For the past two years Pope Francis has enchanted and bewildered the world with his compassion and his contradictions. In this greatly expanded edition of his international bestselling and critically-acclaimed biography *Pope Francis – Untying the Knots*, Paul Vallely adds nine new chapters which reveal behind-the-scenes stories to explain this Pope of paradoxes.

The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism lays bare the intrigue and in-fighting surrounding Francis's attempt to cleanse the scandal-ridden Vatican Bank. Vallely exposes the ambition and arrogance of the top bureaucrats resisting the Pope's reform of the Roman Curia. He unveils the hidden opposition at the highest levels which is preventing the Church from tackling the sex abuse crisis. He unpicks the ambivalence of Pope Francis towards the role of women in the Church. And he maps the battlelines which are being drawn between Francis and the conservatives with talk of schism to split apart the Catholic Church.

Behind the icon of simplicity and warmth that is Pope Francis the book portrays a steely and sophisticated politician who has learned from the many mistakes of his past. The Pope with the winning smile was previously a bitterly divisive figure. His decade as leader of Argentina's Jesuits left that religious order deeply split. His behaviour during Argentina's Dirty War, when military death squads snatched innocent people from the streets, raised serious questions.

Yet something dramatic happened to the man born Jorge Mario Bergoglio. After a period of exile and 'a time of great interior crisis' he underwent an extraordinary transformation. The man who had been a strict conservative authoritarian – and the scourge of liberation theologians who wanted to bring political change to the lives of the poor – was radically converted into a listening leader who became Bishop of the Slums, making enemies among Argentina's political classes in the process. Now he wants to lead the world's Catholics to become 'a poor Church for the poor'.

Paul Vallely travelled to Argentina and Rome to meet Bergoglio's intimates over the last four decades. His book charts a remarkable journey. The man who was to become Pope Francis changed from a reactionary into the revolutionary who is now unnerving Rome's clerical careerists with a gospel of mercy – and a desire to get the Church out of the sacristy and onto the streets. Vallely offers a wealth of new insights – essential reading for anyone who wants to understand this ground-breaking pope.

As a journalist **Paul Vallely** has produced award-winning reporting from 30 countries over three decades for which he was nominated for the UN Media Peace Prize. As a writer his books include *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the 21st Century*. He co-wrote Bob Geldof's best-selling autobiography *Is That It?*.

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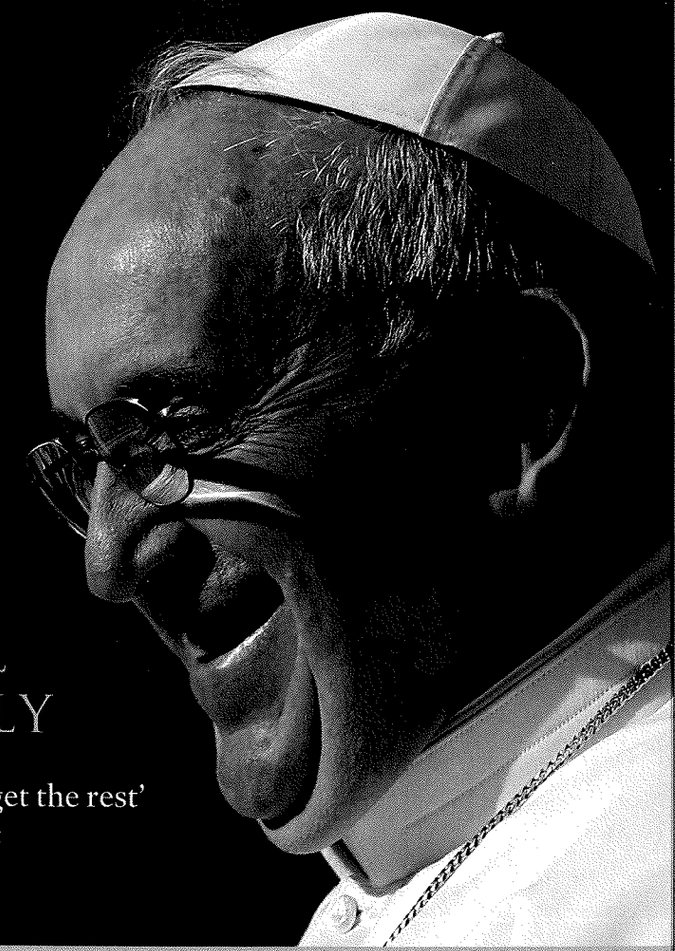
POPE FRANCIS

UNTYING THE KNOTS

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF CATHOLICISM



PAUL VALLELY

'Read this book, forget the rest'
The Tablet

Revised and Expanded with 9 New Chapters

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Pope Francis

Untying the Knots
The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism

Paul Vallely

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most seriously in recent decades. What worries me is that there are still people around Pope Francis who are not trustworthy, people who don't want to see progress on this matter, because they have something to hide, because they had been part of the cover-up or simply because they have other priorities. I have reservations about how far the Vatican will really address the problem. But I am open-minded. So let's give the process a chance. But after getting involved I feel the more I know, the less I know.'

All the lay members of the commission were clearly being robust behind the scenes, but it was the two survivors who were the most uncompromising. On the eve of the February meeting Marie Collins gave an interview in which she said: 'Survivors and everyone else are waiting to see if this commission achieves anything. We certainly don't want to be waiting 20 years to find out if there's anything to come out of it that's worthwhile.' At the press conference after the meeting Peter Saunders set a deadline. 'If we do not see serious progress in the next two years then I, and the other survivor and some lay members, will walk out.' Marie Collins backed him, telling reporters she also would leave if no progress was seen soon.

Later one of the other members of the commission said privately to Saunders: 'You have the commission by the balls on that.' The Vatican was afraid that they really might quit – which would be a public relations disaster at the very least.

'We're not here for lip service or to be token "survivors" for PR cover,' Mr Saunders replied. 'We're here to protect children. And if we conclude that we really can't do that, we'll walk.'

15

Synod and Schism

It was an authentic eighteenth-century English country manor house in the Palladian style, but it had been spruced up to such high-tech modern standards – pale pine floors and under-lit spa pool – that it looked like a modern replica. The large meeting room to the side was new but, by contrast, it had been built to look as though it might be old, with its bare brick walls and dark wooden beams. The chandeliers suspended from the high ceiling, made of circular black iron, looked anachronistically medieval. The hotel was a jumble of genuine tradition and unhistorical fakery on the edge of the Roman city of Chester in the north of England.

At a table, in the middle of this *mélange* of the authentic and the faux, sat Cardinal Raymond Burke, the implacable standard-bearer for the Catholic Church's fiercest opponents to the reforms of Pope Francis. The cardinal is known through the Church for his combination of unflinching doctrinal conservatism and his love of lacy liturgical old-form finery – on high days he even wears a *cappa magna*, the 20-yard-long red silk cape discarded decades ago by most prelates but which has come to be regarded as the emblem of restorationists and revivalists in the Catholic Church. He was there to give a talk on marriage, which he had entitled 'Remaining in the Truth of Christ on Holy Matrimony'. The room was packed with an audience as varied as the architecture. Clean-cut young men with short hair sat alongside eccentric-looking professorial figures with bow-ties and voluminous hair. There were clerics of all shapes and sizes. An elegant young priest with high cheek-bones sat – in a dashing calf-length double-breasted black coat – behind a red-faced rotund cleric, whose dog-collar seemed tight-set against his bulging neck. Women in tweedy twin-sets sat cheek by jowl with matronly housewives from working-class districts of Liverpool wearing the little golden feet lapel-pin that is the symbol of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), which was sponsoring the event. One of the women peered suspiciously around the room and said to her companion: 'There are people here I've never seen at an SPUC event before.' There were more than just seasoned pro-life campaigners present. The room was filled – it was

revealed when the time came for questions – with unreconstructed traditionalists who thought the Catholic Church had lost its way at the Second Vatican Council and who felt it was now dangerously adrift under the papacy of Francis. Behind me sat a middle-aged couple with cut-glass upper-crust accents which would not have seemed out of place in the stately home Downton Abbey. 'This is a battle for the soul of the Church,' one said to the other in a whisper so loud that everyone around could hear.

The cardinal stood up and moved to a transparent podium. It did not take him long to get into full culture-warrior confrontation mode. Within the first minute he was attacking modern culture for being 'profoundly confused and in error'. Two minutes later he was attacking by name Cardinal Walter Kasper, who had expressed 'the confusion and error' during an Extraordinary Consistory of Cardinals a year earlier, in February 2014, after Pope Francis invited Kasper – the man described as the theologian of this pontificate – to address his fellows on the subject of the forthcoming Synod on the Family. Kasper had suggested, in what Francis later described as 'a beautiful and profound presentation', that it was time for the Church to allow Catholics who had divorced and remarried to receive Holy Communion. Burke offered to the Chester meeting his own vision which was as remarkable for what it omitted as for what it said.

The cardinal spoke about 'the fundamental truth of marriage' for almost an hour without once mentioning love in its most commonly understood sense. There were references aplenty to 'the integrity of the conjugal act' and 'the essence of the conjugal union'. He spoke of 'the faithful, indissoluble and procreative union of marriage' and even of 'the faithful and enduring covenant of divine love'. But it was abstract philosophical theology. There was, in it, no recognition of the secret language of human love: of intimacy and care, of softness and openness, of empathy and warmth, of creativity and companionship, of kindness and cleaving, of mutual support and friendship, of weeping together and laughing together, of giving and sacrifice, of touch and affection, or of emotional and psychological closeness. Cardinal Burke's view of marriage was something clinical and cold. The love-making of a couple using contraceptives was 'a tool for personal gratification', in the Burke lexicon. At times his language was even violent, as when he said that with contraception 'the procreative nature of the act has been radically violated'. It was language of a kind which fell oddly on the ear from a man who, at the same time, accused gay men and women in the Church of having an 'incredibly aggressive homosexual agenda'. There was only one mention of mercy – and that was to disparage it.

But there was something else that was even more striking. Throughout the hour in which he spoke, he quoted Pope John Paul II no fewer than 25 times. He quoted Benedict XVI some 22 times in all. He even quoted Pope Paul VI three times. But he did not quote Pope Francis once. Indeed the word 'Francis' did not so much as pass his lips. 'It was quite extraordinary,' one member of the audience observed to me afterwards. It was as if he could not bring himself even to pronounce the name of the current pontiff. And when once he spoke of 'the Holy Father' he meant John Paul II.

The questions he was asked after his speech, with only one exception, seemed to come from unequivocal traditionalists. Indeed they were not questions so much as laments for the old ways. They asked about the abandonment of Thomist philosophy, inadequately catechized priests, hermeneutics of rupture and discontinuity, a crisis in reverence for the Eucharist, and the implicit blasphemy of priests who say they want to make the liturgy interesting. Only one questioner dared to be different, asking about dialogue, being open-minded, thinking outside the box, and the open discussion. Cardinal Burke replied that 'deepening our understanding of the tradition of the Church is not being not open'. To think otherwise was to be naïve. 'We have to speak truth in charity,' he said, drawing his biggest round of applause from an audience who did not sound as if they were being particularly charitable. 'That was long overdue,' said the Downton woman behind me. It was an instructive evening, for it lifted the veil on the kind of opposition which Pope Francis is up against.

Cardinal Burke ended by telling his faithful followers that they should take Saint John Fisher and Saint Thomas More as models. They were martyrs who died defending the integrity of the fidelity and indissolubility of marriage. The cardinal was clearly ignorant of the historical facts of what happened when Sir Thomas More was confronted with the Oath of Succession – which declared Henry's child by his first marriage illegitimate so that the children of his second would succeed to the throne. More said he would swear it, if it were worded differently. It was not the issue of whether the first marriage of Henry VIII was valid – or, as the monarch claimed, invalid – which was the point of principle for which More died. What he objected to was the fact that the Oath abjured the Pope and laid the ground for schism between the Church of Rome and the Church in England. The irony was lost on Cardinal Burke. But Thomas More was martyred not to defend the indissolubility of marriage. He gave up his life to defend the authority of the Pope.

* * *

Had Pope Francis been a fly on the wall at the Chester event he might merely have smiled wryly. The previous two popes may have regarded all disagreement as dissent. But Francis had set out to allow different views within the Church to flourish. Indeed fostering vigorous debate was central to the biggest of all the reforms he was planning to transform the Catholic Church.

The new Pope's decision to set up the Council of Cardinal Advisers, which became his C9 cabinet, had been an extremely bold step. It brought cardinals into the decision-making process of the Church over the heads of the Curia officials who had for centuries run the Vatican, often as a law unto themselves. But Pope Francis could claim that he had been given a mandate for that. Cardinal after cardinal, during the discussions before the conclave that had elected him, had said the Curia needed to be a servant not a master to local churches round the world. But the Pope's next – and potentially most far-reaching – change was one that was made on his own authority alone.

One of the top issues on the agenda of the first meeting of that cabinet was how a Francis papacy could allow bishops around the world to have a greater say in how the Church was run. The church jargon for that was episcopal collegiality, and the main vehicle for this ought to have been the Synod of Bishops, the body set up by Pope Paul VI in the last year of the revitalizing Second Vatican Council. The presence of so many bishops in Rome for the great Council inspired Pope Paul to create a body which would 'make ever greater use of the bishops' assistance in providing for the good of the universal Church'. The pontiff would enjoy 'the consolation of their presence, the help of their wisdom and experience, the support of their counsel, and the voice of their authority'.

The word *synod* derives from the union of two Greek words, *syn* which means 'together', and *odòs* which means 'path or journey'. The concept of synodality is an ancient one within the Church, even if in the second millennium of church history the popes began to rule like medieval kings – and synodality became a word which fell upon stony ground. But if Pope Paul VI enabled it in the modern Church he shied away from implementing the idea, so, from the outset, the synod had never been what the Vatican II bishops desired. Where Paul VI was nervous about releasing the potential of the synod, Pope John Paul II had no time for sources of authority to rival his own and effectively closed it down. Benedict XVI was less autocratic but did not change the formula of the synod as an occasional gathering of bishops, delegated from episcopal conferences around the world, called to advise the Pope on a particular subject. Popes reverted to a monarchical model of government. Synods became formal rubber-stamping bodies meeting every two or three years, their debates circumscribed by the Curia and their conclusions pretty much decided in advance

by the Vatican. Francis remembered, all too well, his experience as the relator (secretary) of the 10th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2001. 'A Vatican official came and told him what to do,' one Argentine theologian told me. 'That will not happen any more.'

The revitalization of the synod was to be, according to the church historian Massimo Faggioli, Francis's most important reform. The eminent papal historian Eamon Duffy, went further. 'If the weight is to shift from the Roman bureaucracy to the Synod of Bishops,' he said, 'it will be a restructuring on a scale not seen since that of Pope Sixtus V in the late sixteenth century.'

* * *

Francis wasted no time in setting about his top priority. He began working privately with Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, the man he had appointed as secretary-general of the synod not long after becoming Pope. Baldisseri had been secretary to the conclave that had elected Francis. Three months later Baldisseri announced that the Pope was looking to transform the synod, which met occasionally, into 'a dynamic permanent synod' that would create 'an osmosis between centre and periphery'. In August 2013 Pietro Parolin, the Pope's newly-appointed Secretary of State, in his first interview, revealed that Francis had made it one of his objectives to create a more democratic atmosphere in the Church. 'It has always been said that the Church is not a democracy,' Parolin said. 'But it would be good during these times if there could be a more democratic spirit, in the sense of listening carefully.' What the Pope wanted was 'a collegial movement of the Church, where all the issues can be brought up, and afterwards he can make a decision'.

Pope Francis began to translate those words into action. He doubled the office space of the synod's permanent secretariat, a body which worked entirely outside the Curia. He authorized the hiring of more staff. He met several times with Cardinal Baldisseri to reform the procedures used at synods. In October 2013 Francis was reported as saying in another interview: 'This is the beginning of a Church with an organization that is not just top-down but also horizontal.' And he sent out another radical signal by mentioning his fellow Jesuit, the late Cardinal Mario Martini, who as Archbishop of Milan had been seen as the liberal pole of authority in the time of Pope John Paul II. 'When Cardinal Martini talked about focusing on the councils and synods he knew how long and difficult it would be to go in that direction.' He would proceed, Francis said, 'gently, but firmly and tenaciously'. Those words were to be a blueprint of what was to follow.

Pope Francis spent two days in early October meeting with Baldisseri and his Synod Council. The Pope brought to the table the 'see-judge-act' method that Latin American bishops had adopted from Liberation Theology. A three-stage process was needed: to examine the lived experiences of ordinary Catholics, and reflect upon them, and then to decide what actions were needed for change. A new vehicle was needed, the Pope said, to revive synodical government and return to the way it was conducted in the early Church and was still practised in the Orthodox Church. Then he hit upon the idea. He would turn the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops – on the subject of the Family, scheduled for October 2015 – from a two-week meeting into a two-year process. He decided that the Ordinary Synod in 2015 should be preceded by an Extraordinary Synod in October 2014 which could decide the questions that should be the basis of discussion at the regular meeting. In between the two synods, the wider Church could offer views on the issues based on its lived experience and prayerful reflection. But that was not all. He wanted wider consultation and stimulation even before the bishops got to the subject in the first place. That required input from both above, from the College of Cardinals, and below, from ordinary Catholics all round the world. Francis took the idea to the first meeting of his council of cardinal advisers in October.

The project moved swiftly. In November he ordered a study designed to reduce the number of dioceses in Italy – which numbered more than two hundred – and a reform of its governance structures to redress the imbalance between Italians and the bishops of the rest of the world. That month he published *Evangelii Gaudium*. In it he said he wanted to promote a 'sound decentralization' of church government. And he added: 'Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it.' Pope John Paul II had said something similar almost twenty years before but, said Francis, 'we have made little progress in this regard'. The Second Vatican Council had called for a return to the way synods had worked in the early Church – 'to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit'. Yet this had not happened and the devolution of 'genuine doctrinal authority' to the national conferences of bishops had not happened sufficiently. Instead 'excessive centralization' was hindering the ability of local churches around the world to reach ordinary people. And the lack of synodal government in the Catholic Church was a huge obstacle to any future moves towards Christian unity with Constantinople and Moscow. Diversity and debate was not a problem but a blessing: 'Differing currents of thought in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice, if open to being reconciled by the Spirit in respect and love, can enable the Church to grow.'

This would be a seismic shift. The Curia, including the guardians of doctrinal orthodoxy at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, would become subordinate to the synod. They would be servants rather than masters. The change in the pecking order became apparent when, in January 2014, Pope Francis announced his first new cardinals. Top of the list was Pietro Parolin, as we noted previously, the Secretary of State. But where the old protocol would next have named Gerhard Müller, the head of the CDF, his name was only third. Above him had been placed Lorenzo Baldisseri, the secretary of the synod. The significance was not lost on Vaticanologists. 'The message was unambiguous,' said one leading Vatican-watcher, Robert Mickens: 'the CDF is to be at the service of the College of Bishops, not its doctrinal minder'.

There was another dimension to the thinking of Pope Francis. Government by synod would remove one of the major obstacles to Christian unity so far as the Orthodox Church was concerned. In his first interview as Pope, with Antonio Spadaro in September 2013, he had said:

> We must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels. Maybe it is time to change the methods of the Synod of Bishops, because it seems to me that the current method is not dynamic. This will also have ecumenical value, especially with our Orthodox brethren. From them we can learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodality. The joint effort of reflection, looking at how the Church was governed in the early centuries, before the breakup between East and West, will bear fruit in due time. In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us.

The Pope's thinking was revealed more explicitly when he appointed Enzo Bianchi as a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Bianchi was the prior of the monastery of Bose, a community of monks and nuns belonging to different Christian Churches. Soon after his appointment he told the *Vatican Insider* website: 'The Pope wants to achieve unity also by reforming the papacy.' He wanted to make it a papacy which 'is no longer feared', to quote the words of the Orthodox Church's ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew, 'with whom Francis has a bond of friendship'. That would require 'a new balance between synodality and supremacy', Bianchi said. 'The Orthodox Church exercises synodality but not primacy, we Catholics have papal primacy

but we lack synodality. There can be no synodality without primacy and there can be no primacy without synodality. This would help create a new style of papal primacy and episcopal government.' He later added: 'No-one has spoken like this for a thousand years.' Conservatives greeted his words with alarm.

The process Pope Francis had conceived was set in train. In October 2013 a 38-point questionnaire was sent out by Cardinal Baldisseri to national bishops' conferences across the world with the instruction that they should use it to ask ordinary Catholics what they thought of the Church's teachings on the Family. Baldisseri also announced that ordinary believers could also write directly to his office with their views. The questionnaire – which some bishops' conferences put online for grassroots Catholics to answer directly – did not shy away from controversial issues like premarital sex, contraception, divorce, remarriage, same-sex relationships, *in vitro* fertilization and adoption by gay couples. It was a revolutionary act by Francis. The direct global survey of lay people was unprecedented. Indeed, previous popes had made it evident that they did not want to know what the people in the pew thought. They should just pray, pay and obey. That had been made very clear in previous years to senior British clerics Cardinal Basil Hume and Archbishop Derek Worlock, who held a National Pastoral Congress of 2,000 bishops, clergy and lay people in Liverpool in 1980. When the British prelates handed the report of the event to Pope John Paul II, pointing to one paragraph and asking him to read it there and then, he put it aside without even looking at it. Pope Francis's initiative to send a questionnaire to the laity was without precedent since Cardinal John Henry Newman had written, in the nineteenth century, his famous essay, 'On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine', suggesting a two-way process between the taught and the teacher.

The questionnaire was far from perfect. Its wording was opaque and clumsy. It asked why ordinary people did not understand church teaching rather than enquiring what they found difficult or out of line with the Gospel. 'It was a classic Roman document laying the blame on the failure of the laity,' an official in one bishops' conference told me. Some commentators even suggested that it had been deliberately badly written by conservative Vatican officials to subvert the intentions of the reforming Pope. One middle-ranking Curia official laughed at that notion and told me: 'The language just reflects the way people here think.' What was remarkable, he added, was not that it was done badly but 'that it was done at all – that was what people here found astonishing.' They were to be further amazed when they discovered the things ordinary Catholics dared to say in reply – and what Pope Francis intended to do with the results.

If the questionnaire was the view from below, Pope Francis knew that he had to contend with opinions from around him in the Vatican from indivdiuals who were accustomed to see their views holding sway. How would the College of Cardinals react to the idea of empowering the college of bishops? Francis decided to test the water with a subject which was both close to his own experience of dealing with chaotic families in the slums of Buenos Aires – and which had also been a neuralgic issue at the 2005 Synod on the Eucharist. He selected one man to light the gunpowder fuse.

* * *

When the cardinals gathered in Rome for their seven days of discussions before the conclave that chose Francis, they all lodged in the Vatican hostel where the Pope now lives, the Casa Santa Marta. The then Cardinal Bergoglio had a room right across the hallway from that of Cardinal Walter Kasper. The German cardinal had, by coincidence, just received from his publisher two copies of the Spanish translation of his latest book, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. He gave one to Bergoglio.

'Ah, mercy!' the Argentine cardinal exclaimed when he saw the title. 'This is the name of our God!'

It was not – in the words of David Gibson of Religion News Service, who interviewed Kasper afterwards – 'just one of those *pro forma* compliments you might give to an acquaintance at a book party'. Mercy, as decades of Bergoglio's life had shown, had long been a guiding principle for the former Jesuit Provincial's later life and ministry. He devoured Kasper's book in the days leading up to the voting. Four days after the conclave ended the new Pope was addressing a large crowd in St Peter's Square. Kasper, who was watching on television, was staggered when Francis mentioned the book, praised Kasper as a 'very sharp theologian' and told the world: 'That book has done me so much good.'

Ever since the time of Pope John Paul II, Kasper had been arguing that it was time to lift the ban on remarried Catholics taking Communion if their first marriage had not been annulled by the Church. (An annulment is a declaration that when a couple married, one or more of the Catholic tests for validity of marriage was not met.) Kasper was not advocating a change in the Church's dogma on the sanctity of marriage, but an amendment in the 'pastoral practice' about who can receive Communion. He said: 'To say we will not admit divorced and remarried people to Holy Communion? That's not a dogma. That's an application of a dogma in a concrete pastoral practice. This can be changed.'

Even a murderer can confess and receive Communion, he frequently noted. His attempt to persuade John Paul to allow the change had been thwarted by conservatives in Rome, led by the then head of the CDF, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Over the years the two German cardinals had sparred over the issue in the pages of theological journals. Though Ratzinger's view had prevailed the conservatives still did not like Kasper. After Francis praised his book from the balcony, one of them went to the Pope and admonished him: 'Holy Father, you should not recommend this book! There are many heresies in it!' Kasper knew this because the Pope himself later told him, telling Kasper not to be concerned and adding with a smile: 'It goes in one ear and out the other.'

Kasper was the man Pope Francis decided should address a gathering he had called of the cardinals for February 2014 to discuss the two forthcoming synods on the Family. To the wider world the issue of remarried Catholics and Communion might have seemed fairly arcane. But, with Catholics now getting remarried at a similar rate to the rest of society, it is a huge pastoral crisis in those parts of the Church which do not simply turn a blind eye to the issue. Some hoped the problem could be eased by making it easier to get an annulment. But three individuals close to the Pope, two of them cardinals, have told me that Francis does not see this as the solution. Kasper warned the Pope that if he addressed his fellow cardinals on the subject there would be a heated response. 'Holy Father, there will be a controversy afterwards,' Kasper said. The Pope laughed and told him: 'That's good, we should have that!'

Kasper was right. The discussion which followed his presentation was impassioned, with heavyweight conservatives lining up against the German advocate of reform. But Francis rejoiced in the exchanges. 'I would have been more worried if there hadn't been an intense discussion,' he said afterwards. 'The cardinals knew that they could say what they wanted, and they presented different points of view, which are always enriching. Open and fraternal debate fosters the growth of theological and pastoral thought,' he said. 'I'm not afraid of this; on the contrary, I seek it.'

Two key insights about Pope Francis arose from all this. The first was about the specific issue of Communion for the remarried. But the second – and almost certainly the more important understanding – was about how anxious he was to change the way the Church makes decisions.

It was overwhelmingly clear that Pope Francis wanted a more compassionate approach to remarried Catholics taking Communion. In public he dropped massive hints. In his first airborne press conference in July 2013, when asked about the issue, he said: 'I believe this is the time of mercy. The Church is a mother: it must reach out to heal the wounds. This time is a *kairos* of mercy.'

The word *kairos* denotes a special moment in history in which God's purposes can be seen at work in a particular way. He quoted with approbation his predecessor as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Quarracino, as saying 'half of all marriages are null... because people get married lacking maturity, without realizing that it is a life-long commitment, or get married because society tells them they have to get married'. The Pope then placed the issue on the agenda for the very first meeting of the C8, where he suggested studying the Orthodox practice of blessings for second marriages. Next, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he had written: 'The doors of our churches must always be open and the sacraments available to all', adding that the Eucharist 'is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak'. He had, remember, described Kasper's presentation as 'beautiful and profound'.

He appeared to have gone further in 2014 when he was reported as having telephoned a woman who had written to him from Argentina to say that her parish priest had denied her Communion because, though she had never been married before, she had now wed a man who had previously been divorced. She afterwards told the media that the Pope had counselled her simply to find another priest who would allow her to receive the Eucharist. That had caused a furore, with conservatives saying the Pope was undermining church teaching on marriage and also complaining that he should have consulted the woman's priest and bishop before calling her. The Vatican press office rushed to tell the media that this was a private conversation which 'did not form part of the magisterium' – church jargon for official teaching. But Francis was untroubled by the criticism, I was told by one cardinal close to the Pope. 'In talking to the woman he's acting as if he were parish priest to the world,' the cardinal said. 'Conservatives say he doesn't give enough thought to the implications of the advice he gives to individuals being applied to the wider Church. And he knows that what he is doing in such situations is a double-edged thing to do. But he feels the spirit of God is present in it – and that the instinct of the People of God will find what is right in any given situation.' He took the same attitude to a group of individuals in what the Church calls 'irregular' family situations just a month before the first October synod. He conducted 20 weddings in the Vatican, a number of them couples who were already living together, contrary to church teaching on premarital sex – 'living in sin' as several newspapers put it. At least one of the couples had a child. Once again the message was that the Church welcomed all – not only those who embrace its sexual ethics perfectly.

As the months passed, the results of the questionnaire began to leak to the media, despite requests from the Curia that they should be passed to Rome

without being published. Bishops in some countries had refused to issue the survey to their flock; in Italy, for example, they had done almost nothing to engage ordinary Catholics with the questions. But it gradually became clear that in many of the 114 countries that had replied – from Germany and Ireland to the Philippines and Japan – a tectonic gap had opened between official teaching and what Catholics in the pew believe and do. The Canadian bishops respected the Vatican request not to publish the details but announced that their survey had found 'a huge gap' between theory and practice, according to Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Conservatives in the Curia became increasingly alarmed. Cardinal George Pell said that 'substantial doctrinal and pastoral changes are impossible' and the sooner 'the wounded, the lukewarm, and the outsiders' realized that the better; the irony that the wounded, the lukewarm, and the outsiders were precisely the kind of people Pope Francis was trying to reach was clearly lost on the Australian cardinal. The Vatican's most senior arbiter on doctrine, Gerhard Müller, had the Vatican's official newspaper reprint one of his essays, which insisted that the Church only allow married couples to separate for 'compelling reasons', such as physical or psychological violence. In all other cases, he said, 'the marriage bond of a valid union remains intact in the sight of God, and the individual parties are not free to contract a new marriage, as long as the spouse is alive'. The CDF chief insisted, citing Pope Benedict XVI, that the argument for withholding Communion from remarried Catholics was rooted in 'sacred scripture'. There was, he averred, 'no possibility of admitting remarried divorcees to the sacraments'.

But this was the pontificate of Francis, not Benedict. The days were gone when the head of the CDF spoke and his word was taken as final. Müller, as we saw in Chapter 13, was rebuffed by members of the C8. Cardinal Marx responded that the synod was perfectly free to change pastoral practice on Communion for the remarried. When Müller hit back – insisting that changing practice implied changing doctrine, and that neither synod nor Pope were free to do that – the chairman of the C8, Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga, slapped down Müller for rigid thinking. The battlelines were being drawn.

What happened next was that Pope Francis made it clear that he wanted the lived experience of the lay Catholics set out in the questionnaire to be the starting point for the discussion among bishops at the Extraordinary Synod. Their views were to be the basis for the *instrumentum laboris* – the working document on which the approaching synod would be based. This was far from

normal practice. Again, said one mid-ranking curial official, Pope Francis 'was striking out into new territory'.

* * *

Pope Francis wanted major change. He wanted the Church to become more compassionate in the way it treated Catholics excluded from full Communion because of their 'irregular' sexual situations. But he wanted much more. He did not want to decree change like an old-style papal monarch. He wanted the Church to find a better way to agree its decisions.

On 1 April 2014 he wrote a letter that received little attention from the world's media. It was to Cardinal Baldisseri, Secretary of the Synod. It was even ignored by most Vatican analysts at the time. But the great church scholar Father Ladislas Orsy wrote of it: 'That brief letter may well be to date one of the most significant documents of the present pontificate.' In it Pope Francis told Baldisseri of his intention 'to raise the undersecretary of the synod, Fabio Fabene, to the dignity of bishop'. The formality of the wording was a clue. The letter used the solemn sentences normally reserved for major papal proclamations, Orsy observed. No undersecretary to the synod had ever before been made a bishop. But there was more to the Pope's signal of intent even than that. Orsy deconstructed the letter in an article for the Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*. Francis had written that he had made the decision 'after having deeply examined the signs of the times' – a signal, said Orsy, that Francis was aware he was seizing an historical moment. It also spoke, rather mystically, of the origin of the synods lying in the 'inexhaustible expanse of the mystery and of the horizon of the Church of God'. Once 'mystery' is the measure, wrote Orsy, 'the riches waiting for discovery cannot be exhausted'. What Pope Francis was signalling was a change which, in his view, was both historic and profound.

The reason he had chosen Baldisseri to supervise the process became clear a month later. 'The Church is not timeless, she lives amidst the vicissitudes of history and the Gospel must be known and experienced by people today,' the Secretary to the Synod told a Belgian Christian magazine, *Tertio*. It was time to update church marriage doctrine in connection with divorce, the situation of divorcees and people who are in civil partnerships. The response of ordinary faithful Catholics to the questionnaire was significant, Baldisseri said, seeming to echo the old Bergoglio line that the holy faithful people of God 'are infallible in believing'. Cardinal Baldisseri said that the bishops 'must recognize that the faithful perceive the truth'. The two-synod process, he said, 'will allow a more adequate response to the expectations of the people'. He also announced a

significant change to synod procedures. Where previously bishops had made prepared speeches in succession, with almost no interaction or dialogue, they were now to be asked to submit their presentations two weeks before the meeting opened. 'This is not to limit the discussion, but to help organize it,' the cardinal said. The synod would begin with a summary of those presentations by cardinals rather than, as in the past, a rephrasing of the working document drawn up by the Curia. The drawing of the agenda would thus pass from Vatican bureaucrats to bishops out in the dioceses. All this had been agreed in detail with the Pope, as had another big Francis gesture – the announcement that the synod proceedings would, for the first time, not be conducted in Latin but in Italian. To the horror of the traditionalists, Pope Francis was dragging the Catholic Church kicking and screaming into the fifteenth century, which is when the rest of Europe set aside the dead language for the common vernacular.

But the true extent of the change Francis had planned only became evident when he stood up to speak. On the opening morning of the Extraordinary Synod the 191 bishops were told by the Pope: 'One general and basic condition is this: speak out... Nobody should say: "I can't say this or they will think this of me..."' After the heated discussion in Feburary when the cardinals debated the Kasper presentation, one cardinal had written to the Pope saying: 'Some cardinals didn't have the courage to say certain things out of respect for the Pope, believing that the Pope may have thought differently.' That was not good, Francis said. 'This is not what synodality is about. We must say everything we feel we need to say, in the spirit of the Lord, without pusillanimity and without fear. At the same time, we must listen humbly and embrace with an open heart what our brothers tell us. These two attitudes express synodality.' They should speak with *parrhesia* – the Greek word (meaning to speak candidly, boldly, and without fear) which was used of the way the disciples spoke after the Resurrection. The bishops, he concluded, should speak boldly and listen with humility, safe in the knowledge that 'because the synod always takes place *cum petro et sub petro* [with Peter and under Peter]... the Pope's presence is a guarantee for everyone and protects the faith'.

It was a dramatic contrast to previous synods, which under previous popes had been stage-managed as carefully as Soviet party congresses, where Vatican officials went around privately telling participants not to mention certain subjects or make particular remarks. This time, the Pope said, there should be no such taboos.

The shocks continued. During the opening speech of the synod, Cardinal Péter Erdő of Hungary said that 'many marriages celebrated in the Church may be invalid' because couples did not go into them with the intent of making a lifetime commitment. Erdő had been appointed relator, or secretary to the sessions, so his comments carried particular weight. Annulments should be made easier, he implied, suggesting that bishops could grant them, avoiding the necessity of a courtroom procedure. Many bishops' conferences around the world had already backed such an idea. But though Pope Francis had already indicated his eagerness for speeding up annulments – he had set up a commission in August to study it – both reformers and resisters knew that annulments were a side-issue. The debate over ending the exclusion of remarried Catholics from Communion had become a symbol of a deeper disagreement between the two sides.

The division was aired again with further remarks of Erdő suggesting that the debate should be seen through the lens of the principle of graduality. This was a piece of theological terminology that had been popular three decades earlier but that had been squashed by Pope John Paul II after the 1980 Synod. It says that morality is not all-or-nothing; rather, moral progress comes in stages and it is necessary to start 'where people are' and then move them towards being better rather than demanding instant perfection. So it is better to encourage individuals where they are doing good than chastise them for what they are getting wrong. It seemed an effective summary of the overall approach of Pope Francis. Cardinals at the synod began to speak up for it. Gradualism could help the Church find a new way of talking about sex, said Cardinal Marx, one of the C8, which by this point had become the C9 with the addition of Cardinal Parolin to its ranks. Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster said the idea 'permits people, all of us, to take one step at a time in our search for holiness in our lives'.

A similar pragmatism was reported to the synod from the grassroots. One of the married couples invited to attend was Ron and Mavis Pirola of Sydney, Australia, who had been married for 55 years and had four children. They told the synod of a dilemma from their own lives. Family friends had a gay son who told them he wanted to bring his partner home for Christmas. The Pirolas' friends were faithful Catholics who understood the Church's opposition to homosexual partnerships. But they were also loving parents who resolved their dilemma on whether to invite the gay couple into their home with three simple words: 'He's our son.' The case, the Pirolas said, showed how the clergy might have something to learn from the ordinary faithful on how to strike a balance between upholding church teaching but also showing 'mercy and compassion'. The synod responded 'very warmly, with applause', said Cardinal Nichols afterwards. The Nigerian Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama – who earlier in the year had thanked God and praised Nigeria's president for signing a new anti-gay

law that imposes a 14-year prison sentence for homosexuality – commented: 'If the son is part of the family it is only natural that the family should be together. You cannot exclude a family member from a feast, from a meal. Our arms should be open.'

Such a change of tone from Africa was just one indication of how the leadership of Pope Francis was working through the synod. There was a new warmth, veteran observers said. 'Laughter was heard in the synod for the first time,' said one senior Curia member. The vocabulary changed, noted another seasoned official, expressing surprise at the meeting's general wish to tone down the use of terms such as 'living in sin', 'contraceptive mentality' and 'intrinsically disordered', which were previously common. The word 'gay' was heard for the first time in a synod. But as well as a shift in tone there was a far greater sense of a genuine conversation between the synod fathers than on previous occasions.

But a vocal minority of conservatives in the synod became increasingly concerned. They saw the new openness of Pope Francis as an unwelcome departure from the clarity of the approach of the previous two popes, which had valued orthodoxy over debate. It was too reminiscent of the mood and tone at the Second Vatican Council, whose enthusiasts they blamed for subsequent excessive liberalism. This was exactly the wrong time for the debate on Communion for the remarried, they believed, because it would weaken the Church's defence of the sanctity of marriage at a time when it was under attack from campaigners for gay marriage, which was becoming increasingly acceptable all across the developed world. Five conservative cardinals had, on the eve of the synod, produced a book, *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church*, arguing against Kasper on the issue of Communion for the remarried. It included contributions by cardinals Müller and Burke, with a blunt foreword by Cardinal Pell.

But it was the methods as much as the message of the synod that prompted their growing anxiety. They claimed that an attempt to deliver a copy of the book to every member of the synod had been thwarted by the synod administrators. Cardinal Burke had disapproved of the testimony of the married couple from Australia, saying that the friends involved of the Pirolas had scandalously exposed their grandchildren to the bad example of a 'disordered relationship'. But it was the production of an interim summary, halfway through the synod, that led the conservative faction to break out into open revolt.

The midway document – known as the *relatio post disceptationem*, or report after the debate – was supposed to be a summary of the first week's debates before the members broke into smaller different-language groups to discuss it. When it was produced, the media greeted it as a revolutionary document

overturning many of the attitudes of the John Paul/Benedict era. Communion for the remarried should be allowed on a case-by-case basis, it said. Gay Catholics should be 'accepted and valued' by the Church. Pastors should seek to emphasize the positive rather than the negative elements of the lifestyles of remarried or gay Catholics. Mercy should be advanced alongside doctrine. The 'law of gradualness' should be applied to help guide couples towards the ideal. All this was described as a 'pastoral earthquake' by the veteran commentator John Thavis. The document was received very differently by opposing factions within the Church. Joshua McElwee, the Vatican correspondent for the liberal *National Catholic Reporter*, commented on Twitter: 'It feels like a whole new church, a whole new tone, a whole new posture. Wow.' And the leading Jesuit commentator of *America* magazine, Father James Martin SJ, tweeted: 'Today's stunning change in tone from the Catholic bishops on LGBT people shows what happens when the Holy Spirit is let loose.' But the ultra-conservative Voice of the Family coalition branded it a 'betrayal' of the Catholic faith. It was, said the organization's founder, John Smeaton, 'one of the worst official documents drafted in church history'.

A heated row broke out, with angry and raised voices. It was not just the hardline conservatives who were indignant. More mainstream members of the synod accused Archbishop Bruno Forte, the secretary of the committee selected by Pope Francis to draft the interim report, of inserting his own views into the document and presenting it as a draft of the synod's final document. Bruno was, reported Associated Press, 'an Italian theologian known for pushing the pastoral envelope on dealing with people in "irregular" unions while staying true to Catholic doctrine'. Cardinal Napier of South Africa spoke out at a Vatican press conference. It was not enough, he suggested, to say that the synod's final document could be rewritten to more accurately reflect the views of the meeting. The story had flashed around the world with headlines like: 'At last, the Catholic Church changes its mind on gays'. That was almost impossible to retract, he complained. 'We're now working from a position that is virtually irredeemable,' he said. 'It's not what we were saying (in the synod hall). It's not a true message!'

The arch-conservative Cardinal Raymond Burke went further. The interim document was not just unrepresentative, he said, but wrong. 'The document lacks a solid foundation in the Sacred Scriptures and the Magisterium,' he proclaimed. For the first week of the synod Pope Francis had not spoken. It was time for him to break his silence, Burke pronounced. A statement from the Pope was 'in my judgement ... long overdue', Burke said. 'I can't speak for the Pope,' he later added, though many felt that was exactly what

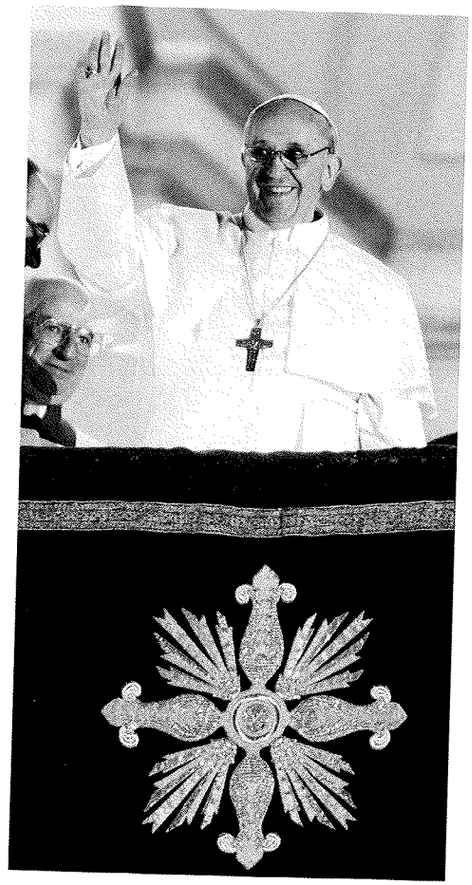
he was trying to do. 'And I can't say what his position is on this, but the lack of clarity about the matter has certainly done a lot of harm.' In fact the Pope's position was quite clear. He had seen the interim report in advance and had approved it.

Behind the scenes the authors of the interim report tried to make out that it reflected the views that cardinals had outlined in their longer written presentations to the synod as well as what they had said in their four-minute speeches in the hall. But many cardinals were not placated. Some objected to the fact that the synod secretariat had refused to release texts of their speeches to the synod; they claimed that the summaries outlined at the synod's daily press conferences were exercises in spin rather than accurate accounts of the breadth of the discussion. When the cardinals congregated in their language groups, one synod father opened the discussion by pointing to the section on gay couples in the interim report: 'Did you hear any of this last week?' He got a negative reply all round. The interim report was severely criticized in seven of the ten language-based discussion groups.

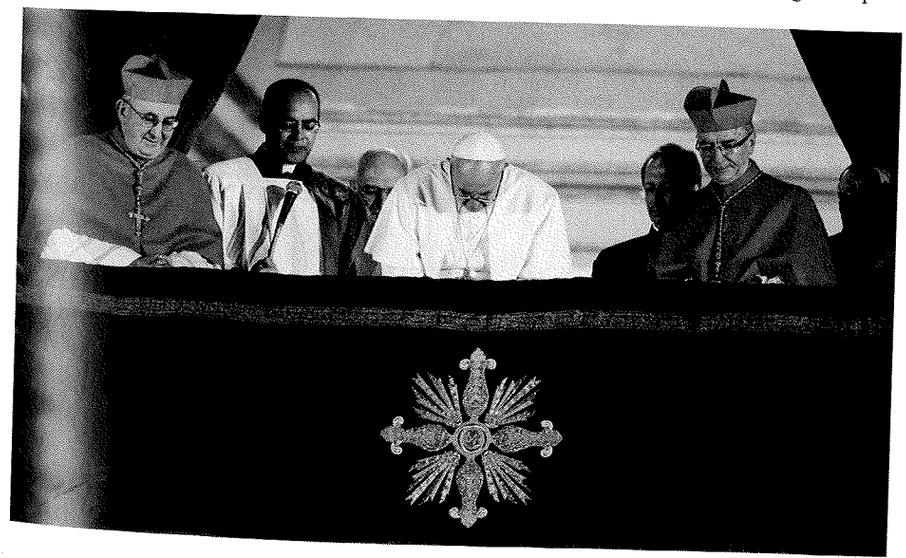
'The old Vatican manipulation behind the scenes is still at work, this time from the other side,' one church historian based in Rome told me. 'Those on the liberal wing, who feel they have the backing of the Pope, have been manoeuvring the agenda so that it advances what they want, leaving the conservatives feeling their opinions are being given insufficient weight. But that has been a tactical mistake, because by broadening the debate from Communion for the remarried to include homosexuality they have shifted the synod on to a disagreement on which the battlelines are even more deeply entrenched.'

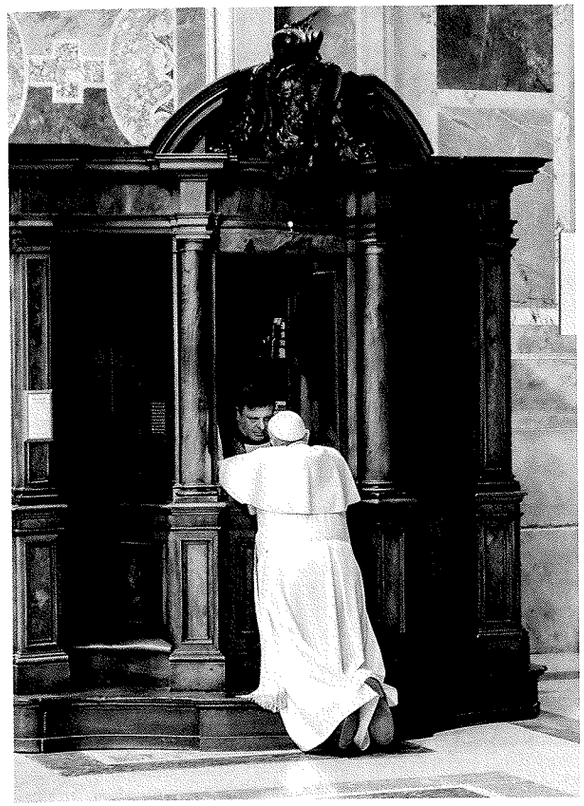
The staunch conservative, Cardinal Pell, detected a plot in that. Communion for the divorced and remarried was, for some liberal cardinals, 'only the tip of the iceberg'. Pell continued: 'It's a stalking horse. They want wider changes, recognition of civil unions, recognition of homosexual unions. The Church cannot go in that direction. It would be a capitulation from the beauties and strengths of the Catholic tradition, where people sacrificed themselves for hundreds of years, to do this.' In the synod he demanded that the reflections of the language groups should now be published too. He slammed his hand on the table and said to the officials of the secretariat: 'You must stop manipulating this synod.'

The Pope certainly got the frank debate he wanted. The synod ended with a vote on a final document which toned down some of the conciliatory language on gays and remarried Catholics. Almost all the document was approved by an overwhelming majority of bishops. But three sections – one on how the Church should deal with those in same-sex relationships and two calling for further



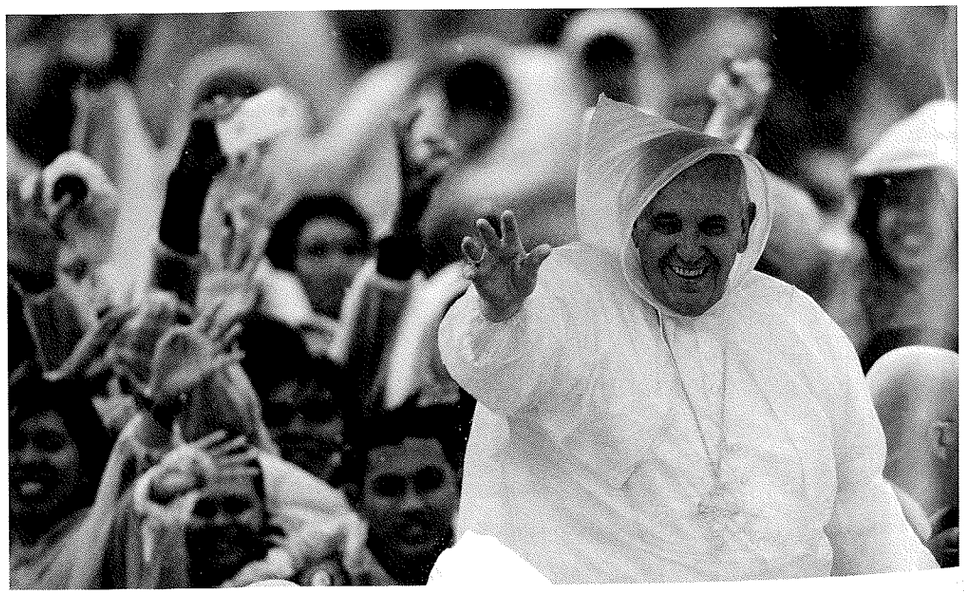
Newly elected Pope Francis waves to the waiting crowd from the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica (*above*) on March 13, 2013. Pope Francis bows his head (*below*) to receive the blessing of the ordinary people before he gives his first blessing as Pope.





Francis surprised his aides by going to Confession in public during Holy Week, March 2015.

The Pope refused an umbrella and insisted on wearing the same poncho as everyone else in the rain-soaked crowd in Tacloban, Philippines, January 2015.



study on Communion for the remarried – failed to receive the two-thirds majority that constitutes formal approval by the synod. The secular media reported the vote with headlines like: 'Pope suffers synod setback on gays'. But the Jesuit magazine *America* showed there was another way to interpret the outcome. Its Rome correspondent, Gerard O'Connell, who is close to Pope Francis, wrote:

> The Final Report of the Synod on the Family revealed that the Synod has closed no doors, all the main questions are still on the table, and an absolute majority of the synod fathers are with Pope Francis, in favour of a Church that like the Good Samaritan reaches out to care for all her 'wounded children'.
>
> At the same time it showed clearly that a significant minority totally opposes the admission of the divorced and remarried to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist, and wants the Church to move with great caution in its pastoral approach to homosexual persons lest Church teaching be compromised.

Like the interim report, it encouraged pastors to identify and take advantage of 'the positive elements' in civil marriages and cohabitation, with a view to leading those couples towards the Christian ideal of marriage.

If it was a setback the Pope responded to it by publishing, unusually, the full final report, including the three paragraphs that did not get a two-thirds majority. Beside each of those paragraphs he noted the voting figures, showing that they just fell short of two-thirds approval (on remarried Communion by just 9 votes, on the gays paragraphs by 20 votes). But their inclusion in the final document ensured the issues would stay in the debate at the next synod. The full document was sent to bishops' conferences throughout the world to promote discussion on the issues among bishops, clergy and lay Catholics at local church level. To add to the complexity, a number of reform-minded bishops voted against the final text because it was too conservative rather than too liberal. The Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, said he did not vote for the final wording on gays because it did not include the words 'welcome', 'respect' and 'value'. And Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, head of the Conference of Bishops in the US, made a point of using the language of welcome that the final text had rejected.

But the synod ended with a masterly address from Pope Francis in which he praised the frank exchanges in which the synod fathers had engaged. He made it clear that he was untroubled by the level of disagreement. 'Personally, I would have been very worried and saddened if there hadn't been these temptations and these animated discussions,' the Pope said, 'if everybody had agreed

or remained silent in a false and quietist peace.' Debate did not mean that the Church's unity was in danger, Pope Francis added. But he concluded by warning traditionalist and conservative bishops against zealous literalism and 'hostile rigidity' and by cautioning progressives and liberals against 'destructive do-goodism' and a 'misguided mercy' that wants to bind up wounds without first treating them. The speech won him a thunderous four-minute standing ovation from the vast majority of the 191 synod members. 'It was the kind of speech that both a Raymond Burke and a Walter Kasper could walk away from feeling as if the Pope understands them,' wrote John Allen in the *Boston Globe*, 'and it seemed to allow what had been a sometimes nasty two-week stretch to end on a high note.' One curial official expressed astonished admiration to another veteran Vatican-watcher, Robert Mickens, telling him over dinner: 'They have repeatedly taken the Pope to the brow of Vatican Hill, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he always passes through their midst and walks back to Casa Santa Marta.'

* * *

Vatican analysts hailed the 2014 Extraordinary Synod as a new chapter in the history of Catholicism. A first step had been taken in significantly shifting the way the Church governed itself. Bishops had openly discussed ideas for which they could have been investigated, censured, silenced or removed from office under previous papacies. The climate of conformity and fear that had gripped Catholicism had lifted. But the price of that was that it allowed the first mainstream public opposition to Pope Francis to emerge. In the months that followed, that criticism grew into a vocal backlash.

The most vociferous of Francis's public critics was Cardinal Raymond Burke. He was a man who now felt he had nothing to lose. He had already been stripped of his position on one of the Catholic Church's most influential bodies, the Vatican committee that oversees the appointment of new bishops throughout the worldwide Church. Before the synod the Pope had summoned him to a private meeting, where the pontiff had told him that he was to lose his job as head of the highest-ranking legal body. He has served there for six years, which was longer than most men kept that post. The Church needed a 'smart American', the Pope would later say in explaining the decision publicly, to be head of the chivalric Order of Malta. But neither man believed that. It was a largely ceremonial job usually given to cardinals as they approached retirement. Burke, the apotheosis of the culture-warrior bishop from the fortress Church of the John Paul/Benedict era, was being given the sack. His confrontational

condemnatory approach to the wider world summed up everything Pope Francis wanted to change in the Church.

The gloves were now off for Burke. The thin code in which he began to speak of the pontiff was decipherable to everyone – though it suited some conservatives to pretend to believe Burke's shallow assertions of loyalty to the Pope. It was, said Professor Eamon Duffy, 'a dramatic departure from the protocol that inhibits cardinals from public criticism of living popes'. Burke's distaste for Pope Francis and what he was doing was evident to all. He made it clear to any media outlet that wanted to interview him.

'There's really just a growing confusion about what the Church really teaches,' Burke told the Irish television channel RTÉ. He did not need to say who he thought was responsible for spreading it. 'You can't have this dichotomy between doctrine and the discipline by which we're disposed to follow it. That isn't the way church doctrine is formulated and it's not the way discipline is formulated. The Church is not a democracy. The Church is not about revolutions. This talk about finding good elements in homosexual acts, that simply is a contradiction for us.' 'Who am I to judge?' was not a question disposed to fall from the lips of Cardinal Raymond Burke. In an interview with the Spanish Catholic weekly *Vida Nueva* he went further in another attack on the Pope's leadership. 'Many have expressed their concerns to me. At this very critical moment, there is a strong sense that the Church is like a ship without a rudder,' Burke said. 'Now, it is more important than ever to examine our faith, have a healthy spiritual leader and give powerful witness to the faith.' The implication was clear; the current leadership was not spiritually healthy. 'I do not want to seem like I am speaking out against the Pope,' he said, disingenuously, in the interview. But the ordinary faithful 'are feeling a bit seasick because they feel the Church's ship has lost its way'. Commentators like the traditionalist Damian Thompson in the British conservative journal the *Spectator*, who before the synod had been lamenting 'a degree of chaos unprecedented in recent Catholic history' which was all 'the Pope's fault', now began to write about 'the Catholic civil war' having begun.

Mainstream cardinals dismissed talk of a conservative backlash as sensationalist. 'There's some opposition, but it is a very small if voluble minority,' one cardinal close to the Pope told me. 'It's just not serious. The vast majority of people in the Church are very happy to have a pope with this inclusive style.' That may have been true in the broader Church. And certainly, even among conservatives, outright hostility was at first confined to a tiny traditionalist minority. The Georgetown University academic Paul Elie, in an article for *New Atlantic* magazine on the cloistered retirement life of Pope Benedict, described the opposition as 'certain Catholics who object to the direction in which

Francis is taking the Church' who had turned to look to Benedict, the Pope Emeritus, as their standard-bearer. 'They are the seminarians with crew cuts striding in groups around Rome, cassocks swishing at their ankles,' he wrote. 'They are the devotees of the Latin Mass and the advocates of reunion with the fascist-friendly schismatics of the Society of St. Pius X.' So the addition of Cardinal Burke to the opposition was significant. He may also have been an arch-conservative devotee of the old forms of the Latin Mass but he was closer to the mainstream and a cardinal who had been at the heart of church governance in the Ratzinger era.

In the first months of the Francis papacy conservative Catholics had been unsure what to make of the new Pope. At first they tried to seek out and emphasize all the points of continuity between him and his predecessor Benedict. But gradually it became clear that there were also many points of contrast and of change. This bemused them. It also caused them a particular problem because part of their traditionalist ecclesiology insisted that the Pope was always right. One of the most reactionary British Catholic websites had been called Protect the Pope in the Benedict era. Under Francis it would have had to change its name to 'Protect the Pope – from Himself'. That was a thought which the conservative Catholic columnist Ross Douthat was later to articulate in the *New York Times*, writing that 'this Pope may be preserved from error only if the Church itself resists him'.

But in the early months of the Francis pontificate most conservatives kept their heads below the parapet. Some hoped he would reveal himself to be more the kind of pope they wanted. Others decided to wait out what many conservative bishops in the United States privately began to call 'the Jesuit Experiment'. The Vatican correspondent of the *National Catholic Register*, Edward Pentin, who has good contacts among the traditionalist right-wing in the Church, told me just after the synod: 'They feel that Pope Francis is causing confusion in the Church by not upholding the Church's teachings properly. They think he has socialist leanings and that he brought division through his silence in the synod rather than uphold traditional doctrine and practice.' Those close to Francis insisted, 'He's not silent; he's listening.' But conservatives were unimpressed. 'Just listening and remaining silent implies he consented to the general innovative theology presented at the synod, they feel,' said Pentin. 'They see him as ushering in a period of confusion, uncertainty and concern. Those fighting on life issues felt they had their back covered by the last Pope. Now they are not so sure. After Francis's remarks about the Church being obsessed with abortion, and his albeit misquoted "who am I to judge?" on homosexuality, they feel like their general has deserted them. They are concerned about his theological approach.' They see it as a theological vagueness and lack of precision. A liberal Jesuit inside the Vatican said something similar: 'For the past three decades progressive Catholics have felt excluded. Now it's the traditionalists' turn. Benedict was like a father to them. Now they are fatherless.'

At the end of 2014 one of Italy's best-known Catholic writers, Vittorio Messori – who had been a Vatican insider since 1984 when he conducted a rare book-length interview with the then cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger – wrote an article in *Corriere della Sera* which claimed to have detected a turning point for Pope Francis. Doubts about the new Pope had spread to 'some of the cardinals who were among his electors' who were now having 'second thoughts'. Another prominent right-wing Catholic intellectual Professor Robert de Mattei publicly suggested that developments under Francis were leading down 'a road that leads to schism and heresy'. And the Catholic controversialist Antonio Socci floated the wild idea that the resignation of Benedict XVI might not have been valid under church law – meaning that Francis was not really pope.

Burke and Pentin had used the same word: 'confusion'. It became conservative code for the resistance to Pope Francis which surfaced most boldly in the United States – the part of the world where the 'culture wars' between conservative and liberals had become most engrained and embittered. Men as clever as Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and the late Cardinal Francis George, then the retired Archbishop of Chicago, announced themselves to be confused too.

Confusion was a euphemism for anything the Pope said that conservatives did not like. Archbishop Chaput had signalled his suspicion of Pope Francis within weeks of his election. Chaput was in Rio de Janiero for World Youth Day. He had booked the trip assuming Pope Benedict would be presiding. It was long before Francis gave his interview saying the Catholic Church had been too obsessed with abortion and gay marriage – two of Chaput's key badges of Catholic identity. It was even before the defining remark: 'Who am I to judge?' But as early as July 2013 Chaput was cautioning that 'the right wing of the Church' generally had 'not been really happy about his election'. He warned the Pope that he needed to 'take care' of conservatives. To reinforce the point he then published, on his diocesan website, extracts from emails he had received from 'confused' catechists, parents and everyday Catholics. One mother of four children who had opened pro-life clinics and spent years counselling pregnant girls 'wanted to know why the Pope seemed to dismiss her sacrifices'. Another, which Chaput said came from a priest, complained that Francis was accusing priests 'who are serious about moral issues of being small-minded'. Another email he published bemoaned the fact that the Pope 'makes

all of the wrong people happy, people who will never believe in the Gospel and who will continue to persecute the Church'.

At the end of it all the archbishop posted: 'We can draw some useful lessons from these reactions.' He did not need to spell out what he thought they were. They were lessons, not for Pope Francis, who presumably was not a regular reader of catholicphilly.com, but for those of Chaput's flock who needed guidance on what to think about the new Pope. After the synod Chaput went further while giving a lecture in Manhattan, saying that 'confusion is of the Devil' and that 'the public image that came across [of the synod] was one of confusion'. Again the subliminal message was clear, as David Gibson, a Catholic convert who reports for Religion News Service, put it: 'Confusion may come from the Devil, but the synod came from Pope Francis.' Chaput, the man scheduled to host Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in September 2015, went on to suggest that US Catholic bishops should consider refusing to sign civil marriage licences for all couples in protest at the introduction of legalization allowing gay marriages. Justifying this characteristically confrontational suggestion, he said: 'Conflict always does two things: it purifies the Church, and it clarifies the character of the enemies who hate her.' It was the sight, one US commentator observed, of 'a culture warrior in full battle array'. The opponents of Pope Francis had entered the field.

There were two issues here. One was what Vatican veteran John Allen perceptively has called the Pope's older-son problem. It was a reference to the Parable of the Prodigal Son. 'Over his first eight months, Francis basically has killed the fatted calf for the prodigal sons and daughters of the post-modern world, reaching out to gays, women, nonbelievers, and virtually every other constituency inside and outside the Church that has felt alienated,' Allen wrote. 'There are an awful lot of such prodigals, of course, which helps explain the Pope's massive appeal. Yet there are also a few Catholics today who feel a bit like the story's older son, wondering if what they've always understood as their loyalty to the Church, and to the papacy, is being under-valued.' Allen continued: 'In the Gospel parable, the father eventually notices his older son's resentment and pulls him aside to assure him: "Everything I have is yours." At some stage, Pope Francis may need to have such a moment with his own older sons and daughters.'

But the other problem was with a smaller, but more influential, group. The loudest resistance to Pope Francis did not simply come from those who had felt smiled upon in the Benedict years and who now felt pushed to the kerb. Most of the bishops in the United States had been appointed in the John Paul/Benedict era and were men in the mould of the popes who had elevated them. A few

'social justice' moderates, like Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, had slipped through the net, but the bulk were pastorally minded conservatives. A smaller number, perhaps a fifth of the total, were ideological conservatives; the leading figure among these was Chaput. (Burke is regarded even by fellow hardline conservatives as embarrassing in his belligerence – 'Burke is the leader of the Catholic equivalent of the Tea Party', as one seasoned observer of the scene put it, 'whereas Chaput is at the head of the Church's neo-con Republicans.') It was with these theo-cons that Pope Francis's problem lay. They were clerics who adopted the rhetorical trope of 'confusion' but they were not confused at all. They simply disagreed with the Pope's instruction to include, encourage and accompany, preferring instead to prohibit, judge and condemn. Some of them took the view that, since the Pope was aged 76 when he was elected, they could afford just to ignore him, keep their heads down and wait for him to die. 'Popes come and go but the Curia lasts forever, they say, and many in the Curia don't think he's going to last long,' one insider told me. But others could not resist the temptation to be obstructive or obtuse.

To convey their unhappiness with 'the Jesuit Experiment' they engaged in activities which in the military would be described as dumb insolence. Bishop Morlino of Madison, Wisconsin, adopted a dismissive tone towards *Evangelii Gaudium* in an interview on the conservative EWTN TV network, suggesting Pope Francis's exhortation was just his personal opinion and not a proper teaching document. Others were downright disrespectful, like the zealous anti-abortion campaigner Thomas Tobin, Bishop of Providence, Rhode Island, who said that instead of kissing babies the Pope should be reaching out to embrace and kiss unborn children. Others tried patronizing the Pope, as with the interview with Cardinal George on the eve of his retirement from Chicago, in which he asked a series of condescending questions of the Pope, each beginning: 'Does he not realize … ?' George ended by saying of Francis: 'He says wonderful things, but he doesn't put them together all the time, so you're left at times puzzling over what his intention is. What he says is clear enough, but what does he want us to do?' Had a liberal spoken like that about Pope John Paul II or Pope Benedict XVI he would have been hauled to Rome for a severe dressing-down.

The problem for conservative bishops was that, even as they voiced all their reservations and 'confusion' about Francis, the Pope's popularity among ordinary Catholics rose to soaring levels. The authoritative Pew Forum survey in March 2015 showed that, two years after becoming the leader of the Catholic Church, his favourability ratings among US Catholics were at the same high levels as those of Pope John Paul II in the 1980s and 90s, and

far surpassing those of Pope Benedict. Nine out of ten approved of him. The survey showed that Pope Francis continued to grow more popular – and that conservative Americans approved of him even more than did moderates or liberals. His popularity was also climbing steadily – by 13 points since he was elected – among the non-Catholic population. Men and women, Republicans and Democrats, were united in their esteem for the pontiff. 'The constant cry of conservative bishops may be that people are confused by Pope Francis,' said David Gibson of Religion News Service. 'But all the evidence is that people are not confused. It is the conservative bishops who are confused because they do not know how to interpret him. There is no real confusion in the pews. The *sensus fidelium* is clear,' he said, referring to the Catholic doctrine that church teaching is only accounted to be completely true when it has been universally accepted by the whole Church, which incudes ordinary Catholics in the pews.

Despite the Pope's enormous popularity there were some in the Catholic Church who began to talk openly about the possibility of the Church being split by a formal schism in reaction to Francis's 'confusing' messages. The notion was floated by a number of prominent conservatives, most notably by the *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat. Not long after the Extraordinary Synod, Douthat issued a warning to the Pope not to 'break the Church' to promote his goals. If Francis continued to alienate conservative Catholics, he warned, it could lead to 'a real schism'. The subtle threat that conservatives might splinter off was echoed by a number of other conservatives and secular commentators. But these dark warnings did not come from Catholic churchmen. They were almost all from lay conservatives who were probably influenced by uninformed talk among the secular conservatives they knew. There was widespread outrage in neo-con circles at Pope Francis's denunciations of capitalism. They were further stung by the news that he was preparing to throw the Church's weight behind calls for action on climate change. It was also perhaps significant that Douthat was a convert to Catholicism who perhaps lacked an intuitive understanding of the priority which Catholics place on unity. Senior Catholic clerics, after long careers working within a complex sophisticated and wealthy hierarchical institution like the Catholic Church, were unlikely to easily countenance the idea of breaking away and having to set up a new church structure from scratch. Catholics have always seen schism as a Protestant rather than a Catholic proclivity. As David Gibson rather tartly put it: 'That's a lot of infrastructure to create, and pay for; it's not like a zealous Baptist who can start a new congregation with a Bible, a river and maybe a tent.' More importantly those talking of schism were a tiny if noisy minority said the Pope's chief theological adviser, Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernández. In May 2015 he told *Corriere della Sera*: 'The overwhelming majority of the people are with Francis and they love him. His opponents are weaker than you might think. Not pleasing everyone does not mean provoking a schism.'

But the talk of schism was important even if it was just sabre-rattling. 'It was an emotional release valve which gives you a sense of how unsettled the conservatives are,' Gibson said. 'These are people who have had the inside track for so long they feel disorientated now to be on the outside.' Cardinal Burke was the only clerical outlier on this. Asked by the Catholic website *Aleteia* whether there was 'a real risk of schism' he replied: 'If in some way the Synod of Bishops was seen to go contrary to what is the constant teaching and practice of the Church, there is a risk'. But Burke was already out in the cold and psychologically may have felt he had nothing more to lose. Other senior conservative clerics avoided such wild talk.

Pope Francis needed to do three things if he was to make his changes stick. The first was to replace ideologue bishops with more moderate men. Francis had begun to do that, but it would not bring change quickly, said Gibson. The second was to give cover to those bishops who were always closet Francis types but who kept quiet in the shadow of fierce ideological conservatives. And that too had begun, with a number of individuals clearly emboldened. 'The third is to convert and convince the pastoral conservatives,' said Gibson, 'and there is a significant amount of that going on. One centre-right bishop said to me the other day: "Francis has reminded me of what's important."'

* * *

Pope Francis was unfazed by the backlash he had provoked. When I asked a Jesuit close to the Pope, Father Antonio Spadaro, whether Francis was privately pleased or concerned with the outcome of the first synod he replied: 'He's never pleased, or upset; he's consoled. I have never seen him anxious or preoccupied. He says that the sense of peace which descended upon him soon after his election has never abandoned him. Everything is in the hands of the Holy Spirit.' Francis took the example of a previous pope, John XXIII, who used to wake up at night thinking about some problem but then would say to himself: 'Giovanni, why are you so worried? Whose Church is it, yours or God's?' And then he would answer his own question: 'It's God's; so go back to sleep.'

Francis, likewise, had a simple answer to the question asked by Cardinal George in Chicago: 'What does he want us to do?' The Pope gave the reply just a month after George had asked it. In an interview with the Argentine newspaper

La Nación he said: 'Look, I wrote an encyclical and an apostolic exhortation. I'm constantly making statements, giving homilies. That's magisterium. That's what I think, not what the media say that I think. Check it out; it's very clear. *Evangelii Gaudium* is very clear.' It was a tart rebuke to George's dissimulation. 'Francis knows exactly how power is spelled,' said Bernd Hagenkord, a Jesuit who works for Vatican Radio. 'He's a communicator in the same league as Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. They say he's being unclear, but we know exactly what he means.'

The *La Nación* interview two months after the synod was notable for the bold questions asked by the reporter Elisabetta Piqué – and for the directness of the Pope's replies. Resistance to his reforms was now becoming more evident, she observed. 'You said it,' he replied. 'Resistance is now more evident. But that's a good sign for me. It's out in the open and there is no stealthy mumbling when there's disagreement. I am not worried. It all seems normal to me. If there were no difference of opinions, that wouldn't be normal.' The interview continued:

> **Elisabetta Piqué:** At the recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family, two different visions of the Church surfaced, one sector open to debate and the other refusing to hear anything about it. Is this the case? What do you think?
> **Pope Francis:** I wouldn't say that's quite so... What we benefited from was the synodal process, which is not a parliamentary process but rather a protected space so that the Holy Spirit can work. Two clear qualities are needed: courage to speak and humility to listen. And that worked very well. There are, indeed, positions more inclined this way or that way, but in the pursuit of truth. You could ask me, 'Are there any individuals who are completely obstinate in their positions?' Yes, there surely are. But that doesn't worry me. It's a question of praying for the Holy Spirit to convert them, if there are such people. The prevailing feeling was a brotherly one, trying to find a way together to tackle the family's pastoral issues.
> **Piqué:** Conservatives, especially in the United States, fear that the traditional doctrine will collapse. They say the Synod caused confusion because it mentioned the 'positive nuances' of living together, and gay couples were mentioned in the draft...
> **Pope Francis:** The Synod was a process... The first draft was merely a first draft meant to record it all. Nobody mentioned homosexual marriage at the Synod; it did not cross our minds. What we did talk about was how a family with a homosexual child goes about educating that child, how the family bears up, how to help that family to deal with that somewhat unusual situation. That is to say, the Synod addressed the family and the homosexual individuals in relation to their families, because we come across this reality all the time in the confessional: a father and a mother whose son or daughter is in that situation. This happened to me several times in Buenos Aires. We have to find a way to help that father or that mother to stand by their son or daughter. That's what the Synod addressed. That's why someone mentioned positive factors in the first draft. But this was just a draft.
> **Piqué:** Some people fear that the traditional doctrine will collapse.
> **Pope Francis:** You know, some people are always afraid because they don't read things properly. Or they read some news in a newspaper... They don't read what the Synod decided... I think some Synod fathers made a mistake when they talked to the media. We decided that each one of us would grant as many interviews as he liked, with total freedom. No censorship was imposed. We chose transparency.

The synod issued briefings rather than publishing speeches word for word, he said, because some members of the synod sent written presentations in advance and then said something slightly different at the meeting. Also, Francis said, he was anxious that individuals felt free to say what they liked without keeping anything back, as they might have done if they knew their speech was to be reported *verbatim* and attributed to them. 'Different bishops had different approaches, but we will all move on together.' Pope Francis said he was not afraid of doing that 'because it is the road that God has asked us to follow'. It was not, he stressed, about doctrine but about how to look after people. That had been a key point in his concluding address to the synod, the Pope recalled:

> I pointed out that we had not addressed any part of the doctrine of the Church concerning marriage. In the case of divorced people who have remarried, we posed the question, what do we do with them? What door can we open for them? This was a pastoral concern: will we allow them to go to Communion? Communion alone is no solution. The solution is integration. They have not been excommunicated. But they cannot be godparents at baptism, they cannot read the readings at Mass, they cannot give Communion, they cannot be catechists. There are about seven things they cannot do. It seems that they are excommunicated *de facto*! So let us open the doors a bit more.

Pope Francis continued that he saw no reason why remarried Catholics could not be godparents. The presence of a remarried Catholic at a christening amounted to them saying, the Pope said: 'I made a mistake, I was wrong here, but I believe our Lord loves me, I want to follow God. Sin will not have victory over me, I want to move on.' That was a Christian witness, he said. So why was that disallowed when the Church's rules would permit someone to be a godparent who was a crook, so long as he had been properly married in church? What kind of testimony did that give to their godchild?

'A testimony of corruption? We must change things a little. Our standards need to change.'

A few days later Pope Francis published the preparatory document for the 2015 Synod. It consisted of the final document from the 2014 Synod – including the three controversial paragraphs – along with a new set of 46 questions to be delivered to bishops' conferences, Eastern Catholic synods, religious superiors and dicasteries, as well as academic institutions and ecclesial movements. The team that put together this *lineamenta* was the same as the one behind the Extraordinary Synod. Francis had not heeded calls from conservatives to change the men whom they had accused of trying to manipulate the outcome of the 2014 gathering. Rather, he had given a vote of confidence to Cardinal Péter Erdő as the synod's relator, or secretary, and also to Archbishop Bruno Forte, who had drafted the conciliatory paragraphs on homosexuality which conservatives had found so contentious. Forte was again named special secretary to the 2015 Synod. But one man had been added to the team. Cardinal Wilfrid Napier – the South African prelate who had forcefully complained that the 2014 interim report did not reflect the first week of the synod debates – was added as a fourth president of the 2015 October assembly. Bishops around the world were told to prepare for the Ordinary Synod by focusing on the pastoral care of families without seeing it merely in terms of doctrinal issues. They were urged to do everything possible to avoid 'starting over from zero', but rather to take account of what already happened in the first synod.

The 2015 Synod promised to be as fiercely contested as was the 2014 one. At the start of 2015 the General Secretary of the Synod, Cardinal Baldisseri, defended the controversial part of the 2014 final report and revealed that Pope Francis endorsed the controversial mid-term report from the meeting before it was published. 'All of those points have been personally approved by Pope Francis,' he said. Some critics seemed mollified by the way the process was working through. 'Some were very upset and disturbed that the cardinals were arguing in public,' said Cardinal Napier. 'But most of us are saying: Isn't that what a debate is about. You try winning people with your arguments.' But others maintained their original stance. Cardinal Angelo Scola, the man who had been the favourite to be Pope when Francis got the job, declared that Communion for the remarried risked 'almost a functional separation among doctrine, pastoral practice and discipline'. Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney said something similar, and said that those building expectations of change were doing everyone a disservice. 'People have said Francis has caused confusion because he hasn't been clear enough,' Fisher said. 'I think he wanted a discussion, he wanted points of view. It's a dangerous strategy, no doubt. There can be a lot of emotion and polarization'. That was exemplified in March 2015 when one in ten priests in Britain signed a letter to the *Catholic Herald* calling on the synod later that year not to admit remarried Catholics to Holy Communion.

For all that, no one was sure what Pope Francis's intentions were at the end of the two-year two-stage synod process. 'The first synod was a way of breaking up the soil,' said one senior priest in Rome outside the Vatican. 'The whole process has been very clever. As we approach the second synod it's still not clear whether Francis has been pursuing a particular agenda by stealth. Or whether the whole process of opening up discussion is more important to him than the eventual outcome. That way he keeps everyone involved and engaged. No one can be quite sure so they have to go along with the procedure he has put in place.' A seasoned Vatican diplomat suggested that Pope Francis wanted the best of both worlds: 'He wants a synodical process but in the end he'll also want a decision and a clear course. The second synod may set that course but without taking a decision. I suspect that the decision will come from Francis alone in the post-synod document he draws up.'

One conservative Jesuit church historian in Rome, who asked not to be named, offered a more Machiavellian insight: 'It was interesting that on the opening morning of the 2014 Synod the Pope stressed that the synod always takes place *cum petro et sub petro* – with Peter and under Peter. That phrase implies consultation and collegiality. He wanted people to feel reassured that the Pope's presence was a guarantee for everyone and protected the faith. But the phrase cuts two ways. It is *with* Peter, so the Successor of Peter is just a first among equals. But it is *under* Peter, which means that in the end, even after a synodical process, it is the Successor of Peter who decides. Perhaps Francis meant that ambiguity intentionally. It may be, of course, that I am thinking in this suspicious way only because I am a Jesuit. But then the Pope is a Jesuit.' Another member of the Society of Jesus, from the Americas, offered a gloss on that: 'There's a Jesuit expression from the ancient Greek *speûde bradéōs* which means 'make haste slowly'. Francis is learning from the mistakes he made before, when he presided over some deep divisions within the Jesuits in Argentina. When he was 36 he tried running an organization top-down and it didn't work very well. What he himself called his authoritarian way of making decisions without consultation backfired. So, if he can now move the synod at least partly in what seems to be his direction, it will enable him to say, when he announces a change, 'as the synod fathers have deliberated and taught'; that, in other words, he is acting on the back of the opinions of many synod fathers – much as he said when he set up the C8, that he had a mandate from

his fellow cardinals to do it. Ultimately his position is greatly strengthened if he has the Church with him, including the C9 as it now is, and the synod. It's really important to him to bring people along. But even more basically, as a friend of his told me recently, he is completely open to the process. He's fine with letting the Holy Spirit guide things. That's essential for understanding what he's doing.' The papal historian Michael Walsh, the former Librarian at Heythrop College, suggested that Francis would strike a balance on that: 'He does not want a split in the bishops. He wants to try to reach consensus,' said Walsh. So the move forward may be smaller than he personally wants. But the unity of the Church is important in Catholicism.' The head of one Roman seminary agreed. 'This isn't a tactic – to maintain unity,' he said. 'It is a principal – to usher in collegiality'.

Behind the scenes Francis conducted a series of private meetings over the following months in the Casa Santa Marta. Those who received individual summons to go to see him told me that the subjects which were so controversial at the synod were at the top of the list of issues he wanted to discuss. The head of one Rome-based religious order had a one-to-one with Francis to discuss the issue of the pastoral care of divorced and remarried Catholics. 'It was clear he wanted change,' the religious leader told me. 'His question was how? I told him that in the third century some Christians were excluded from Communion because they had once offered worship to the Emperor. It was very harsh. The Pope at the time changed the discipline to readmit them, I told Francis.' The Pope nodded.

Another of his private meetings was with Erwin Kräutler, Bishop of Xingu in the Brazilian rainforest. The Pope wanted to talk to him about his forthcoming encyclical on the environment, *Laudato si*. But Kräutler's big anxiety was the desperate shortage of priests in his huge diocese, which had 700,000 Catholics in 800 church communities and only 27 priests. Could married men be ordained? 'You tell me,' the Pope replied. Local bishops, through their regional and national conferences, the pontiff said, should make proposals based on their lived experience and then bring them to Rome. It was consistent with Francis's general desire to make bishops take more responsibility for the direction of the Church without waiting for initiatives from Rome or from the Pope personally. But it also reflected the Pope's shrewd sense that he could not tackle everything at once. When one of his advisers later asked him about married priests, Francis replied: 'One thing at a time.' Another senior curial official confirmed that, saying: 'He understands you need to pick your battles.' Nevertheless in November 2014 the Brazilian bishops set up a task force to study the idea.

The position of homosexuals in the Church was also on the agenda for his private talks. Again his approach was not doctrinal. 'He wanted to know about

people's lived experience,' one Vatican insider told me. 'He wants to know where God is already active in people's lives. That was why he began the two-synod process by asking the laity of their experience of life through the questionnaires.' On the principle of 'one thing at a time' Francis knew that finding a place for gays and lesbians in the universal Church is a massive task. His limited experience of Asia, and what he had begun to learn about Africa, taught him that the local churches were in very different places on the issue. 'On homosexuality he does want change,' said one of those who had private meetings with the Pope, 'but he sees pastoral care as a fulfilment of the teaching rather than a contradiction of it. Part of the Catholic approach is to yoke together two inconsistent views in a way which is consistent.' A senior figure in the Curia said: 'Francis is trying to find a solution that uses both poles in the tension. The tension cannot be resolved but it can be lived with. It is time over place,' the official added, referring to one of Pope Francis's four guiding principles. 'And Francis is sharp. He knows not to move too quickly.'

None of those who had had these private meetings with Francis wanted to break confidence by speaking publicly. But Father James Alison, a priest and theologian who has written much on gay and lesbian theology, said it was a significant step forward for the pontiff to allow discussion of the dilemmas posed for families with gay relatives. 'I think that the Pope was very brave even allowing the issue to come up at the synod at all, given how much of a psychological factor it is in the lives of many clergy and in particular the higher clergy,' he said. 'A lot of them are gay; the notion that somehow all the gay people are weeded out before they become bishops is nonsense; I was never in a minority as a gay person when I lived in a formal religious setting, never.' Alison was a member of the Dominican order for over a decade. His advocacy for the acceptance of homosexuals in the Church is rooted in Catholic teaching concerning nature, grace and original sin. 'The structure of holiness that has given them their jobs depends on a notion of goodness, which includes denying who they are. And some of them think that that's a sacrifice made to God and that they're doing something good. Whereas in fact it means that they're constantly demanding sacrifices of other people to be like them. And so you can see why it requires a great deal of courage for any of them to even start talking about it.

'They can talk about an issue like Communion for the divorced and remarried because that is essentially theological (and depends on issues concerning the sacraments, and the words of our Lord which are genuinely theologically complicated). But the gay issue, which is theologically quite straightforward, is immensely difficult for many bishops psychologically,'

Alison continued. 'And that's why it's such a relief when the pontiff appears to be straight because it means that it's not a particular problem for him. He just let people know they could talk frankly and boldly – and that they needn't be frightened of expressing their opinions. There was a predictable backlash but the Pope handled it very well.'

One Jesuit close to Francis, Father Antonio Spadaro, thinks the point that Alison makes about Francis and homosexuality is true more widely. The backlash over the synod has been wider, deeper and more visceral than the resistance to Francis's reforms within the Curia, because it touches on doctrine, which for many clerics lies at the heart of Catholicism. The criticisms made of the Pope by some conservatives are so sharp that Spadaro views the 'anguish' of the Pope's foes 'as more of a psychological problem' than a question of doctrine. And he added that Francis's emphasis on mercy 'provokes in some Catholics a panic, the fear of a lack of certainty that stuns me'.

Yet other perceptive commentators on the Catholic Church think that Pope Francis does not have a stealthy private agenda at all. His plan, so far as it goes, is to open up the Church more to allow the Holy Spirit to blow more freely through the institution, eddying in what were once airless corners. 'What the Pope most wants is not for one side to win, but for both sides to recognize the need to encounter one another', wrote the prominent US Catholic writer Michael Sean Winters, who normally takes a liberal perspective in his award-winning columns. 'He has called the Church to a 'culture of encounter' and that call pertains not only to those outside the Church but also within. The Pope's own advisers tend to agree. Cardinal Marx said: 'The Synod cannot have winners and losers. That is not the spirit of the Synod. The spirit of the Synod is to find a way together. Not to say: "How can I find a way to bring my position through?" Rather: "How can I understand the other position, and how can we together find a new position?" That is the spirit of the Synod.'

The former Master of the Dominican Order, Father Timothy Radcliffe, saw Francis working at a deeper level even that that. 'The Pope is also undoing the mechanisms of control; he's an uncontrolling person,' he said. Radcliffe cited the eminent Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor and his great work *A Secular Age*. 'Taylor thinks that secularism is fundamentally about control because once you cease to believe in the providential presence of God working in the world then humans have got to take over and control everything. And the Church has been affected by this desire to dominate and to rule. What Pope Francis is doing is systematically undoing that in ways that are deeply liberating.' Radcliffe sees the Pope's extended synod process, beginning with the questionnaire, as part of that. 'He wants to know what ordinary Catholics think. His fundamental concern is that together as a church we must be responsible. He wants to devolve a lot of responsibility from his own position to the college of bishops – and he hopes that bishops in the dioceses will give more responsibility to the ordinary people.' But that is not all. 'He also wants each of us to take responsibility for our own lives because in the end that's what being grown-up is about. What Pope Francis wants is a church for grown-ups.'

The paradox for the Pope is that establishing such a model has empowered those in the Church who are as opposed to change as Francis is open to it. Cardinal Raymond Burke, now liberated from his posts and responsibilities in the Vatican, seems intent on making himself the centre of the opposition. In an interview with French television in February 2015 he raised the stakes yet again – saying that he was prepared to 'resist' the Pope in a public challenge that had no precedent in the John Paul/Benedict era. This was the key part of the exchange with the FranceTv.info interviewer:

> **Cardinal Burke**: I cannot accept that Communion can be given to a person in an irregular union because it is adultery. On the question of people of the same sex, this has nothing to do with marriage. This is an affliction suffered by some people whereby they are attracted against nature sexually to people of the same sex.
> **Question**: If perchance the Pope will persist in this direction, what will you do?
> **Cardinal Burke**: I shall resist, I can do nothing else. There is no doubt that it is a difficult time; this is clear, this is clear.
> **Question**: Can we say today that the Catholic Church as an institution is threatened?
> **Cardinal Burke**: The Lord has assured us, as He has assured St. Peter in the Gospel, that the powers of evil will not prevail, '*non praevalebunt*' as we say in Latin, that the forces of evil will not have victory over the Church.

At this point the camera lighted upon a portrait of Pope Francis and the interviewer asked:

> Is the Pope still your friend?
> **Cardinal Burke** (with a smile): I would not want to make the Pope an enemy for sure. That is enough for now.

It certainly was. He was indicating to the interviewer that she had asked enough questions. But it also could easily have meant that Cardinal Burke would have more to say in the future. He did. In March 2015 he compared gay couples and remarried Catholics to murderers. A month later he gave an interview to the

Italian Catholic website *Nuova Bussola Quotidiana* in which he claimed that his 'I shall resist' declaration was not a criticism of Pope Francis but of some hypothetical pontiff but few were persuaded by his protestations.

Many in the College of Cardinals shrugged off the rhetoric of bellicose rigorists like Burke as expressing the views of a small minority on the extreme fringes of the Church. 'There's opposition for every change so I do expect if he makes any change there will be opposition,' said one of Francis's C9, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay. 'There are a lot of voices that are very loud [in opposition], but I don't think they represent the mainstream,' said Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington. 'There's some opposition but it's just not serious,' one cardinal close to Francis, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, told me. 'The challenge for him is to ensure that collegiality becomes enstructured. How? The synod is very important. He said that to me. The synod was set up to implement the collegiality of Vatican II. It has never properly done that.' Indeed, said the church historian Michael Walsh: 'Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Benedict XVI, said you could only have collegiality if the Pope was present'. By contrast with that, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor continued, 'true collegiality is what he's restoring. He came in not with a plan but with an instinct – but an instinct which had been formed. It was formed in Aparecida where a model was established for collegiality among the Latin American bishops which he is bringing now to the universal Church.'

It was a Latin American who set out what Pope Francis wants to unfold for the college of bishops worldwide if he is given the time. At the beginning of 2015 Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, coordinator of the C9 advisers, gave a lecture about the reforms of the Church of Mercy at Santa Clara University. 'True ecclesial renovation,' he said, cannot occur without a transformation of institutions but also a focus on the quality of the Church activities, practical, spiritual and mystical. He continued: 'Usually, renovation begins with pastoral activities. For it is there where the inconsistencies of a certain "model" of the Church and reality are primarily experienced. The missionaries, the evangelists on the "margins" of the Church, are the first ones to notice the insufficiency of the "traditional" ways of action; the pastoral criticism begins with the experience of the mission in the "peripheries". Changes and adjustments begin there.' This required simultaneous changes in institutions, organization, attitude and approach, he said. Reforms must encompass all levels of the Church: the religious congregations, missionary societies, dioceses; the Vatican Curia, bishops' conferences, synods, parishes and lay movements; and also the teaching of theology, seminaries, Catholic schools and so forth. 'Everything in the Church changes consistent with a renewed pastoral model,'

he said, and concluded: 'The Pope wants to take this church renovation to the point where it becomes irreversible. The wind that propels the sails of the Church towards the open sea of its deep and total renovation is Mercy.'

What this means for the Synod of Bishops is that Pope Francis wants it to become a permanent part of the structure for governing the universal Church. That means that the Pope will continue to revamp and expand the synod. So much so, predicted the commentator Michael Sean Winters, that the October 2015 Ordinary Synod would probably have to be extended. 'People say this is new but that is how the Church was in the first millennium,' said the Jesuit, Father Norman Tanner SJ, who is Professor of Church History at the Gregorian Pontifical University, in Rome. 'And women played a role there. Those who pretend that the Church has always been as it was in the Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI era are either ignorant or dishonest.'

Others went further. Cardinal Napier advised that if the Pope was going to make changes in the governance of the Church that would last, he would have to 'put structures in place that are going to make those changes carry through regardless of who is in the seat'. For change to be effective what was needed was a synod with more teeth. 'Better consultation is not the same as sharing in decision-making,' said Mary McAleese, who served as president of the Irish Republic from 1997 to 2011 and who, after leaving politics, completed a doctorate in canon law. In a lecture to the Von Hügel Institute in Cambridge she explored the three ways in which the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* suggested that the College of Bishops could exercise more power over church governance. None of them had been tried in practice. The most effective of the three, she suggested, was involved turning the Synod of Bishops into a decision-making body. 'Reforming the Curia is a meaningless exercise unless you reform church governance,' she said in an interview with RTÉ. 'That means that there has to be a decision-making body working with the Pope – decision-making, not advising, not collaborating, not being asked [their] opinion – but being directly involved in governance'. The Synod of Bishops was the obvious body to do that, though there were some canonical issues to sort out about the relationship of the synod to all the bishops worldwide, she said. Under canon law, the Pope can give decision-making powers to any synod, though no pope has ever done so. It would be, she said, 'a template for the kind of noisy, messy, argumentative Church the Vatican Council envisaged and that Francis seems comfortable with: not top-down, control-driven and passive, but a healthy, vibrant *communio* of the diverse engaged in active listening and talking top-down, sideways and bottom-up, unafraid of bad news, unafraid of healthy debate'.

That is exactly what traditionalists and conservatives like Cardinal Burke fear.

'I don't think Pope Francis has a plan of the exact outcomes he wants,' said Father Timothy Radcliffe, 'he just wants to unleash the unruly freedom of the Holy Spirit and let it blow where it will.'

16

A Weakness for Women

'The boys played the girls – and for once the girls won.' Sister Simone Campbell spoke with her usual easy grace and charm. But it was not a particularly smart thing for a lawyer to say, even with a smile. The girls might have won one round, but there was a longer game being played. And the boys could play quite dirty.

As well as being a lawyer Sister Simone was a member of a religious order, the Sisters of Social Service. She was speaking on the CBS News flagship US documentary *60 Minutes* about the long war conducted over the past decade between activist nuns and conservative bishops in the United States. But her words had a wider resonance, for they spoke to the unsettled relationship between women and men throughout the Catholic Church all across the world – a relationship which has taken a new, but no less complicated, turn since the election of Pope Francis. The struggle for the soul of Catholicism continues, though there has been a tectonic shift in the fault-lines between the two sides.

The subject under discussion was Obamacare – or, more formally, the Affordable Care Act, the legislation with which President Barack Obama sought to provide some measure of healthcare to the poorer citizens of the United States. The US bishops had opposed the measure, arguing that it would be used to channel government money to fund abortion. The US nuns had argued that it would be good for the poor and that the bishops had been misled by their staff on the abortion issue. 'How do you know that?' she was asked. 'Because I read the bill,' she replied. 'The fact is I'm a lawyer. I read the bill. I saw what it said. It made sense. I could see that it said "no federal funding of abortion" which is what the bishops' staff was concerned about.' The bishops' staff clearly hadn't read the bill properly, was the implication. The insult did not go unnoticed.

The battlelines between the nuns and bishops, the women and men, had been drawn years earlier. But Obamacare was a tipping point. Sister Simone wrote an open letter supporting the legislation. Dozens of prominent nuns signed it. The Catholic Health Association – the largest healthcare group in the United States, with more than 2,000 health facilities – took the same view. So did a crucial number of anti-abortion politicians and the bill was signed