

Politics & The Pulpit:



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Thank you very much for your very kind introduction. I'm very glad to be here. It's an important moment in the life of the Church globally and in the United States. And so I really appreciate this opportunity because it allows me to think more deeply about a few things that have happened in these last few years and that are going to happen. Because you may have heard today the news that on the 29th of October, President Biden will be received in the Vatican by Pope Francis, which is two weeks from now. The 29th of October will be two weeks before the U.S. bishops meet in Baltimore for their fall assembly, where they supposedly will discuss the document on the Eucharist, which is an idea that surfaced almost one year ago when Joe Biden, the second Catholic president, was elected.

It's a very interesting time, also, because, as you know, last week in the Vatican, Pope Francis opened the synodal process leading to the synod of bishops in Rome of October 20-23. And what is supposed to happen in every diocese in the world, including in this country, this Sunday, in two and a half days, is that every bishop should open a synodal process locally in their diocese.

It's a very, very important moment. And with all possible humility, someone who was born and raised in Italy and came to this country only 13 years ago, I would like to offer some ideas about the intersection of the Church, of faith, and of public life in this country in light of these last few years that in my opinion have been revealing of some dynamics of our time.

Why is this moment very particular? Well, because if something happens only twice in more than two centuries, it means that we should pay attention. So, this is the second time this country has a Catholic president, Joe Biden, and it's very different from the time of the first Catholic president, John Kennedy. In 1960, the problem was, can a Catholic be elected president. And it is a problem that was very clear in the minds of the Democratic Party even before 1960, when young John Kennedy had the idea of running in 1956. And his party told him, it's not going to happen; it's impossible.

It did happen in 1960, and John Kennedy made it happen also because of his choice of framing his Catholicism in a particular way, in a way that was fundamentally private, not too public, which is very different from what we see from Joe Biden, who is a Catholic in the full sense of the word. He's a very public Catholic. He's a very traditional one. He's very devout. In some sense, he's not the typical Vatican II Catholics. Vatican II Catholics are not known for carrying a rosary in their pockets. So it's a particular kind of Catholic.

But despite all of that, the problem that Joe Biden faced last year at the time of the election, and still faces, is not like at the time of Kennedy—can a Catholic be a president of the United States. Joe Biden's problem is, what kind of Catholic. Because he's the wrong kind of Catholic in the eyes of many fellow Catholics and of many other who have a religious faith in this country.

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This is an extraordinary moment in the life of the United States, which is still very much inspired by a religious sense of itself. Even for those Americans who are not religious, America is religion in some sense. And so this is a very particular moment.

What has happened in these last few months or year that did not happen with John Kennedy in 1960 is that there has been the project or some attempt by Catholics, and a good number of Catholic bishops, of declaring Joe Biden not Catholic anymore or of abandoning Joe Biden in a place that was deserted by Church leadership. This is something that is still in the works in the minds of some. There is still an attempt going on for very serious reasons. Abortion is a very serious moral matter that has been framed in the legislation in this country in ways that are quite different from the way it has been legislated in European countries, for example. So, I think it would be a mistake to underestimate or belittle the serious concerns that some have for some very serious moral issues in this country.

But despite all that, I believe there is a very, very serious problem in these attempts of Church leaders to abandon in public, and at the highest public level, which is in liturgy, a Catholic who serves as president of the United States. I am very sensitive to this, despite my being Italian and not being a U.S. citizen, because this reminds me of something that happened just a couple of years before I left Italy in 2007, where there was a very committed public Catholic serving as prime minister, Romano Prodi. The antagonist, the opponent, of Silvio Berlusconi. You may have heard of him.

I remember that what Italian bishops did with Romano Prodi, a very faithful Catholic, was to declare him *persona non grata*, a Catholic who whom they did not want to deal. And most remarkably, back then, the cardinal president of the Italian Bishop Conference, was the same clergyman who, as a young priest, had celebrated the marriage of the young and future prime minister, Romano Prodi, the same person. So that was extraordinary. I have seen before bishops abandoning and declaring this Catholic prime minister or president, head of state, we don't like him; we don't want to deal with him.

But what is happening in this country is more serious because we are talking about a U.S. Bishop Conference that is debating a document that could send a message aimed at excluding the second Catholic president from communion, which is something that goes against not just canon law, because the Bishop Conference has no jurisdiction, no authority on this, but it also goes against tradition, because there's never been anything like that.



I just want to offer a few thoughts about all this that is happening from the point of view of an historian and a theologian who tries to step back a little from the day-in, day-out noise of statements and so on. So, here, I believe the first element of context for these considerations on the intersection of faith and public life is this: that clearly, there is a new horizon that John Kennedy did not have to deal with at all, the rise of biopolitics, life issues—abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage. So that is something that is common to the Church worldwide. It's not just America; it is Europe, it is Latin America, and it will be, or it is already, in different fashions on other continents.

But there's something more. In this country, the United States, the very old, centuries-old sectarian temptations that really do not belong to Catholic world views, to divide the world in good and bad people, found, in this country, an extraordinary device to amplify that mentality, which is a two-party system, which you don't have in any other major country where there is a sizable Catholic population.

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What is the product of this two-party system? It is a two-party church. We have a two-party Catholic Church. So this is not just something that affects the behavior at the polls every four or two years, but it has penetrated, really, the minds of Americans, of our minds and of Catholics.

Here, there is the attempt of using the sacraments and the personal faith of a Catholic whose position on some policies is exactly the same of roughly fifty percent of his fellow Catholics, the temptation is to use these sacraments not just as a weapon but as a counter-sacrament. It is one of the many contradictions—not paradoxes, because paradoxes are essential for the faith, but real contradictions, which are negative things—which, the most important debate we are having about communion in this country is about excluding someone from communion. And it's excluding the most visible Catholic leader of this country.

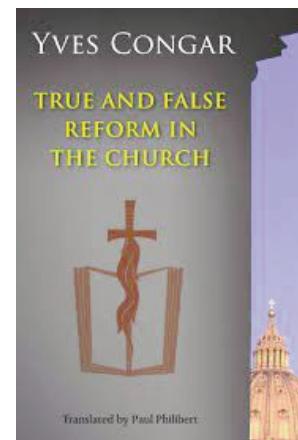
So here, there is, I believe, something at the heart of this that we should consider very seriously. It is one of the effects of reducing everything, even religion, even our faith, even the Church, a certain healthy sense of the Church, of reducing that to the plane of an exclusively social and political level, as if the fact that one goes to communion is not something that is, first of all, political, but it is first of all religious. It has to do with his faith, with what happens after we're not here anymore.

This is something that has penetrated, I believe, in fairness, both the right and the left, the reduction of the life of the Church, of the fundamental elements of the Catholic faith, even the sacraments, to the level of what is politically usable, what is politically expedient. That is a perversion that we have seen very clearly in these last few months with what's happening with Joe Biden.

Now, there is a particularly dangerous version of this association of religion and politics, of Catholicism and a political ideology on the right. That is—I don't have to tell you that—on the right. It's something that we Vatican II Catholics should wake up. It is not something that will go away and end up in the

dust bin of history. It is there. It is something we should not dismiss as the remains of a past history; it is our history.

Now, here, there are some things that are coming up in a particularly strident and vocal opposition, if not condemnation, of Joe Biden and of his presidency coming from a conservative Catholic culture. That is very interesting because it is basically the blow-by-blow description of what one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the 20th century, Yves Congar, a French Dominican and one of the most influential advisors to the Second Vatican Council, described as the typical political, theological ideology of the extreme right.



There is a very interesting appendix to his book of 1950 on the true and false reform of the Church. He had a second edition of that book in 1968, a fateful year, the 1968 edition of that book preface that he wrote looking from his windows at what was happening in the streets of Paris in May 1968. So, he was extremely attentive to what was happening.

So here, Congar wrote a very interesting couple of pages on the connection there is between what he called a right-wing mentality and integralism. And I believe that with minimal adaptations, it is something we could use to understand some fundamental features of the attempt of conservative Catholic culture in this country to distort a healthy balance in our Catholic faith.

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So, here there are eight elements that Congar, in 1968, identified as typical of the connections between right-wing mentality or integralism, and Catholicism.

1. A deep pessimism about human nature.
2. A belief in the need for strong authority.
3. Distrust of any doctrinal development.
4. An inclination to ensure that Catholicism doesn't become too easy.
5. An emphasis on dogmatic formulas over the subjective reality of faith.
6. A preference for deductive reasoning over inductive reasoning.
7. Ecclesial authoritarianism or dictatorship in the Church.
8. The idea that the ecclesiology of the Church should be shaped not by the mystical dimension but by a rigid hierarchy.

This is striking, because almost sixty years ago, Yves Congar described with shocking precision something that has remained a typical part of this connection between right-wing mentality and Catholic integralism.

Now, why is this coming to an explosive moment right now in this country, in the United States, at this juncture between faith and public life? Well, because Pope Francis is stuck between the global church and American politics. He's a global pope for a church that is becoming much more global than before. But when he talks to American Catholics, to U.S. bishops, he has to deal in one way or another with American politics, and not just American Church politics, because all bishops in the world, in every country, they do church politics, all of them. But with Congress politics, Senate politics, Supreme Court politics.

This is happening right now, because what we have seen, as I said earlier, in this country, a two-party system has created a two-party Church in a particular way because a majority of the U.S. bishops have become—and it's a funny joke, but it happens to be real—they look like the Republican Party. That is what has happened.

So, here, we have that the leadership of the Catholic Church in this country has accepted, has interjected in their bodies, in their minds, in their souls, this idea that the world is made of two parties. And, therefore, the Church is made of two parties. And so a certain language, a certain idea of the other, a certain way of framing the issues, has started to mirror the language, the tactics, the imagination of a political party.

I'm not blaming any one individual leader in this. I believe there is a wide responsibility that goes back many years that is not just bishops, but it is part of the contingent, of the elites who have a voice in the Church.

We have this very particular moment, because on the one hand we have Joe Biden, a Catholic who was elected president way after anyone could imagine that he could be elected, because, if you remember, in 2015, 2016, he said, I'm out of here. I'm not going to be running. So that is a surprising element. And so this is the first element that is causing waves, the troubles on this issue.

But on the other side there is Pope Francis. And now, in the Catholic Church, and this is something that would require hours to explain, but the papacy as a ministry in the Church, as a function, is essentially incompatible with the idea of a two-party church. The papacy, as being imperial for so many centuries, monarchical, you can call the papacy many things, but if there is one thing that makes me attracted to that history is that it's a function that is essentially the opposite of a partisan leader.

This is something that we have seen lately. We have a papacy that has become less patient with the partisanship of some Church leaders—in this country, but not only. And on top of that, you have Pope Francis, who is a Jesuit from Latin America, who has a critical view of the United States, of America in general. For him, modern history, yes, begins with America, but with Latin America, not North America. It is a completely different view of modern history, of when history starts.

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He has no patience with this idea that the United States has a special blessing coming from God, that the United States has a special destiny in world history, the beacon, and all of that. You cannot expect that from Pope Francis.

So that is something that has, I believe, upset the expectations and the understandings of many Catholics in this country that had been used to something that was not of use. And that happened for a series of reasons, which is the pontificates of Pope John II and Pope Benedict XVI, almost 35 years, two popes who were Americanophiles, who looked at the United States with a very keen eye, because of Communism, because of the push-back on life issues. And so at least two generations of Catholics in this country got used to the idea that the papacy and the United States are natural allies.

In Augustine's terms, it is PERMIXTA; it's a mixed body. Not just of saints and sinners—mostly sinners, as we all know—but also, of people who are different, look different, think differently.

Well, that has never been true between 1978 and 2013. That was an exception. And so now Pope Francis has brought back some realism and some pragmatism that has to do with Joe Biden and his particular situation, but also because there is a papacy that is getting back some of its ministry by not acting in a partisan way, not just domestically in this country but, for example, on the world stage. A pope that visits Iraq sends a particular kind of message, and I don't have to explain to you what kind of message that is.

My final point is this. There are many problems in the intersection between faith and public life. The usual progressive or liberal pieties that we used to exchange in the 1990s were upset and were no longer valid, really, after 9/11, after 2001. It's even been worse in these last few years after Brexit. The ecological crisis should force all of us to reexamine our comfort zone, what we think the role of the Church and of religion should be in public life, or shouldn't, all of us.

In the immediate short term, I believe the biggest problem and temptation is the temptation of sectarian-ism, this idea that we can save ourselves by retreating or remaining in our small, isolated worlds. So, you may have heard of the book that was published in 2009, the Big Sword, how Americans have become more entrenched in their communities, where everyone votes in the same way, reads the same stuff, looks the same.

Well, this is happening in the Church as well. You may have heard of the Benedict Option. There is on the market of the Catholic Church a number of very attractive products—boutique liturgies, religious cyber entities that are tailored, are customized, for all of us.

The Church is something bigger. It's supposed to be bigger. It's supposed to have people together who do not look the same, do not think the same, do not vote the same way. In Augustine's terms, it is PERMIXTA; it's a mixed body. Not just of saints and sinners—mostly sinners, as we all know—but also, of people who are different, look different, think differently. And so this sorting out, this big sword, has happened in our social life, in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our economic life, but also in our Church.

And this is, I believe, the biggest danger of this discussion that is happening with Joe Biden and the Eucharist and so on, because this time may be the policies on abortion, but next time it will be something else.

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In the end, we will find a church where the idea of being together, at liturgy together, despite every-thing, will be lost. And I'm not sure what happens the day after that concept is lost. As a theologian, as an historian, as a Catholic,

I believe this is an utter perversion of the idea of the liturgy and of the idea of the Church. And of course, this is something that calls all of us to examine our sense of the Church. All of us have some issues at heart that we think are decisive. And we should continue to cherish them and work for them, be active, advocate.

At the same time, if that idea of the agenda becomes overwhelming, it can really lead to a very dangerous moment in the life of the Church, which is already very fragile, very unstable for so many reasons. So, this is, I believe, the time of recovering a certain sense of the Church, *sensus ecclesiae*, that is being threatened by an overwhelming social and political element. So, here, there is a message that is credible if it is not visible in what we do, of course. But there is also something that should be kept safe from the day-by-day political controversies, and this moment is one of those moments where we see that risk being the highest.

So here, I've offered you a thought. I'm very happy to be here, and I am very curious to hear from you and to hear your questions, but also comments. Thank you very much.

Moderator: Thank you. So, we are going to open this up for a few questions.

Brad: Thank you, Professor. It's a very insightful talk. I've had the privilege of hearing you before and am glad to hear you once again. My question is this. This goes to the point of excommunication. I'm aware of several situations—first, in principle, I have to say, an organization ought to have the right to excommunicate. The question is, how and why.

In the past, there was a traditional way, which was, if there was a teacher or bishop or someone who taught against the Church, they'd be given an opportunity to recant and if they chose not to, they might be excommunicated. Martin Luther, "Here I stand. I can do no other," and others.

Second, for some odd reason, we chose to extend that to persons who marry, get a civil divorce, and remarry without an annulment. And now we're talking about doing it for people who hold certain political views, at least political leaders.

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My question is, I am willing to accept that an organization ought to be able to choose who its members are, but why wouldn't the same opportunity for some kind of due process and discussion be afforded to people In Category 3, the political view, or even Category 2, the divorce and remarriage, that was afforded to someone like Martin Luther, who arguably caused a lot more disruption, much of it positive?

Massimo Fagioli: The present discussion on Joe Biden and the Eucharist is not really excommunication; it's exclusion from communion. It's a bit different. So, you would not be deprived of a funeral, for example. It would be the Eucharist only. And so it's a bit different here.

You're right that those who want to go ahead and say Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi should not go to the Eucharist are not following procedure. You're right, because canon laws says a few things. It should be the local ordinary.

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If you ask a canon lawyer, he or she will tell you that in tradition, if there is a doubt on the admissibility of a head of state to communion, in history it was always up to the pope to make the final decision. So, here, these bishops are really trying to enforce a law, but the law is not on their side. That's one problem here.

So, there is due process in the Church, or there should be the certainty of the law. Thank God that things are not always done by the book in the Catholic Church. If they were done always by the book, it would be an insufferable church. Here, you're right: In extreme cases, you have to know what are your rights. I know the bishops don't have the law on their side here. My preference is to make a theological argument that's based on prudence and on wisdom much more than on the basis of the law. But you're right, there is a legal aspect that is being ignored by some of them.



Barbara: Massimo, I find it very contradictory. The bishops seem to be involved in partisan politics. But then when it comes to the issues of our time, many bishops, many priests say it doesn't belong in church, and so we don't talk about racism in Church. We don't talk about poverty or the climate or whatever. So that is very contradictory.

And then secondly, the problem I have is, they said they wanted to do this anyway so there weren't abuses of the Eucharist. However, the Eucharist is supposed to be a sacrament of healing, forgiveness, inclusion, and union, and yet we want to find so many ways of excluding people. And thirdly, we tend to think of the Eucharist of just being the moment that you receive Eucharist and there's not enough catechesis about being eucharist once you leave the church door. So, all of those things are percolating in me.

Massimo Faggioli: Sure. So, on number two and three, you're right. I don't have anything to add. On number one, you're right. So, there are some issues that are considered politically relevant and others that aren't. In all fairness, that's true, in some sense on both sides of the aisle in different ways.

Now, there is one fundamental issue here. The choice of what issues can be talked about in Church is much more critical in a church like in the United States, which needs to survive through the donations of the faithful, because there are some parishes that are talking about abortion, or other parishes talk about racism, that will receive the support of the parishioners. It is a problem that poor churches or churches that are supported by taxpayers' money, like in many countries, leaves those churches free to speak, while in this country, we know that there is a system of funding churches at the local level that need a certain kind of support locally. And at the highest level, we know that there are some wealthy Catholics in this country whose agenda is very clear against the environment, against workers' unions, and so on, and they can be very convincing. Let's say that. So, their unlimited checkbook speaks volumes.

This is a very serious problem, and I agree, the choice that U.S. bishops made in 2019—so, the year before the campaign of 2020—was to declare abortion the preeminent issue. And after that, knowing that Donald Trump would have run a pro-life campaign—so they knew what would be the result of that.

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But you're right, there is a very idiosyncratic choice of what issues I want to talk about as a bishop or as a parish priest in my...yes.

Rita: Thank you very much, Massimo. It was really very wonderful to hear you. So, I'll just play out this scenario, especially as you were speaking about this entanglement of our U.S. bishops in the two-party system. And if they're thinking politically—and I don't know what they're thinking. Bishop Cardinal Gregory, who is the ordinary for Joe Biden's parish, has already said that he is not going to ban him from communion. So, now you have executive committee issuing a statement. Let's say they do it, this formal statement. And then you have the local cardinal saying, no, I have the authority. And you have Pope Francis meeting with Biden and clearly saying, let's talk about poverty, let's talk about the climate and Catholics' responsibilities there.

It just feels like a Vesuvius. I know you can't predict, but maybe you know something about the way some of the minds are operating on that executive committee. It just seems like it's a problem that doesn't have to happen.

Massimo Fagioli: First, whatever the USCCB says in this document, if it's approved, no one can force Cardinal Gregory to do something that he doesn't want to do. Second, we know that if such a document is approved, it could legitimate some actions of other bishops in the diocese, other areas of the country, where President Biden might, in official travel, visit where other Catholic politicians live. So, here, I don't think it will be a problem for Joe Biden in Washington, D.C. I think it could be a problem if he travels and stays more than one day or over a weekend in San Francisco or in Denver. That could be a problem.

So, if that document is approved, the issue is bigger than just Washington, D.C. Also, for how the Catholic Church works today, it's not unlikely to have an individual parish priest who has heard of this document and takes matters in his own hands

and says, well, I'm following the CCG on this. He's regarding what his bishop says about this.

So, it would have consequences anyway, I believe, and there's no way that, as I said, Pope Francis can intervene dictatorially on the U.S. bishops. Those bishops have no authority to mandate a policy in individual dioceses, but they can send a certain kind of message that can be interpreted by some bishops in a certain way, and for a Catholic idea that in the local church the local bishop is ultimately responsible for his church, it's not imaginable that the Swiss Guards will be parachuted into the dioceses of Denver and they will take over.

So, we will see what happens.

Mike: When you were talking about Yves Congar, you mentioned the eight characteristics of the attitude of the right vis-a-vis integralism. What do you mean by integralism?

Massimo Fagioli: Integralism is a particular kind of understanding, the Catholic faith that was typical of the 19th century, early 20th century, and we thought it was going to go away, that it would be forgotten. But actually, in this last few years it has returned in this country, if you know some authors. So, integralism means this. One has to apply the truth of the Catholic faith integrally to the social life, to the political life, without compromises, without adaptations, without concessions. Of course, this is a fiction, because there is no complete package of Catholicism that you can say, okay, I have it and I will apply it here without compromises. This has never happened.

But that was a post-French Revolution ideology that says, we have to fight back against modernity, against atheism and so on, and the only way to do this is to reapply Catholicism integrally to our public life, to our legislation and policies. And this is something that a few important Catholic authors in this country are arguing for openly. For example, I've read this last year of an important Harvard professor of law, by the way, who said, we should welcome migrants in this country, but only Catholic

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migrants, not non-Catholic ones. That is integral's policy in his view, which happens to be anti-Christian, in my opinion.

But that is just one way to translate integralism. Without concessions, without adaptations, everything as it is, but of course, in the way I understand it, because there is no perfect, 100%, pure Catholic message that can be agreed upon, not even in the Vatican. As you know, the Vatican doesn't have workers' rights. Lay workers in the Vatican have no workers' rights. And so not even in the Vatican are they integralists.



Massimo Faggioli: Let me say this. The Catholic Church, the Church, and especially Catholicism, is political, shouldn't be partisan. These are two different things. So, here, at a local level, it means to present, when one speaks or preaches on relevant issues, to present all issues at the same level of importance that they deserve. So, here, I don't think that in a parish, there should be more prayers for the Philadelphia Eagles or Boston Red Sox or whatever than for Iraq. One example. There should be an effort to be the person who represents, especially if one has a role of leadership, on all issues that are at the heart of the Catholic teaching. Social issues and so on.

That is not happening when we have consciously or unconsciously adopted a two-party system where you choose automatically where you belong. That is going to make any church leader who does that in this country unpopular with a certain percentage of these people. There's no question about that. So, there is a cost in the short-term. But in the long term, I think that it will pay in terms of authority and of credibility—I believe.

Peter: Massimo, I should mention I am from Australia, where, as you know, we've just completed the First Assembly of our Plenary Council. I am fascinated, in your introduction, of party politics, which obviously does apply to Australia as well as to America, I would suggest. But I wonder what you think about this proposition that this really wouldn't be such a problem if bishops were accountable.

The bishops are, in fact, part of a very autocratic system, and certainly in Australia, there are many bishops who feel no need to consult with their people, who are happy to take decisions without being in touch with their people. And of course, it's also an all-male hierarchy, very much an antiquated command-and-control model.

But what we need in the Church is being addressed by Pope Francis's approach to synodality, which requires a recognition that leaders actually listen to the people around them. But it needs to go much further than that, particularly on the issue of the 'unequality' of women or the exclusion of women from the governance of the Church. It's that hierarchical, autocratic, all-male system which is not good leadership and doesn't consult that reinforces the prejudices of those people in the hierarchy and the effectiveness of those prejudices.

Massimo Faggioli :I agree with you, generally speaking. Pope Francis has been pope for eight and a half years. The clerical system we have is 1,000 years old. So, there's a sheer number of years of time that we need to understand to proceed to a model that is more adequate. I have no love of that.

Now, not all systems that are antiquated are bad. So, here, for example, the papacy is very antiquated. I would choose the papacy every time of every day of the week and twice on Sunday compared to the Silicon Valley model of leadership.

Here, I am not a defender of this system, even though I have to say I've worked much more and much better with the Australian bishops than with the U.S. bishops.

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So, you're right, what you're doing in Australia is frustrating, I guess, but it's much more than we in the West can imagine, I can assure you of that.

Here there is this moment. It's about pushing, pushing, pushing, and working for what can be achieved. What's happening right now ten years ago was in no one's mind—maybe God's mind. But no one could imagine what is happening now. Under Pope Benedict and John Paul II, synodality, or synods, were a synonym of who cares—literally.

I understand your frustration, but something is moving. And I don't know where it's going, but I also know that it will be very hard to go back to where it was before. That's what I can say.

When Vatican II was opened in 1962, most experts said, this council will go nowhere because the Roman Curia has a grip on everything; nothing will happen. At Christmas we'll all be home and nothing in 1963 will be different.

Well, a few things have happened since then.

Sister Marie: My question is based on the last gentleman's comments—I think Peter—because you opened up by talking about the synod. I have been reading a great deal about it, and in every article, the word 'listen' is probably said a thousand times—that it is to listen, to listen, to listen. I have also been doing a great deal of reading about the traditionalist in the Church today, and I'm becoming more and more aware of just how strident the voice has become in that regard.

And I guess I'm asking you to guess, or to look into a crystal ball—and maybe you've just answered the question. No one would have expected that Vatican II would have the results that it did have. So, maybe in my fear the synod, that people won't listen. Maybe I should look back at Vatican II and take that example? Because I want to believe that the Spirit will work in this synod as it did through Vatican II.

Massimo Faggioli: So, the synod between now and the next 24 months, the result will be, if anything, a compromise on some issues—first. Second, if there's something that must be said, Catholics who see themselves in a tradition of Vatican II and so on are open to synodality, to the idea of the synod, while on the traditional side, if you just read what they are saying, they think it's all trash; it's something not worth the attention.

That is a fact. Again, I do think that on some issues there will be a compromises with a more conservative Catholic culture, locally and internationally. But in all, I believe that if Pope Francis has called a synod, it is out of a fundamental fidelity to the Second Vatican Council—in the way he sees it of course.

I believe that those who don't believe in synodality will, in the end, exclude themselves and they will try to wait [things] out. I'm not sure that this is going to work for them because it's a global process. And if, now, a hierarchy that is out of touch, is not respected, is not taken seriously right now, I don't think the situation will be better in two years—unless...this is the game of some—so, they plan to be masters of a much smaller church. That is a big risk and that could happen.

If we look at what has happened in these last few years after the launch of the Benedict option and all that, what has happened there? Nothing. The idea of a purer, smaller church is unworkable because in the end, every idea can be tested as to its validity by pushing it to an extreme. So, if you push an idea to an extreme, what is the extreme of the purer, smaller church? It is a church made of one, which in the end is not something you really want to be a member of. Really.

I believe that there is no plan there that is a real alternative to synodality. That's my conviction.

Moderator: I have to get your opinion on this, because I know you wrote a little bit about it. At the Amazon synod, we had bishops making recommendations.

Politics & The Pulpit:

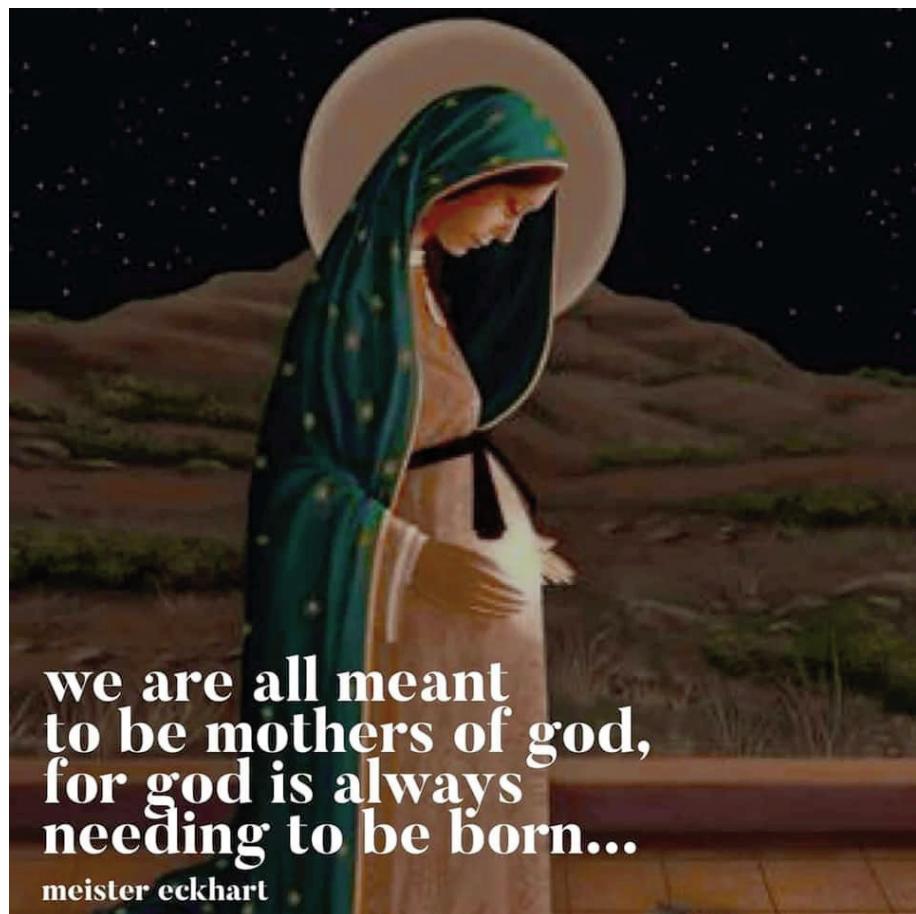
This was all supposed to become part of ordinary magisterium if they could agree. And then Pope Francis says, basically, no. And I'm talking about the idea of a married priesthood and even the idea of discussing women deacons. And I know you wrote about the limitations of synodality because your piece was important to me at that time. How do you see that as we move forward to this next synod process? I know it's going to be a compromise—of course. But what is the likelihood that something can actually come from the people and it will become part of ordinary magisterium, or how we function, how we work.

Massimo Fagioli: What Pope Francis did in 2020 was for the moment not to accept that recommendation. For the moment, because he has really not come out strongly against that. He

simply said, I don't think that it was the fruit of a genuine synodal decision, which I think was his way of saying, I don't like it.

This idea keeps coming up. It will be difficult to reject it. If you know what happened last week in France, the commission's report on sex abuse crisis, one of the recommendations is for Pope Francis to go back to that suggestion of the Amazon synod and implement, as an experiment, the ordination of married men. So this is not something that has gone away.

If it keeps coming up, I don't think it will be easy to pretend that this idea doesn't exist.



Prayer to the Mother of God, Mary

*Holy Mary,
Mother of Jesus the Christ
priestly woman and holy prophetess,
who carried in your very body
the Gospel of Peace—
we greet you,
and we ask you to be our mother as well.*

*Holy Mother of God,
whose sign in our presence is creation,
whose sacrament is the eath,
mother who is to us both womb and tomb—
we praise you.
Your jewels are the riches of beauty in all creation
sparkling forth in flower bloom,
bird wing and rainbow-sing-sign.*

*We honor you, Mary, wife of Joseph and mother of Christ.
Hostess to angels, patroness to contemplatives,
guide to pilgrims, inspiration to poets,
light to those who wander in the darkness
in response to the voice of God—
we honor you
and ask to be united with you.*

*United with you, we will be one with God.
United with you, we will be open to the will of God.
United with you, we too will feel the mystery of Christ,
alive within us.*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us!

Amen+

*Prayers for a Domestic Church
Fr. Ed Hayes*