

ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM
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ROBERT MCCLORY EDUCATIONAL FORUM

FAITHFUL DISSENTERS
ST. MICHAEL
STERLING HEIGHTS, MI
SEPTEMBER 10, 2009

INTRODUCTION Fr. Gerry Bechard

Robert McClory graduated from Medill College in 1971. He has been an associate professor emeritus at Medill (a part of Northwestern University) since 1983, where, in 1999, he received the Excellence in Teaching Award, plus numerous journalism awards including Women in Communications, Chicago Headline Club, Associated Church Press, Catholic Press Association, The National Academy of Television, Arts and Sciences. Robert has written several books including *The Man Who Beat Clout City*, *Racism in America*, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission*; *Haunted by God: The Life of Dorothy Day*; *Faithful Dissenters*; and *As It Was in the Beginning*. He served as a priest in the Archdiocese of Chicago and was one of the founders and still a board member of a little organization referred to as Call to Action (laughter). Apparently he has too much time on his hands, because he's constantly writing books; but it is my honor and privilege to introduce to you Robert McClory. (Applause)

Faithful Dissenters Robert McClory

Thank you very much Gerry. I appreciate the reading from Scripture from the Acts of the Apostles and the commentary, which I also recognized, because I quote Luke Timothy Johnson, his analysis of the meeting of that Council in Jerusalem in the book, and he added my own comments at the end of it. I thought they sounded familiar (laughter); and I think it is a very apt selection to lead into what I am talking about today. I am very delighted to be here with this huge crowd. I usually talk to smaller crowds – sometimes just my family (laughter). But I am been very honored to be invited.

You know the Elephants are well known in Chicago and respected; and I suspect they're also known throughout the country. I'll bet in every diocese there are people that are jealous of the Elephants, that you are able to gather together and listen to and talk to and talk about issues that are of incredible importance to the Church today. So I thank you for the honor of being able to be here. And last night I talked to the IHM sisters out at their motherhouse – that huge fortress in Monroe. (laughter) I was afraid to go in there. It's almost daunting. But the friendliness and the hospitality of those sisters is extraordinary. You feel like maybe you're in heaven, or that it will be something like that, because they go out of their way to make everybody welcome.

The subject however today is dissent in the Church. Dissent! And I've been talking about that for about 15 years, and writing about it, and it's not a subject that everybody wants to write about, or talk about, or even think about: dissent, disagreement. Dissent is a dis word. It's a putdown word. It has a lot of neighbors. It has a lot of relative dis words like disagreeable, disgusting, disgraceful, disastrous, dishonest. I was trying to think if there are any good dis words? Well, I found one, and it's very appropriate today. The word is discernment; and that's what that passage from Acts is all about, discernment – how they came to a conclusion, how they came to a decision on a matter of extreme importance in the early Church.

A lot of people gathered, talked about it, argued, and then, when things settled down a bit, representatives from various sections of the Church – the missionary Church, the administrative Church, the founding Fathers of the Church – they all had a representative get up and speak to the people, and then said, “What is your will?” And with one voice they said, “Yeh, that's the way we think. So be it, at least for the Church in Jerusalem. But we got to go out and talk to the others: we can't decide this on ourselves.”

Have you heard decisions in the church being made this way lately? No! The quote was from my book, *As It Was in the Beginning*, some copies of which are outside; and during the break I'd be glad to go out and sign any of them, provided you are willing to buy one (laughter). In an earlier book called *Faithful Dissenters* – but we'll take care of that in time. I'm hoping that we will have time today for some discussion as they did at the Council of Jerusalem; so I want people to think about what I'm talking about, and during the question period to come forth. I'm not asking everybody to agree with it. That is not the way that the Church in the early days worked. You don't have to agree. You can disagree. You can expand on, or you can state your own version, of what I am talking about. So I ask you, meanwhile, many of you picked up a paper (see attachment), a two sided sheet with some writings about dissent. I ask you to put that paper aside now and not read it while I'm talking because I have to have your intense attention. Anybody that is dozing, or anything like that, will be removed from the room (laughter).

Dissent, therefore, obviously has a negative connotation to people. Dissent is not something you enjoy, because it is something that goes against whatever is being proposed; but I chose, however, in talking about dissent in the Church today to see it more in a positive sense – to see it as a corrective, as a way of correcting things that aren't as they should be, or as a duty – in fact, a responsibility – to say to somebody: “You have a responsibility. You can't just sit there. You have a duty to dissent.” Or even to say that dissent in the Church today is a holy thing. It is something that perhaps is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and should be therefore treated with respect.

Now you all know – everybody knows – that we live in a Church where there's a lot of

disagreement. In fact there's almost a toxic environment in the Church. And when I was listening to the President last night, and had been listening to the President in recent weeks, talking about the health care reform, you get the impression that there's a toxic environment in the United States, an environment of anger and reproach and unwillingness to listen, a toxic environment where people are screaming at one another in irrational ways. So there's a parallel in the Church today. And there are very good reasons why people are in disagreement – and I'm not going to spend time on that except to mention some of the things about which people are upset, depending on who you are and where you are.

- One of them is the extreme centralization of decision making in the Church – extreme centralization: all decisions about the future are made at the Vatican for the world-wide Church. And Tom Reese, who I think spoke to this group, did he not at one time? Tom Reese, who is the former editor of America Magazine, before he was asked to step down; he is a student of history; and he said that he did not believe that in the history of the Catholic Church, there was any point, any time, when we had as much centralization as we have now. Even in the high middle ages, there were a variety of people who provided input. Today the input generally comes from the Pope and the people who surround him in the Curia and the other offices in the Vatican. So that's one of the reasons that people are upset. In the society today total centralization is not appreciated.
- A second reason that people have been upset is the priest abuse scandal, and I'm not going into that, but that enraged, enraged many Catholics, who were simply appalled at the fact that priests, to whom they committed their children, that the children were abused by certain priests, and they can't understand it.
- Another group that causes a good bit of anger and disagreement are the bishops. This is the first time. When I was a little kid, and when I was in the seminary, and all the time after in the seminary, bishops were bishops; they were respected; they were holy; they did not make mistakes. But we now know that bishops made terrible mistakes, amongst which was sending abusing priests to different parishes, and sometimes different dioceses, without informing anybody that these people were dangerous. These things have limited the credibility of the hierarchy in the United States to an incredible extent.
- The arrogance of clerics, bishops, priests is an issue that is very bothersome to some people. They see certain priests as autocratic, certain bishops as dictatorial: "It will be this way, because I says it this way," Father O'Hooligan, who is telling his parishioners what they can do, and what they can't do, and what they can read and cannot read. This sort of thing runs against the grain of modern Catholics.
- Another thing that is disruptive and causes disagreement is the feeling of many people that we have had a betrayal of the hope of Vatican II – that instead of Vatican II living out what's its

promise was, we see a restoration of outmoded devotions and customs, and an attempt not to go forward, but to go backward into the 19th or the 16th century with our faith. It's a very aggravating thing for people.

- And finally, things that upset Catholics today is the announced ongoing Vatican investigation of U. S. women religious. Have you heard about that? (laughter) Well, if you haven't heard, you should go to Monroe (laughter) and talk to the sisters there. They are, I don't know, they were carrying torches when I left (laughter). They are very upset about that. The investigation as you know has two prongs:

1. The first prong is a meeting with the leadership of every woman's religious congregation in the country; and they are concerned about whether these orders are faithful to the teaching of the Church on all matters and on their formation. How are they forming their sisters? Are they faithful to the Church in all senses? And vocations: how are they doing on vocations?

2. Secondly, the other prong is a special investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, or to the umbrella group of 95% of the women's orders. And they are concerned there particularly about their fidelity to certain key doctrines. And the three key doctrines they are of most concern to them is the Church's position on the ordination of women. Secondly, the Church's position on the immorality of homosexual unions. And thirdly, the doctrine that the Catholic Church has primacy in matters of religion. That may seem kind of vague to you, but is based on the document *Dominus Jesus*, which was promulgated by Pope John Paul II, in which it is said, "The message of Christ comes to humanity in the Catholic Church in a form that is," and I am quoting from the document here, "complete, definitive, absolute, total, exclusive, full and unique." There it is. And the Vatican is wondering: "Do all nuns subscribe to that?"

Now all of these irritants, all of these issues which concern people, have resulted in various people going in various directions:

- Many people, as you know, have decided to leave the Church. They simply no longer consider themselves Catholic. A few years ago a very thorough study was done of religion in America, and the largest Christian denomination was still Roman Catholic. But the second largest denomination, if you will, in the country are former Roman Catholics; and this has been particularly hard on younger Catholics. We are hemorrhaging young Catholics at an incredible rate.

In my years at Northwestern University, we got into discussions on religion, and students would tell me, "Yeh, I was a Catholic; not anymore." Or they will say, "I am a recovering Catholic." Sort of like Alcoholics Anonymous. When they get a feeling they should go to church, they call up a friend who talks them out of it (much laughter). And it's interesting to discuss it with these people, because they're not just discouraged; they actually consider themselves out of the Church and they're not coming back soon. So that's one group. Now I

would not call those people dissenters. I would call them drop outs; and I'm not arguing with them and saying, "O! Come back; you can't leave; you'll go to hell". I try to talk to them about their reasons and say, "You know, a lot of people are staying in the Church with some of the same problems that you suggest." But in any event, they're drop outs who we have to consider non-Catholics – and they're doing what their conscience tells them – so I'm not going to fight or argue.

- Then there's a second group that I would call people who stay in the Church, but complain all the time, everywhere, when they get a chance. They don't like the pastor; they don't like the bishop; and they don't like the Pope; and they will tell you why; and they will go over it, and over it, until you're stomach turns. And people have told me at Call to Action: "I belong to the Catholic Church, but the bishops don't." Oh! I'm afraid they do. "I belong to the Catholic Church, but I will not read anything that the Pope writes. When I see the Pope has an article quoted in a paper, I turn it aside." Uh! Uh! Those people, and there are many of them, I do not consider that to be dissenting. I would call it whining. (laughter)

- And there's a third group – and maybe that's the largest group of people – who just come to church on Sunday without any joy, without any enthusiasm, without any interest, to tell you the truth, except to fulfill their Sunday duty. And you see them in many parishes around the country, if you stop in on a Sunday; and there they all are. And they are not singing – hymns are going on, and you know who's singing, but not them. They are not listening to the readings, partially because one of them is doing the readings, and there is no attempt to project. This is a terrible, sad situation. They're like zombies. They are like people for whom there is no life. And I would not call them dissenters. I would not call that dissenting. I would call that moping.

- But there's another group of people. There is another group of people, who are thoughtful about these things – these issues I just mentioned – who are prayerful, who talk to God about it, and who have talked to others about it, about their concern. And they have come to a decision; and their decision is: "I do not agree with this position of the Roman Catholic Church. I deny it." And they take responsibility for that kind of very strong decision. And I think some of these people – many of these people, and I suggest, I would wonder, if a lot of people, right here this afternoon, are not in that group – some of these people, whom I would call dissenters, dissent in a creative way: priest, religious men and women, and many laity. And they look at the Church in a very interesting way: They try to live as if the Church of the future is already present. Or to put it another way, they try to live as if the kingdom of God were already here. Of course Jesus lived that way. It's already here. It's breaking out. And they manifest it, not by talking about it, as much as living it, as of course Jesus did. Or to put it another way: they live as if the vision of Vatican II had come to fruition, and had not been stalled, had not been disparaged and impeded in its progress. It's an interesting way to live. It's also a very dangerous way to live that way.

Now my education in dissent came almost by accident. I was asked to write a book about the

Birth Control Commission that Pope John XXII had in the 60's. This was in the early 90's that I had to do the research for the book and it was fascinating. I read history in a way I had never read it before. During my years of schooling I read history the way you did – I mean the way most of us did, and that is: it went in one ear, and it stayed as long as it was necessary to take the exam, and then when the exam was over, you just leaned over and let it all run out the other ear – let it out; couldn't remember a darn thing. But when you're writing a book, oh! oh! you've got to pay more attention; and things stick and stay in a way they don't; and I got really interested in the history of the Church; and that led to the book Faithful Dissenters, where I went through history, and looked at people who had dissented on issues of grave importance, and I wrote up just maybe 15 of these people in brief review of what they did. My criteria were that they had all dissented, that they all got in trouble, and that they're all dead, (laughter) and that they are all considered great by the Church today. These are not enemies of the Church. Many of them are saints; and these were people who dissented in rather amazing ways. And it wasn't just on minor issues. You find dissent on matters of faith, matters that were absolutely taught as of faith – “You must believe this.” This is part of the Catholic faith: teachings, rulings, doctrines, all kinds of issues. Just to mention a few:

- For 1700 years it was believed that taking interest on a loan is contrary to the gospel and contrary to Church teaching. There was something like four ecumenical councils and 12 popes that had explicitly condemned taking loans. You cannot take loans. In fact the gospel in today's, if you went to Mass today, the Gospel today quotes Jesus as saying, “When you give a loan, do not take interest. It is wrong to take interest. Just give the loan and it's gone.” That was assumed to be the way. It isn't anymore. Everybody takes interest. God help us, you've got to get some interest. Not much. But it is no longer a teaching of the Church. We forgot. For 1700 years it was clear; and then, it's gone.
- The earth is the center of the universe. For 1800 years that was absolutely believed to be a matter that is clear in the bible, clear in the teaching of the Church and in the tradition of the Church. And it's gone. Nobody believes: “Well, there's the flat earth people!” but the rest of us do not believe that at all.
- It was once believed, for 20 centuries really, that the Catholic Church was the one true church and other churches had no right to exist, that we only tolerated them, and sometimes we had to suppress them when they got troublesome. We no longer believe that. That was settled at the Second Vatican Council.
- Our position on slavery. It was for many centuries believed, even after the Civil War, Rome was still saying “Slavery, well that's all right.” Guy's gotta beat up on somebody.
- Our position on the Jews was very clear and very severe for centuries and centuries; and now it has changed, radically, just in the 20th century.

- So amazing things happen; and you say, “Well, why did that happen?” Well, it happened for a number of reasons, as you know, because of changes:
 - o a new understanding of science,
 - o a new understanding of history, a new way of looking at history that we didn’t have before,
 - o cultural shifts – people don’t think the same way; and therefore we have to adjust; and suddenly we realize, “Oh my God! That was simply a cultural decision, not a matter of faith,”
 - o biblical research – our understanding of the bible in a brand new way that we never thought about before.

- And those are the things, generally, that are given as the cause of these shifts; but it’s not exactly the whole answer; because in many cases, the shift occurred because somebody, or some group, started to live as if the Church of the future was already there. They began to talk about, and think about, and urge others to think about something that the Church wasn’t ready for, the institutional Church wasn’t ready for; but they said, “It’s coming, it’s coming; and we need to face it instead of just hiding from it.”

I don’t want to give you a lot of examples, but I’m just going to mention one that I talked about in the book, *Faithful Dissenters*. Have you heard of Mary Ward? A lot of people have not heard of Mary Ward. She was a 17th century English woman, very well educated, very intelligent woman, and she was living during the time of the Protestant Reformation. And England, at that time, was being very hard on Catholicism. All of the convents were closed, the nuns were told to go back to lay life. Anybody would be prosecuted if they were seen wearing a religious habit. The priests were really persecuted. They were thrown into jail; and in many cases they were killed. So Mary Ward looked around and said, “The religious education of women, particularly, is not going on at all; somebody ought to do it.” So she decided, after much prayer and thought, to form a new religious order which would combine contemplation with good works in the world, especially through the religious education of women. Now her new religious order had three major components:

1. There would be no requirement of cloister or enclosure. Her nuns would be able to go out freely into the world.
2. The order would be governed entirely by women, not by bishops; and it would be answerable only to the Pope.
3. The sisters would wear secular clothes. They would dress like anybody else. Of course they had to, if they were going to operate, especially in England.

And the interesting thing is that she did this at a time when just a few years after the Council of Trent, which said, and I quote, “By God’s judgment and threat of eternal malediction, bishops shall require strict enclosure of all religious houses. And it will be unlawful for any nun to leave the convent, even for a brief period of time for any reason, unless she has the permission of the bishop,” not the Mother General, the bishop. Now this was the rule; and it was being enforced

all over the world during this stressful emergency. It was sort of like a period of a lockdown in a prison. Everybody get in their house; it's not safe outside. And it was being enforced and obeyed by all good Catholics, but not Mary Ward. So she began to acquire a lot of young women who thought this was a good idea. She formed a house called the organization The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary; not the BVM's that you may have heard of, but the IBVMs.

And when word of it came, when women started to work out in the world in England, people on the mainland in Europe were concerned. And so within a few years she had established houses in France, Germany, Holland, Italy and Austria; and they were having great success teaching religion to Catholic people, who wanted to remain Catholic during this time of persecution in some of these areas. Now she had asked the Pope for his permission when she started; and she got none. She got nothing! The Pope said nothing! So she took this as a mysterious sign of his approval (laughter). She was thinking as if – she was thinking out ahead. Now what happens is that a lot of the priests got worried about these women going out. Women, you know, administering sacraments. God only knows what they were doing – baptizing and other things – and they made their feelings known to Rome. They said, “These galloping girls were wandering around Europe and they must be unhorsed, must be put down”. In 1631 Urban VII responded. He disbanded the order. He had Mary Ward thrown in prison in Germany, where she was at the time, and she was accused of being a heretic, a schismatic, a rebel against Holy Church; and the order was destroyed as it were.

Mary Ward spent the rest of her 14 years teaching as a lay person back in England. But some of her nuns stayed together informally without talking much about it. And 58 years later, after Mary Ward's death, they appealed to Rome; and the order was re-instituted, not quite in the radical form that it was at the beginning, but in a more conservative way. But it was the IBVM's are back. However, not until 269 years after Mary Ward's death, were the members of that order allowed to announce that Mary Ward was their founder. And it was only in 1951 that Pope Pius XII called Mary Ward, “that incomparable woman given by the Holy Spirit to Catholic England in the darkest of periods, that holy woman.” There you go! A simple example of a dissenter; a first rank dissenter, and thinking ahead. Now what was she thinking of? What she was foreseeing were the nuns of the 20th century, out in the world, wearing secular clothes, answering to their own superiors – at least trying to answer to their own superiors.

The Church had changed. The Church was changing. And what it says, what these kinds of historical people say to us, I think today, is that dissent must not just be just said ... “No you can't dissent.” Dissent must be respected at times as a legitimate manifestation of the Holy Spirit working in the Church...out ahead of the Church, which the Holy Spirit is known to do.

And there are others, ones that I found very intriguing in the book, like Hildegard of Bingen. In the 12th century she's acting like Joan Chittister (laughter). She's going all over the world; she's

arguing with political leaders, she's writing songs and plays. The nuns in her convent, she insisted, would always have a supply of beer (laughter), because she felt that the nuns were more amusing when they had beer (lots of laughter). She said that.

We have people in the modern world, well in the middle ages, like Galileo, who took a chance because he dissented in a way. It was a very cautious dissent; but it was enough to get him in big trouble. In the modern world Yves Congar, the Dominican who was way ahead of us on ecumenical thinking; and he got persecuted for it, of course. And John Courtney Murray in the 20th century, on the issue of religious freedom, way out ahead; and of course he got persecuted for it.

So being a dissenter generally means getting in trouble. You know you're in dissent when you're in trouble. But people say, "How can I dissent today from official Church teaching? How can I say, 'No,' to the ban on women's ordination and still know that I am a follower of Jesus Christ and consider myself a loyal member of the Catholic Church? How can I do that?" And I think the answer is: you can't know. You can't know, because dissent is not always the great thing that these examples provide. Dissent in some cases has caused disaster to the Church, caused wars, and schisms, and all kinds of terrible things. So dissent must be taken very carefully and very thoughtfully. I think dissent is a little bit like cholesterol: there's good dissent and there's bad dissent. There's good cholesterol and bad cholesterol; and how do you know that you do not have too much bad cholesterol, that in fact, you have an overabundance of good cholesterol. And the answer is: you don't know. You only find out, or somebody may find out about your cholesterol, after you're dead. So also with dissent; you'll find out after you're dead. But people say, "Well, then, I'm not going to take a chance. I'm not going to change. I'm going to be loyal and not dissent in any way; and therefore I'm saved." Oh, wait a minute! In both cases, in the case of following the institutional Church exclusively, you're taking a chance. In dissenting you're taking a chance. There's always a leap of faith involved. So nobody's excused in this crowd from taking a chance one way or the other. And I'm saying, today, I think a lot of people are taking the chance, are taking the jump knowingly, thoughtfully.

But what I want to do at this point is give you some thoughtful ideas about four dissenters who have been very helpful to me. And they are on those sheets of paper that you picked up on the way in. (See attachment.) Theologians, all respected by the Church all got in trouble in some way or other; but all are now considered Roman Catholics in good standing, more or less.

- And the first is John Henry Newman, who you may know to be considered the greatest theologian of the 19th century. Newman was a convert from the Anglican faith and he was very interested in the history of the Church – how the Church handled dissent and heresy in the olden days. And I stumbled upon him. We had studied a little bit about John Henry Newman in the seminary, but we never really got into what he was all about; and I came on this little thin book in the library called *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* – and I thought,

“What?” On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine; and the book is about an historical investigation he did, as no one had ever done before, of the Arian heresy of the fourth century. I’m sure you’re all interested in that: the Arian heresy in the fourth century.

Arius was the leader of a great number of Christians. There were two opinions that were travelling around at the time about: Is Jesus God and man or is Jesus not God. That’s crazy! You can’t call somebody that’s human God. Is he just a great creature, greater than any man, any angel, any human? That was the position of Arius. Others said no, he is two natures in one person. And they called a council at Nicea of all the bishops. All the bishops didn’t show up, but a lot of them did. And they decreed at Nicea that, after much argument and much disagreement, that Jesus was true God and true man; and they wrote a creed called The Nicene Creed, which we recite in church today, to make sure. Jesus is: “God from God, light from light, true God from true God. Begotten, not made. One in being with the Father.” Now all of those were repeated in various ways, in so many different ways, because it was trying to get across the fact that he is God.

But Newman showed through his investigation, that for 60 years after Nicea, the bishops of the world sided with Arius. Now you say, “Oh! They should have sided with Nicea because it was an ecumenical council.” They didn’t know it was an ecumenical council at the time. It was just a council, just a gathering of bishops. There were many councils that were declared invalid over the years, that just dropped out of site. But many of the bishops, the great number of the bishops, sided with Arius. And I’m going to read the second reading under John Henry Newman (the handout) and you can read along. The Nicene dogma of the council was maintained during the greater part of the 4th century...not by the unswerving firmness of the Holy See. The Pope, in fact, wrote an Arian proposal, not by councils or bishops, but by the consensus of the fidelium (the consent of the faithful), the lay people. On the one hand, I say, there was a temporary suspense of the functions of the teaching Church. The body of bishops failed in their confession of their faith. They spoke variously, one against the other. There was nothing after Nicea, of firm, unvarying, consistent testimony, for near sixty years. We can stop there. So he says for sixty years there was nothing.

Well, why aren’t we all Arians? And I think a lot of people today are Arians – but we won’t go into that. We’re not Arians because the lay people said, “No! No! No!. Arius is wrong, the bishops are wrong. They got it right at Nicea; and then didn’t follow their own statements.” So after sixty years the Arian position kind of weakened and the next council was called at Constantinople – the Second Council of Constantinople – and it reaffirmed it in a little bit different way what Nicea said, but maintained that Jesus is both God and man. And Newman was astounded at that; he said, “What was going on there? The bishops were wrong and the lay people were right? How can that be?” For sixty years they were saying what turned out to be the doctrine of the Church, a very interesting thing. He said, “I think” - the first statement by Newman – “I think I am right in saying that the tradition of the apostles, committed to the whole of the Church, manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouths of the

bishops, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all the other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect.” And Newman drew four conclusions from that:

1. The first obvious is there are many sources for the formation of legitimate doctrine. There isn't just one. It not just the bishops. It comes from a lot of different places, as he points out, and that is what led to the Second Council of Constantinople.
2. Second conclusion that he drew. The sense of the faithful must be consulted. It must be listened to, because at the Council of Constantinople, it was the sense of the faithful that prevailed in the long run; and that's why we believe what we believe today. Newman believed that true teaching involved what he called a *conspiratio*; that is, a Latin word which we literally translate as conspiracy. But we don't mean conspiracy in the sense of a group of people who gather together to do evil. We mean what it literally means: *conspitatio*, a breathing together. He said the two lungs of the Church, the bishops and the laity, the hierarchy and the lowerarchy, if you will, must be in cahoots, in cooperation, breathing together. That's when you have a healthy Church. And when one is breathing and the other isn't, you've got sickness; you've got pneumonia. And using that same analogy, I think we have a good amount of pneumonia. It's not a healthy situation.
3. Thirdly, he said, “We can have in the Church a doctrine that is promoted, promulgated by the Church at its highest level, with the Pope and the bishops all agreeing, and it may not be received by the people, as was the case in the Arian situation” – not received by the people! It's very much like a tree falling in the forest and nobody's there. Nobody heard it because nobody was there. And Newman said that sort of thing has happened in the past; and he said it could happen in the future; and what is most interesting to me is that it can happen in the present: that a doctrine can be promulgated ... can you think of a doctrine that was promulgated with absolute clarity and certainty, and for the better part of 45 years, it hasn't been received by the faithful? Think! Some of you are not thinking (laughter). This is about as clear a case of modern non-reception as you will get. But they don't talk about that; they don't talk about that; they just keep repeating it. It's like they just keep chopping down trees in the hopes that somebody will wander in the forest and hear it (laughter). It simply doesn't make sense.
4. And finally Newman said – this is a big thing – tradition is very important for Catholics, very important in the Church. But tradition doesn't stop; it keeps going on, and that makes for trouble, because the tradition of the Church did not stop at the Council of Trent. It did not stop at the First Vatican Council or the Second Vatican Council. It's been going on ever since; and you gotta take that seriously. It doesn't mean that a new tradition completely outlaws what was formerly thought to be the valid tradition. It means that you gotta think about it. You gotta talk about it. You've got to have discernment. We don't have it.

Newman had a great impression on me. I loved that man. Pope Paul VI said at the end of the Vatican Council, he said, “This Vatican Council was really Newman's Council.”

- Second, Francis Sullivan. I love Francis Sullivan. He taught at the Gregorian in Rome for 36 years; and he taught dogmatic theology. And often, when I'm giving a talk, and there are priests there, some people studied under – anybody here studied under Francis Sullivan? There's one! Notice they're in the back (laughter) – Francis Sullivan was the great dogmatic teacher. And I was afraid to read Francis Sullivan, because he wrote the book *Magisterium: The Teaching Authority of the Church*. And I thought, "Oh boy! He taught at the Gregorian. He's very clear that everybody gotta do what we're told to do." Not so! Not so!. And I can remember now, that in reading him, I was just so energized, I couldn't sleep that night. Francis Sullivan had the advantage of the Vatican Council; and so he read the Vatican Council's doctrines – I think he was there as an expert. But there are some statements in the Vatican Council that prepared the way for his thinking; and I'll read just a little bit of those statements – you don't have them on that sheet, but you all have a copy of the Vatican Council at home, and I will expect you to read it tonight (laughter).

This is from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*); and you've heard it a million times, but you didn't think about it. "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy Spirit, cannot err, cannot make a mistake, in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith, which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality, when from the bishops down to the last number of the laity, it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals." This is an astounding passage! It places the source of Catholic conviction about the truths of the faith first and foremost in the people as a whole. This is where the Holy Spirit principally dwells; and this is where anybody must go to discern what is to be believed and what isn't.

Second reading. This is from the Constitution on the Revelation of God: "Now the magisterium is not above the word of God, but serves it teaching only what has been handed down, listening to it devoutly, guarding it conscientiously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission." So we have here what? We have an obligation on the part of the bishops and the pope to listen. Before they can become the teaching Church, they must be the listening Church. "The deposit of faith, says Sullivan, "is not entrusted uniquely to the successors of the apostles; it is handed on primarily, not to the apostles, but to the whole Church." And they must recognize that.

And the third, also from the Constitution on Divine Revelation. "This tradition which comes down to us from the apostles, develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit, develops changes, for there is growth, growth in the understanding of the realities of the word, which have been handed down. How does it happen? How does it change? Through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasures these things in their hearts, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things that they experience, and secondly, through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession, the gift of teaching." Isn't that something? Who comes first? The faithful, who think about these things, who pray over them,

who have experiences that might enlighten, and then also by the bishops. And he says finally, “For, as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward,” moves forward. I think that’s amazing when you consider it in connection with this idea of the teaching of the Church as complete, definitive, absolute, total, unique, full, and exclusive. It isn’t full. It isn’t exclusive. Well, okay!

So Sullivan then gives us a little bit of his thinking – and I don’t want to go too long, but we’re okay. He’s talking about the pope here in that first one. He’s talked about the bishops and says, “They must listen. Bishops do not teach on their own. Before the pope can define a dogma, he must listen to the Church; and he can define his dogma only what he finds in the faith of the Church. The pope has no source of revelation that is independent of the faith life of the Church. From this it follows the Pope cannot simply define a dogma without having in some real way consulted the faith of the Church; for he can define only something that has been handed on in the teaching and is being handed on in the life and worship of the Church.” Then he goes and says this – and this is the thing that kept me up all night – “I think it is unjust to treat all dissent from the teaching of the ordinary magisterium – that’s the ordinary teaching of the Church – as disobedience, or to turn agreement with his teaching, with the pope’s teaching, the magisterium teaching, as a test of loyalty. No doubt there are Catholics whose respect for the teaching authority of the Pope is so great that the simple appeal to that authority is enough to convince them the teaching is true. But such persons should resist the temptation to think disloyal other Catholics in whose minds the reasons against the teaching makes so strong an impression that the formal authority of the magisterium is not enough to overcome their doubts.”

Powerful stuff! And then he hits the nail on the head. “If in a particular instance Catholics have offered their religious submission of mind and will which the Church requires, to the authority of a magisterium, by making an honest and sustained effort to achieve an internal assent to its teaching, and still find the doubts about its truth remains so strong in their minds that they cannot actually give their sincere intellectual ascent to it, I do not see how one could judge such non-assent to involve any lack of obedience to the magisterium.” That is really interesting. He says, “We are required to give submission” – Rome says that – “submission to all the truths of the faith, no distinctions,” which is another crazy idea. We never had that before in the history of the Church. Everything is equally ... you must give internal and external submission. Now the Latin word that they use is obsequium. You must give obsequium to the teaching. But obsequium can be translated in different ways; and one way of translating obsequium, which theologians use, is respect. The teachings of the Church must be given respect; and respect is different than the idea of total conformity, total submission. That’s Sullivan. He is a guide. He is a recognized theologian. He taught the bishops. I don’t know where they were when he was teaching (laughter). They may have taken the day off. They might have been getting fitted for those hats that they wear.

- My third guide and mentor is Richard McCormick, a Jesuit theologian, who died a few years

ago, and you can read later his first statement where he talks about the present situation. The second reading of McCormick's on the back of your page is... "My concern is that the farther we move away in history from Vatican II, the more some people begin to interpret unity as uniformity. They seem to want to go back to the monolithic Church, which must form a bulwark, on the one hand, against communism, and on the other, against the Western liberal consumer society. I think that above all in the West, with its pluralist society, such an ideal of a monolith Church is out of date and runs into a blind alley. And there is the danger that, in that case, people with that ideal before their eyes will begin to force the Church in the direction of a ghetto Church, a Church of the little flock, the holy remnant." And I've heard talk about that and I think you have too. We're going to have the perfectly loyal, obedient church. Well, we may have it, but we could get all those people in the back chapel eventually (laughter)? McCormick then tries to give us some rules for dissent, and they're much more complicated, but I just sum them up here. He said:

1. When a Church teaching comes out, read it, and you must make a sincere effort to understand it.
2. You must consider the reasons for the teaching and those against. For instance, when the teaching about banning all homosexuals from the seminaries – you know that came out here several years ago – so you consider the reasons for it. Why did they say that? What evidence did they have to say that? And what's against that teaching?
3. Then, you do a serious examination of your own conscience on this. Are you taking this position of dissent, or thinking about taking it, out of vanity because you like to be on the side of the underdog? Is it because of what Monsignor Hooligan said to you back 20 years ago, and you've never forgiven him? Is it because the priest scandal is so severe that it just ruined your attitude toward Church authority? Is it because of sheer arrogance that you're smarter than they are? None of these reasons are good enough. Did you pray over it? Did you talk to somebody else about it? Did you look at the intellectual reasons for it?
4. And, finally, do you still, after going through all this process, still hold respect – obsequium – for the general trustworthiness of the Church over the long haul – I say, over the long haul. It doesn't have to be right now; but when you look at the history of the Church, it's got a pretty good record over the long haul. If after going through the process, one still doubts or rejects, that person should not be labeled a disobedient Catholic, but a conscientious dissenter.

McCormick is a good person to follow. He has a famous book, which I'll think of in a minute, that will help you.

- And the final dissenter, and the man I've grown to love, he is my mentor, Edward Schillebeeckx. How many of you have read something by Edward Schillebeeckx? Oh my God! The whole Elephant group!. Well, that's good. A couple of years ago The National Catholic Reporter asked me to go to Holland to find out what's going on over there. And I went, and my wife went with me, and we spent four days, or so, in Holland, because the Catholic Church, all organized religion, is sinking in Holland. Something less than 5% of the Catholics go to church

on Sunday in Holland, and it is very interesting. But the reason that I went was that the priests in the Dominican Province of Holland sent a booklet to all the parishes in Holland, and they said, “Because of the lack of priests, and because of the small congregations we have, it is now necessary (and they said this explicitly) for each parish to select for itself someone from the congregation to administer the Eucharist, to preside at the Eucharist on Sunday.” This can be a layman, obviously, or a laywoman, or a married couple, perhaps or a gay person, or a gay couple. “There shall be no prohibitions and that person shall preside at the Eucharist.”

Now Holland, for a long time, had had these Word and Communion Masses, and the people were getting tired of them, and in many places they were starting to do their own Eucharist. So the Dutch said it is time for the Church to say let’s go with that, because that is the way it was done for a thousand years in the early Church, that each community picked out a leader, a person that they wanted to be the presider at the Eucharist, and by that very fact, the person was considered ordained. Now that practice collapsed in the second thousand years of the Church. But when the Dominicans did this, they were following the teaching of Schillebeeckx. Schillebeeckx said this way early; he said it in the late 70’s and early 80’s; so it’s nothing crazy and new. But I just want you to take a look at a few of his sayings.

Against the background of the existing Church order then, new and sometimes urgently required alternative possibilities are often only to be seen through the medium of what is bound to be regarded as at least temporarily illegal. This is not a new phenomenon in the Church – it has always been the case. I am bound to say that an alternative practice of critical Christian communities is both dogmatically and apostolically possible. It is, in my opinion, a legitimate Christian possibility which is demanded by our present needs. Given the existing canonical order of the Church, this alternative praxis is not even contra (against) the order, but another way of doing things, running right along the given order, that is, it is not in accordance with the letter of the Church’s order, but it is in accordance with what (in an earlier situation) that Church order really wanted to safeguard.

And on that last paragraph. “It would be wrong in my opinion to place all the blame (for the outmoded sacral image of the priest) on Rome. Leadership or authority can only be exercised meaningfully and appear in changed forms if both the people and their office bearers, including the bishops and pope, have reached a sufficient level of consciousness. It is not possible to ask the highest authority in a world Church to change the prevailing order in that Church if the change does not meet with the approval of the majority of Christian communities.”

Schillebeeckx is not asking us to appeal to the pope or the bishops at this point. He’s saying, “It’s not going to happen, because you are appealing to people who have devoted their life to this.” You can’t ask the bishops and the pope to think outside the box, when they live in the box, when they are paid by the box (laughter). And what’s the point of getting mad at them. That is who they are. You can’t ask a tiger not to roar; this is their nature. It will only happen when the

practice changes. Now, when women started getting ordained – you know about that – we have about 60 or 70 women now in the world who have been ordained illegally, and the Church says invalidly, and I thought they shouldn't be doing this. We should wait. We should appeal to the pope. What those women were doing – I am convinced, and they will tell you that is they were living as if the future Church were already here, as if what Vatican II was talking about has been fulfilled – they're living, and of course that creates trouble, that creates difficulty for Rome, and for them, but that is dissent carried a step, and not just into the head or into the motions of the individual, but it is living that way in a social world. And I know that many people, Catholics, are already dissenting this way, in other ways, for instance: the welcoming of gays, gay couples, into parishes, and their participation in the ministries of those parishes. That is happening all over the country. It is happening quietly. Nobody is screaming and yelling about it. But it is happening and it is contra, not contra it's praeter, it is beside the norm that says you may not have committed homosexuals in ministry in the Church. And I think the ecumenical activities of Catholic churches, Catholic people, Catholic parishes which goes well beyond what Rome says is okay. That sort of thing is acting, living as if the Kingdom of God is already here.

We went to a Mass in Amsterdam on a Sunday and the Mass was packed with people and it was an inter-faith Mass – Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, and others – and at the end of the Mass – I won't talk more about it now – but at the end of the Mass, I went up to the people who were there, first of all to the pastor, who is a Dominican, who has run that church for forty years, and I said, “What percentage of your parish are Catholic and non-Catholic?” And he said, “I have no idea” (laughter). So I went up to some of the people, and I wanted to get their impressions, and I said to a young man, “Are you a Protestant or a Catholic?” And he looked at me, and he said, “For 400 years Catholics and Protestants went their separate ways; we are now coming back together. Do you have a problem with that?” (Much laughter) And I said, “No! No! Not at all.”

That Mass was a transforming event for me, it really was, because the church was packed with all kinds of people. And the music just carried you up to the ceiling. It was sung by the celebrant partly, the Eucharistic prayer by the celebrant, by the choir and by the people, taking turns all together, at times, and then separately, and it just had something about it. But it was in Dutch. So after the Mass, when I went to the pastor, I said, “Was that a Mass?” He said, “Of course, it is a Mass. What did you think it was?” I said, “I don't speak Dutch. Was that a real consecration?” And he said “Yes.” You know he looked at me like a kindergarten kid. He said, “Of course, you have to understand that it is we who are consecrated when we receive the Eucharist”. And I said “How have you been able to do this? Haven't they put you out of business?” And he said, “Strange question. We have been here for 40 years; and at one point, the Cardinal of Holland called us in and said, ‘You've got to start ordering this church shut down;’ and this old Dominican said, ‘I'm sorry, but we don't answer to you; we answer to the Dominican Prior President in Rome.’ And for 40 years the Dominican General, is what they call him, in Rome had not condemned this and not approved it. He just said, ‘Well, I guess that's going on’.” (Laughter) That is dissent, I would say, in a creative sense; and in the midst of this

arid Holland, this arid country where Christianity is dying, I see this thing springing up; and it doesn't look anything like the Church I grew up in, or anything that I've seen in the United States, because the presider at that Mass was a Lutheran layman. Oh! Oh! People have asked me "Was a priest in the church?" And I say, "Yeh! There was a priest." And they said, "Okay! Okay!"

It's a different kind of world we're growing up in, and your children are growing up in, and I think that it is people who live as if who are going to bring the future; and we have some. And I don't think we need everybody; but we need some. God knows.

Transcribed by
Bev Parker
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Attachment
The Church and Dissent Today
John Newman

I think I am right in saying that the tradition of the apostles committed to the whole Church...manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs, by events, disputes, movements and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect

The Nicene dogma was maintained during the greater part of the 4th century...not by the unswerving firmness of the Holy See, Councils or Bishops, but...by the consensus fidelium [consent of the faithful]. On the one hand, I say, that there was a temporary suspense of the functions of the Ecclesia docens [the teaching church]. The body of the Bishops failed in their confession of the faith. They spoke variously, one against another; there was nothing after Nicea, of firm, unvarying, consistent testimony, for nearly sixty years. There were untrustworthy Councils, unfaithful Bishops; there was weakness, fear of consequences, misguidance, delusion, hallucination, endless, hopeless, extending itself into nearly every corner of the Catholic church. The comparatively few who remained faithful were discredited and driven into exile; the rest were either deceivers or were deceived. "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine"

Francis Sullivan, SJ

Before the pope can define a dogma he must listen to the Church, and he can define as dogma only what he finds in the faith of the Church. The pope has no source of revelation that is independent of the faith-life of the Church...From this it follows that the pope cannot simply define a dogma without having in some real way consulted the faith of the Church, for he can define only something that has been handed on in the teaching, life and worship of the Church.

I think it is unjust to treat all dissent from the teaching of the ordinary magisterium as disobedience, or to turn agreement with his teaching as a test of loyalty to the Holy See. No doubt there are Catholics whose respect for the teaching authority of the pope is so great that the simple appeal to his formal authority is enough to convince them that the teaching must be true...But such persons should resist the temptation to think disloyal others Catholics in whose minds the reasons against the teaching make so strong an impression that the formal authority of the magisterium is not enough to overcome their doubts.

If in a particular instance Catholics have offered their religious submission of mind and will to the authority of the magisterium by making an honest and sustained effort to achieve internal assent to its teaching, and still find that doubts about its truth remain so strong in their minds that they cannot actually give their sincere intellectual assent to it, I do not see how one could judge such non-assent to involve any lack of obedience to the magisterium. "Magisterium: The Teaching Authority of the Church"

Richard McCormick, SJ

"I view the matter as dominantly an authority problem. By that I mean that any analysis, conclusion or process that challenges or threatens previous authoritative statements is by that very fact rejected. Any modification of past authority is viewed as an attack on present authority. Behind such an attitude is an unacknowledged and historically unsupportable triumphalism, the idea that the official teaching authority of the church is always right, never errs, is always totally adequate in its formulations. Vatican II radically axed this idea in many ways but nowhere more explicitly than in its Decree on Ecumenism: "Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine...these should be rectified at the proper moment."

"My concern is that the further we move away in history from Vat. II, the more some people begin to interpret unity as uniformity. They seem to want to go back to the monolithic church which must from a bulwark on the one hand against communism and on the other hand against the Western liberal consumer society. I think that above all in the West, with its pluralist society such an ideal of a monolith church is out of date and runs into a blind alley. And there is the danger that in that case, people with that ideal before their eyes will begin to force the church in the direction of a ghetto church, a church of the little flock, the holy remnant." America, 7/17/93

Criteria for responsible dissent:

1. A sincere effort to understand the teaching
2. Consideration of the reasons for the teaching and those against
3. Serious examination of one's conscience
4. Holding respect for the general trustworthiness of the church

If, after going through the process, one still doubts or rejects, that person should not be labeled a disobedient Catholic but a conscientious dissenter (on the issue or issues considered).

Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P.

Against the background of the existing Church order then, new and sometimes urgently required alternative possibilities are often only to be seen through the medium of what is bound to be regarded as at least temporarily illegal. This is not a new phenomenon in the Church – it has always been the case. I am bound to say that an alternative praxis of critical Christian communities is both dogmatically and apostolically possible. It is, in my opinion, a legitimate Christian possibility which is demanded by our present needs. Given the existing canonical order of the Church, this alternative praxis is not even *contra* (against) the order but *praeter* (alongside) the order, that is, it is not in accordance with the letter of the Church's order, but it is in accordance with what (in earlier situations) that Church order really wanted to safeguard.

We should not make the alternative forms of praxis into a mystery. Our attitude should be governed by realism and sobriety. Renewal in the Church usually begins with illegal deviations, and it rarely happens that attempts at renewal come from above.

It would be wrong in my opinion to place all the blame (for the outmoded sacral image of the priest) on Rome. Leadership or authority can only be exercised meaningfully and appear in changed forms if both the people and their office bearers (including the bishops) have reached a sufficient level of consciousness. It is not possible to ask the highest authority in a world church to change the prevailing order in that church if the change does not meet with the approval of the majority of Christian communities. "Ministry: Leadership in the Church of Jesus Christ"

Patrick Granfield.

Reception is a multi-layered reality. It is not a purely juridical concept...nor is it exclusively the task of the magisterium. When the Church teaches a doctrine or mandates a discipline, the process of reception is not ended. Reception of papal and episcopal teaching involves the entire People of God: the hierarchy and the faithful together are the bearers of reception...Christian truth is not an abstraction but exists only in the living faith of people. Church officials play a critical role in the process of reception by their formal teaching...But it is the faithful themselves who appropriate the teaching of the Church... "The Limits of the Papacy"

Compiled by Robert McClory

