

Fr. Perozich comments —

We priests must walk a close line in addressing bishops, cardinals, and the pope. It is more common now for a cleric to be canceled whose comments are not well received by a bishop with authority to cancel the cleric. Fr. Vaverek does an excellent job in this regard in showing respect while teaching God's truth.

Canon 212 §3: They [the faithful] have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church. They have the right also to make their views known to others of Christ's faithful, but in doing so they must always respect the integrity of faith and morals, show due reverence to the Pastors and take into account both the common good and the dignity of individuals.

Canon 223 §2 Ecclesiastical authority is entitled to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights which are proper to Christ's faithful.

I give a hearing to those who speak their opinions such as those who speak their own New Morality. I listen to those who speak God's truth like Fr. Vaverek.

Bishop Robert Barron in the article below deserves hearing and a listening as he directs the reader away from the errors of "inclusivity" and "welcoming" when they are used to undermine God's transforming power shown by Jesus to all He met, to reject sin and believe in the Savior.

Accompanying Those Innocently in Error

Fr. Timothy V. Vaverek
SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023

Cardinals, bishops, and priests who promote the “New Morality” believe that pastoral accompaniment requires accepting the behavior of anyone whose conscience is firmly, yet innocently, mistaken (for example, regarding sexuality).

In reality, this approach withholds the grace-filled truth Jesus brings to correct both guilty and innocent consciences, so that we can live freely and abundantly. Rather than give rein to error, the Good Shepherd sent the Church to teach the world “to observe all that I have commanded.”

To appreciate the true scope and purpose of pastoral accompaniment, we must recognize that Christ isn’t solely focused on sin and pardon. Were His concerns that narrow, we could, like the supporters of the New Morality, leave people to languish in innocent error. But He has an infinitely greater goal: our sharing in His life and saving work.

By uniting us to Himself in the transforming, ongoing conversion of *metanoia* lived in fidelity to Him and His Gospel, Jesus frees us from both sin and error. He thereby reorders our identity and life so that as children of God we can become whole and help heal others through our witness and prayer.

To rightly accompany people mistaken about their identity and the purpose of life, Church ministers and lay members must avoid two extremes. We can’t treat them as wicked when they innocently act wrongly and **we can’t leave them ignorant of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.**

Such an approach requires taking seriously the damage caused by innocent errors. The sincerity of a mistake excludes culpability – but not consequences. Accidentally poisoning someone still kills him. **Teaching that sexual activity outside marriage is natural or beneficial doesn’t prevent the physical, psychological, and spiritual harm that can be done to a person, and overflows to partners, families, and communities.**

Compassionately dispelling errors thus promotes a better life for everyone. And indicating that someone is wrong helps free them. This type of correction is a service, not a condemnation.

The practitioners of the New Morality insist instead that it’s unrealistic and wrong to announce the truth to those sincerely and

steadfastly in error. They claim people with a clear conscience must be “welcomed” and “affirmed” as fully integrated members of the Church, including being admitted to Holy Communion.

Note the radical implication: the Church must cease publicly addressing errors to avoid causing offense. Proclaiming that any specific belief or behavior (for instance, ethnic prejudice or unmarried sexual activity) violates the love of God and neighbor could result in some sincere person feeling judged.

The logic goes further. Compassion for those in error isn't enough: we must accept the mistaken aspects of their identity and behavior as good. After all, it wouldn't be very “affirming” if we merely “tolerated” those aspects because we considered the person ignorant of the truth or incapable of living it.



*

These misguided suppositions are evident, for example, in the New Moralists' troubling approach to homosexual partnerships. They

loudly invoke the teaching on sincere conscience to affirm such unions, but hide that the teaching also holds homosexual activity sinful for anyone who correctly understands sexuality and acts freely. The movement's leaders now propose to overcome that inconsistency by declaring such bad behavior morally good.

But if the Church can't publicly proclaim the truth about human life and Christians can engage in any conscience-approved behavior, what becomes of her unified, faithful witness to Christ and His liberating, life-giving Good News? **The New Morality doesn't enhance the Church's mission; it stifles the Gospel and human flourishing.**

Pastoral accompaniment of those who are mistaken must be rooted in Jesus. He didn't hide the truth or exempt those innocently in error from needing to change their hearts and minds. He called *everyone* to undertake the *metanoia* of laying aside both sin and error in order to live freer and richer lives in Him.

Christ proclaimed the truth compassionately and hopefully, promising to be with us and to make fidelity possible regardless of circumstance. He knew many listeners would feel confused or judged and that some would leave, but He insisted **there's no other path to life.**

The Church, then, properly accompanies those in error only by consistently bringing them Jesus – His truth, and love. That requires disciplining members of His body who, innocently or not, depart from the Gospel. Otherwise, the Church would cease aiding the wounded and fostering a communal witness.

That witness is a participation in Christ and His work through which the Church and her members make present the transforming life He offers. **This “living Gospel” draws others, unites them to Jesus, and empowers them to live as God's children.** It helps them discover their true identity and the eternal meaning of their joys and sorrows. Most importantly, it schools them in a love capable of sacrificing to observe Christ's commands in every situation, even surrendering family or life, because He first sacrificed Himself for them.

If some people find they can't, in conscience, live this way, they're not abandoned. Jesus offers His grace outside the sacraments. The Church's witness, compassion, and prayer continue to embrace them.

The reason they can't share completely in ecclesial life isn't sin; it's their false witness. They innocently deny some truth about Jesus, His Gospel, and authentic human life. Ensnared in that harmful error, they reject the Church's witness and correction. Hence, they obviously aren't willing or able to join entirely in her life and mission.

Accompanying such people with the living Gospel can enlighten and free them. If they eventually accept Christ's commands (and the struggle to live accordingly), they're welcome to fully participate in the Church as we together seek God's gifts of forgiveness and faithfulness.

What none of us is allowed to do – Cardinals, bishops, priests, or laity – is to substitute conscience for the Gospel lived, proclaimed, and handed down by Christ in His Church. Jesus, not our sincere judgment, is the authentic source and measure of every person's identity and life. No other accompaniment can heal and save us.

***Image:** *Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee* by Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1618 [Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia]. "Certain of the justice and morality of his position, Christ, and his disciples as they take in the words of their teacher, stand against the Pharisees, on whose faces we can read lack of comprehension, annoyance, and even anger."

© 2023 *The Catholic Thing*. All rights reserved. For reprint rights, write to: info@frinstitute.org

***The Catholic Thing* is a forum for intelligent Catholic commentary. Opinions expressed by writers are solely their own.**

Inclusivity and Love

BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

The other night, I had the privilege of participating in one of the listening sessions for the continental phase of the Synodal process. The basis for our discussion was a lengthy document produced by the Vatican after it had compiled data and testimony from all over the Catholic world. As I have been studying and speaking about synodality, I very much enjoyed the exchange of views. But I found myself increasingly uneasy with two words that feature prominently in the document and that dominated much of our discussion—namely, “inclusivity” and “welcoming.”

Again and again, we hear that the Church must become a more inclusive and welcoming place for a variety of groups: women, LGBT+ people, the divorced and civilly remarried, etc. But I have yet to come across a precise definition of either term. What exactly would a welcoming and inclusive Church look like? Would it always reach out to everyone in a spirit of invitation? If so, the answer seems obviously to be yes. Would it always treat everyone, no matter their background, ethnicity, or sexuality, with respect and dignity? If so, again, the answer is yes. Would such a Church always listen with pastoral attention to the concerns of all? If so, affirmative. But would a Church exhibiting these qualities never pose a moral challenge to those who would seek entry? Would it ratify the behavior

and lifestyle choices of anyone who presented him or herself for admission? Would it effectively abandon its own identity and structuring logic so as to accommodate any and all who come forward? I hope it is equally evident that the answer to all those questions is a resounding no. The ambiguity of the terms is a problem that could undermine much of the Synodal process.

*. . . inclusivity of the Lord was unambiguously and consistently accompanied by his summons to **conversion**.*

In order to adjudicate this matter, I would suggest that we look not so much to the envioning culture of the present day but to Christ Jesus. His attitude of radical welcome is nowhere on clearer display than in his open-table fellowship, that is to say, his consistent practice—countercultural in the extreme—to eat and drink not only with the righteous but also with sinners, with Pharisees, tax collectors, and prostitutes. These meals of sacred fellowship Jesus even compared to the banquet of heaven. Throughout his public ministry, **Jesus reached out to those considered unclean or wicked**: the woman at the well, the man born blind, Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, the thief crucified at his side, etc. So, there is no question that he was hospitable, gracious, and yes, welcoming to all.

By the same token, this inclusivity of the Lord was unambiguously and consistently accompanied by his summons to conversion. Indeed, the first word out of Jesus' mouth in his inaugural address in the Gospel of Mark is not "Welcome!" but rather "Repent!" To the woman caught in adultery, he said, "Go and sin no more";

after meeting the Lord, Zacchaeus promised to change his sinful ways and compensate lavishly for his misdeeds; in the presence of Jesus, the good thief acknowledged his own guilt; and the risen Christ compelled the chief of the Apostles, who had three times denied him, three times to affirm his love.

In a word, there is a remarkable balance in the pastoral outreach of Jesus between welcome and challenge, between outreach and a call to change. This is why I would characterize his approach not simply as “inclusive” or “welcoming,” but rather as loving. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that to love is “to will the good of the other.” Accordingly, one who truly loves another reaches out in kindness, to be sure, but at the same time he does not hesitate, when necessary, to correct, to warn, even to judge. My mentor, Francis Cardinal George, was once asked why he disliked the sentiment behind the song “All Are Welcome.” He responded that it overlooked the simple fact that, though all are indeed welcome in the Church, it is “on Christ’s terms, not their own.”

An overall concern that I have, very much related to the consistent use of the terms “welcoming” and “inclusivity,” is the trumping of doctrine, anthropology, and real theological argument by sentiment, or to put it a bit differently, the tendency to psychologize the matters under consideration. The Church doesn’t prohibit homosexual acts because it has an irrational fear of homosexuals; nor does it refuse communion to those in irregular marriage arrangements because it gets its kicks out of being exclusive; nor does it disallow women’s

ordination because grumpy old men in power just can't stand women. For each of these positions, it articulates arguments based on Scripture, philosophy, and the theological tradition, and each has been ratified by the authoritative teaching of bishops in communion with the pope. To throw all these settled teachings into question because they don't correspond to the canons of our contemporary culture would be to place the Church into real crisis. And I sincerely do not believe that this shaking of the foundations is what Pope Francis had in mind when he called for a synod on synodality.



Bishop Robert Barron is the founder of [Word on Fire Catholic Ministries](#) and bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester in Minnesota. He is also the host of [CATHOLICISM](#), a groundbreaking, award-winning documentary about the Catholic Faith, which aired on PBS. Bishop Barron is a #1 Amazon bestselling author and has published numerous books, essays, and articles on theology and the spiritual life. He is a religion correspondent for NBC and has also appeared on FOX News, CNN, and EWTN. Bishop Barron's website, [WordOnFire.org](#), reaches millions of people each year, and he is one of the most-followed Catholics on social media. His regular [YouTube videos](#) have been viewed over 90 million times. Bishop Barron's pioneering work in

evangelizing through the new media led Francis Cardinal George to describe him as "one of the Church's best messengers." He has keynoted many conferences and events all over the world, including the 2016 World Youth Day in Kraków, Poland, as well as the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, which marked Pope Francis' historic visit to the United States.