

A Path To Freedom



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I. The Beginning

Luke tells us how it all began. He liked to do this. He begins the story of Jesus with the conception, the only evangelist to do so. In Acts, he gives us the conception of the Christian Community, as it were on Pentecost, and this also by the Spirit.

Luke writes that the community, not just the apostles, are gathered: "all of them in one place." He adds: "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" and, indeed "all of them began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2). Luke has Peter declare that your sons and your daughters are prophets; today, your young men see visions and your old men dream dreams.

The Church is born as a community. All are given the Spirit; all preach; all see; all have visions and dreams. It is Pentecost.

Two millennia later, in our era, Vatican II, the first Council in Church history to deal with the laity as a structure of the Church, captures this Pentecost theme. It teaches that Tradition and Scripture were entrusted to the "practice and life of the believing...church", not solely to the episcopal magisterium. The community determines which books make up the New Testament, what they mean and how they can be brought to life in the Church (Dei Verbum, 8).

The marks or signs of the Catholic Church are found in the community,

derived from the Spirit, of course, but made visible by the community. The community makes the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

The gathering of the faithful makes the Church one. Baptism unites the Church, not ordination.

The faithful make the Church holy, through, what Vatican II called, its practice of the faith and its spirituality (Dei Verbum 8).

Without the faithful dispersed through the world, the Church is not catholic or universal.

Indeed, the Church is apostolic because the community accepts the Christ the apostles and the apostolic age proclaimed. This apostolic faith has its origins, not only in the Twelve, but in the women at the cross and the disciples who buried Jesus, and the Easter faith of Magdalene. The acceptance of faith by the Twelve certainly matters but Pentecost celebrates the fact that the Twelve chosen by Jesus have become a larger community, commissioned by Christ in the Spirit. Apostolicity refers to a period in the Church's life, not to the Twelve alone. No one in the first century feared the Church would die when the Twelve died. The larger Church had received Pentecost and the Spirit and the dreams and the visions. The New Testament is clear about this.

Without the community at large, the Church cannot be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Period.

Hearing the Voice of the Faithful

Eastern Christianity understood the link between baptism and the community better than Western Christianity did, Christianity, in the West, is only a partial Church without the East and vice versa. John Paul II reminded us that the Church has only one lung without the East. We can conclude from this that the breath of the Spirit does not breathe fully in the body of the Church if it is received with only one lung.

In the West, in the fifth century, baptism was linked, by Augustine, to original sin. Augustine was brilliant beyond description. But he got this wrong. In the East, where Christianity began and where all the Councils of the first millennium were held, the focus in baptism was on becoming the People of God.

The Church learns, early in its history, that the Spirit is best discerned in community, in councils, in synods. The Church learns also that the Spirit is revealed in the history of the People of God. It is not given all at once. Jesus at the Last Supper told us this. There were other lessons, he observed, that could not be received now, all in one moment.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you but, whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant... (Matthew 20: 25-26).

Thus, the acceptance of the Gentiles was not credible to the Church in the year 35 and yet became doctrine in the year 50 at the Jerusalem Council.

In our era, we have seen that women priests were not a credible option for the community a century ago and seem to be an imperative now; ecumenism was unthinkable for Catholics at large in 1865 and became conciliar teaching in 1965; a lay-led

Communion Service was prohibited in 1935 and promoted in 1995.

What made the difference? The community and its experience with Gentiles or women or Protestants or enlightened laity. The Spirit led the community to accept what Church administrators once denounced. The norm through Church history has been this: Church administrators follow what the community at large accepts. Church administrators matter but never as much as the community does.

We were told: “when two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them” (Matthew 18: 20). Notice there is no hierarchy in that number. We were taught:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you but, whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...(Matthew 20: 25-26).

Is this not clear?

Then how did we miss it?

II. The Community and Doctrine

There are three magisterial or teaching structures in the Church: episcopal (papal), theological, communitarian. Teaching is formally expressed by the episcopal magisterium. This teaching is not authentic and cannot be considered infallible unless a genuine dialogue among bishops and theologians and the community at large is a substantial part of it.

John Henry Newman, in his classic 1859 document, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine” said it well:

...the body of the faithful...and their consensus is the voice of the Infallible Church...

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The chronological order in which the Church understands its faith is, first, *sensus fidelium*. This *sensus* is the response the community makes to whatever it receives. From this response, Tradition emerges. These unwritten resources guide the Church for the first few centuries, including, of course, the apostolic age. Eventually, both of them lead to the written Scripture, which comes last.

What this Scripture is, which books make it up, and what they mean depend upon the *sensus fidelium* and Tradition. Scripture emerges in the Church from the community at large; there is no record anywhere that it came about after a meeting of Church administration or in any other way. Scripture becomes the privileged expression of this faith, a faith already there. It is, then, not a text-book written by a few but a communal endeavor developed by all.

Around the year 67, the original apostles who knew the pre-Easter Jesus have died. Except for the seven authentic Pauline letters, most of the New Testament is written after their death. The first Gospel is composed after the Twelve are gone. The Twelve, therefore, are not a guide to what constitutes the New Testament.

The community is inspired to receive Scripture. Scripture is not accepted because it is inspired; it is inspired because it is accepted. The authority of an apostle means less than the community acceptance of a doctrine.

Following Newman's lead, a doctrine not received is not infallible. Infallibility in teaching depends on infallibility in believing and receiving, not the other way around.

Furthermore, doctrine in the Church does not have as its object the proclamation of a truth. Its intent is pastoral care, spirituality, an encounter with God. What is said is less important than the effect it has on people.

Thomas Aquinas tells us that faith reaches for the reality beyond the doctrine, God, for example, who cannot be put into words (S.T. 2; 2q.1). We know from our own experience, that how we say we love someone is less important than the love we seek to express and the willingness of another to receive the

love. This does not mean that the words have no value but that the love matters more and the reception by the other matters most.

The community is inspired to receive Scripture. Scripture is not accepted because it is inspired; it is inspired because it is accepted. The authority of an apostle means less than the community acceptance of a doctrine.

This consensus of the faithful is never valid if it is forced. In a totalitarian system, force is a factor in creating compliance. In a believing community, agreement must be free.

The believing community is freely at work in receiving Vatican II and determining how it is accepted. The community has affirmed the major themes of that Council: collegiality, liturgical and biblical renewal, ecumenism, religious freedom and conscience. The turbulence of the last fifty years is not caused by resistance to the Council by people but by their desire to implement the Council and to do this even while Church administrators resist their efforts. The turbulence shows us people coming to terms with the Council and making it work.

Let us apply the norms for reception and agreement to the papacy. It is not the election of a pope that makes a pope legitimate but the acceptance of that election by people. Many elected popes were not accepted and anti-popes or multiple popes emerged. The Council of Constance (1414-1417) was an assembly of the community in the name of the Spirit. It led to the removal of all three current popes and the election of a new pope who could be accepted throughout Christianity. When popes fail, the community rescues the Church. This is not theory; it is history.

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The pope does not unify or sanctify the Church and does not make it catholic or apostolic. This is the work of the Spirit and the community. The pope is an institutional sign of a unity already achieved by the faithful. The pope does not create a community of believers or validate baptisms or make the Eucharist occur.

Let us go further. In Church doctrine and law, all the laity are empowered to baptize. This baptism makes every recipient a member of the Church. The faithful who make visible the four marks of the Church are not only so-called practicing Catholics. Indeed, Vatican II never limits the faithful to those practicing Catholicism in a certain way.

Part of the reason for this is that it is difficult to define a practicing Catholic. Those who participate regularly in the sacraments may be blind to the Gospel message of justice and the beatitudes. Sometimes the holy are simply ignorant, as Teresa of Avila reminds us.

Does the Spirit abandon those who, for good reasons, no longer attend Sunday Eucharist regularly? If these so-called non-practicing Catholics serve the disadvantaged or raise their families with Gospel values or become martyrs in their ministry to the marginalized, are they not practicing Catholics? What do we say, furthermore, about the witness of other Christians, also baptized, in Orthodox and Protestant churches? Is it not facile to dismiss them from the *sensus fidelium*? Does this not become all the more difficult to do when Jesus, we know, was open to the religiously alienated and even encouraged marginality?

We must be sensitive not to the tidiness Church administrators may prefer but to the diverse ways the baptized live out their faith, make sense of their lives and follow the charisms and conscience the Spirit gives them, especially when the institutional Church fails them.

The *sensus fidelium* is evaluated less in terms of its consistency with institutional orthodoxy and more in terms of the Gospel. Indeed, when an institution is enamored of its own orthodoxy, it dismisses not only so-called non-practicing Catholics but also practicing Catholics when they are not servile. Many practicing Catholics have reached a different consensus on birth control

and a married priesthood and are not taken into account by Church administrators.

There are two other issues to address before we conclude this section.

The first of these is how we discern the *sensus fidelium*. This is more difficult to gauge than the consensus of bishops or theologians because the field is so large.

There are many ways to do this, however, if there is good will on the part of the hierarchy, in discerning the faith and life of the larger community. Let us cite seven of these:

- ◆ Parish and diocesan councils, free of intimidation or interference
- ◆ Councils or senates of priests in charge of their own affairs
- ◆ Chapters of women and men religious inspired by the charism of their calling
- ◆ Catholic reform and renewal organizations of regional, national, and international standing
- ◆ Public and inclusive consultation in drafting pastoral letters
- ◆ Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues and assemblies
- ◆ Polls and surveys professionally and respectfully conducted

In any case, we never articulate a truth so absolutely that it can be stated, unchanged and free of all conditions of time and language. Never. The *sensus fidelium* may receive a doctrine in one era and reject it in another, not because the faithful are frivolous but because they sense the emergence of new circumstances, often before Church administrators do. Thus, mandatory celibacy may make sense in one centu-

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ry but not another. The restriction of ordination to men may have a point in one culture but not in another. Birth control may express different values in one set of circumstances but not another. Separation of Church and State may not work in one era but become imperative as societies include greater diversity and heterogeneity.

John Henry Newman reminded us that truth is “the daughter of time” (*Development of Christian Doctrine*, Notre Dame Press, 1989). Time gives us the experience to see deeper into a truth and to adjust our understanding of it.

The last issue in this section focuses on what the *sensus fidelium* adds to the magisterium of the bishops or the theologians that they cannot achieve without it.

The *sensus fidelium* is more directly incarnational and concrete, more calibrated to daily living, more attuned to how a teaching is lived out in the realities of marriage and family, career and civic life. The *sensus fidelium* makes a teaching catholic and rejects it when it is not resilient enough to be universal. Church administrators may live in a single culture, Roman or European, or in a single class system, clerical or curial, and become impervious to knowing how or whether this doctrine, albeit impressive in formulation, works outside the narrow framework of its construction.

Without recourse to the *sensus fidelium*, Church administrators may lose the value of a more inclusive sensibility of faith, one that stresses relationality over uniformity. Some issues elude a single-stated standard: end of life care for a loved one; the same-sex marriage of a son or daughter; offering Protestant Christians sacraments; deciding when artificial birth control may become a moral imperative; calling a sexually abusive priest or bishop to Christian responsibility.

Without a *sensus fidelium*, we lose dimensions of our humanity and we expose the Gospel and the very faith we cherish to suffocating conformities where the Spirit cannot breathe and where both lungs of the Church struggle for life and are not able to function.

III. The Community and Law

We begin this section with eight assumptions about authority and law that Church administrators and people at large accept, at least in principle. Church administrators, indeed, the Vatican, would not want to go on public record rejecting any one of these:

- ◆ There is a true equality among the baptized
- ◆ Authority intends the good of community and not its own advantage
- ◆ The papacy and canon law exist for the good of the Church at large
- ◆ A responsible lawmaker does not create law to burden the community
- ◆ Legitimate authority seeks to be credible and effective
- ◆ No church officer promotes isolation from the community
- ◆ It is dangerous to dismiss massive resistance to a law even if that resistance is wrong
- ◆ Church officers want a culture of dialogue in some measure and have set up structures to facilitate this

Let us see how these assumptions affect law and the way we live in the Church.

We note that law in the Church is law only by analogy. It is different from secular law. It is much closer to theology than to jurisprudence. Its intent is spirituality rather than compliance. This is why the last canon, 1752, reads:

The salvation of souls... is always the supreme law of the Church.

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In the Church, law is not valid unless it is accepted by the community. This principle goes back sixteen centuries, to Augustine. It is written into the first codification of canon law by Gratian, in the twelfth century. Indeed, an intelligent, responsible interpretation by the community makes the law better and enhances the authority of the legislator.

Secular law is valid as formulated if the proper procedure has been followed. Church law is invalid, even if proper procedure has been followed, if the community does not accept it. Even if the law has been received by the Church at large, a local community of Christians may decide it does not apply to them. They are free then, under law, to create a contrary custom. This contrary custom becomes the law if it continues for thirty years without a formal reaction from the lawmaker. The contrary custom creates in itself a new law. A bishop, therefore, not answering mail, as many do not, actually contributes to the development of contrary custom. Silence is the same as agreement in canon law.

In all of this, we must avoid two extremes: robotic obedience to law with no discernment; and, absolutely elective behavior in which we do anything we want. In any case, we are explicitly told in Canon Law that “Custom is the best interpreter of laws” (Canon 27). Custom, therefore, matters more than judicial review by those who know the law or scholarship by those who have researched it. Custom supercedes every other way of dealing with the law. It comes from the instinct and sense of the People of God.

A further restriction on law in the Church is called *epikeia*. It applies even to an individual. A group or a single person may conclude that the specific circumstances of their life were not taken into account in the law. The law, therefore, does not apply to them. This is derived from the eight assumptions we have specified. The lawmaker never intends to burden needlessly or to harm the community or individual. We take for granted that we are all acting in good faith.

The Church, we see, officially allows lawlessness. It makes clear that breaking a Church law may be illegal but it is legitimate. After thirty years of resistance, with no formal response from a lawmaker, the resistance becomes legal, as we have seen.

There are a number of times when this resistance prevailed:

- ◆ The Eastern Catholic Church refused to accept mandatory celibacy.
- ◆ The 1917 Code of Canon Law required every diocese to have a synod every ten years; bishops, including the Bishop of Rome, did not comply.
- ◆ John XXIII decreed in *Veterum Sapientia* (1962) that all seminaries in the world must conduct all theological lectures in Latin. Professors around the world assumed the directive did not apply to them because they did not know Latin well and had not the time to learn it properly or, if they did, their students would not understand it; Rome allowed the contrary custom to prevail.
- ◆ Fasting for a time before receiving communion is ignored.
- ◆ Communion is given, at the discretion of the minister, to divorced and remarried Catholics and to homosexual couples. John Paul II gave communion to Prime Minister Tony Blair in the Vatican, when he was an Anglican.
- ◆ Communion is received regularly by Catholics who attend Protestant worship services.
- ◆ Catholic couples often live together before a Church wedding.
- ◆ Limbo was doubted and denied for centuries until it was recently rejected by the pope.
- ◆ When eating meat on Friday was prohibited, Catholic countries in Europe simply did not comply and the law was changed.

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- ◆ The obligation to attend Sunday Mass, or go to confession, is reinterpreted by Catholics to take into account their individual circumstances.

The power or authority of the lawgiver is not a sufficient norm in Catholic law and theology. Good law is meant to bring peace to the community. Therefore, canon law is obliged to look to the community to judge if this is happening and to act accordingly when it is not. There is a noteworthy difference between the 1917 Code of Canon Law in which the People of God are not given priority and the 1983 Code in which they are. The difference is due to Vatican II. The response of the People of God to the law, therefore, must be encouraged, not distrusted.

*All the Catholic faithful, since they participate in the mission of the Church, have the right to promote or to sustain apostolic action by their own undertakings...
(Canon 216)*

It should be clear by now that the *sensus fidelium* is the point of convergence in Catholic life for law, reception, community, conscience, and faith.

The escalating division in the Catholic Church between what people believe and what administrators teach, between how people behave and what lawmakers require is not due solely to secularism or self-indulgence. Educated and autonomous Catholics do not accept monarchical legislation. They force a culture of dialogue on the Church by non-compliance if they have not been otherwise consulted or taken into account.

The three magisterial or teaching offices in the Church (bishops, theologians, and the People of God) are obliged by Church teaching to create a culture of dialogue between and among them. If this does not happen, the community acts accordingly. Today, bishops at large ignore university scholarship and have contempt for the *sensus fidelium* when it is not compliant. The

response of people has been active and passive resistance to being governed in such a manner.

This crisis gives us the opportunity to act creatively and responsibly. Two examples of creative resistance or reinterpretation are intentional communities and appropriate definitions of what it means to be Catholic. These two examples show the community using its own sense of things on the doctrinal level and on the level of law.

First, intentional communities.

Large numbers of people in the United States have abandoned parishes, often with sadness, when these parishes seem to have lost the Gospel or, even, basic human decency and polite behavior.

Three quarters of Catholics no longer attend Sunday Liturgy regularly. It is difficult to believe that three quarters of the Catholic population are simply misguided. It is dangerous to dismiss massive resistance. More to the point, many of these believers still have sacramental and spiritual needs.

The intentional community is one response to these needs. These communities carry the liability of including only the like-minded but parishes are not immune from this either. Intentional communities may, unintentionally, limit public access but parishes also do this when they treat people disrespectfully and celebrate liturgies which cater excessively to those who are reactionary and very judgmental.

The new Code of Canon Law (1983), for the first time in history, gives people a right of association.

The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and govern associations for charitable or religious purposes...they are free to hold meetings to pursue these purposes in common (Canon 215)

This, my friends, is a Bill of Rights for intentional communities, *de jure* and *de facto*. It is a charter for VOTF and for the American Catholic Council as well.

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The next canon gives Catholics the right to take the initiative in apostolic actions on their own behalf.

All the Catholic faithful, since they participate in the mission of the Church, have the right to promote or to sustain apostolic action by their own undertakings... (Canon 216)

Intentional communities gain increased legitimacy in direct proportion to the lack of credibility and pastoral care in Catholic parishes. Catholics have the right to respond to the plundering of their parishes by acting on their own behalf. There is a true equality among the baptized. Authority, remember, intends the good of the community. A responsible lawmaker does not create law to burden the community.

These words are not rhetoric. They are pastoral imperatives and law for the Church.

The second creative initiative is an appropriate definition of what it means to be Catholic.

We begin by observing that only baptism is necessary for Church membership. Belief and obedience are not required in Church law or teaching for membership. Otherwise, many bishops would no longer be Catholics. No bishop or pope has the right to determine who is a member of the Church. If this were so, we would have a bishops' Church and not Christ's Church.

Membership is determined by baptism. Period. This membership is permanent and cannot be revoked by a bishop or the pope.

The official Church confirms this by including as Catholics all those baptized as Catholics. This is very different from the way Protestant churches count their members. Catholic baptism holds for membership even if one does nothing Catholic after baptism. I offer one example of how the official Church confirms this by its own actions. Church law requires that a baptized Catholic be married in a Catholic ceremony, even if that baptized Catholic never did anything Catholic after baptism.

How then does one know if one is Catholic? Baptism suffices but there are other convincing signs, many of which apply to the vast majority of Catholics here.

- ◆ A sense of belonging or being at home in the Catholic Church, broadly defined
- ◆ A love of Christ, the New Testament, the Eucharist
- ◆ An awareness that Catholicism helps me to make sense of my life
- ◆ A conviction that I have been called to be Catholic
- ◆ A recognition by Catholics at large that I am a Catholic
- ◆ A deep respect for the *sensus fidelium*
- ◆ A commitment to Vatican II

If these categories do not fit, it is enough that you have been baptized Catholic.

Catholicism is not measured by compliance with present Church policy, in fact or by law. That is too narrow a definition, too uncatholic, if you will. If such a criterion were strictly applied, Francis Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, and John Henry Newman were not Catholics. Nor were those nineteenth-century dissidents Catholic when they rejected Pius IX's call for armed conflict and violence to defend the Papal States with bloodshed against the invading Italian forces. Nor were the early twentieth century liturgical reformers calling for the liturgy later endorsed by Vatican II. Nor were the condemned biblical scholars seeking a critical interpretation of the New Testament, until Vatican II itself went in their direction.

We must not measure Catholicism by something as transient as current Church policy or as restrictive as how the very docile receive official directives. Creative disaffiliation matters immensely for the spiritual good of the Church. Subversive wisdom requires that we call nonsense nonsense,

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especially when it poses as intelligence. When Church administrators are blind, there must be room for prophets and for those who read the signs of the times and not only L'Osservatore Romano.

In any case, Church authority cannot be authentic unless and until the community validates it.

One of my favorite Jesuit authors, a professor of mine at the Gregorian University in Rome, said it well:

Authority is the quality of leadership which elicits and justifies the willingness... to be led ("Authority in an Ecclesiology of Communion", Francis Sullivan, *New Theological Review* 10, 1997, 18-30).

With even greater authority Vatican II's Constitution on the Church tells us:

The universal body of the faithful...cannot be mistaken in believing...(12)

IV. Apostolic Imagination

A Latin saying encapsulates this section succinctly:

Ecclesia est semper ipse sed numquam idem (The Church is always itself but never the same).

Early on, in the very beginning, there was a sense that what Jesus taught and did should be faithfully remembered but not repeated in the form the first disciples received it. The words and deeds of Jesus had to be applied concretely and creatively to conditions Jesus did not address.

And, so, apostolic imagination was born. What Jesus never directed became normative for the apostolic community.

- ◆ Gentiles were accepted as equal to Jews, by baptism
- ◆ A New Testament was written
- ◆ Four different Gospels interpreted Jesus in diverse ways

- ◆ A sacramental system developed
 - ◆ There was a plurality of ministers based on charism and community approval
 - ◆ Paul, who never met Jesus, is considered an apostle
 - ◆ Women are given the title "apostle"
 - ◆ The structure of "The Twelve", created by Jesus, and kept as "The Twelve" before Pentecost (Matthias succeeds Judas), is allowed to expire
- Apostolic imagination worked in the apostolic age and continued through the first millenium.
- ◆ The liturgy is celebrated not in Aramaic but in Gentile languages in which Jesus did not pray
 - ◆ Ecumenical Councils are inaugurated
 - ◆ The Council of Nicea describes Jesus in ways he did not and would not use (the Son consubstantial with the Father)
 - ◆ Ephesus describes Mary ("Mother of God") in language the first-century Church would reject
 - ◆ Rome, not Jerusalem, becomes the mother Church

Ecclesia est semper ipse sed numquam idem (The Church is always itself but never the same).

- ◆ The papacy is granted authority to function as Peter's successor
- ◆ Monasteries create communities of people who withdraw from everyday life in a manner Jesus did not endorse

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The driving force behind apostolic imagination is two-fold.

In the first instance, the Spirit was believed to guide the Christian community in directions impossible to predict.

We have seen this operate in the first millennium. It continued in the second. There were two startling Ecumenical Councils in the second millenium. They were examples that apostolic imagination was still at work.

One of these was Constance, an assembly driven by the *sensus fidelium*. Although opposed by all three popes, it attributed its authority to the Holy Spirit. It took the institutional Church away from renegade popes and gave the People of God a pope they would accept.

Vatican II was a totally unprecedented Council. It was the first Council to abandon the juridical model and language of the Roman Empire's Senate. It issued no definitions, no denunciations, no infallible doctrines. It was the first Council to deal with the laity, as we have seen. It insisted the Church was the People of God. It declared the significance of the *sensus fidelium*.

Had the community been more prominent in the last fifty years, the Church would have been better guided.

- ◆ There would have been a different teaching on birth control
- ◆ and on a married priesthood
- ◆ and on the ordination of women
- ◆ and on same-sex relationships
- ◆ and on ecumenical unity
- ◆ and on the sexual abuse crisis
- ◆ and on fiscal accountability
- ◆ and on hierarchical mismanagement

Listen to what, now Blessed John Henry Newman, one of the greatest Catholic theologians in Church history, had to say in this regard. Long before a conciliar decree is issued, he observed, the laity accept it through the centuries by what might be called their "silent votes".

Later, commenting on the Arian heresy which tore the Church apart, not long after the New Testament was formulated, Newman notes: "the body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism...the pope...said what (he) should not have said...the body of bishops failed..." The Arian heresy was concerned with who Jesus of Nazareth was and

Long before a conciliar decree is issued, the laity accept it through the centuries by what might be called their "silent votes".

Blessed John Henry Newman

how he should be defined. Newman makes clear that the official Church got the teaching on Christ wrong and that the *sensus fidelium* saved the Church. Because of this he tells us: "in order to know the tradition of the Apostles we must have recourse to the faithful."

We have now entered the third millennium. Of this we are certain. The Church will continue to go in directions no one can predict. It will, as it always has, declare as doctrine and law many things which are now condemned. The faithful at large will see to this. The third millennium gives us some indication that this will be the millennium of the Spirit and of the community. Much of the first millennium focused on who Christ is. Much of the second millennium dealt with how the institutional Church is defined. This millennium begins with the Spirit and the People of God.

The faith of the Church, we conclude, is not entrusted to a few but to all God's People.

Once we lose sight of Luke's words that Pentecost was for "all", we create not a Pentecost Church but a Church without Pentecost where the doors are closed and fear locks the disciples in the room and in themselves.

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In a Church without Pentecost, Jesus dies a second time, not on Calvary but in the midst of his own disciples.

A Church without Pentecost has place for a hierarchy but not for God's People. It gives us only memories of Jesus and takes away the community's ability to think in new ways.

Why would we want such a Church?

Clearly, Jesus did not.

Nor did the Spirit.

Why would we want such a Church?

Clearly, the apostles did not.

Nor did the New Testament.

Why would we want such a Church?

We would want such a Church only if we forget our beginnings, silence the culture of dialogue and forfeit apostolic imagination.

But then we have the Church of Christ no more. Without the People of God, the gates of hell prevail and the Church of Jesus Christ, the living Church of God's Spirit, is built no longer on rock but on sand.

In such a Church the apostles die in vain and the blood of martyrs is no longer the seed of the future.

Why would we want such a Church?

In such a Church, the waters of baptism make us only institutional Catholics and no longer the disciples of Christ.

Why would we want such a Church?

In such a Church the law matters more than the Gospel, and compliance takes precedence over faith, and we become a subservient community in which all but a few are slaves and serfs.

Why would we want such a Church?

Clearly Christ did not want this. Nor do we.

We shall not become such a Church. In the name of God, for the sake of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, we ask for something better, braver, bolder, not for ourselves alone but for all God's People.

Note: Two canon lawyers, Rick Torfs of Louvain, Belgium, and James Coriden of Washington, D.C. Theological Union, and one theologian, the Australian writer Ormond Rush, were guides in the writing of this essay.