

Fr. Perozich comments —

The synod on synodality is a vehicle being used by powerful clergy to change the church to fit their lifestyles. They gather laity like themselves to offer “perspectives” which merely are viewpoints from their personal experiences unrelated to the revealed truth of God.

A hermeneutic is an interpretation tool. It must be based in revelation, not personal experience which is another name for “perspective”, an individual’s interpretation not related to the truth of God.

Some “perspectives” are given more emphases if they fit the agenda of those who control the synod.

Archbishop Viganò offered an opinion on the “perspective of homosexual clerics, **“The acceptance of sodomy is a lie, which too often seems to want to legitimize the conduct of many prelates and clergy rather than saving the souls of poor sinners. ... they are the arrogant affirmation of falsification, of the subversion of logic, of the negation of the truth.”**

Grondelski clarifies what is happening. **“But modernity tends to accentuate perspectival subjectivity to the degree that it denies either objectivity itself or at least one’s ability to know it. At best, we have a gaggle of partial visions stitched together, the sewing itself down through subjective tailors’ eyes.”**

“Critical” thought promotes a “hermeneutic of suspicion”: we should first investigate claims, not on the basis of their veracity but from the angle of *cui bono*, who benefits? In this lens, truth is not so much a matter of reality as of power, a mask to conceal power relations.

The synod leaders are cobbling together their preferences cherry picked from personal opinions in order to create a new doctrine to be taught rather than the revealed truth of God.

I once saw a poster which stated, “It’s my opinion, and it’s very true.”

Now more than ever Catholics of substance need to learn to articulate their faith which is being undermined by the opinions of others to create a church of their liking. The Episcopal church already tried this, and it is nearly dead.

When I applied to seminary one of the priests on the selection committee stated, “He is already formed,” with the intent of rejecting me because I might not buy into every “perspective” and “novelty” that the new powers were imposing.

He was right. I have the faith of old, and so do many of those who are reading this. I share this with you lay faithful so that you continue to walk in the revealed truth from God.

“I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity.” — Cardinal Newman from Fr. Peter M.J. Stravinskis

Tribal truths, synodality, and the Church’s teaching

Classical Catholic thought assumes two things of which modernity doubts, if not despairs: that the reason of all human beings are ordered towards truth and that the truth is attainable.

May 8, 2023 John M. Grondelski, Ph.D. \
Print



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Among the striking moments in John's Passion narrative is when Jesus's declaration about His coming into the world "to testify to the truth" (Jn 18:37-38) is met by the skeptic Pilate's retort: **"what is truth?"**

His query is peculiarly apt today, surprisingly on the cusp of the upcoming Synod on Synodality.

The Synod has been preceded by a variety of "listening sessions," which some portray as "the voice of the Spirit" swelling up from the oppressed proletariat of the pews and peripheries, teaching the "learning Church" new truths (or at least new insights into old truths). This sentiment permeates many of the "syntheses" cobbled together on multiple levels, from diocesan to continental, seeking to capture those sessions.

Let me suggest that the notion of “truth” assumed by some involved in this process claims dubious paternity to what Catholics have hitherto understood by “truth.”

Why? Because it involves a novelty for Catholics that I will call “tribal truth.”

The most cursory review of Synodal synthesis documents discloses recurrent citations of statements by certain demographics, especially **women, homosexuals, and national ethnic minorities** (in the United States, especially Black and Latino Catholics).

Contemporary thought seems to “privilege” the viewpoints of certain groups qua groups. Part of it derives from a mentality that downplays or even denies objectivity in favor of subjectivity. The question is how far one goes with that mentality. Perspective does affect what one sees. **But modernity tends to accentuate perspectival subjectivity to the degree that it denies either objectivity itself or at least one’s ability to know it. At best, we have a gaggle of partial visions stitched together, the sewing itself down through subjective tailors’ eyes.**

I might like to know your “perspective,” but I want and need to know the “truth.” Modernity, however, seems to despair of reaching the latter, certainly not without an obligatory detour through “perspectives.”

Recently, this individual subjectivity has been accompanied by a **group consciousness subjectivity**: there is supposedly a “women’s perspective” and this perspective and that perspective. This is particularly rife among theoreticians of **critical racial theory (CRT) and demographic permutations, e.g., “wymyn’s studies,” “queer studies,” etc.** Sometimes, these subjectivities become so unique that those outside the tribe are told not to dare and attempt to divine the unique insight. **The task of these others is to wait and be enlightened by the privileged insight bearers.**

How all these modern, subjective versions of “truth” contrast to classical Catholic thought is in **their belief that truth is not primarily the object of the reason** of *homo sapiens*, irrespective of one’s genitalia, melatonin levels, or sexual proclivities. Classical Catholic thought assumes two things of which modernity doubts, if not despairs: **that the reason of all human beings are ordered towards truth and that the truth is attainable. Truth is not an “unreachable star” after which people are in never-ending quest, satisfied by the journey rather than its destination.**

Consider also the implications, if one assumes a gendered psychology: what is its relationship to the biological underpinnings of the body? The “mind-body” problem—regardless of how one conceptualizes it—has implications for one’s approach to gender ideology.

I understand and accept that people come with different perspectives. But I reject that these different perspectives constitute unique and nontransferable loci of truth, inaccessible to others unless “woman-splained,” “gay-splained,” or “black-splained” to those outside the group. We tread on dangerous ground when reason is fenced off by race, sex, ethnicity, or other criteria extrinsic to the inherent rationality of *homo sapiens*. From that vantage point, it is no distant jaunt to “my truth” and “your truth” rather than “the truth.” **Such subjective “truth” may be all the rage on American college campuses. It has no place in the Church, which is committed to *one Truth*.**

And, for those who may recoil at that statement, remember that the One who is Truth spoke of Himself as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” except through whom no one comes to the Father (Jn 14:6). Those who have issues with the univocity of Truth need to take that up with the Church’s founder.

While these ideas may be appealing to a modernity long on results and short on abstract thinking, let's ask ourselves the epistemological question they pose. If everybody is irretrievably immersed in a subjective perspective, can there be something like objective truth? Or is all "truth" but a more-or-less time-bound approximation to *any* reality that is in itself *unknowable*.

Classical philosophy defined "truth" as the correspondence of things to reality. Does modern "critical" thought ever consider that reality to be accessible?

These are critical questions for how the Church understands herself and her history. Their consequences for moral theology, for example, are huge.

The Church has relied on the correspondence theory of truth. It has also presumed inherent human rationality. **We should be careful before we rush uncritically into embracing modern thought forms alien to our heritage.**

For if truth is in the eye of the teller (for today's beholder can only challenge what he is told at the price of being branded a carrier of some "phobia"), then where does that leave the Church's teaching?

"Critical" thought promotes a "hermeneutic of suspicion": we should first investigate claims, not on the basis of their veracity but from the angle of *cui bono*, who benefits? In this lens, truth is not so much a matter of reality as of power, a mask to conceal power relations.

Proponents of this approach to thinking never tell us why we need a hyper-hermeneutic of suspicion in some cases (e.g., what dead white Europeans might claim) but should fawningly accept the claims of others (e.g., today's preferred minorities or "periphery" dwellers). **It's all a power game—but don't you dare point out our reshuffling of the power dynamic.**

Through the optics of "critical thought" and "hermeneutics of suspicion," **received Catholic teaching is, in principle, all**

up for grabs, because its truth is secondary to power. It's all the product of male clergy seeking to preserve their privilege!

Applying this approach, those intent on deconstructing received Catholic faith and morals will be able to feign that they are doing no such thing! No, they are merely “developing” these doctrines by accentuating facets of them which our “skewed” or “limited” perspectives failed to account for (even if those “perspectives” are diametrically opposed to what the Church has long and constantly taught as essential to salvation). Some may even claim it's all the work of the Holy Spirit!

So, what the Church condemned as morally evil yesterday can now be morally good, even praiseworthy. No contradiction there (the principle of non-contradiction being so antiquarian anyway).

Should the Church be embracing a way of thinking that (a) subordinates truth to power and (b) despairs of ever being able to attain definitive truth anyway?

We see a blush of this in the latest decisions out of Rome to give voting rights in the Synod on Synodality to non-bishops, even to set representation quotas for women, young people, etc.

I'll avoid discussion here of the obvious ecclesiological problems posed by this move: those who are part of the decision-making process of a synod *of bishops* ought to *be bishops*. Synod relator Cardinal Hollerich dismisses the objection by noting bishops still retain a majority of the Synod and, in the end, Synods only *recommend* things to the Pope. That's a separate problem.

My point is rather to the degree to which the mindset that thinks the changes are necessary depends on the “tribal truths” approach criticized above. Synod General Relator Cardinal Hollerich **defended the change**, insisting “their presence ensures the dialogue between the prophecy of the People of God and the discernment of the pastors.”

So, has the Holy Spirit now chosen not to focus on bishops (who are bishops because of a unique sacrament) and instead opted for a preferred channel through certain demographics of the “People of God” whose prophecy is to enlighten the “pastors?” **Given the demographic stipulations being imposed, are we to assume that prophecy now comes through tribal truths the duller pastors might not grasp?**

Are they also to enlighten the Church past, whose teaching, in theory, they might seek to revise because of their fuller vistas? Is this not also Rousseau’s “inevitable-forward-progress” paradigm with a dash of holy water?

Has reason ceased being human and become instead a partial characteristic divided among distinct tribes?

We might first think through the understandings of *epistemology* [what distinguishes justified truth from opinion] and theological anthropology that these approaches imply and the implications that follow from them before discern them to be “just what the Church (or world) needs.”

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