

The Catholic Church has always taught that its doctrine and Constitution are both of divine origin, having been established by Jesus Christ to belong to the foundation of His Church, and never to be changed by men, be they the highest officials in His Church. Yet from everything we know about the present Synod of Bishops' meeting in Rome for this month of October, it does seem that revolutionary changes in Church teaching and structure are what Pope Bergoglio has in mind to bring about by means of this Synod. For instance, the participants in all previous Synods were predominantly high clergy, but in line with the Church's democratisation by Vatican II (1962-1965), this time a large proportion will be laity and women.

Faced with the threat of this Synod to the Church's very survival, five Roman cardinals from all over the world – Brandmueller (Germany), Burke (USA), Sandoval (Mexico), Sarah (Guinea) and Zen (China) – wrote to the Pope on July 10 of this year with a list of five “dubia” or doctrinal doubts, on which they asked him, entirely in accordance with Canon Law, for a doctrinal clarification of what he had meant by what he said on various occasions concerning **1** Divine Revelation, **2** Same-sex unions, **3** synodality, **4** women priests and **5** the Sacrament of Penance. Here is what the Church teaches on these points :

- 1 Divine Revelation:** whatever the Church has declared to be doctrine from God, can never be changed.
- 2 Same-sex Unions :** objectively sinful situations, e.g. same-sex unions, cannot be made good by the sinners' good intentions, but remain a betrayal of the divine Revelation which condemns them.
- 3 Synodality :** any meeting of bishops such as a Synod, with or without laity and women taking part, remains a group for the Pope to consult, but it cannot partake in his governing of the Church.
- 4 Women priests :** by the very nature of the Sacrament of Orders, women can never be valid priests.
- 5 Sacrament of Penance :** Confession is invalid if the penitent has insufficient contrition for his sins.

On July 11 of this year, Pope Bergoglio replied to each of the five “dubia” with considerations of his own. His full answers in his letter of July 11 can be found on the Internet, e.g. at edwardpentin.co.uk --

- 1** *Divine revelation is binding for ever, **but** what binds for ever may need to be re-interpreted in order to fit the new circumstances of new times.*
- 2** *Perennial substance is one thing, **but** cultural conditioning is another. Thus there must always be pastoral charity for the Church's sheep. Their behaviour does not always conform with Church norms.*
- 3** *The Catholic people must collaborate in the Pope's government of the Church. All such collaboration can be called “synodal”. **But** to fit the Universal Church, it must always be wide open.*
- 4** *The Church has always taught that women cannot be priests, **but** they have equal rights with men.*
- 5** *Of course the Church always required repentance for absolution, **but** in our day things have moved so far on that the mere fact of a sinner coming to Confession can be enough to merit absolution.*

The five Cardinals could not be satisfied with such considerations, however pious and well-meaning they may have seemed to be. And so on August 21, they wrote again to the Pope with their five “dubia”, reformulated so as to ask for a clear and doctrinal “yes” or “no” answer to each of their doubts. Here is how they recast the same doubts, to elicit from the Pope the exact answer that the questions call for –

- 1** Yes or no, if a text is once defined as divine doctrine, can that text be changed at any time later ?
- 2** Yes or no, can a Catholic priest bless a same-sex union ? Is all extra-marital sex still sinful ?
- 3** Yes or no, will the present Synod of Bishops be exercising the Supreme Authority of the Church ?
- 4** Yes or no, could the sacramental Ordination of a woman to the Catholic priesthood ever be valid ?
- 5** Yes or no, can a penitent Confessing a sin but not repenting of it, validly receive absolution ?

If the Synod pretends to change Catholic doctrine on any of these points, it will not have been a Catholic Synod, and the normal consequence will be a schism in the Church.

Kyrie eleison

A Catholic is such by what he believes,
Not to be blown around like autumn leaves.

