Contra Silentium Obsequiosum: On the Roman Catholic Approach to Dissent and Tradition

***Theological Studies,* DOI: 10.1177/00405639241288575**

Travis LaCouter, Ryszard Bobrowicz, Taylor Ott, and Judith Gruber
KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Abstract: Dissent, understood as a public rejection of the authoritatively pronounced rules, verdicts, and truth claims within a given community, although disruptive, can offer multiple benefits to the life of the community. However, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) effectively leaves no other option for dissenters than to adopt a stance of obedient silence. This essay emphasizes a need for a shift in the magisterial attitude toward dissent, one in which Catholic truth claims can bear the collective scrutiny and questioning expressed through dissent and thus be more fully integrated into the life of the community. To do that, the essay divides the discussion into two parts. First, the essay offers an analysis of the concept of dissent, its potential benefits, and its entanglement with the other concepts more broadly. Second, it scrutinizes the construction of power, tradition, and dissent in the RCC specifically.

Keywords: conflict, contestation, dissent, ecclesiology, tradition, politics, protest, Roman Catholic Church

Dissent, understood as a public rejection of the authoritatively pronounced rules, verdicts, and truth claims within a given community, is clearly a disruptive phenomenon. It goes against the grain of established hierarchies and decision-making processes, making the task of governing much more difficult. It threatens rebellion if left unaddressed. It disrupts the sense of unity and emphasizes rifts in the community. No wonder then that authority throughout history was at best skeptical and, at worst, violently hostile toward dissenting voices. From Socrates in antiquity to the recent demonstrations in Hong Kong, dissenters often face a dire fate and severe punishment for making their voices heard.

The situation is not different, if not even more severe, in the broadly construed religious context. Dissenters are often accused not only of endangering the temporal community but also its afterlife. To the extent that authoritative truth claims are sacralized in

religion, religious dissent takes on not only political but also soteriological significance. Here, as Roger Scruton pointed out, the smallest differences matter the most. “For those in the vicinity of real religion, the world presents a stark and disturbing choice between the absolute safety of the orthodox creed [or correct practice], and the mortal danger of denying [them] from a position within its territory.”[1] Thus, religious dissenters share an equally uncertain fate as political dissenters, including the threat of death, as exemplified by countless examples throughout history, from the anti-Christian persecutions of Diocletian to the ongoing attacks on Salman Rushdie.

Yet dissent, despite its disruptive and threatening character, has also been recognized as constructive and even beneficial in multiple contexts, and an explicit space has been provided for it in areas as diverse as scientific research and judicial proceedings. High courts make a practice of publicizing dissenting opinions as a way of acknowledging difference and affirming the capacity for rational argument in a pluralistic setting.[2] In science, the freedom to express dissent is the heart of peer review and is generally recognized as “important for

---

[1] Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 7–8.

[2] Commenting on the ostensible benefits of dissent, the former head of the European Court of Human Rights Luzius Wildhaber explained in 2006 that they, “express the reality that balancing different public and private interests will not automatically lead to identical results in pluralistic democracies; and that it will do no harm to the credibility and authority of the Court if such differences are brought into the open and are argued and explained as rationally as possible.” Wildhaber, *The European Court of Human Rights 1998–2006: History, Achievements, Reform* (Kehl am Rhein: N. P. Engel, 2006), 249. It is important to note that attitudes toward dissent vary among international courts, a fact that has been the subject of recent literature. See, for example, Jeffrey Dunoff and Mark Pollack, “The Road Not Taken: Comparative International Judicial Dissent,” *American Journal of International Law* 116, no. 2 (2022): 340–96, https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2022.1.

uncovering unjustified assumptions, flawed methodologies and problematic reasoning."[3] Similarly, some religious traditions recognize the value—or, at least, the inevitability—of dissent and accordingly try to integrate it into the life of the community. In Judaism, for instance, *Machloket L'shem Shemayim*, the Rabbinic principle of "disagreement for the sake of heaven," recognizes the validity of certain enduring divergences in opinion by calling for respect of both parties and humility in the pursuit of truth.[4] Within Christianity, many Protestants turned the usual logic of being branded dissenters upside down, taking dissent as a point of honor and an important identity mark.[5]

---

[3] Inmaculada de Melo-Martín and Kristen Intemann, "Scientific Dissent and Public Policy," *EMBO Reports* 14, no. 3 (2013): 231, https://doi.org/10.1038/embor.2013.8.

[4] Gerald Steinber, "Jewish Sources on Conflict Management: Realism and Human Nature," in *Conflict and Conflict Management in Jewish Sources*, ed. Michal Roness (Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University, 2017). For more, see Leonard Greenspoon, ed., *Authority and Dissent in Jewish Life* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2020). Surveying historical Jewish attitudes toward dissent and unity, Alan Mittleman suggests that "forming a counter-community rather than dissent over core beliefs per se constitutes heresy or apostasy in the Jewish experience." Mittleman, "The Management of Intramural Dissent in Judaism," in *Dissent on Core Beliefs: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Simone Chambers and Peter Nosco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 78.

[5] Curtis W. Freeman, *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

However, this does not seem to be the case within the institutional framework of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).[6] Quite the opposite, the current legal model of the Church limits the space for religious dissent to the point of formal nonexistence. For example, the Code of Canon law not only requires assent to the definitively pronounced doctrines considered infallible[7] but also "a religious submission of the intellect and will" to the pope, the college of bishops, and to one's own bishop in their non-infallible teaching authority.[8] The canonist Norbert Lüdecke notes that this positive obligation is supplemented by a negative one—to refrain from anything that does not correspond to them.[9] Building on that, Bernard Anuth writes that only "an obedient silence is permissible, as the maximum deviation from non-infallible teachings of both the universal and particular church's magisterium, and only in justified exceptional cases."[10]

---

[6] See also the Theological Roundtable "Dissenting Church: New Models for Conflict and Diversity in the Roman Catholic Tradition," *Horizons* 45, no. 1 (2018): 128–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2018.58.

[7] *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), c. 750.

[8] Canons 752–53.

[9] Norbert Lüdecke, *Die Grundnormen des katholischen Lehrrechts in den päpstlichen Gesetzbüchern und neueren Äußerungen in päpstlicher Autorität* (Würzburg: Echter, 1997), 344.

[10] Bernard Anuth, "Dealing with Conflict and Dissent in the Roman Catholic Church. An Inventory from the Perspective of Canon Law," in *Dissenting Church: Exploring the Theological Power of Conflict and Disagreement,* ed. Judith Gruber, Michael Schüßler, and Ryszard Bobrowicz (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 85. For an illustration of the force of these norms in action, one need look no further than the case of "dissenting" theolgians punished by Vatican authorities; for a partial

As we will argue below, this approach results from an understanding of magisterial pronouncements as arising from soteriological necessity, rather than any particular political constellation of power. And yet, magisterial teaching *is* deeply rooted in the exercise of power. This constatation is especially important today, as Roman Catholic institutions grapple with a historical loss of power and an ongoing crisis of legitimacy that together give rise to more frequent and more fundamental types of dissent. Whether in matters of sexual ethics[11] or attitudes to migration,[12] whether lay or clergy,[13] countless Catholics not only disagree with the official doctrinal positions of the magisterium but make their dissent public. In this context, it seems untenable for magisterial power to continue to assert a right to blind

---

history here, see Bradford Hinze, "A Decade of Disciplining Theologians," in *When the Magisterium Intervenes*, ed. Richard Gaillardetz (Minneapolis: Liturgical Press, 2012), 18–50.

[11] "The majority of Catholics worldwide disagree with Catholic doctrine on divorce, abortion, and contraceptives. Additionally, the majority of Catholics in Europe, Latin America and the United States disagree with established doctrine on the marriage of priests, as well as on women entering the priesthood. Taken together, these findings suggest an extraordinary disconnect between the church's basic teachings on the fundamental issues of family, pastoral responsibilities and the viewpoints currently held by many of the world's more than 1 Billion Catholics. Perhaps more alarming, are the generational divides found in the analysis of the data, which show that younger Catholics are even more likely to hold views contrary to church teachings than Catholics as a whole." Bendixen and Amandi International, *Global Survey of Roman Catholics* (Univision, 2014), 5, https://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/UNIVISION-Catholic-Poll-Executive-Summary.decryptedKLR.pdf.

[12] Jerry Kammer, "A Catholic's Dissent from the Bishop's Immigration Policy," *Center for Immigration Studies*, 2014, https://cis.org/Kammer/Catholics-Dissent-Bishops-Immigration-Policy.

[13] Philip Pullella, "Vatican disciplines Austrian dissident priest," *Reuters*, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-austria-dissident-idUSBRE8AS0RM20121129.

obedience. There seems to be a mismatch between the formal, institutional "ontology of sameness"[14] that equalizes the terms "magisterium" and "tradition" and the living tradition of everyday Catholic reality and broader Catholic theology.[15]

This essay argues that the RCC, instead of formally (and wishfully) legislating dissent away, needs to embrace dissent in its institutional self-understanding by making space for legitimate dissent and reevaluating its relationship to dissenting voices.[16] We first posit that dissent is a valuable diagnostic instrument, shedding light on the existing arrangement of power and voice within the broader discursive framework. Beyond its value for rendering a more accurate description of the church, it can also play an integral role in the community's

---

[14] James Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 1 (2004): 56. Hanvey's argument will be discussed more below.

[15] A significant amount of work has been done in Catholic theology concerning a more nuanced understanding of tradition; see, for example, John Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Richard Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); and, more recently, Anne M. Carpenter, *Nothing Gained Is Eternal: A Theology of Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022). However, despite the significant reformulation of the notion of tradition that took place during the Second Vatican Council, the formal organization of the RCC remains stuck in the old model, as expressed by the continuation of the *auctores probati* in the Canon Law. For more see Lüdecke, *Die Grundnormen des katholischen Lehrrechts*, 320–91.

[16] By "legitimate dissent," we mean here merely dissent that is allowed to exist within the formal structures of the institution (e.g., as a judicial dissent is allowed for in a high court ruling). By arguing that such a space should exist, we make no prejudgment as to the merits of any particular instance of dissent.

effort to articulate and convey its fundamental assertions of truth, which are always mediated historically and socially.[17] Rethinking dissent along these lines would bring with it a reconsideration of "tradition," which would help to align the institution with the significant work that has been done by Catholic theologians: from a fiction of the historical monolith that needs to be protected against corruption to a living tradition with multiple subsets, rejecting the binary of the internal agreement and external critiques in favor of a space for internal disagreements.

The essay is divided into two main parts. First, we take a closer look at the notion of dissent, its meaning, entanglement with other categories, including tradition, and its potential benefits. Second, we consider the particular constellation of dissent and tradition in the RCC, asking why magisterial positions insist on a near-total rejection of dissent. A conclusion reiterates the importance of an inclusive ecclesiological approach to dissent and the need to rethink tradition as multilayered and constituted by internal contestation.

Entangled Dissent and Its Benefits

Multiple difficulties attend to the task of discussing dissent. To begin with, "dissent" is not a freestanding concept, as its invocation always already implies several other contextually related concepts against which it comes to take on its particular meaning and significance at a given time and place. Chief among the concepts that condition our understanding of dissent are categories like authority, tradition, and even truth, as these are what dissent is often defined against. Moreover, the word has legal, political, interpersonal, and even spiritual

[17] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), §32, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

valences that are carried differently at different times by different parties—those who are celebrated today as heroic dissenters may have been previously condemned as dangerous subversives. Finally, the very same act may or may not be considered dissent depending on its context, audience, or intention, so there is an inherent ambiguity that must be accounted for in particular cases.[18] Therefore, we must start by acknowledging that the meaning and significance of dissent are *historically constructed* depending on the exigencies of power, voice, and memory. It is a term that one finds always enmeshed in a web of conflictual signification(s).[19] In precisely this way, however, the term can be useful as a diagnostic tool, since its invocation arguably tells us less about the act or belief to which it has been applied than about the specific constellation of power and license in a given discursive or social arrangement.[20]

This is not to deny all meaning to the word, however: it signals, minimally, an opposing or contrary belief to that which is authoritatively established. A number of

---

[18] This ambiguity can be thought of in terms of what has been called the "politics of gesture." See, for example, Michael J. Braddick, "Introduction: The Politics of Gesture," *Past & Present* 203, Supplement 4 (2009): 9–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtp001.

[19] "Dissent" thus provides a good illustration of Saussure's basic argument about the "negative value" of words in themselves, since it is one of those "concepts [that] are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system"; Ferdinand de Saussure, "Course on General Linguistics," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology, 2nd Edition*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2004), 67.

[20] In this way one could trace a doctrinal history of Christianity, for instance, by attending to key heresiological debates; see, for example, J. Rebecca Lyman, "Heresiology: The Invention of 'Heresy' and 'Schism,'" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 296–314.

important points arise even from this minimal definition. First, we could observe that dissent is only liable to arise in a serious way on those questions that are open to meaningful or frequent contestation. We do not typically speak of someone who denies a manifest truth (e.g., "The sky is blue") as a dissenter, nor do we call a given truth claim dissent in the absence of any consensus or established position. But when it comes to discourses where hermeneutic and interpretive claims are much more frequently or fundamentally at issue—for example, constitutional law, political or ethical debates, or scientific discovery—then notions of dissenting opinion naturally have more purchase. Thus, for dissent to arise, there must be a dominant position, and it must assert itself through a more or less pronounced exercise of power (and is therefore open to contestation). Accordingly, we might call such discourses where dissent is liable to occur *contested discourses*.

Tradition plays a specific role in this discursive arrangement. Alasdair MacIntyre describes a tradition as "an argument extended through time."[21] His key insight is that the concept of rationality is always tied to the tradition in which it is found. When rational argumentation is understood as having historical underpinnings, it means that "those who construct theories within such a tradition of inquiry and justification often provide those theories with a structure in terms of which certain theses have the status of first principles; other claims within such a theory will be justified by derivation from these first principles."[22] For him, traditioned arguments proceed in two ways: internal interpretive debates that clarify positions held by those in agreement with the tradition and external conflict with critics of the tradition. Although MacIntyre is certainly correct that both things happen, histories written

---

[21] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 12.

[22] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 8.

from less powerful social positions, that do not neatly align with the discursive power of those in authority, suggest that internal debates are even more common, contentious, and intrinsic to the development and constitution of a tradition, and they are not always simply for the sake of clarity but contain real disagreements over fundamental issues. The authoritative sources of a tradition, for instance, are not always agreed upon, nor is the question of who counts as an authoritative interpreter. Thus, the question of a community's internal incoherence is not necessarily resolved simply by competing arguments in a rational debate but through ongoing power conflicts that make use of and even help constitute the categories of rationality and tradition. [23] In other words, the epistemological and soteriological aspects of the assertions of the truth cannot simply be separated from the politics surrounding them. This recognition presses us to reinterpret what and who counts as part of a tradition and where power has shaped communal understandings of tradition and dissent from it.

Our second observation is that the dissenter is not a neutral or apathetic party concerning such contested questions. On the contrary, they have reason for making their voice heard. Of course, this voice can be exercised through written or spoken word, as well as through action, gesture, and physical presence. As Sundar Sarukkai notes, "Voice is not sound, not [only] mere speech … but is a call that reaches out to others and brings them into

[23] For example, Susan Moller Okin argues that the tradition of Western political philosophy was, until quite recently, built upon the assumption of sexual inequality. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). So too the Christian tradition has often presumed the inequality of certain kinds of bodies as they are raced, sexed, gendered, and placed on a map.

its fold."[24] So, whatever form it takes, there is an inherently public, even performative element of dissent that is always aimed at being heard, accounted for, and, ultimately, at being persuasive enough to have some effect in the world.[25] At the same time, a dissenting voice remains conditioned by the powerful regimes of representation within which it strives to assert itself.[26] What the dissenter's choice in favor of voice tells us is that dissent should be clearly distinguished from a doctrine of relativism, which would consider "all views … equally good."[27] On the contrary, the dissenter is convinced of the rightness of their view and the wrongness of another.[28] What is at issue in dissent is thus not a denial of truth as such but

---

[24] Sundar Sarukkai, "Voice and the Metaphysics of Protest," *Postcolonial Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2021.1882067. Sarukkai draws a parallel with the Hindi term *pukar*, which refers to a particular type of call that demands help or attention.

[25] The "expressive" element is key: a purely private conviction that does not somehow lead to voice would never have a chance to come into conflict with the prevailing discourse and thus should not be considered dissent properly speaking. It would remain at that point an internal conviction, a moral reservation, a pang of conscience, and so forth, and, while these things may be preliminary to dissent, they cannot be equated with it.

[26] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Intepretation of Culture* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 267–313.

[27] Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 21.

[28] Tine Hindkjaar Madsen evaluates the claim that dissenters are therefore to be considered "epistemically arrogant" (as they are often accused of being when denounced by those in power). Madsen, "Are Dissenters Epistemically Arrogant?," *Criminal Law and Philosophy* 15 (2021): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11572-019-09521-9. Madsen points out that a high degree of rational certainty alone is not enough to warrant the charge of arrogance (for many in a democratic body will be certain of their position and since certainty may be warranted by available evidence). Rather, the charge of arrogance could only be sustained if one assumed that the outcomes of the given

of a given truth-claim. Accordingly, we could say the dissenter is one who evinces an *active concern for the truth*.

Finally, we can note that, as one who shows an active concern for the truth in the context of a contested discourse, the dissenter naturally assumes a certain amount of risk. The nature of this risk varies depending on the sort of power that one speaks up against but could include everything from censure and scorn to excommunication or even death.[29] So why does the dissenter speak up at all? Why not just choose to stay quiet or acquiesce to the terms of the prevailing discourse? Simply put, the dissenter chooses to exercise voice because no other option is acceptable to them. This suggests dissent goes beyond mere disagreement or a difference of opinion since these are often overlooked in the course of interpersonal and communal relations ("Well, agree to disagree!"). Dissent, on the other hand, arises from an intolerable experience of disjunction on the part of the dissenter: By their participation in the prevailing discourse, the would-be dissenter feels compelled to endorse a view of reality that they cannot accept as true, and it is the attempt to escape this disjunction that leads them to an exercise of voice. When the terms of the discourse itself are such that one party cannot speak what they consider to be the truth without being punished as a dissenter, then it is a sign of serious "hermeneutical injustice" inherent in the discourse.[30] Such hermeneutical injustice

---

deliberative procedure always coincide with the truth. Since, however, it is "questionable" whether such procedures (whether democratic or otherwise) are always epistemically reliable, the charge of arrogance should only be considered on a case-by-case basis.

[29] Albert O. Hirschman's classic discussion of the matter, including the "costs" of exercising voice: *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), especially chap. 3.

[30] On the notion of "hermeneutical injustice," see Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147–75. Fricker explains that for such

can have the effect of preventing the marginalized party from making sense of their life experience in the context of the community to which they belong. One important function of dissent, therefore, may be as a means of achieving "ontological harmony," whereby a speaker's words (*logos*) more adequately conform to their experience of life (*bios*).[31]

The preceding points (while admittedly somewhat abstract and preliminary in nature) have surfaced several important dimensions of dissent. It is, on this telling, a certain kind of voice, exercised in the context of a disputed discourse and arising from an experience of ontological disjunction. Understood in this way, there is no reason to disavow dissent out of hand. Indeed, dissent could be considered "epistemically beneficial" both for the individual dissenter and for the community to which they belong, in that it helps to expand the working basis of common knowledge, provoke new questions (and therefore new depths of understanding) about what is already known, and continually test the truth-claims of the community against the experience of its members.[32] Dissent also provides a valuable

---

individuals, "their social situation is such that a collective *hermeneutical gap* prevents them in particular from making sense of an experience which it is strongly in their interests to render intelligible" (7, italics added).

[31] On the notion of "ontological harmony," see Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001), 100.

[32] On "epistemically beneficial" dissent, see Justin B. Biddle and Anna Leuschner, "Climate Skepticism and the Manufacture of Doubt: Can Dissent in Science be Epistemically Detrimental?," *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 5 (2015): 261–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-014-0101-x. The subject of Biddle and Leuschner's article is, as their title suggests, "epistemically *detrimental*" dissent (they have in mind things like climate research funded by the fossil fuel industry or tobacco industry research that cast doubt on the link between smoking and lung cancer). Dissent of this kind, they argue, is rooted in "particular political and economic goals" rather than a search for

feedback mechanism for those in positions of authority, alerting them to areas where consensus does not exist, and it provides a valuable outlet for the dissenter who would otherwise be left to contend with their feelings of ontological disjunction unaided. We could go as far as to say that dissent understood in this way is constitutive of the community's attempt to formulate and transmit its own foundational truth claims. It is for these reasons (among others) that space is often made for dissent in fields that treat consensus as a good and a goal.

Summing up the considerations so far, we can say that dissent, in the way we consider here as potentially beneficial, is not an opposing view that raises voice in contested discourses just for the sake of it, but for the sake of truth, hermeneutic justice, and ontological harmony. In this, it clashes with the authority in question, which for its part seeks to balance dissent's potential epistemic benefits against the need for obedience that stabilizes the internal life of the community. This act of balancing looks different in different communities, which will naturally come to different conclusions regarding how much space to make for dissenting voices. However, as noted above, the negotiated space for dissent within the RCC is nearly nonexistent. Thus, we need to consider what led the RCC to this particular discursive arrangement.

The RCC and the Rejection of Dissent

truth (262). We do not deny that such forms of detrimental dissent can and do exist in theology, but we are bracketing this consideration for the moment in order to grasp the features of what we might call properly functioning dissent. The case of epistemically detrimental dissent is an important one to consider, however, and we will return to it in a future article.

Despite the broader recognition of the value of dissent and its benefits, the authoritative institutions of RCC rarely if ever acknowledge them. Instead, mirroring the legal model of canon law, the International Theological Commission asserted plainly in 2012 that "dissent toward the magisterium has *no place* in Catholic theology."[33] Why should this be? What is it about the construal of magisterial authority that makes such a thing as legitimate dissent officially unthinkable? In response to these questions, let us propose three significant features of the contemporary magisterial attitude toward dissent and suggest how these serve to obscure productive thinking on the matter.

Our first claim in this regard is that dissent creates a problem for magisterial authority because of how power is typically structured and wielded in the RCC. Specifically, it appears central to the magisterium's conception of itself that its power not be seen as coercive or even as a form of force. Instead, magisterial power is frequently imagined in terms of service, shepherding, preservation, instruction, and other similar terms, all of which suggest at most an indirect exercise of power in relation to the rest of the church community. As the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* put it, magisterial power is obliged to "reject and condemn" dissent in order to secure the "protection, safekeeping, and growth of the Catholic flock" against the "gates of Hell."[34] Notice in particular how the central power structure of the church is presented here not just as a juridical necessity but a soteriological one (i.e., one that defends against the "gates of Hell"), thus imbuing the exercise of power

---

[33] International Theological Commission, "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria" (Vatican City: Vatican, 2012), §41, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html (italics added).

[34] *Pastor Aeternus* (July 18, 1870), https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/en/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-pastor-aeternus-18-iulii-1870.html (translation by authors).

with sacral significance. Even when such explicitly self-sacralizing language is not used, magisterial power claims are almost always framed in terms of "safeguarding" and "protection," as can be seen in more recent documents such as (mutatis mutandis) *Lumen Gentium* (1964), *Pastor Bonus* (1988), and *Praedicate Evanglium* (2022).[35]

In reality, however, magisterial power is a real form of power capable of being deployed coercively and experienced as force rather than protection. It is important to note here that magisterial power is not in the first instance material power (in the sense of economic, political, or military power). Rather, it is a more fundamental form of *discursive power*, which the sociologist Isaac Ariail Reed defines as the ability of one group to determine "the categories of thought, symbolizations, and linguistic conventions, and meaningful models of and for the world" that predominate within a given community.[36] Such

---

[35] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), §45, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; *Pastor Bonus* (June 28, 1988), §11, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19880628_pastor-bonus.html; and *Praedicate Evangelium* (March 19, 2022), §§69–78, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html. This is not to deny the legitimate differences between these documents or in the church's evolving understanding of its pastoral authority in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is only to note that this authority is practically always conceived of in terms of *pastoral* authority, rather than as an outright use of power.

[36] Isaac Ariail Reed, "Power: Relational, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions," *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 3 (2013): 203, https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275113501792. The concept also has currency in media studies, where it is used in the context of information networks and large-scale communication spaces; see Andreas

power, Reed notes, "work[s] best when it hides its workings and appears *not* to be an exercise of power."[37] Herein lies the problem of dissent for such power, since it momentarily reveals the fact that discursive power is, in fact, being exercised. By making the outer boundary of acceptable speech explicit within a given discourse, dissent represents the point at which discursive power loses its anonymity. In such cases, discursive power clearly has the capacity to become coercive or harmful, as can be seen, for example, in the cases of any number of high-profile theologians who have had their freedom to teach, write, or publish denied to them because of their publicly stated arguments on controversial or contested topics.[38] We said above that the presence of dissent necessarily signals that a given discourse is subject to a dominant position—it is in the nature of discursive power to hide this fact, making dissent particularly vexing to those who wield such power. In Catholicism, this discursive power is hidden under the veil of rationality, as it is a tradition that has emphasized the central place of reason (alongside faith) in determining theological claims—without consideration of the contextual character of that rationality as emphasized by MacIntyre. While dissent requires a

---

Jungherr et al., "Discursive Power in Contemporary Media Systems: A Comparative Framework," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, no. 4 (2019): 405–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219841543.

[37] Reed, "Power: Relational, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions," 203.

[38] Of course, as the example of "dissenting" theologians suggests, the coercive exercise of discursive power is by no means unconnected to the coercive exercise of material power. For instance, being deemed a dissenting voice could result in an individual theologian's loss of employment and thus significant financial or professional insecurity etc. (to say nothing of the reputational, emotional, and even spiritual harm that might follow). For an important account of this, see Charles Curran, *Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), especially chaps. 5–7.

contested discourse in order to seriously occur, those who disagree with magisterial claims are often accused of acting/believing irrationally or refusing to accept reason.[39]

If the dynamics inherent to discursive power constitute one reason why dissent is officially unthinkable in the RCC, a second reason has to do with the hermeneutic dynamics inherent to a certain view of tradition. In an exemplary discussion of this phenomenon, James Hanvey notes that one influential view of tradition sees it essentially as a matter of "transmission"—that is, the uninterrupted transmission of the knowledge of the "event of revelation" through history and time.[40] On this view, the "governing notion of tradition … becomes one of maintaining closeness to the source."[41] A doctrinal correlate for this view can be seen in the teaching on apostolic succession, which has been used to deny, for instance,

[39] The common charge of "relativism" within Catholic normative debates can be seen in this light; see, for example, Joseph Ratzinger, "Homily for the Mass 'Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice'" (April 18, 2005), https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

[40] Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," 50. This view is widespread among magisterial authorities, but it is not without its theological defenders. Guy Mansini, for instance, appears to affirm the possibility of maintaining such a continuity through an "authoritative succession of spokesmen" who are "especially empowered" to repeat the word of God down through history. Mansini, "Ecclesial Mediation of Grace and Truth," *The Thomist* 75, no. 4 (2011): 575, 576.

[41] Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," 52. On tradition as "transmission," see Yves Congar *Tradition and Traditions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 296. This "closeness" is meant to overcome two kinds of "distance"—historical distance (i.e., the length of time since the original "events" of revelation) but also metaphysical distance (i.e., the distance between God and man). In this latter sense, the urge to maintain a "closeness" to the source could be understood idolatrously as an attempt to conquer the infinite otherness of God.

women's ordination[42] and unity among the Christian churches.[43] History can only be seen as a realm of possible corruption or distortion, against which the content of revelation must be insulated by an ahistorical "ontology of sameness" (that is, tradition comes to be understood *as* sameness—*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*).[44] Thus construed, tradition becomes a realm of permanent continuity and authorized repetition, rather than the community's historical form of life with all the disjunctions and conflicts implied therein.[45]

---

[42] On apostolic succession vis-à-vis women's ordination, see Jill Peterfeso, *Womenpriest: Tradition and Transgression in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), especially chaps. 4 and 5. The anthropologist Maya Mayblin examines Roman Catholic priesthood as the "quintessence of repetition" in "The Ultimate Return: Dissent, Apostolic Succession, and the Renewed Ministry of Roman Catholic Women Priests," *History and Anthropology* 30, no. 2 (2019): 133–48; especially 135–36. For Mayblin, a repetition becomes "sacred repetition" when it is believed to maintain some connection to the "original [revelation] event" (135).

[43] On apostolic succession vis-à-vis Christian unity, see Paolo Cocco, "Apostolic Succession: Limit or Challenge to Communion?," *Pro Ecclesia* 25, no. 3 (2016): 261–369, https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121602500303.

[44] Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," 53–54 and the statement of Vatican I (*De Filius* 4) cited by Hanvey, 53–54.

[45] Modern studies have emphasized the historical mutability of particular Church teachings (e.g., regarding usury, slavery, and so on); see here especially John T. Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). However, such studies have not produced a willingness on the part of magisterial authorities to abandon their commitment to an implicit "ontology of sameness." Indeed, even in cases where past teachings are explicitly being reversed, an underlying continuity is ultimately affirmed. See, for example, "Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting

Of course, such a view empowers primarily those who are seen as the keepers of tradition and further reinforces the soteriological "necessity" of their power claims (as we suggested above); their office now comes to be seen as the truest expression of the community's collective identity.[46] Not only does this view result in a "transfer of power from the tradition to the agent who keeps it [i.e. the magisterium]," it also establishes magisterial authority as a "solipsistic" police power that must proceed by an "implicit procedure of denial," so that no new innovation or insight can be acknowledged unless it is put in terms of the prevailing dominant discourse (and thus denied the status of insight or innovation).[47] Magisterial

---

Integral Human Development on the 'Doctrine of Discovery'" (March 30, 2023), https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/03/30/230330b.html.

[46] Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," 53. Cf. the account given by Ladislas Örsy, "Magisterium: Assent and Dissent," *Theological Studies* 48, no. 3 (1987): 473–97, especially 483, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398704800303. Some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (and especially the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*) provide an important magisterial counterweight to this long-standing tendency, by relativizing the "teaching authority" of the church against the absolute word of God and thus placing the magsiterium "with[in] the whole 'listening' community of the faithful" (Hanvey, 58 and *Dei Verbum* §10). Such conciliar formulations did not so much resolve these tensions as make them explicit, however, and there have certainly been signs of resurgent magisterial prerogatives since then. See the discussion by Mary Elsbernd, "Whatever Happened to *Octogesima Adveniens*?," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 1 (1995): 39–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399505600I.

[47] Hanvey, 56. While the language of the "development" of doctrine may seem to offer an alternative here, Hanvey notes that it can easily mask the problem inasmuch as it still presents our knowledge of revelation in linear terms (and thus reinforces the idea of some unchanging ahistorical "essence"). Instead, Hanvey commends the language of historical "insights" that arise at particular moments but

authority, when conceived of and justified in this way, becomes a dominating logic, a closed "hermeneutic circle" that cannot admit anything new nor tolerate any contradiction.[48]

To put Hanvey's account in the terms of our current discussion, we can see quite clearly that this arrangement precludes the possibility of epistemically beneficial dissent, precisely because it insists on the ahistorical "ontology of sameness" that is incapable of thinking new thoughts. Even more troublingly, this conception of tradition "alienates [the community] from its own historical experience," which is after all not a linear history of continuous transmission but rather one of "disjunctive" and disruptive voices, bodies and insights that transcend any single totalizing discourse.[49] Dissenters testify to the vitality of this disjunctive tradition and challenge the idea that the community is best understood in terms of the magisterial voice alone.[50] In this way, they help resist the potential for apathy and self-referentiality to become the defining factors of the community's common life, and they help sustain a tradition across time and space by continually drawing attention back to the basic hermeneutical questions: What do we believe? What are the consequences of this

---

remain "permanently generative in the life of the community" and retain an ability to effect "creative dislocation" across time and space (Hanvey, 57, 62).

[48] Hanvey, 56, 62.

[49] Hanvey, 57, 62.

[50] In recent history, and especially after revealtions regarding widespread sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, lay-led protest groups like Voice of the Faithful have challenged the magisterium's exclusive right to teach and lead without the input and oversight of the wider community. For an important study of VOTF and the tensions inherent to intrainstitutional protest movements, see Tricia Colleen Bruce, *Faithful Revolution: How Voice of the Faithful Is Changing the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

belief for our collective lives together? What attitudes and practices arise from this belief in our current time and place? And vice versa, which beliefs are encapsulated in our practices?[51]

In the RCC, then, dissent obstructs the invisible flow of discursive power and complicates a commonly held but narrow view of the tradition as the static, sacral transmission of ahistorical truth. Our third and final claim regarding the difficulty of dissent in the RCC has less to do with the magisterial attitude toward dissent than it does with the ambivalence of dissent itself. For "dissent is a troubling word," as Margaret O'Gara reminds us, "because it begins on a negative note and [it suggests] to some a group wishing to secede from the community."[52] Dissenters occupy a "difficult … in-betweenness" that calls into question their identity as members of the collective: they find themselves, "pulled from the one side by those who say that dissent does not go far enough and from the other by those who demand acquiescence as the sign of loyalty."[53] The dissenter thus faces the double burden of justifying their position in the community while still attempting to critique it; a task that is often experienced as emotionally exhausting and psychologically draining. In addition,

---

[51] Denis Carroll, "A Note on Dissent Theological and Otherwise," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76, no. 301 (1987): 29–41, especially 29: "Far from dissent being corrosive of a living tradition it is the suppression of difference which leads to stagnation and death: 'the attempt to freeze a particular tradition in an absolutely conservative way is already the end of the story, the true "nihilism," that prevents the story from remaining alive.'" Internal quotation from John Haught, *What Is God*? (New York: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 81.

[52] Margaret O'Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 113.

[53] Austin Sarat, "Terrorism, Dissent, and Repression: An Introduction," in *Dissent in Dangerous Times*, ed. Austin Sarat (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2. Compare this to the resonant account of "discursive exit" given by Laura Montanaro in "Discursive Exit," *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 4 (2019): 875–87, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12463.

the fact that some dissent *is* undertaken in bad faith only complicates the picture further.[54] For these reasons, many who might undertake to publicly dissent are dissuaded from doing so by the reputational and social costs within their community. These costs are all the higher when considering dissent within the RCC, which is the sort of community from which individual members are likely to derive significant aspects of their identity. In such an organization, the would-be dissenter is asked to justify not only their dissonant view but their very existence.[55] Add to this the self-sacralizing nature of the institution's power claims, as discussed above, and the problem becomes not just existential but soteriological, calling into question the fate of the dissenter's eternal soul. This obviously creates a significant structural obstacle to voicing dissent in the RCC. This point also recalls what was said above about dissent arising from a feeling of "ontological disjunction," a feeling that is only likely to be exacerbated in

[54] "Bad faith" dissent here is similar to Biddle and Leuschner's concept of "detrimental dissent" that "impedes knowledge production" (Biddle and Leuschner, "Climate Skepticism and the Manufacture of Doubt," 262). "Bad faith" can be defined in a similar way to how it is understood in law, as (1) a dishonest approach in which a different reason for dissent is presented than the true motivation or purpose, (2) a complete lack of interest in the questions of truth or legitimacy or faithful performance of one's role in the community, or (3) disregard for the well-being of the community and fair treatment of all parties involved. Ultimately, the reality of whether or not a dissenting claim is made in bad faith is known best, if not only, by the dissenter themselves.

[55] The example of Roman Catholic women priests provides a good example of this; see again Mayblin: "Roman Catholic woman priest's difference from a man is compounded by her dissenting position within the Church. *Her dissent echoes her existential difference*. Her sexual features, her 'feminine qualities' rebound that dissent. The result: a potentially escalating spiral of difference, which is dangerous in a religion that places a supreme value on seamless continuity." "The Ultimate Return,"137 (italics added).

cases of Roman Catholic dissent. The ambivalence of dissent is further compounded by the fact that dissent is not always an active choice, a conscious embrace of risks associated with raising one's voice. In some cases, individuals cannot avoid *being* dissent, as they embody the deviation from the norm in the very shape of or the drives inherent to their bodies, without having a choice at all as to whether they conform to the official, constructed norm.

While the first part of this article offered an account of dissent focused on its distinctive features as a form of voice, the second highlighted some of the particular challenges that attend to it in the context of the RCC. These considerations help clarify some of the reasons why dissent remains a formally unthinkable category in this context. Magisterial attitudes both shape and echo a general misgiving about dissent that finds expression in a variety of Catholic contexts—from the seminar table, to the kitchen table, to the Eucharistic table. Dissent is, on this telling, a special problem for Catholic theology, which is perhaps not surprising in a church with such an entrenched history of "clerical and authoritarian" attitudes.[56]

And yet, the current approach to dissent within the RCC is no longer sustainable, as an ontological disjunction between doctrine, representing *logos*, and life, *bios*, becomes increasingly untenable and erupts in growing fragmentation of the Catholic community—from the parish level to the global church. Despite the attempts at veiling the discursive power with soteriological claims, the current prevalence of dissent shows the deep entanglement between the assertions of the truth and political power. The loss of the latter leads to the weakening of the former. A part of the solution might lie in a more complex

[56] Eamond Duffy, "Tradition and Reaction: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Renewal," in *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (London: Continuum, 2003), 54.

notion of tradition, one that leaves behind the ahistorical model of uninterrupted, pure, and singular tradition, in favor of a more complex, multilevel understanding of lived traditions.[57]

For an Ecclesiology Embracing Dissent

Throughout this essay, we have argued that there is a need to rethink the Roman Catholic approach to dissent and tradition. While dissent can certainly be disruptive, it also has significant constructive potential. It is disruptive because, through historical construction and embeddedness in contested discourses, dissent gives witness to the concrete constellations of power, rather than simply a given act of belief, undermining them in the process. But this turns it into a useful diagnostic tool, helping to underline the existing disjunctions within the community, including who is experiencing hermeneutical injustice by being forced to endorse truths with which they do not agree. Dissent can provide not only a way to recover a sense of ontological harmony for those disagreeing with the authoritative discourse but also afford the broader community epistemological benefits, including exposure to new questions and areas of knowledge, the contrasting of the formal positions and the experience of those guided by them, and the creation of pathways for reformulation and transmission of its foundational truth claims. Dissent, as we argue, is constitutive to the functioning of normative discourses,

---

[57] Hans Urs von Balthasar alludes to such a notion when he suggests that "the ecclesial magisterium can represent Christ's truth only from the standpoint of doctrine and not of life." Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2009), 212–13. The distinction between "doctrine" and "life" need not be understood as a zero-sum opposition but rather as mutually reinforcing aspects of the community's ongoing search for truth.

which is why so many communities consciously create a space for it even despite its challenges.[58]

By limiting the space for dissent to silent obedience (and even then, only in justified exemptions), the RCC is not only losing the benefits outlined above but denies the experience of its own community. The magisterial position creates a historically inept sense of tradition as a simple transmission of an unchangeable monolith that needs to be protected against potential corruption. Such an approach hides the discursive power of those in authority, disguising it behind soteriological claims that are separated from their political character and contextual entanglement. Moreover, such an approach is increasingly untenable, as testified by the proliferation of dissent in areas where the influence of the RCC is waning, which in turn further testifies to the reliance on political power for asserting truth claims by its authority figures.

Thus, in place of the current ontology of sameness, we argue for an institutional ecclesiology that embraces dissent, reintegrating the political, existential, and soteriological dimensions of dissent. Such an approach requires a nuanced, multilayered understanding of tradition that goes beyond the dichotomy of internal clarification disputes and external critique, including space for internal critique as well. As we have indicated, while Catholic theologians have been developing such a nuanced approach for at least half a century, the

---

[58] In this sense we can speak, with Bradford Hinze, of the "grace of conflict" in the life of the church. Hinze, "The Grace of Conflict," *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 40–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920904073. However, Hinze focuses on conflict as "prophetic resistance" to unjust structures and so as an opportunity for the community to reclaim an identity that has been imperiled or overwritten (especially 60–63). While this is certainly one aspect of the grace of conflict, our account has highlighted the ways in which conflict is also constitutive of the community's truth itself *prior* to any prophetic action that might arise in defense of that truth.

magisterial adoption has been lacking. Thus, we hope that, as the political power of the Catholic Church wanes, more explicit space for dissent in its formal arrangements, and a more inclusive approach to dissenters, will advance.

Moreover, the ambivalent character of dissent requires us to move beyond thinking only in terms of what could be described as heroic or privileged dissent. This type of dissent has been captured well by Sidney Callahan:

> I can become aware that this or that teaching I am being instructed to believe is not right; it just doesn't seem true. It seems false to the Christ of scripture, or to earlier traditions, or to my reason, or to my life experience and the testimony of the wise and good. I am furthered in my dissent when theologians and some bishops also agree with my position.
>
> But first off, as an obedient listening member of the Church I will give a benefit of doubt to the teaching or pronouncement. I will begin to inquire what the teaching really means in context, and then what is its degree of importance and authoritative status. If, after reflection I decide that the Church appears to be unfaithful to God's loving will and truth, I must dissent. First privately, and then if appropriate I may publicly voice my dissent.
>
> This obligation to dissent becomes imperative when people are being hurt. I have to speak up and work for change in the most effective way I can find, which depends on who I am and my state of life.[59]

While important, this type of dissent covers only part of the picture. As we have tried to show throughout this article, dissent is not limited to those who reflectively disagree with a given truth. In some cases, dissent does not necessarily result out of good faith. In others, the structure of power and hermeneutical injustice leave individuals no choice whether to dissent at all. Quite the contrary, sometimes their very existence constitutes the violation of the norm, and thereby they embody dissent and evidence the connection between the political and the soteriological. The costs of bearing such "embodied dissent" are not primarily

[59] Sidney Callahan, "Dissent and the Future of the Church," *Sacred Heart University Review* 23, no. 1 (2003): 22–23. See also Karen Kilby, "Responsible, Critical Assent," in *Towards a Kenotic Vision of Authority in the Catholic Church*, ed. Anthony J. Carroll et al. (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 183–94.

epistemological but rather existential, making them especially relevant to debates about the proper scope and function of dissent in the Catholic Church.

The purpose of this article is primarily diagnostic. We aim to describe the RCC's approach to dissent and tradition, its main challenges, and what could be the way forward. While the need to embrace dissent in institutional Catholic ecclesiology, instead of excluding it, seems clear to us, the question of how to do it in practice requires further reflection and work. Future research will need to resolve what it will mean in practice and how to engage dissent in its possibilities to creatively and positively develop the ecclesial community as well as in its possibilities for harm.

Author Biographies

All authors are part of the "Dissenting Church. Developing a critical theological understanding of contestation around normative claims in the Roman Catholic Church and beyond" project at KU Leuven funded by the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO).

Ryszard Bobrowicz (ThD, Lund) is a postdoctoral research fellow. He collaborates with A World of Neighbours, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, and the Atlas of Religion or Belief Minority Rights. He recently coedited an open-access volume on *Dissenting Church: Exploring the Theological Power of Conflict and Disagreement* and his first monograph, *The Politics of Multifaith*, was published by Brill in 2024.

Judith Gruber (PhD, Salzburg) is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and director of KU Leuven's Centre for Liberation Theologies. Previously, she held a tenure track position as Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Loyola University New Orleans. Her research focuses on the intersection of theology and critical cultural studies, with a particular

interest in postcolonial and intercultural theologies. Recent publications include “The Theo-Politics of Ritual: Defining and Contesting the Sacred Order of the Church,” *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwae002.

Travis LaCouter (DPhil, Oxford) is a postdoctoral research fellow. He previously taught at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and his first book, *Balthasar and Prayer*, was published by T&T Clark in 2021.

Taylor Ott (PhD, Fordham) is a postdoctoral research fellow. Her current research interests focus on the role of dissent and theorize the role that dissent plays in building ecclesial community from theological, historical, and ethical perspectives. Her first book, titled *Conflict and Catholic Social Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, will be published with Routledge in November 2024.