Vatican this weekend will finally make official what Catholics around the world have known the past 35 years – that Archbishop Oscar Romero was a martyr for the faith.

His beatification ceremony on Saturday in San Salvador is expected to draw some 250,000 or more worshipers. It will also authorize March 24, the day in 1980 when he was murdered while celebrating Mass, as the liturgical feast of the man so many already call, “St. Romero of the Americas.”

Oscar Romero is just the latest of some 683 new “blesseds” and 843 new saints that Pope Francis has declared in just a little over two years as Bishop of Rome.

John Paul II canonized 482 people and beatified another 1,342 during nearly 27 years as pope, while Benedict XVI declared 45 saints and 843 blesseds during his almost eight years on the Chair of Peter.

Francis jumped way ahead of his two predecessors already at his very first saint-making ceremony when he canonized the 813 Martyrs of Otranto. But even if you count this group as one, the current pope has still added 22 new feast days to the Church's liturgical calendar.

He has already presided over five separate canonization ceremonies and will hold a sixth next September when he makes Junipero Serra a saint during a visit to the United States. At this pace he will soon overtake Benedict XVI who presided over only 10 such ceremonies. John Paul II, who was known as the "Saint Maker," celebrated 51 canonization Masses.

If Benedict was seen to have slowed down the Vatican's saint-making machine, Francis seems to have kicked it back into overdrive. Just look at the number of beatification ceremonies that have take place these past 50 months.

There have been 36 of them. Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for Saints, has led all but four of these ceremonies, while the pope has presided over two.

During Benedict's pontificate 111 beatification ceremonies took place; during John Paul's long reign 147 were held. At the rate he's going, Francis would match the first figure in the sixth year of his pontificate and second just two years later.

Now, who's the real saint-maker here?

“The pope is absolutely not isolated. On the contrary, the Church – the entire Church – loves him and is following him faithfully.”

And, not only that, reports that claim he has “enemies” and “adversaries” in the Roman Curia and even among some cardinals are patently “false.” Indeed, the entire College of Cardinals has placed its “highest trust” in Pope Francis and every single one of its members would give his blood for this man in whom they have pledged “obedience and filial respect.”

If you need proof, just consider that it’s “always the same journalists and same periodicals” that continuously churn out these nasty reports about inter-church squabbles. Such pieces, and the scribes that pen them, are usually “ideologically biased.”

That's the view of Cardinal Agostino Vallini, the pope's vicar for Rome. And if you're buying his line, then I've got some swampland to sell you in Florida.

The 75-year-old cardinal made his denunciation of what he apparently believes to be mere journalistic fabrications in an interview this week with the Diocese of Rome's online news and information paper, *Roma Sette*.

Perhaps he felt he needed to do so as a way of protecting the simple faith of the proverbial “pious old grannies” and the naive lay folk in the pope's diocese. But people are not so stupid, especially not the Romans, and to treat them as such is paternalistic.

Cardinal Vallini has been the pope's vicar (basically, surrogate head of the diocese) since 2008. Before that he spent four years as prefect of the Apostolic Signatura, the Church's highest court.

So he's no simpleton. And he's not an outsider.

As a member of several Vatican commissions and offices he knows full well that not everyone is on board with Pope Francis' vision for the Church or his program for reform. It is a “false reading” of the situation (to use the cardinal's words) to pretend they are.

Given the content of Cardinal Vallini's remarks, it seems pretty clear that one of the nonidentified journalists he had in mind was Massimo Franco.

A highly regarded columnist for Italy's best-selling daily, *Corriere della Sera*, Franco published an interview last week with Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernandez, a theological advisor to Pope Francis and rector of the Catholic University of Argentina. The archbishop spoke

quite matter-of-factly about the pope's internal enemies, the ones whose very existence the cardinal has denied.

Well, Franco was back again this week with a new article that re-emphasizes and expands on the Archbishop Fernandez's assertions. He again claimed that 20 percent of those working in the Roman Curia were hardcore supporters of Francis; 70 percent formed a "silent and indifferent majority" that was cooperating with him, but already looking forward to his successor; and that another 10 percent constituted real "enemies of the Argentine pope, even if non-declared."

But the author then asserted that many of the diocesan bishops in Italy were disillusioned with the pope. He quoted one unnamed prelate as saying, "When he's speaking about bishops, this pope who shows such great mercy toward everyone, seems inclined to use the stick."

The comment apparently came after Francis addressed the Italian Episcopal Conference on Monday evening at the start of their general assembly. Among other things, he told the bishops not to meddle in politics, to speak out more forcefully against corruption in society and to stop trying to tell Catholics what to do all the time in those areas that rightly belong to the competence of lay people.

"The laity that have an authentic Christian formation don't need pilot-bishops, pilot-monsignors or clerical input for them to assume their responsibilities at all levels, from the

political to the social issues, and from the economic to the legislative (realms). Instead, they need pastor bishops,” the pope said.

And as if that wasn't enough of a knock on their heads, he told the Italians they needed to work more collegially.

“One sees in some parts of the world a widespread weakening of collegiality,” he said. “The practice of verifying the reception of programs and the fulfillment of projects is lacking; for example, conferences or events are organized that feature the same voices and put people to sleep, rubberstamping decisions, opinions and persons.

The Italian bishops are wondering if the pope has issues with the men that wear miters. Or just with them.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/maker-of-saints/1269>

Promoting a people's Church

Remembering Bob Kaiser, a friend and Vatican II correspondent

April 8, 2015

There are some people we wish we had met earlier in our lives. Robert Blair Kaiser, Time Magazine's legendary Rome correspondent during the Second Vatican Council, was such a person for me.

Bob died on Holy Thursday in Phoenix, Ariz., at the age of 84. He had been battling cancer (and I mean really getting on with life) for several months, busily working on the manuscripts of at least three or four more books he hoped to complete before going to God. I'm told he actually died with his laptop computer on his chest! For a writer that's what is called dying with the proverbial boots on.

And Kaiser was a writer. He wrote a lot. And incessantly. He didn't only write about the Church, though it and its people were his most beloved topic — the “people's Church.” (Well, maybe Church, God, and American football were all a toss-up — probably women, too!)

Kaiser was a real character. But I never met him until 2001, shortly after I had left Vatican Radio and began as Rome correspondent for the Tablet of London. Bob had moved back to Rome for his first long-term assignment here since

the council and the occasion was a dinner party that he hosted for John Allen, newly assigned here by the U.S. National Catholic Reporter.

Naturally, I had read much of what Kaiser had written at Vatican II and afterward and was anxious to finally meet him. The weekly dinner parties he threw for theologians, bishops and journalists during the council were legendary.

Well, we hit it off immediately and soon became good friends. We were together at one of Bob's *soirees* the night the Vatican announced that John Paul II was about to die. We then kept each other "in the loop" as we each reported on the interregnum and conclave.

Kaiser had been a Jesuit and continued to be one through and through, even though he left the Society of Jesus before becoming a priest. He was generous as a friend and a colleague, even to a fault.

So it was fitting that he should die on Holy Thursday, the great celebration of feasting and serving. And it's just as fitting that his funeral this Friday should come during the Octave of Easter and on the 60th anniversary of the death of one of his Jesuit heroes — Teilhard de Chardin.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/you-dont-mess-with-children/1054>

Rome priest makes historic church a dining room for the poor

Amidst baroque splendor they "eat like the rich and important people"

February 18, 2015

Pope Francis began the season of Lent on the morning of Ash Wednesday by doing what he does in the middle of almost every other week of the year – he held a general audience in St Peter’s Square for pilgrims and visitors from around the world. Then in the afternoon it was just a short car ride across the Tiber River and up the Aventine Hill where he continued the tradition of celebrating Mass at the first in the series of ancient, Lenten “stational churches” – the Basilica of Santa Sabina.

The Pope has a number of significant appointments on his calendar during these Forty Days of Lent, including a spiritual retreat all next week at a religious house in the Alban Hills south of Rome and a daylong pastoral visit to Naples near the end of next month. But one event that is sure to draw particular attention is his visit on Saturday evening, March 7th, to the Roman church of Ognisanti (All Saints).

The early 20th century parish sits outside the old city walls on the New Apia Road, less than half a mile from the Cathedral Basilica of St John Lateran. Francis is going there to mark the 50th anniversary of the first-ever papal Mass to be celebrated publicly in the vernacular. It was on March 7, 1965 – the First Sunday of Lent – when Pope Paul VI offered the Mass in Italian with the parishioners of Ognisanti. This was the pre-established date for the entire Church throughout the world to begin applying the liturgical reforms called for at the still-ongoing Second Vatican Council.

The reforms included replacing certain parts of the Mass in Latin with prayers and readings in the local languages. The Eucharistic Prayer was still in Latin at that point, but soon the great majority of bishops pushed the Vatican to allow for the entire liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular, a move that continues to anger some Catholics to this day.

They and others are waiting to hear what Pope Francis will say about an issue he has said very little about up to now – the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms.

Back in the summer of 2012 the people of Rome’s Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish lost the beloved father figure that had been their pastor some thirty-seven years. Mgr Pietro Sigurani, whom we all called simply “Don Pietro”, had been taken from the parish he had helped

make one of the diocese's most dynamic. He was forced to retire at age 76 and replaced by a professor from the nearby Lateran University, Mgr Paolo Selvadagi, who was named one of Rome's auxiliary bishops within months and also replaced.

I don't know what has become of Nativity Parish because I stopped attending shortly after the departure of Don Pietro, quite possibly the most inspiring homilist I've ever heard. Since then I've been an orphan in the "liturgical wasteland" that can be Rome, alternating between the Caravita Community (an international Sunday Mass group in English that promotes ecumenism and reformed liturgy) and a couple of Italian convents near my home.

The forcibly "retired" Don Pietro, meanwhile, was named rector of the Church of Sant'Eustachio, a minor basilica one block from the Italian Senate and the Pantheon. It's one of the hundreds of "museum churches" that decorate Rome's historic center, an area where local residents are too few to be able to support them as vibrant parishes. Well it was.

In the short time Don Pietro has been at Sant'Eustachio, which sits opposite one of the city's most famous coffee bars of the same name, he has transformed it into a vibrant center for prayer, theological-sociological discussion and – most impressively – a welcome place for the city's poor and marginalized. I discovered this only a couple of weeks ago when, by accident, I attended an organ concert that was

held to raise funds and awareness for the church's new outreach.

It turns out that each day my old parish priest and his "Friends of Sant'Eustachio" bring poor folks in from Rome's outskirts and give them a full, hot lunch. The "dining room" is the central nave of the richly decorated baroque church. "They tell me: 'Don Pietro, we eat like the rich and important people here – in a grand palace!'" the priest recounted. And that is one of his objectives – to bring the poor to "the center of our attention, the center of the City of Rome and the center of Italy's palaces of power". More than a hundred people are "dined" each day. Says Don Pietro: "The house of God is where the poor should be fed!"

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/rome-priest-makes-historic-church-a-dining-room-for-the-poor/815>

Thoroughly a 'Vatican II man'

Vatican's new foreign minister embraces pastoral, non-ideological approach

November 12, 2014

Pope Francis made a key appointment last week when he named Archbishop Paul Gallagher the Holy See's equivalent of “foreign minister.”

The 60-year-old Liverpool priest is the first English-speaking native to hold this important position, officially called Secretary for Relations with States. He has an attentive pastoral sensitivity and excellent dialogue skills, most recently on display in Australia where served less than two years as papal nuncio.

Those skills — honed as nuncio in Burundi and Guatemala — will be important in his new post. The job includes negotiating with ambassadors and other foreign diplomats, both here in Rome and at international bodies abroad.

By all accounts Archbishop Gallagher is thoroughly a “Vatican II man.” He is also refreshingly non-ideological. Most importantly, he enthusiastically supports the vision of Church renewal and reform that Francis has spelled out in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, essentially the programmatic blueprint of his pontificate.

The Vatican's new foreign minister prepared for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome when now-Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor was rector and did his theological studies at the Gregorian University.

After ordination and then three years of pastoral work in Liverpool, the then-Father Gallagher returned to Rome to study at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the elite school that prepares papal diplomats. He was an *Accademia* classmate of the Vatican's current "interior minister" or *Sostituto*, Archbishop Angelo Becciu. Now the two of them will work together as the top assistants to Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/thoroughly-a-vatican-ii-man/331>

The return of the Letter from Rome

After a few months break, Robert Mickens' update from in and around the Vatican is back

October 1, 2014

As I was saying last time, before I was interrupted, Pope Francis is facing resistance to the fresh air and change of ethos he's trying to bring about inside the Church. And those with eyes to see can detect this opposition especially among the current crop of seminarians and younger priests, as well as a number of bishops.

“The resistance is coming from those that don't want to change,” says Professor Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Sant'Egidio Community here in Rome. In an interview some months ago, he pointed out that many regular folks all over the world were still enjoying a “honeymoon” with Papa Francesco. And he predicted that it would not wane quickly because it's “much more substantial” than a mere “media phenomenon”.

Precisely because there is substance to changes the 77-year-old Jesuit Pope is trying to inculcate in the Church, especially his effort to wipe out clericalism, resistance to

him has grown. However, it is not fashionable or favourable (especially to one's career) for clerics to go around bashing the Bishop of Rome. So they have to find another target.

This is exactly what happened during Benedict XVI's pontificate when the former pope's enemies chose his Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone SDB, as their surrogate punching bag.

Those hostile to Pope Francis and how he's governing the Vatican and the Universal Church have affixed the bull's eye on the backs of any number of people close to him. For example, in the first weeks of his papal ministry they tried to dig up dirt on some of Papa Bergoglio's closest aides, only to see their poisonous arrows deflected by a shrewd and self-composed man who will not cave in to blackmail.

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Cardinal Walter Kasper is the latest and most prominent among those taking a hit for Pope Francis.

His sin, in the eyes of certain defenders of Church orthodoxy, was that he dared to offer possible ways of allowing divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Holy Communion. He did this last February in a major address to all the cardinals. The Pope asked him to.

But negative reaction to Kasper's proposals (later published as a book) was swift and it continues. Up to 10 cardinals with conservative leanings have publically denounced his views; five of them piled together criticisms in their own book. More bishops will probably start openly espousing one of the two sides over the next two years as the Synod of Bishops deals with issues regarding the family.

Bishop Johan Bonny of Antwerp, a former official at the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has so far offered the most significant support of the Kasper position. In a 22-page paper he argued for carefully drafting a new approach to marriage and family life that would be marked by mercy, respect for individual conscience and even doctrinal developments. Like the cardinal, he has infuriated the self-styled guardians of Truth who loudly proclaim that Pope Francis does not support the Kasper-Bonny proposals, but who, privately, are not quite sure.

Among them is group of 48 intellectuals, mostly Catholics known to be aligned with conservative causes, who recently wrote an open letter to the Pope and the Synod. Included was an appeal to step up opposition to divorce and to reject any proposal that might threaten the indissolubility of marriage.

Can we assume that all the signatories are paradigms of the marriage model they want the Church to insist upon for others and not like the unmerciful servant in the Gospel (Mt 18, 21-35)?

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/good-to-see-you-again-return-of-the-letter-from-rome/129>

