

EXCLUSIVE: Bishop Schneider Comments on New Book, Synod on Synodality, Cardinals' Five Dubia

In an exclusive interview with *Catholic Family News*, Bishop Athanasius Schneider provides insight into his new book, [Credo: Compendium of the Catholic Faith](#), which was published by Sophia Institute Press in September. “Once a common practice among Catholic bishops,” the Publisher’s Preface explains, “the publication of this book marks the first time in over fifty years that a Roman prelate has issued a comprehensive presentation of the Faith that is entirely his own, accessible to readers of any background, and attentive to the needs of our time.”^[1] The book also bears the *imprimatur* (approval for publication) of Bishop Peter Libasci of Manchester (New Hampshire), the diocese in which the publisher is located.^[2]

“The doctrinal confusion within the Church is indeed very wide and profound,” His Excellency said when asked about the current ecclesial landscape, “especially among the bishops and priests, in most of the seminaries and religious convents, and among the faithful.” Hence, the need for an intervention.

“The most dangerous error,” he told CFN, “is the acceptance of the diversity of religions as something positive or as a fact,” which Pope Francis regrettably affirmed in the [Document on Human Fraternity](#) signed during his visit to Abu Dhabi (Feb. 4, 2019). “From this error stems the heretical opinion that one can be saved in any religion.”

When asked about what motivated him to prepare this new book, Bishop Schneider said that “one of my intentions was to respectfully correct ambiguous statements in certain texts of Vatican II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and of certain acts and statements of some post-conciliar popes, especially of Pope Francis.”

“Not all assertions in a Papal or Conciliar document are *ipso facto* infallible,” he explained. “They can be theoretically ambiguous and even erroneous, which history has proven. However, this doesn’t contradict the fact that the Church as a whole, in her constant doctrinal teaching throughout the ages, remains infallible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, notwithstanding that in some rare historical cases Popes or Ecumenical Councils could issue ambiguous or erroneous statements in their non-definitive teachings.”

“My intention,” he emphasized, “is that my book might help dispel the current widespread doctrinal and liturgical confusion within the Church, so that the purity and beauty of Catholic doctrine, its morals and its Liturgy, will shine again, so that Catholics can distinguish without a doubt the wheat from the tares, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.”

CFN also asked His Excellency about certain aspects of the Synod on Synodality general assembly in Rome (Oct. 4-29), as well as the five *dubia* (formal questions) related to the Synod that were submitted to Pope Francis by Cardinals Walter Brandmüller, Raymond

Burke, Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, Robert Sarah, and Joseph Zen.

See below for the full interview:

Catholic Family News: Your Excellency, your new book has over 2,500 questions and answers pertaining to Catholic faith, morals, and worship. You explain in the Preface that your “intended audience has been chiefly God’s ‘little ones’ – faithful Catholics who are hungry for the bread of right doctrine.” [3] Based on your years of pastoral experience and extensive travels, how deep and widespread would you say the crisis of doctrinal confusion is in the Church today?

Bishop Athanasius Schneider: The doctrinal confusion within the Church is indeed very wide and profound, especially among the bishops and priests, in most of the seminaries and religious convents, and among the faithful. The basic error consists in doctrinal relativism, which creates a state of mind of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding any religious truth. The most dangerous error is the acceptance of the diversity of religions as something positive or as a fact, about which Catholics don't have to be concerned. From this error stems the heretical opinion that one can be saved in any religion. Such a widespread error, which in practice has been supported by the Holy See for decades through the worldwide interreligious meetings (on the pattern of the 1986 Assisi meeting) and taught positively in most theological faculties and seminaries, is basically stifling the missionary zeal of evangelizing, which is the first and divinely instituted mission of the Church.

CFN: The Publisher's Preface notes that “the publication of this book marks the first time in over fifty years that a Roman prelate has issued a comprehensive presentation of the Faith that is entirely his own, accessible to readers of any background, and attentive to the needs of our time.” Why aren't more bishops addressing the doctrinal crisis of our times by either publishing themselves or commissioning sound catechetical works?

Bishop Schneider: One important reason why bishops don't issue their own catechisms (which is nevertheless envisaged in the Code of Canon Law) consists in the fact that there exist the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its *Compendium*. Yet there are new doctrinal and pastoral topics which require doctrinal clarification beyond any doubt, just to name the most important topics: the confusion created by the interreligious meetings; ecumenical prayers; the totalitarian gender ideology; by the “Pentecostalization” of Catholic life, prayer and doctrine; the ever growing liturgical anarchy; the inherent doctrinal and ritual ambiguity of the Novus Ordo itself; the inherent doctrinal ambiguity of the doctrine of

religious freedom; and the *de facto* introduction of divorce into the Catholic Church through the admittance of divorced and civilly “remarried” Catholics to Holy Communion, a permission issued by Pope Francis in his letter to the bishops of the Buenos Aires region. In view of such a confused situation, which is partly supported by the official policy of the Holy See, many bishops do not dare to issue doctrinal clarifications by proposing the constant teaching of the Magisterium regarding these matters.

CFN: In composing this new book, did you look to any particular catechism or other work for inspiration? Which catechism would you recommend to the lay faithful as the best source for studying the Faith?

Bishop Schneider: I consulted the Catechism of St. Peter Canisius, of Cardinal Gasparri, and the Catechism of Spirago. I would recommend the Baltimore Catechism for English-speaking people. I cannot say that there is a best among them. Each of the known traditional catechisms has its own advantages, but also has some omissions regarding various topics. Beside the catechisms already mentioned, I would also recommend the Catechism of Pope St. Pius X.

CFN: One of the goals of your new book appears to be to address modern errors and dangers to the Faith. For example, in the chapter on Creation you define “the error of so-called ‘transhumanism,’” [\[4\]](#) a movement which has gained significant momentum in recent decades. Would you say that your book addresses a wide array of modern errors?

Bishop Schneider: I tried to cover the most widespread errors both within and outside the Church, e.g., transhumanism, Pentecostalism, the meaning of the persecution of the Traditional Latin Mass and the problem of “obedience” that this persecution generates, the cult of Mother Earth, Asian methods of meditation, female priesthood or diaconate, the use of social networks, science and evolution, just war, the death penalty, gender ideology, modesty, vaccines and health mandates, world religions, the meaning of true prayer, faithful raising of children and schooling, the complex issue of religious freedom and freedom of expression, scandals in the Church, the infallibility of the Magisterium, the degrees of the Magisterium, pornography and sexual education, Sunday work and how one should worship God, Communism and Freemasonry, globalism, the Charismatic Movement, consumption of marijuana and drugs, and the sense of an authentic renewal of the Church.

CFN: Speaking of the chapter on Creation, the topic of UFOs and aliens appears to be increasingly popular these days. Since it is not covered in your book, I would like to ask: Do you think that belief in intelligent creatures from other planets is compatible with the Catholic Faith? What about the theory that UFOs and aliens

are really a manifestation of demonic deception?

Bishop Schneider: We do not possess any hints in Divine Revelation about intelligent creatures from other planets. Therefore, we should reasonably exclude such probabilities. We can say that the talk and propaganda about UFOs and aliens is an illusion, inspired by Satan, the father of lies, in order to create a greater mental and religious confusion and to distract and lead people away from the historical Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God and only Redeemer of humanity and all creation.

CFN: In various endnotes to your new book, you apply the terms “ambiguous affirmation,” [5] “misleading phrase,” [6] “regrettable affirmation,” [7] and “confusing claim” [8] to certain statements found in the documents of Vatican II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Is one of your goals with this new book to correct ambiguities found in the aforementioned texts? How would you answer those who object to the notion of correcting papally promulgated texts?

Bishop Schneider: Indeed, one of my intentions was to respectfully correct ambiguous statements in certain texts of Vatican II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and of certain acts and statements of some post-conciliar popes, especially of Pope Francis. Papally promulgated texts don't automatically possess the charism of infallibility, but only those texts which the Pope formally declares to be a definitive or infallible teaching of the constant Magisterium of the Church. There are some papally promulgated texts relating to discipline and to non-definitive doctrinal assertions in the past, which were subsequently improved and corrected or which just became forgotten and obsolete (e.g., the official letters of Pope Honorius I to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople regarding the heresy of Monothelism, the papally promulgated norms of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding the discrimination of the Jews, the Papal Bulls about witches in the 15th century). Not all assertions in a Papal or Conciliar document are *ipso facto* infallible. They can be theoretically ambiguous and even erroneous, which history has proven. However, this doesn't contradict the fact that the Church as a whole, in her constant doctrinal teaching throughout the ages, remains infallible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, notwithstanding that in some rare historical cases Popes or Ecumenical Councils could issue ambiguous or erroneous statements in their non-definitive teachings.

CFN: In 2011, you may recall that a group of 50 theologians and scholars [petitioned Pope Benedict XVI for an in-depth review of the Second Vatican Council in light of Tradition](#). Would you be in favor of such an examination today?

Bishop Schneider: Yes, and this is indeed very urgent. Since one of the main tasks of the Magisterium consists precisely in dispelling ambiguities and provide the flock of the faithful

with a solid and sane spiritual food of doctrine. Without a clear and sound doctrine, people cannot lead a morally sane and God pleasing life, and neither can worship God in the right manner.

CFN: Returning to the subject of errors, you devote a section of your new book to Freemasonry (in the chapter on Faith),[\[9\]](#) a topic you cover more extensively in [Christus Vincit](#) (Angelico Press, 2019). How would you answer those who claim that Freemasonry no longer presents a serious threat to the Church, i.e., those who dismiss warnings about Freemasonry as paranoid “conspiracy theories”?

Bishop Schneider: Those who qualify warnings about Freemasonry as paranoid “conspiracy theories” are living in a complete illusion, ignoring the public statements of Freemasons themselves in which they affirm that their main goal is to build up a purely naturalistic and anthropocentric world for the nebulous “Great Architect of the World”. Freemasonry categorically rejects Divine Revelation in general and specifically the Incarnation of God, i.e., the Divinity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Freemasonry publicly admits that it promotes divorce and abortion, religious indifferentism, and relativism. There is also evidence that in the most strategic posts in politics, finance, and international organizations there are Freemasons, since they themselves sometimes acknowledge this fact. The qualification of warnings about Freemasonry as paranoid “conspiracy theories” was basically created by Freemasons themselves to protect themselves from any suspicion, and to present Freemasonry as a philanthropic entity, so that this organization and its members can penetrate into all strategic bodies of societies unchecked in order to execute their main goal of building up a “spiritual temple” — surely not for the true God, the Holy Trinity and for Christ, the King of kings, but for the “Great Architect of the World”, who is ultimately a false god and an Anti-Christ, since Freemasonry is basically nothing other than an Anti-Church as such.

CFN: Turning to current events, the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops has been meeting in Rome throughout this month (Oct. 2023) as part of the three-year Synod on Synodality initiated by Pope Francis two years ago. Despite the [numerous documents](#) produced throughout the synodal process, neither the Pope nor the Vatican have been able to provide a clear definition of “synodality,” despite Francis’ [claim](#) that “[i]t is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” How would you define this novel term? Do you agree with the Pope’s claim?

Bishop Schneider: The so-called synodality is a novel pastoral model in which bishops are encouraged to gather regularly for dialogue with each other, their priests and faithful, and various interest groups from inside and outside the Church, about ecclesiastical or

humanitarian matters. At present, the so-called synodality has borne no fruit in apostolic commitment of preaching the Catholic Faith to all nations or the conversion of non-Catholics, and has generally consumed significant time and resources that could be better spent for prayer and preaching, as St. Peter advised: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

CFN: The *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document) for this year's synodal assembly includes several "questions for discernment" which contain troubling topics. For example, Worksheet B 2.3 states: "Most of the Continental Assemblies and the syntheses of several Episcopal Conferences call for the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered. Is it possible to envisage this, and in what way?" Yet the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches (in accord with the constant Magisterium), "The Church confers the sacrament of Holy Orders [which includes the diaconate] only on baptized men (*viri*), whose suitability for the exercise of the ministry has been duly recognized" (para. 1598), and further, that "the ordination of women is not possible" (para. 1577). Does the Synod have the authority to change this teaching and allow women to be ordained?

Bishop Schneider: For sure it is not possible for women to receive Holy Orders. By the will of God and the irreformable constitution of the Church, only baptized men are able to receive sacramental orders, as it configures them to the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church His Bride, enabling them to represent Him sacramentally as a spiritual father. Those who clamor for the ordination of women as Catholic clergy oppose the divinely established order of the two sexes, each with its own specific mission; reject the hierarchical constitution of the Church; and denigrate the unique dignity of Christian womanhood, consisting principally in motherhood, both physical and spiritual. Women may not receive the order of deacon. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is one sacrament, conferred in three grades. The sacramental ordination of women as deacons would therefore contradict the whole Tradition of the universal Church, both Eastern and Western, and violate her God-given order, since the Council of Trent dogmatically defined: "The divinely established hierarchy is made up of bishops, priests, and ministers," i.e., at least also of deacons.

There were so-called "deaconesses" in the ancient Church. But for the first five centuries of the Church, there is no trace of "deaconesses" in the West; and although the term does appear in the East, these women clearly did not receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. An ancient Church document called *Constitutiones Apostolorum* speaks thus: "The deaconess does not bless, and she does not fulfill any of the things that priests and deacons do, but she looks after the doors and attends the priests during the baptism of women, for the sake of

decency" (Book VIII, Chap. 28). The "deaconess" was evidently not a woman exercising the office of deacon, but rather a completely different ecclesiastical function.

The woman in charge of a monastic community of women was also called sometimes a deaconess. In the early Middle Ages in Gaul, abbesses or wives of deacons were also called *diaconissae*, by analogy in the case of the wives of priests (*presbyterissae*) or even of bishops (*episcopissae*). In the Middle Ages, the nursing and teaching religious orders of nuns also fulfilled the functions of the deaconess, as did women who were instituted as widows or abbesses, still without any ordination.

CFN: The Synod's working document likewise calls upon participants to discuss the following (Worksheet B 1.2): "How can we create spaces where those who feel hurt by the Church and unwelcomed by the community feel recognised, received, free to ask questions and not judged? In the light of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, what concrete steps are needed to welcome those who feel excluded from the Church because of their status or sexuality (for example, remarried divorcees, people in polygamous marriages, LGBTQ+ people, etc.)?" How would you answer these questions?

Bishop Schneider: The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith thus explained the true meaning of the Church regarding this topic: "The principles of respect and non-discrimination cannot be invoked to support legal recognition of homosexual unions. Differentiating between persons or refusing social recognition or benefits is unacceptable only when it is contrary to justice (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 63, a.1, c.). The denial of the social and legal status of marriage to forms of cohabitation that are not and cannot be marital is not opposed to justice; on the contrary, justice requires it." ([Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons](#), June 3, 2003, n. 8). Memorable, as well, remain the following words of Pope John Paul II: "Is it realistic to imagine a 'permissive' Christ in the field of married life, in terms of abortion, pre-marital, extra-marital or homosexual acts? Of course, the primitive Christian community was not permissive ... the numerous passages of the Pauline letters which touch on this matter (cf. Rom 1, 26 ff; 1 Cor 6, 9; Gal 5, 19) ... are certainly not lacking in clarity and rigor. And they are words inspired from above. They remain normative for the Church of all times." ([Meeting with Young People in Amersfoort, Netherlands](#), May 14, 1985).

CFN: Two days before the Synod general assembly began, five cardinals [made public](#) the five *dubia* (formal questions) they submitted to Pope Francis in July related to the Synod, and later the responses they received from him. Due to the Pope's ambiguous replies, "which have not resolved the doubts [they] had raised,

but have, if anything, deepened them” ([Letter to Pope Francis](#), Aug. 21, 2023), the cardinals sent reformulated *dubia* back to the Pope (in hopes of receiving simple “yes” or “no” answers) but have not heard back. What is your opinion of the cardinals’ *dubia*? If Pope Francis refuses to unequivocally affirm Catholic faith and morals in response to their reformulated *dubia*, do the cardinals have a duty to publicly correct the Pope?

Bishop Schneider: Without a doubt the cardinals have a duty to publicly correct the Pope. Cardinals should admonish the Pope respectfully, yet clearly, about his doctrinal errors or heresies, first privately and after fruitless warnings even publicly. They should, furthermore, publish a formula of a Profession of Faith in which the theological errors that the Pope teaches or tolerates are rejected. In an extreme case, if a Pope should impose doctrinal errors on the Church, bishops and faithful should reject his errors, while continuing to respect his authority as the Supreme Pastor of the Church in all things that are not opposed to the truths of the Faith, and pray for him. Cardinals should start a general intercession prayer campaign to implore the conversion of the Pope, so that he may be able to proclaim again the doctrine of faith in its purity according to the Divine mandate: “And being once converted, confirm thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

CFN: Thank you, Your Excellency, for your time. Is there anything else you would like to say about your new book?

Bishop Schneider: My intention is that my book might help dispel the current widespread doctrinal and liturgical confusion within the Church, so that the purity and beauty of Catholic doctrine, its morals and its Liturgy, will shine again, so that Catholics can distinguish without a doubt the wheat from the tares, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

[1] Bishop Athanasius Schneider, [Credo: Compendium of the Catholic Faith](#) (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2023), p. xxi.

[2] As the Code of Canon Law states ([can. 827 §1](#)): “To be published, catechisms and other writings pertaining to catechetical instruction or their translations require the approval of the local ordinary, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 775, §2.”

[3] Bishop Schneider, *Credo*, p. xxiii.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 362.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] See *ibid.*, pp. 140-142.