

Fr. Perozich comments —

This article drew my attention because of its attention to the crisis in church authority, and because of the author's work in the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), formerly called Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), during the tenure Cardinal William Levada.

Msgr Hans Feichtinger is intelligent, educated in the teachings of Jesus from scripture and tradition, in philosophy. These are not requirements for men ordained to be bishops who sometimes use authority to proclaim their ideas rather than Jesus' gospel.

This priest knows of what and of whom he speaks. Msgr. Feichtinger also knows the players in the church because he lived in Rome.

When I read his analysis, it appears to me to be in the mindset and style of Cardinal Gerhard Müller.

The article is not so much about blessings of sinful unions as it is with the crisis in authority, fidelity to Jesus, power grabs by the Vatican, ignoring of synodal processes, reducing priests to functionaries of the bishops, tensions because of the faith of the younger priests compared to the bishops who control these priests.

These machinations of power and authority obscure the message of evangelization, repentance, conversion, and true unity in Jesus. If there is no Christendom in Christianity, then there is no evangelization that will convert hearts.

Fiducia Supplicans: A Crisis of Trust

The current reactions to Fiducia Supplicans constitute an outbreak of a crisis of trust toward the Holy See that has been lingering for years.



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[Msgr. Hans Feichtinger](#)

I remain amazed and puzzled by how the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* is affecting the Church—and by how the responses to it still seem to be under-perceived, downplayed, or ignored. Negative reactions to the document, and against specific contents of the document, have been strong, including those from entire bishops' conferences and large numbers of priests and lay people.

Ignoring the vehemence and the reasons behind these reactions is not the way forward. Neither is it promising to continue demanding that people just read the text again. And it also will not be enough to remind Catholics, and priests in particular, of their loyalty and obedience to the Holy Father. Some reactions may have sounded a bit hysterical—in our world this seems unavoidable—but it does not make the substantial problems less severe, which are both doctrinal and pastoral.

The document, as Cardinal Fernández himself has made clear, is substantially his own work and allegedly follows indications received from Pope Francis who, by approving it, is responsible for it anyway. Moreover, the ever-popular game to blame the media for misrepresenting Vatican texts must stop—first, because **if anyone is continually misrepresented, that becomes his own problem**; second, because in this case there actually was not much misrepresentation. The fact that secular media home in on certain aspects of the document is hardly surprising and not as bad as apologetic prelates want it to be.

The document has severe flaws, as numerous voices in the Church have explained. Its attempt to put a lot of distance between blessings “of couples” and “of unions” is a stretch, or even sophistic. You cannot convincingly separate the action (blessing of a couple) from its meaning (blessing two individuals). Even the alleged distinction between spontaneous, pastoral, non-scripted blessings and the more solemn, formal, liturgical ones,

remains specious. Finally, such spontaneous blessings are not new, and—like the ritual ones—have always had descending and ascending aspects. Those different aspects, however, do not create two separate kinds of blessings.

Pastorally, the very serious question is what the blessings for irregular, and even more for homoerotic, unions are supposed to be good for. Stabilizing such unions, in many cases, is questionable. The most recent attempts by Cardinal Fernández to explain the new blessings as a prayer to liberate couples from anything contrary to the Gospel make them, in part, into something like an exorcism—is *that* really what we are going for? The hope that the solution proposed here will remove the issue from ongoing synodal and ecclesial debates will not be fulfilled.

In reality, as is evident from how this document is being debated and (not) received in the worldwide Church, **this is not about pastoral care but about tensions among bishops, and between bishops (conferences) and the Holy See. It is about a pernicious crisis of trust among the members of the hierarchy, the College of Cardinals very much included. It is also about a lack of trust among priests toward bishops and the Holy See**, which is the most relevant issue here, because, after all, these blessings are supposed to be given *by* priests.

The lack of consultation among bishops and priests in the process of elaborating this text is tragic, revealing, and a bit terrifying. **Becoming a “more synodal” Church cannot mean creating an ever less synodal Vatican. Neither must it mean excluding priests (in parish ministry)** at the degree we see currently at the Synod of Bishops 2023-24 (otherwise significantly enlarged with laypeople and religious).

A number of bishops, also in Rome, view the younger generation of priests with skepticism and/or condescension. Often, **what prelates criticize about them is psychologically shallow and theologically weak.** Such

disdain will not build up a culture of trust, cooperation, and obedience; and as a formation strategy, it will fail.

How can young priests take older prelates seriously if the latter do not return the favor or, rather, if they do not begin with an advance of trust in the young clergy. After all, are we not praying for an increase in vocations? **It seems very hard for some bishops to believe that God might call men to the priesthood who are not like they have been.** It should be obvious that such an attitude pulls out the rug under anyone who claims to be close to the teachings of Vatican II or a proponent of synodality, not to mention that it may just be a lack of trust in God's providence.

The current reactions to *Fiducia Supplicans* constitute an outbreak of a crisis of trust toward the Holy See that has been lingering for years. The document erodes the pope's own influence (*auctoritas*). Exercising pastoral leadership based mostly on formal authority (*potestas*) never bears fruit; this applies to the ministry of the Holy Father, even when it comes with the threat of schism and its consequences.

For where we are today, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith bears particular responsibility. The new document on blessings presents itself as doctrinally traditional while introducing a change of practice. Consciously or not, in doing so it introduces a problematic separation between what the Church does and what she believes/teaches. **The Holy See cannot just issue policy changes like a civil government, not even if these changes are based on pastoral intentions and visions of the pope himself.**

The claim that the changes proposed are built, somehow, on a continual "development" of the Church's doctrine and practice is not legitimate. First, because **such a claim introduces the notion of a doctrinal change through the back door of a new practice; second, because the idea of a development**

of dogma/doctrine is a theological model to explain, retrospectively, how what the Church has come to believe over centuries is coherent with the Gospel, and with divine revelation more generally.

Making this idea into a tool of the magisterium and of Church governance is theologically questionable. The role of the magisterium is not to create a balance between demands of older and contemporary views, or between more forward leaning and more conservative people: **all these are political concepts or diplomatic methods inadequate to the ecclesial questions**, which must be addresses with the firm conviction that doctrinal and pastoral considerations cannot be opposed to each other and can be resolved only with confident trust in the wisdom handed on to us through the sacred tradition. In our “rich white” countries, we also need more humility in how we involve the churches in poorer parts of the world: our “development,” societal and economic, comes with a lot of corruption.

I believe that behind the divergent positions taken vis-à-vis the document there are divergent views on what evangelization is. So, the good news here is that in the Church today evangelization is on everyone’s mind. But we need to agree more deeply on how **evangelization is essentially tied to conversion**, even if the Church can live with a certain spectrum of interpretations. But one thing needs to be clearer than it is right now: **there is no Christendom without Christianity. If we talk about the Church’s “presence and relevance” in (postmodern) societies, we must recognize that this is the language of power, a political concept, based on a postmodern version of Christendom that prevents us from truly doing the work of evangelization.**

For our pastoral (and liturgical) ministry, considerations of moral relevance, pastoral or political influence are not primary; what comes first, instead, is trust in God’s

revelation and providence. **The current debate is not about theory vs. practice but about making sure that God’s will is normative and primary for us, both its challenges and its consolations. Unless we get that right, we will lose all our relevance and influence, and—what is more important and tragic—we will betray the mission Christ has entrusted to us, giving up faith in His saving truth and power.** In short, we will sacrifice Christianity on the altar of (a misguided understanding of, or yearning for) Christendom.

I am not convinced this document can be salvaged by more explanations trying to make up for its lack of lucidity. It will be hard to live with it if it simply remains in place. **The way forward is to admit mistakes were made, also because synodal traditions of the Roman Curia were not observed, and thus give an example of how synodality itself is only fruitful if it is faithful. Doctrinal statements from Rome cannot be content with being “not heretical or blasphemous”; they must leave no doubt whatsoever about their fidelity to Scripture and Tradition. As Pope Francis himself recently said: What counts is “the Lord, not our own ideas or our own projects.”**

[Photo Credit: Catholic News Agency]

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