

Fr. Perozich comments —

The two following articles put an explanation into my mind for the controversies Catholics are experiencing in our church.

Firstly, some leaders have outcomes which they wish to establish in the church, outcomes which differ from the church's theology and pastoral practices.

Secondly, Dr. Samuel Greg exposes for me the mindset of those who drift toward liberalism thinking in the Catholic World Report article, "John Henry Newman's long war on liberalism",

When reflecting upon Newman's remarks, it's hard not to notice how much of the Christian world in the West has drifted in the directions against which he warned. Under the banner of "liberalism in religion," Newman listed several propositions. These included (1) "the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion," (2) "that one creed is as good as another," (3) that no religion can be recognized as true for "all are matter of opinion," (4) that "revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective faith, not miraculous," and (5) "it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy."

Thirdly, verbosity, slogans, euphemisms, jargon, ambiguity are used rather than the classic clarity of Catholic theology grounded in solid philosophy to push an agenda.

Fourthly, decentralization is technique to give power to those who wish to effect change. As soon as they get it, they re-centralize and squash any dissent to their newly established rule.

Fifthly, J.D. Flynn may be too optimistic in the lack of effect of the proposals of the liberal think in the Amazon Synod. Those writing the proposals have waited years to get power. Now they have it, and I believe they will push their agenda beginning with the Amazon to affect the entire church.

Sixthly, I have a cautious optimism, like Newman, that God is in charge, and that we need to be about living our faith.

The colored highlights are my own addition to draw attention to certain points. —rp

CARDINAL NEWMAN

*On Monday morning, May 12, Dr. Newman went to the Palazzo della Pigna, the residence of Cardinal Howard, who had lent him his apartments to receive there the messenger from the Vatican bearing the biglietto from the Cardinal-Secretary of State, informing him that in a secret Consistory held that morning his Holiness had deigned to raise him to the rank of Cardinal. By eleven o'clock the rooms were crowded with English and American Catholics, ecclesiastics and laymen, as well as many members of the Roman nobility and dignitaries of the Church, assembled to witness the ceremony. Soon after midday the consistorial messenger was announced. He handed the biglietto to Dr. Newman, who, having broken the seal, gave it to Dr. Clifford, Bishop of Clifton, who read the contents. The messenger having then informed the newly-created Cardinal that his Holiness would receive him at the Vatican the next morning at ten o'clock to confer the berretta upon him, and having paid the customary compliments, his Eminence replied in what has become known as his "**Biglietto Speech**" as follows:—*

Vi ringrazio, Monsignore, per la partecipazione che m'avete fatto dell' {62} alto onore che il Santo Padre si è degnato conferire sulla mia umile persona—

And, if I ask your permission to continue my address to you, not in your musical language, but in my own dear mother tongue, it is because in the latter I can better express my feelings on this most gracious announcement which you have brought to me than if I attempted what is above me.

First of all then, I am led to speak of the wonder and profound gratitude which came upon me, and which is upon me still, at the condescension and love towards me of the Holy Father in singling me out for so immense an honour. It was a great surprise. Such an elevation had never come into my thoughts, and seemed to be out of keeping with all my antecedents. I had passed through many trials, but they were over; and now the end of all things had almost come to me, and I was at peace. And was it possible that after all I had lived through so many years for this?

Nor is it easy to see how I could have borne so great a shock, had not the Holy Father resolved on a second {63} act of condescension towards me, which tempered it, and was to all who

heard of it a touching evidence of his kindly and generous nature. He felt for me, and he told me the reasons why he raised me to this high position. Besides other words of encouragement, he said his act was a recognition of my zeal and good service for so many years in the Catholic cause; moreover, he judged it would give pleasure to English Catholics, and even to Protestant England, if I received some mark of his favour. After such gracious words from his Holiness, I should have been insensible and heartless if I had had scruples any longer.

This is what he had the kindness to say to me, and what could I want more? In a long course of years I have made many mistakes. I have nothing of that high perfection which belongs to the writings of Saints, *viz.*, that error cannot be found in them; but what I trust that I may claim all through what I have written, is this,—an honest intention, an absence of private ends, a temper of obedience, a willingness to be corrected, a dread of error, a desire to serve Holy Church, and, through Divine mercy, a fair {64} measure of success. And, I rejoice to say, to one great mischief I have from the first opposed myself. For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of liberalism in religion. Never did Holy Church need champions against it more sorely than now, when, alas! it is an error overspreading, as a snare, the whole earth; and on this great occasion, when it is natural for one who is in my place to look out upon the world, and upon Holy Church as in it, and upon her future, it will not, I hope, be considered out of place, if I renew the protest against it which I have made so often.

Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another, and this is the teaching which is gaining substance and force daily. It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion, as *true*. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each

individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy. {65} Devotion is not necessarily founded on faith. Men may go to Protestant Churches and to Catholic, may get good from both and belong to neither. They may fraternise together in spiritual thoughts and feelings, without having any views at all of doctrine in common, or seeing the need of them. Since, then, religion is so personal a peculiarity and so private a possession, we must of necessity ignore it in the intercourse of man with man. If a man puts on a new religion every morning, what is that to you? It is as impertinent to think about a man's religion as about his sources of income or his management of his family. Religion is in no sense the bond of society.

Hitherto the civil Power has been Christian. Even in countries separated from the Church, as in my own, the *dictum* was in force, when I was young, that: "Christianity was the law of the land". Now, everywhere that goodly framework of society, which is the creation of Christianity, is throwing off Christianity. The *dictum* to which I have referred, with a hundred others which followed upon it, is gone, or is going everywhere; and, by the end of the century, unless {66} the Almighty interferes, it will be *forgotten*. Hitherto, it has been considered that religion alone, with its supernatural sanctions, was strong enough to secure submission of the masses of our population to law and order; now the Philosophers and Politicians are bent on satisfying this problem without the aid of Christianity. Instead of the Church's authority and teaching, they would substitute first of all a universal and a thoroughly secular education, calculated to bring home to every individual that to be orderly, industrious, and sober, is his personal interest. Then, for great working principles to take the place of religion, for the use of the masses thus carefully educated, it provides—the broad fundamental ethical truths, of justice, benevolence, veracity, and the like; proved experience; and those natural laws which exist and act spontaneously in society, and in social matters, whether physical

or psychological; for instance, in government, trade, finance, sanitary experiments, and the intercourse of nations. As to Religion, it is a private luxury, which a man may have if he will; but which of course he must pay for, and which he must not {67} obtrude upon others, or indulge in to their annoyance.

The general character of this great *apostasia* is one and the same everywhere; but in detail, and in character, it varies in different countries. For myself, I would rather speak of it in my own country, which I know. There, I think it threatens to have a formidable success; though it is not easy to see what will be its ultimate issue. At first sight it might be thought that Englishmen are too religious for a movement which, on the Continent, seems to be founded on infidelity; but the misfortune with us is, that, though it ends in infidelity as in other places, it does not necessarily arise out of infidelity. It must be recollected that the religious sects, which sprang up in England three centuries ago, and which are so powerful now, have ever been fiercely opposed to the Union of Church and State, and would advocate the un-Christianising of the monarchy and all that belongs to it, under the notion that such a catastrophe would make Christianity much more pure and much more powerful. Next the liberal principle is forced on us from the necessity of the case. Consider {68} what follows from the very fact of these many sects. They constitute the religion, it is supposed, of half the population; and, recollect, our mode of government is popular. Every dozen men taken at random whom you meet in the streets has a share in political power,—when you inquire into their forms of belief, perhaps they represent one or other of as many as seven religions; how can they possibly act together in municipal or in national matters, if each insists on the recognition of his own religious denomination? All action would be at a deadlock unless the subject of religion was ignored. We cannot help ourselves. And, thirdly, it must be borne in mind, that there is much in the liberalistic theory which is good and true; for example, not to say more, the precepts of justice,

truthfulness, sobriety, self-command, benevolence, which, as I have already noted, are among its avowed principles, and the natural laws of society. It is not till we find that this array of principles is intended to supersede, to block out, religion, that we pronounce it to be evil. There never was a device of the Enemy so cleverly framed and {69} with such promise of success. And already it has answered to the expectations which have been formed of it. It is sweeping into its own ranks great numbers of able, earnest, virtuous men, elderly men of approved antecedents, young men with a career before them.

Such is the state of things in England, and it is well that it should be realised by all of us; but it must not be supposed for a moment that I am afraid of it. I lament it deeply, because I foresee that it may be the ruin of many souls; but I have no fear at all that it really can do aught of serious harm to the Word of God, to Holy Church, to our Almighty King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Faithful and True, or to His Vicar on earth. Christianity has been too often in what seemed deadly peril, that we should fear for it any new trial now. *So far is certain; on the other hand, what is uncertain, and in these great contests commonly is uncertain, and what is commonly a great surprise, when it is witnessed, is the particular mode by which, in the event, Providence rescues and saves His elect inheritance.* Sometimes our enemy is turned into a friend; sometimes he is despoiled of {70} that special virulence of evil which was so threatening; sometimes he falls to pieces of himself; sometimes he does just so much as is beneficial, and then is removed. *Commonly the Church has nothing more to do than to go on in her own proper duties, in confidence and peace; to stand still and to see the salvation of God.*

Mansueti hereditabunt terram,

Et delectabuntur in multitudine pacis.

But the meek inherit the earth;

And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace

ANALYSIS: THE AMAZON SYNOD AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The issue of clerical celibacy in the Amazon, writes JD Flynn, could be mostly a stalking horse for the debate about decentralization that has intensified during the Francis pontificate.

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Spanish Augustinian Father Miguel Angel Cadenas baptizes an infant in an Urarina indigenous community on Peru's Urituyacu River June 6, 2014. (CNS photo/Barbara J. Fraser)

Vatican City, Jul 4, 2019 / 01:00 pm (CNA).- Three months from now, the bishops of the Amazonian region will meet for a regional synod that has already garnered international attention. The synod has become controversial because it seems to have become to some theologians and

Churchmen a kind of “proving ground” for theological or canonical agendas that are not directly connected to the Amazon.

The recent history of Church synods suggests that the results of the meeting will likely not match the intensity of the rhetoric preceding it. But the rhetoric- and what it can teach us about the state of the Church – matters.

The needs of Catholics in the Amazonian region are abundant. The region is poor: indigenous persons face discrimination and cultural disintegration, deforestation and strip mining threaten ancient ways of life. Between far-flung villages and sometimes negligible infrastructure, priests face the challenge of ministry across very broad territories. Catholics in some places have very little catechesis and few opportunities for Mass and confession, and they face temptations to abandon the faith. A meeting to discuss these realities, and to develop pastoral plans, could do real good.

But the meeting has garnered interest from some German theologians and ecclesiastics who seem to see it as an opportunity to reinvigorate support for an ecclesiology that takes a sort-of “federal” approach to Church doctrine and discipline, with tolerance for a considerable degree of regional variability on moral and disciplinary issues.

Such an approach, some have said, is the approach of “synodality.”

Pope Francis has said frequently there are limits to synodality, and even while debate smolders about his controversial footnotes in the 2015 exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, the pope has said on several recent occasions that neither doctrine nor significant disciplinary matters can or should be subject to regional preferences.

Last week, the pope reemphasized to the bishops of Germany that he will not abide an approach that prioritizes the judgment of a “national” Church over the teachings or norms of the universal Church.

But throughout his papacy, a cadre of mostly European clerics and intellectuals, taking up the sort of “federated” ecclesiological approach advanced by Cardinal Kasper, have attempted to curry favor or support for their position from Pope Francis. It seems clear to most observers that the Amazon synod will be another front in that campaign.

In fact, a synod issue that has generated a great deal of controversy- the possible ordination of married men to the priesthood – is likely best seen through the lens of that controversy.

There may be genuine interest among some Amazonian bishops in ordaining older, married men to the priesthood to accommodate pastoral realities. But much support for the “*virī probati*” proposal comes from those who perceive that decentralizing universal rules about clerical

celibacy will be a precedent for the decentralization of other governance and doctrinal matters, especially those concerning how the Church engages with a secular sexual ethos.

In short, the issue of clerical celibacy in the Amazon could be mostly a stalking horse for the debate about decentralization that has intensified during the Francis pontificate.

But will the pan-Amazonian synod produce the kind of results its interested observers hope for? Will the synod lead to a new way of thinking about the Church itself? That seems unlikely.

On June 30, Vatican Media published a commentary on the upcoming synod by Mauricio Lopez Oropeza, a layman who oversees a Church-sponsored advocacy network for Catholics in the Amazon. He was recently president of the World Christian Life Community, a lay movement of Ignatian spirituality associated with the Jesuits.

Oropeza wrote that the upcoming meeting “is increasingly becoming a Synod which goes far beyond the territory upon which it is based,” adding that the synod “can, and should, contribute enlightenment in a universal overview.”

But the rest of Oropeza’s commentary gives indication of what kind of contribution the pan-Amazonian synod is likely to make to any such “enlightenment.”

Noting contentious issues defining the synod, Oropeza discussed a tension “between the Kairos of the ‘new paths for the Church’ and the cronos of the urgency to respond to the socio-environmental crisis through an ‘integral ecology.’”

“Will a Synod be able to interpret this ‘Kairos’ moment to embrace the revelation of God who demands a progressive but inevitable pastoral conversion and at the same time, able to make a prophetic and effective call for a conversion at a material level and in relationships, in the face of the enormous planetary socio-environmental crisis in a ‘cronos?’ One without the other will be insufficient, and incomplete,” Oropeza wrote.

Even those who have read a great deal of theology could be forgiven for not understanding what any of that means. Indeed, much of the commentary, published by the Vatican’s official media outlet, is stilted, jargon-laden, and difficult to understand. The official synod preparatory documents, by most estimates, are much the same.

In 1946, George Orwell wrote that modern English prose, especially when produced by politicians or bureaucracies, “consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house.”

“The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness,” Orwell wrote, adding that “modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug.”

Modern ecclesial prose, especially when it is written by committee, shares some of those characteristics.

Some observers have lamented the tendency of contemporary Vatican documents to read more like text produced in Brussels committee rooms or Washington, DC think tanks than like the clear, prophetic, and direct language that might be expected from religious leaders. There are notable exceptions, but finding the point in Vatican prose can sometimes seem a Herculean labor.

Synodal documents are especially susceptible to the modern tendency toward vagueness and imprecision, because they are designed to accommodate, or at least give nod to, the particular agendas of all those who have spoken into their creation.

As a result, Vatican synods are often very long meetings, sometimes quite controversial during their proceedings, lead to final documents that are often soon shelved. It is rare that a document produced by a synod becomes a major point of reference for the Church.

When that does happen, it is because of the decisions of the pope, not the deliberations of the synod. Francis, like Pope Benedict and Pope St. John Paul II before him, has on some occasions used the opportunity of a post-synodal apostolic exhortation to say something with significant impact on the life of the Church. But a post-synodal apostolic exhortation that generates as much conversation as did *Amoris laetitia*, or, less controversially, *Christifidelis laici*, is the exception, rather than the rule.

Synods are meant to be conversations. They have no power to effect policy, or proclaim doctrine. The outcome of the conversation does not bind the pope. Their documents, even if taken up as official texts of the Church, bind neither will nor intellect. The synod is not an ecumenical council.

And when the language of a synod – even before it has begun – is laden with slogans, maxims, and ambiguity, it is all the more likely that the outcome of the meeting will be similar. For those wishing to usher in major changes to the Church, a synod is likely the wrong place to expend energy. The effort required is significant, and the return on that effort is not.

The Amazonian synod will be a matter of controversy. During the meeting, journalists, myself included, will raise issues and concerns,

especially if procedural law seems to be shaded in order to produce a predetermined outcome. Given the terms of the debate, the final synod document may well contain serious theological issues. But, after the synod, if history is a reliable guide, very little is likely to happen that is not already – right now – likely to happen.

The synod's best value, perhaps, is as a kind of barometer. During the meeting, there is a great deal to be learned about the state of the Church. The debate around the synod is worth watching. The politics may well become fierce. But the practical stakes of a synod – which has neither power nor authority – remain, by design, exceedingly low.