

THE SILENT SCHISM

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*Healing the Serious Split
in the Catholic Church*

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in extenso

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INTRODUCTION

The Grammar of Simplicity

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[The Church] cannot leave simplicity behind; otherwise she forgets how to speak the language of Mystery, and she herself remains outside the door of the mystery, and obviously, she proves incapable of approaching those who look to the Church for something which they themselves cannot provide, namely, God. At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people.

POPE FRANCIS

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On Pope Francis' World Youth Day trip to Brazil in July of 2013, literally millions of people (not just the youth)—whether there in the pope's presence, watching him on television or the social media, or reading accounts of his remarks—heard the new leader of the Holy Roman Catholic Church speak to the world for one of the first times since his surprising election. For the two of us, researching and discussing at the time how we should focus our message in this book, we were struck by a stark and potent brief phrase, which Francis spoke while addressing the Brazilian bishops. He told them they must learn to speak in the “*grammar of simplicity*,” meaning that the People of God need to hear clear messages of love, joy, compassion, and forgiveness, rather than constant repetition of intellectual and dogmatic ideas.

Of all the many startling, unexpected, and provocative phrases that Pope

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tionalist, progressive, or some other adjective, we have to admit that there is clear disunity among us. The communion to which the church aspires that “we may all be one” seems to be in a quandary, and the harmony we seek certainly has eluded us.

Francis has uttered so far in his still young and unfolding pontificate, this pronouncement was an ever-present and insistent force within us as we wrote what follows on these pages. This book is our attempt to speak about the complex and clashing viewpoints prevalent in today’s church. We have tried to do this by using a grammar of simplicity.

It seems quite obvious to say that today’s Roman Catholics have unanimous agreement on only one thing—*we are in turmoil*. Indeed, whether we are conservative, liberal, tradi-



We all know that changes happen all the time in the church, and often these seem to result in tumult, often followed by separation, if not schism, among the followers of Christ. No authority in the church has ever been able, at least permanently, to stop people from thinking and acting on their ideas; and, no authority has ever been able to control the dynamics and forces of transformation when evolving ideas have compellingly grasped and embraced the imagination of the people.

At times in the history of the church, entrenched hierarchy and curia viewed themselves as beyond any human accountability. They resisted reforming themselves and the structures in the church and thereby contributed to discord and in some cases schism within the church. Could not the Protestant Reformation, for example, have had a different, more unified end result for the church if the institutional church leaders during those times had initiated obvi-

ously needed reforms? It took the Catholic Church over 400 years, at the Second Vatican Council, to accept much of the best of the teaching and practice of our Protestant sisters and brothers: liturgy in the vernacular, lay participation in the mission of the church, emphasis on Bible study and adult religious education, married deacons, and many, many more.

What about the grotesque horrors perpetrated or at least permitted by the hierarchy during the Crusades and the Inquisition? Or official church teachings and writings on antisemitism and anti-Judaism throughout the centuries that laid the religious foundation for Nazi policies that resulted in the murders of over six million Jews and others during the Holocaust? Or institutional church arrogance and antipathy toward Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other world religions?

These acts and attitudes on the part of church leaders did not stop many Catholics from using their God-given abilities to think freely and to challenge the improper exercise of the church's teaching authority. Indeed, the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the faithful to challenge the institutional church has often been evident.



Unjust authoritative structures in the church eventually do not survive when the People of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, imagine a new future for their church. Some members of the institutional church, who are convinced they have authority by virtue of their office rather than by virtue of their call to serve, become so insular and closed-in on themselves that they do not listen to the lived experience of the faithful, what Catholics call “Tradition” (one of the two sources of revelation for Catholics) and “*sensus fidelium*” (the sense or experience of the faithful).

The driving force in the church that has nurtured hope and propelled progress in history is not found in authority's drive to recreate the past. Rather, healthy and vital transformation of the church resides in the dynamic of the people—members of the institutional church and the People of God together—

who have the courage to imagine and to create their future.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ said to Peter, “And now I’m going to tell you who you are, *really* are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. And that’s not all. You will have complete and free access to God’s kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19, *The Message*).

This passage, as newly translated from the original Greek and in its own grammar of simplicity by Eugene Peterson, has always been read as the basis for the legitimacy of the papacy, which is fine, but the keys given to Peter were given to *all followers* of Christ, thereby recognizing that the Holy Spirit comes to the People of God to fire our imaginations with a burning desire to “open any and every door.” The special call of Peter was not for him to foster a privileged or controlling church structure that subsumes and diminishes the freedom found in Jesus’ call to serve and love all. All of us have “complete and free access to God’s kingdom.” Apparently, this is how Pope Francis sees it, and so do we. (Note: In the spirit of Pope Francis, we will use *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition* throughout this book as the source for our Scripture quotes. While it is not the text used at Mass, it does present the Bible in a language that allows the reader to get at the heart of the matter, making the familiar passages come alive in new and inspiring ways.)



We write this book because we are convinced that there is a schism in the Catholic Church right now, a schism between the institutional church and the People of God. But it is a schism between ideologies. Note that understanding the descriptor *ideological* is essential to our analysis. We are convinced that the problems we see in the church today are really not the differences that arise from those who may lean either to a Christian traditionalist or to a Christian

progressive viewpoint. Note that the descriptor *Christian* is equally essential to understand our analysis because differences among *non-ideological* Christians are always overcome by the graced acceptance that is within the spirit of the Gospel, unlike the acrimony and divisiveness fostered within an ideological framework of contrived polarities. In other words, let the space filled with ideologies be instead filled with graced acceptance of similarities and differences in our efforts to bring about Christian unity!

Perhaps some further explanation is needed at the start. *Ideology* is a systematic body of concepts, assertions, and theories that give form to one's viewpoints and beliefs. It is *connected* to our beliefs in that it is a representation of a reality, but it is not the actual phenomenon itself. In other words, Christian faith is not necessarily words, laws, and dogmas describing what certain people or groups say is Christianity; rather Christianity is the *entire* church, replete with its graced and loving faith, spirit, and relationships, as well as those words, laws, and dogmas that express such grace.

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Religious ideologues cast a shadow over the human imagination by offering neat formulae under the guise of what they purport to be the "total truth."

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Ideologues, the persons or groups promoting their own ideologies, usually resort to myopic formulations that take on a life of their own. Religious ideology becomes an insidious force that separates the faithful into opposing camps that run counter to the core of unity of a particular faith. Religious ideologues cast a shadow over the human imagination by offering neat formulae of their faith, always presented under the guise of what they purport to be the "total truth."

Some have described ideology as a perversion of reason. Others describe it more vividly: ideology is to reason as gluttony is to fine dining! If we are to be true to the spirit of a *grammar of simplicity*, however, then we must state at the outset of this book our conviction in no uncertain terms. We believe that at the core of what we call the Silent Schism is a positive, historic, startling departure in our church. We hope to explain that today's schism is not one of separation; rather it is a force for church unity in its promotion of the kaleidoscope of rich

diversity unfolding on our shrinking globe. Christianity is no longer (nor has it ever been) for the ideologues. "Conservatives" and "Liberal" labels are out; Christian love is in.



Pope Francis could not have better captured the spirit of the Silent Schism than with the words he used in an interview that he gave in August 2013 in Rome to Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, when he stated:

If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then he will find nothing. Tradition and memory of the past must help us to have the courage to open up new areas to God. Those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long for an exaggerated doctrinal 'security,' those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists—they have a static and inward-directed view of things. In this way, faith becomes an ideology among other ideologies. I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. God is in everyone's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else—God is in this person's life. You can, you must try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.

As you read this book we ask you to keep in mind the destructive effects ideologues have had on Catholicism (and on other religions as well). Our church was established to embrace all, not just those who look like, think like, act like, and pray like someone's definition of an "orthodox" Catholic. We make no apology, nor do we tone-down our premise, that ideologues of all persuasions in the Catholic Church have contributed to a spiritual degradation of the principles and values of the Gospel. The Catholic faithful are living in an era of our church history in which indignation has become a way of life. It is

about time that all the faithful—laypeople, vowed religious, deacons, priests, bishops, cardinals, and pope together—put a stop to this divisiveness. Instead of indignation and judgment, we need mercy, compassion, and acceptance of those who are different than we are. We need to be what we are: baptized and committed Christians, not ideologues.

Finally, we—a vowed religious Sister and a vowed religious Brother—decided to write this book together so that we may model being less *ideological* and more fully *Christian*. We hoped that by integrating and gladly embracing our innate, God given diversity of viewpoints and experiences as female and male in our church, we might help to alter the female/male division that has been dominant for most of its history.

So, let us begin, using only the grammar of simplicity.

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CHAPTER ONE

For Whom Are We Waiting?

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*We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart,
and to bring home those who have lost their way.*

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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The reason that Pope Francis took the church (and the world) by storm after his election to the papacy is simple. It is found in his name, Francis, which was the name of the saint from Assisi in Italy who also took the church (and the world) by storm in the early thirteenth century. Both men felt a call to save the church, and both went about it in the same way: by example. They led by going back to the gospel and trying to live its radical vision of what the church should be: a servant of the poor and oppressed. St. Francis and Pope Francis are, in many ways, Vatican II Catholics. In fact, some may say they exemplify what Jesus Christ was about—building the “king”-dom, but without the “bling”-dom!



The Second Vatican Council (referred hereafter as Vatican II) took place from 1962-1965, after much preparation and research, and was a distinct pastoral chapter in the history of the Catholic Church. Unlike the previous 20 ecclesial councils that were called to deal with heresies or other errors happening at the time or to clarify doctrines, Vatican II was called to address what was

perceived as an irrelevancy of the church in the world and to bring together the ordained and laity in service to the church. In other words, Vatican II was a turning point in the history of the church: it got the ball rolling in another direction away from the Tridentine polemic of the previous 440 years.

Saint Pope John XXIII, who was canonized in 2014, opened the Council on October 11, 1962, with his speech *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* and enticed the participants (bishops) and *periti* (experts for the bishops) present with an idea of *aggiornamento*, or a call to update the church in bold fashion. (Just as St. Francis had done centuries before.) Pope John recognized metaphorically that the Catholic Church needed to have its windows shoved open to allow the fresh air of the Holy Spirit to blow in and renew the church. Prior to Vatican II, the image of the Church was triangular and clerical, with the pope at the top, then the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and so on.

But Pope John XXIII wanted a church that was less triangular and more circular, a church where Jesus Christ and his mission were at the center and members of the institutional church and the rest of the People of God worked together to advance Jesus' mission here and now. The idea of *aggiornamento* propelled the church into the modern era by announcing to the world that it is adaptable to the needs and desires of people throughout the world, rather than demanding that it must be the other way around.



The bishops and *periti* at Vatican II represented all areas of the world—Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Americas and Australia. Some bishops, primarily from European countries such as Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, came to Vatican II, at least initially, to protect the status quo. They favored the traditional hierarchical nature of the church; they believed the church possessed the whole (and sole) truth about God's plan for the world; and they feared that the Council had the potential of threatening the church's credibility in the world. Most of these bishops were reluctant to read the signs of the times and take the church into the contemporary era.

On the other hand, other bishops, who most often represented more religiously pluralistic societies in Northern Europe, North America, and the missionary countries of Africa, Asia, and South America, wanted the church to become more attuned to the modern world and change the way it related with it. Some of these bishops called for “ecumenism,” that is, cooperation among Christians of all denominations and rites; others, primarily from Latin America, emphasized the importance of social justice and working with the poor; and still others, mainly from countries in Africa and Asia, encouraged dialogue with those of other faith traditions and no formal religion at all. Overall, these bishops were concerned with helping the church become more relevant in their own cultures. They wanted the church to move away from being a Euro-centric church and to adopt a greater sense of identity as a global church.

Imagine the great exchanges of ideas, arguments, and compromises that had to have occurred during the sessions at Vatican II, when those bishops whose primary objective was to preserve the status quo debated other bishops whose sole purpose was to help the church open itself to the world!

While we could focus upon many themes related to Vatican II, we would like to concentrate upon what that council meant by its signature definition of the church as “the People of God.” Overall, the church at Vatican II shifted away from an almost total reliance on hierarchical structures of authority and embraced an understanding of the church as its members, which—of course—meant that the church is primarily the laity, with a few who are ordained to serve them. This was more in tune with the root of the word *church* (*ekklesia*, in Greek; *ecclesia*, in Latin), meaning a gathering of people, and more in keeping with what the early Christians were about (Acts 4:32-35). *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*), the first of the sixteen documents to be approved at Vatican II, tells us that all of us Catholics form the People of God through our common baptism, the universal call to holiness, and the precious gift of faith that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. In particular, the document says:

For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God (88), not

from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit (89), are finally established as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people...who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (90).... It follows that though there are many nations there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members” (9).

Do members of the institutional church today see themselves as part of the People of God? In some cases, yes. Pope Francis certainly seems to be one of them. But in many cases, some of the ordained members of the People of God have pulled so far away from the non-ordained members of the People of God that they have become almost elitist and their message certainly irrelevant. Vatican II reminds us that we are all the church, but with different—yet equally valid—callings on how to go about spreading the message of Jesus. After all, we all share equally in the same Holy Spirit who has been at work in people’s lives since the beginning of the church. It is in keeping with the optimistic tone of Vatican II and its promise of *aggiornamento* that we must revisit what we mean when we say that the church is the People of God.



Shortly after the close of Vatican II, Dr. Seuss, the famed children’s author, wrote a wonderful story, *The Lorax*. The story is about greed, corporate greed in particular, as a character named Once-ler began cutting down trees to make things—“thneeds,” as he called them—that he insisted everyone needs. But in cutting down the trees, he encounters the Lorax, who lives in a tree. The Lorax “speaks for the trees because the trees have no tongues” and insists that the Once-ler stop cutting down trees because if he continues there will be no trees left. Naturally, the Once-ler ignores the Lorax and soon the forest is depleted.

With no trees, there was no prosperity for the Once-ler's corporation and the Once-ler was stuck with the one thought the Lorax left for him: "Unless..."

We, the authors of this book, are calling you, the reader, to claim your rightful role as a member of the People of God, to be prophets and prophetesses like the Lorax, to speak truth to power, to speak up for the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the oppressed, and to say, "Unless..." The term "prophet" comes from the Hebrew *navi*, meaning "one who is called and calls" and *hozeh*, meaning "visionary." It is also from the Latin *propheta*, meaning spokesperson.

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We all share equally in the same Holy Spirit who has been at work in people's lives since the beginning of the church.

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Prophets and prophetesses are not fortune tellers or predictors of the future; rather, they are people who are graced and gifted by God to understand and interpret what is going on in the present and to call people back to what they are truly about. Prophets and prophetesses call upon others to rally around their concerns and demand that those in leadership change the way things are before it is too late, because "the way things are" is simply just not working and "the way things are" is keeping people poor, oppressed, and miserable.

To see the implications of what is happening now is not an easy task for the prophet and prophetess. It requires a good prayer life, proper discernment, complete obedience to the will of God, absolute willingness to accept intended or unintended consequences of what they say, and above all some good, old-fashioned common sense. The Lorax saw that if the Once-ler continued cutting down trees, his forest would be depleted. And that is exactly what happened.

We need prophets and prophetesses more than ever today to call the People of God's attention to big problems the world faces: wars, terrorism, genocides (much of which, by the way, are perpetuated brazenly and sinfully in the name of God). Who are the prophets and prophetesses today who can help us make sense of the horrors of this world and help us find solutions to them? Who is bringing us back to what it means to be a follower of Jesus and his mission?

Keep in mind that, like the prophets of biblical times, prophets and proph-

etteses today are not accepted in their own homeland (Luke 4:24) or often in their own church. When things are perceived as going well (a narrative often promoted by those in authority), do we *really* want someone to call our attention to what is not going well? People who stand against the status quo and for the oppressed and downtrodden are usually seen as suspect and then ostracized from the group.

How are the People of God already working as prophets and prophetesses? More and more Catholics (including Pope Francis) are demanding that Jesus' message (as found in the Beatitudes, for example) become more than mere lip-service. They want it to become the very fabric of who we are as church. They are calling upon members of the institutional church to transform its preoccupation, focus, and emphasis on such issues as birth control, gay marriage, and human sexuality, and instead embrace, encompass, and emphasize the totality of Jesus' wondrous message to love our neighbors, strangers, and even our enemies. In other words, the prophetic People of God are speaking up for people whose very essence—their human dignity—is being threatened right now.



Vatican II tried to alter the way in which the church stands in relationship with the world. Most of the participants, especially those from religiously pluralistic countries, expressed a desire for the church as a whole to be concerned with the needs of all people—Catholics, other Christians, people of other faith traditions, and of no faith at all. It began the arduous task of developing a global awareness of both the economic and social conditions of life and the cultural diversity and plurality experienced around the world.

This is not the time to be labeling Catholics as conservative, liberal, or middle-of-the-road. If the People of God were to take our ability to be prophets and prophetesses seriously, labels would not and could not exist. We would simply recognize that all people have distinct ways of living out Jesus' loving message but that the loving message is the same for every one of us.

During the fifty years since Vatican II, the developing globalization of the

world's economies has also altered the way the church stands in relationship with the world writ large. Many never before seen adverse situations in the lives of the poor and the marginalized have materialized. The church that professes to operate with a preferential option for the poor cannot ignore this reality. As Pope Francis has repeatedly exhorted, the church must first and foremost be the church for the oppressed.

We are not suggesting that we should romanticize the poor; poverty is a social sin. What our modern-day prophets and prophetesses are telling us is that the church must *look like* and *be like* the poor. It is just not enough to give pious homilies or issue well-intentioned statements *about* the poor. It is not even enough to collect money or to pray *for* the poor. We must *embrace* the poor as if they were literally our own family members.

Prophets and prophetesses are also telling us that in our global economy social injustice no longer resides only in developing or third-world countries. They observe an insidious spreading of social injustice even in the developed countries, where there is a new, apparently permanent class of people labeled “the working poor.” Poverty and social injustice is now systemic throughout the interconnected global economic reality of our times. Therefore, solutions must reflect an integrated systemic approach that includes all dimensions of society—including organized religions.

These present-worldly dynamics compel us Catholics to transform our past narrow view of spirituality to be more inclusive of the material concerns of the faithful. It does not matter whether one is conservative or liberal or middle-of-the-road. The point that we are making is that a growing number of Catholics is convinced that our faith as Christians must come together in a meaningful way with the financial situation in the real world. Faith and finance together will help make the gospel truly reflective of Jesus' command to love as he loved us. The preferential option for the poor means that the church in today's world will not be content with merely heralding pious exhortations and encouraging charitable giving. It means we must lead a life dedicated to social justice and dignity for all in our workplaces and in our community, civic, and political affairs. The church's attention in this manner will not make us less spiritual—it will make us truly holy.



The Take Away

This first chapter is designed to remind the reader that we Catholics—the People of God and the institutional church together—are among today’s prophets and prophetesses. We must pay attention to the world’s needs around us, discern the will of God, and determine appropriate actions to take—even if such actions go against the grain of conventional wisdom or upset certain people in power. We must learn to envision both the intended and unintended consequences of our actions.

As Vatican II reminded us, the Holy Spirit is not just for the ordained; the same Holy Spirit is present with all of us and calls all of us to keep the message and mission of Jesus Christ at the center of everything we say and do.