

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE 2015 SYNOD?
OLD NUMBERING: PART 12
NEW NUMBERING: PART A

The Time In Between the Two Synods (Continued)

We are considering here what the Pope wanted at and for the Synod.

Fifthly, Francis wanted this to be a Synod of Mercy (and compassion). Cardinal Mar George Alenchery, major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church expressed this well. “Mercy will be the basis of Church unity at the Synod given Pope Francis’ constant call to mercy, the cardinal predicted” (Michael Swan, Associate Editor of The Catholic Register, “Synod fathers can learn from familial bond: Eastern Church example has much to pass along,” The Catholic Register, October 4, 2015). “This introduction of the roles of mercy to the normal functioning of the Church will give an added impetus to the families in the future Church. Jesus always looked on the sinner, those who failed, with mercy. He was ready to see them also as members of His flock. Even if one is gone astray, He asked the pastors to go and search. That kind of embracing all in the flock of Jesus Christ has to be re-established in the Church, that’s all.” (Alenchery)

The Cardinal doubts that there can be one answer to all the challenges families are facing in different cultures and different parts of the world. “This kind of approach has to be different in different cultures and in different churches. But it is not a diversity making the Church different in different countries” (Alenchery).

In the above, we can see that “Francis, indeed has made faith cool again ... He symbolizes piety in an age of self-serving people, service for others instead of self-enrichment, openness in an age of secrecy, and love of humanity instead of hatred.” (Opiyo Oloya, Superintendent of Education School Leadership, York Catholic District School Board, “Francis’ holiness inspires a whole new generation,” The Catholic Register, October 4, 2015)

In terms of what happened with the 2015 Synod, it is important also to keep in mind that Francis believes that “consultation is very important. The consistories [of cardinals], the synods [of bishops] are, for example, important places to make real and active this consultation. We must, however, give them a less rigid form. I do not want token consultations.” (Francis) “Francis also warned the synod fathers to avoid a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that prompts one to see skullduggery and manipulation in every quarter ... As Cardinal Donald Wuerl [of the United States] remarked, ‘If you are convinced this is all rigged, then you are going to see that everywhere.’.... Pope Francis has made it clear: The synodal process is complex, it is messy but it is not rigged ... I believe him.” (Father Matt Malone, S.J., President and Editor in Chief of America magazine, “Of Many Things” [editorial] in America, October 26, 2015)

Furthermore, “the emotional intensity of the synod was amped up because of perceptions that the pope’s position was still a work in progress ... And when Pope Francis is involved in anything, predictions about what might happen are notoriously hazardous.” (Allen)

As the Synod was beginning, there were some frank conservative worries about what was going to happen. As an example, I use an opinion piece in The Catholic Register of October 11, 2015, “Early thoughts on the Synod,” that was clearly and openly written by the theologian, Father Raymond J. de Souza. I quote certain parts of it at length so that you can get an unbiased look at this matter.

“The seeds of suspicion sown at last year’s [2014] Synod on the Family are now producing their predictable fruit. As the follow-up [2015] Synod gets underway, many people are ready to put the least favourable interpretation on matters. Hence what is heard and what is true – always a dodgy matter in Rome at the best of times – is all the more difficult to sort out...

“The Synod begins with an invocation of the Holy Spirit and in his opening address in the Synod hall Pope Francis spoke of the Synod as a ‘safe space’ for the Holy Spirit to work. Not a few Synod participants and observers have noted that in such gatherings the devil is also at work. Blessed John Henry Newman [19th century theologian], in his study of Church history, noted that councils and synods were times at which the evil one was especially active, seeking to undermine the work of the Holy Spirit ...

“Does the Synod matter? Of course it does. Yet various changes in the rules for this Synod are raising the question. Certain long-standing practices were ditched by the Synod managers on the eve of the Synod. There will be no propositions for the Synod fathers to vote on, one by one, as has always been the case. There will be no Interim report on the proceedings. There will only be a Final report, and the committee to draft it was appointed before the Synod even began, rather than being elected by the Synod participants. The Synod fathers will get to vote on the last day of the Synod on a report they will have only seen that morning.

“Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris opened the proceedings as one of the presiding officers, remarking that the recent reforms of the annulment procedures offer a model for the Synod’s work. He meant that doctrine was upheld while pastoral experience led to procedural reforms. Yet some considered that model an odd one for a Synod. The commission for reforming annulments was appointed by the Pope in August 2014 before last year’s [2014] Synod met, and produced its reforms before this year’s [2015] Synod met. It undertook no consultation with the bishops of the world ... Far from ‘synodality’ the annulment reforms were entirely the work of a papal commission working in secret.

“As customary at synods, there are ecumenical representatives. Metropolitan Hilarion, external affairs officer for the Russian Orthodox Church, is back, even after using his speech at the 2014 Synod to attack the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church for objecting to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, represented here by its patriarch and another bishop, feels betrayed by the Holy See’s deference to Russian Orthodoxy, which backs Vladimir Putin [Russia’s leader] to the hilt. The fact that Hilarion is here at all after his rudeness last year bodes ill for those who hope that the Holy Father will more robustly defend his Ukrainian [Catholic] flock.

“The early days of the Synod brought a distinctive Pope Francis touch – an eye-brow raising private conversation was released. The conversation is contained in a video about Francis responding to criticism over a bishop he appointed in Chile, despite accusation the bishop knew about the sexual abuse of a notorious priest predator and

did nothing about it. 'Don't be led around by the nose by these leftists who are the ones who put this (opposition) together'; the Pope is heard saying on the Video. That earned Pope Francis the criticism of a victim on his sexual abuse commission.

"On the second working day of the Synod, Pope Francis addressed the Synod unexpectedly to reiterate again that neither last year's [2014] Synod nor this year's [2015] Synod will change the Church's teaching on marriage. Still, some Synod fathers are nervous. After all, that doctrine won't change would be the assumption of participants. That it needs to be repeated constantly means that it is not." (Father Raymond J. de Souza)

Here is the background for the video mentioned by Father de Souza in the second last paragraph (above).

"A newly released video of the Pope has shown him defending the controversial Chilean Bishop of Osorno who has been accused of covering up child abuse. The Pope is recorded saying the protests against Bishop Juan Barros were 'plotted' by 'lefties' and that the Church in Chile 'has lost its head' allowing politicians to 'make judgements about a bishop, with no proof.'

"Bishop Barros was ordained in March 21 [2015] amidst chaos caused by hundreds of protesters both inside and outside the cathedral in Osorno [Chile]. He is accused of having known about the abuse committed by Fernando Karadima in the 1980s and 1990s and later of ignoring complaints against the priest.

"Osorno is suffering, yes, because it is stupid and because it does not open its heart to God's words but allows itself to be carried away by the rubbish it hears', said the Pope. The video was recorded by a bystander in St. Peter's Square in May [2015] and shows Francis talking to a group of Chilean visitors. 'Don't be led around by the nose by these lefties, who put this plot together,' he is heard saying." (Isabel de Bertodano, journalist for The Tablet, "Chile" Video shows Francis condemning Barros protests," October 10, 2015)

Since this is not reflecting our Holy Father in the best of light, it is important to quickly look at the judicial aspects of this whole situation. We do that now with help from the journalist Soli Salgado's article, "Video shows pope's defense of Chilean bishop," in the National Catholic Reporter of October 23 – November 5, 2015.

"Though evidence of the abuse [in question above] was verified by Chile's judicial court, the statute of limitations allowed Father Fernando Karadima to dodge prosecution. When a separate Vatican investigation found the priest guilty of abuse, he was condemned in 2011 to a life of prayer and penance in a convent outside Santiago [Chile] ...

"Though Barros was never tried for covering up Karadima's abuse, testimonial evidence has suggested Barros destroyed incriminating correspondence, while other victim testimonies claimed Barros was present during the sexual acts. Though Chilean courts uphold the testimonial evidence, Barros has denied the allegations and has never faced a canonical or civil case ...

"In the video, Francis said, 'The only charges brought against Barros were discredited by the judicial court, so please do not lose serenity ... I am the first to try to punish someone with these types of accusations. But in this case there is no proof – on

the contrary, I say this from the heart. Do not be fooled by those who only look for fuss, who look for scandal.’...

“The Karadima case touches Francis not just through Barros: in 2013, Francis appointed Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz Ossa – Karadima’s most powerful defender, and Santiago’s archbishop from 1998 to 2010 – as one of nine on the Council of Cardinals, a group that advises the pope. Juan Carlos Cruz, one of Karadima’s alleged victims who testified Barros was present during the sexual acts, has long been outspoken in accusing Errázuriz of conspiracy.

“In early September 2015, a Chilean newspaper published an email exchange (dated 2013 and 2014) between Errázuriz and his successor, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati. In the emails, which the archdiocese confirmed were authentic, the two cardinals discussed how to block Cruz from being invited to speak at a meeting of the pope’s child protection commission ...

“The video of Francis was released after Errázuriz testified in a civil lawsuit against the archdiocese, filed by Cruz and two others who say Karadima abused them.

“The accusations against Errázuriz assert that the cardinal was fully aware yet chose to ignore the abuse as early as 2003. In his five-hour testimony, Errázuriz admitted that he knew of the allegations against Karadima, but said he failed to act because he sincerely believed the charges were untrue.” (Salgado)

I think it is true to say that our Holy Father was not his best on this video and it complicated his task to get the 2015 Synod to function at its best. (The video got a lot of media attention as the Synod was meeting.) No one is perfect, including our Holy Father, and we should not expect that someone could be perfect in this life. The incident recorded on this video did shake me up a bit (as it did some others) but it was easy for me to let it go because I still consider Francis to be the best pope we have had in my lifetime. For some, it would have been better if it had never happened but we all make mistakes and we must move on. Let us move on, forget this incident as something due to our weak human nature, and focus again on the Synod itself.

Before we end, please allow me to return to Father de Souza’s comments (shared with you above). I respect Father as a theologian and I uphold his right to state what he thinks regarding the Synod but I (and many others) do not agree with him in respect to all he has written. As for yourself, think about it and make up your own mind on the matter. Thank you.

TO BE CONTINUED

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