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Update on the Synod:

Conservative Bishops seem to be panicking, fearful that the more progressive bishops are getting the upper hand of the Synod. The first week of the Synod was to be dedicated to part one: Listening to Families. Days Four, Five, and Six of the Synod, were largely taken up with small group meetings divided by language. We can only know what happened in those groups based on the [reports from the small groups](#), each in their own language, and from what they choose to tell us in the [scheduled press conferences](#) held each afternoon after the Synod closes for the day. As we read those reports, we learn very little. They barely give us any insight at all into what is really happening.

So what is really going on in the Synod?

Apparently a group of cardinals - including some of the most powerful conservative figures in the Catholic Church - have written to Pope Francis telling him that his Synod on the Family has gone badly off the rails and could cause the church to collapse. Much to their surprise, their "private letter," written just as the synod was getting underway, was leaked by Vatican commentator, Sandro Magister. This may explain why, a few days ago, the Pope suddenly warned against 'conspiracy' and reminded the cardinals that he, and only he, will decide the outcome of the Synod.

In the aftermath of it all, several of the would-be signers are now denying that they ever signed the letter.

As the Catholic Herald reported this morning:

In the letter, the cardinals expressed concern that "a synod designed to address a vital pastoral matter - reinforcing the dignity of marriage and family - may become dominated by the theological/doctrinal issue of Communion for the divorced and civilly remarried." The letter continued: "The collapse of liberal Protestant churches in the modern era, accelerated by their abandonment of key elements of Christian belief and practice in the name of pastoral adaptation, warrants great caution in our own synodal discussions."

The cardinals also asked the Pope to "consider a number of concerns we have heard from other synod fathers, and which we share" while also criticizing the synod's Instrumentum Laboris (its working document). "While the synod's preparatory document, the Instrumentum Laboris, has admirable elements, it also has sections that would benefit from substantial reflection and reworking," the letter said.

"The new procedures guiding the synod seem to guarantee its excessive influence on the synod's deliberations and on the final synodal document. As it stands, and given the concerns we have already heard from many of the fathers about its various problematic sections, the Instrumentum cannot adequately serve as a guiding text for the foundation of a final document."

Here is the list of signers to the letter as originally reported by Magister:

- * Carlo Caffarra, archbishop of Bologna, Italy, theologian, formerly the first president of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family;
- * Thomas C. Collins, archbishop of Toronto, Canada;
- * Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York, United States;
- * Willem J. Eijk, archbishop of Utrecht, Holland;
- * Péter Erdő, archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Hungary, president of the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe and relator general of the synod underway, as also at the previous session of October 2014 [He has now denied signing the letter, though there was a noticeable delay before he did so];
- * Gerhard L. Müller, former bishop of Regensburg, Germany, since 2012 prefect of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith;
- * Wilfrid Fox Napier, archbishop of Durban, South Africa, president delegate of the synod underway as also at the previous session of the synod of October 2014;
- * George Pell, archbishop emeritus of Sydney, Australia, since 2014 prefect in the Vatican of the secretariat for the economy;
- * Mauro Piacenza, Genoa, Italy, former prefect of the congregation for the clergy, since 2013 penitentiary major. [He now denies signing the letter];
- * Robert Sarah, former archbishop of Conakry, Guinea, since 2014 prefect of the congregation for divine worship and the discipline;

* Angelo Scola, archbishop of Milan, Italy. [He now denies signing the letter];

* Jorge L. Urosa Savino, archbishop of Caracas, Venezuela;

* André Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris, France, president delegate of the synod underway as also at the previous session of the synod of October 2014. [He now denies signing the letter.]

Note that not all these cardinals are regarded as outright conservatives: Some like Cardinal Dolan are seen as far removed from the extreme Cardinal Raymond Burke, who has been excluded from the synod.

The main point of contention in the letter seems not to be the question of whether the Church should give communion to divorced people in second marriages, or whether the gay and lesbian community should be given some degree of recognition. The letter is actually an argument about the wisdom of calling the synod in the first place, and expresses the suspicion of over 100 Synod Fathers that the organizers are manipulating proceedings by confronting them with working papers and procedures designed to push them in a liberal direction. Others seem to simply be fed up with what they consider to be the amateurish nature of the proceedings and wonder why, after last year's chaotic preparatory synod, the Pope left the same people in charge. [Summary of article written by conservative columnist, Damian Thompson, the Spectator, 10/12/15.]

Given all of this, what can you do while the Synod is in session?

1. It is not too late to [Sign this petition](#) joining with other international reform organizations who have sent an [Appeal](#) outlining the fundamental problems experienced by Catholic families throughout the world:

- The social and economic problems of the family should be widely discussed by the Synod, particularly those affecting the most vulnerable, children and women.
- Regarding the divorced and remarried and their admission to the Eucharist, the practice of the early Church should be adopted, as it is done in the Orthodox Church.

- Concerning the Motu Proprio (Apostolic letter) of Pope Francis on the canonical process of nullity of marriage we agree with and welcome the simplification of the procedure, but question the concept of annulment as such.
- Homosexual individuals and same-sex couples should be considered as full members of the Church with every right and every duty.
- '*Humanae Vitae*' has not been accepted by the majority of the People of God; couples following their conscience must be respected.
- The Synod should send a clear and public message of repentance to the survivors of clerical sex abuse and their families.
- However much we hope for solutions to these many problems from the presently constituted Synod, we assert that a major flaw of the synod is its clericalized nature and especially the non-representation of the many Catholic family forms we experience in our contemporary world.

If you wish to sign as an organization, [send us an email](#).

2. We invite you to participate in our blog called *The People Speak Out*, which will continue through the Jubilee Year and be delivered to Pope Francis and the Bishops. Here you have the opportunity to share your own very personal story of how the Church teachings being discussed at the Synod have shaped your life . . . for better or for worse.

Our blog issues include a variety of topics. If you are divorced and remarried, do you feel cut off from the Sacraments? If you are gay or lesbian, do you feel disenfranchised by the Church? If you are a woman, how have you been treated? Has the Church's teaching restricting artificial contraception had an impact on your life and marriage? If you are living with someone outside of marriage, do you feel welcomed to the Sacraments? If you were a priest and left because you fell in love, how has the obligation for celibacy impacted your life? If you left the Church, share the circumstance that led to your leaving and what, if anything, would it take to bring you back? We ask you to share your very personal story on any of these issues.

Click on the link below now. Pope Francis wants to hear your story and, more importantly, to have the Bishops hear them.

www.SynodBishopsCanYouHearUs.org



For the diehard Synod follower, [click here](#) to find additional articles on the Synod on our website. We look forward to the interchange of the bishops as the second week opens.

On Behalf of all of us at Catholic Church Reform International,
[Rene Reid](#), Director