

NOTES TO THE CARDINALS/4

Doctrine and pastoral care, there is no room for contradictions

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*In view of the forthcoming conclave, we are publishing a series of in-depth articles inspired by the document signed by **Demos II** (an anonymous cardinal), which sets out the priorities for the next conclave in order to remedy the confusion and crisis created by Francis' pontificate.*

Doctrine and pastoral care: it is more necessary than ever to return to this point, the misunderstanding of which is at the root of the so-called "pastoral turn", that "paradigm shift" which has imposed itself during the last pontificate and which has undermined the importance of the development of dogma in the Church. The point is crucial: the permanence of the Church and her doctrine in different historical circumstances and cultural realities depends on it, that is, the permanence of the Church in the midst of the constant 'winds of doctrine', 'ideological currents' and 'fashions of thought' that constantly stir the waters of this world and cause not only individuals but entire societies to sink.

The "radical paradigm shift" evoked by Francis in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (n. 3), promptly revived by Cardinal Blaise Cupich to refer to the relationship between moral doctrine and pastoral choices, does not refer to the physicist and philosopher Thomas Khun (who discussed this in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), but rather to the Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald, to whom we also owe the emphasis on the "process" so dear to Francis. The pastoral character of the Second Vatican Council, in the perspective of process and paradigm shift, means that it is an "open Council", that is, a Council whose teaching cannot be interpreted according to the usual theological principles of understanding its texts in the continuity of the Church's teaching, that is, according to the well-known expression of St Vincent of Lerins. Vincent of Lerins, present in the First Vatican Council no less than in John XXIII's speech *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, the development of a doctrine *eodem sensue eademque sententia* (according to the same meaning and the same judgement).

In Theobald's view, the deposit of faith must be understood as a whole, a core of values, rather than a set of precise truths; a plastic core that takes on different forms depending on the context in which it is received. According to this logic, it is pointless to raise the question of the continuity of the truths of the *depositum fidei*, since the pastoral shift of the Council would correctly indicate that this "set of values" of the faith can and must be reshaped each time within conciliarity (today we would say synodality), in a constant process of reinterpretation that takes the form of those to whom it is transmitted. Conciliarity/synodality is therefore an essential dimension of revelation, for there would be no revelation without this context which continually shapes and reshapes the meaning of revelation. Revelation as a process. It is from this distorted

perspective that the need for a series of synods has arisen, and it is from this that these synods have become representations of the various components of the Church (laity and clergy, young and old, men and women, homo and trans, etc.), rather than synods of the teaching Church, that is, of the bishops, as was the intention of Paul VI.

It is therefore understandable that while it was essential for the Magisterium to quote the *Commonitorium* in order to preserve dogma in its inevitable and beneficial development, in the light of the "paradigm shift" the same work is manipulated to support a development without continuity of content.

The heart of St. Vincent of Lerins can be summed up in the principle "*eadem tamen quæ didicisti ita doce, ut cum dicas nove, non dicas nova* - Teach exactly what you have learned, so that although you say things in a new way, you do not say new things" (*Commonitorium*, 309); in the last pontificate, however, it was mentioned, extracted from the text to the point of making it say the opposite of what it affirms, only this quotation, referring to tradition: '*ut annis scilicet consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate* - may it be consolidated with the years, developed with time, deepened with age' (*Commonitorium*, 23).

The quotation is found in n. 98 of the encyclical *Laudato si'*, then taken up again in a speech on 11 October 2017 with reference to the change in the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the death penalty, and then again in the last two Synods: at the end of the Synod on the Amazon (26 October 2019) and to the faithful of the Diocese of Rome at the opening of the Synod on Synodality. These were strategic moments, considering that these quotations were repeated to support a discontinuity in the Church's teaching on the death penalty and to indicate the importance of the synodal process of incessant pastoral reinterpretation of Revelation. In essence, St Vincent of Lerins has been twisted to support that hermeneutic of rupture which the Church cannot accept for any document of the Magisterium.

The urgent need to return with honesty to the integral teaching of St Vincent of Lerins, centred on the difference between *profectus* and *permutatio* in the Church's progressive understanding of God's revelation, is self-evident. The Church was founded on the solidity of Peter's creed, not on the fluidity of the thinking of certain theologians. *Profectus* is an organic development that clarifies, deepens and expands, always subsuming the truth previously taught and preserving its meaning (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*); *permutatio* is the alteration, corruption, permutation of the meaning of what has been taught. The difference between the two is not limited to a logical continuity of doctrine, but necessarily passes through it.

The Church's approach is therefore completely opposed to the pastoral paradigm described above, which was illegally and surreptitiously imposed during the last pontificate. There is an urgent need to recover the true sense of dogmatic development in the context of restoring a correct relationship between doctrine and pastoral care. Certainly, the pastoral dimension is not the aseptic application of doctrinal principles, and yet the latter must be the light that animates and verifies pastoral choices guided by the virtue of prudence. Only if truth continues to be perceived as the good of knowledge, and knowledge as the light that guides human life, will it be possible to escape the false alternative between a *depositum* understood as something outdated and the paradigm shift outlined above, in order to rediscover the genuine and vital sense of truth that has marked the history of the Church and of which we have had a shining example in recent history in the splendid figure of John Henry Newman. Without this clarification, the Church remains exposed to division, to a rupture between her present and her past and, potentially, between her future and her present, as well as to divisions within the visible Church today, because of the loss of the unifying and pacifying power of truth.