

**A QUOTE FROM GERALD A. ARBUCKLE**

***REFOUNDING THE CHURCH: DISSENT FOR LEADERSHIP***

“The critical role of dissent in pastoral discernment is far from being a new insight in the Church. Think of what would have happened if St. Peter had forbidden St. Paul and others to raise at the Council of Jerusalem the critical issue of the evangelization of non-Jews. If that had occurred, the Church would have remained a little sect confined to Jewish People. Through St. Ignatius Loyola particularly, we have come to see that the way of dissent should be a normal method of decision-making for the Christian. For Ignatius, as for all Christians, the overriding need is: what is God asking of me or this group? In order to be able to hear the Lord speaking we must spend time in prayerful reflection during which we deliberately propose all kinds of alternatives without pre-judging any of them. Yet all this is impossible if we are not willing to enter into ourselves to discover the obstacles to true listening to the Spirit: the interior chaos of prejudice, fear and sinfulness. The Christian, as he/she gradually begins to be freed of these interior barriers, is able to evaluate the alternatives and slowly feels comfortable with the one that he/she senses is what God wants. A modified discernment process, deliberately aiming to evoke dissenting views for evaluation, is precisely the method adopted by the US bishops for the writing of their key pastorals, for example on peace. It does not lessen their authority. On the contrary, it enhances it because the method, based on the people of God model of Church, recognizes that the Holy Spirit speaks through the legitimate gifts and concerns of everyone within the body of Christ: and people come to own the document that they feel able to comment on.

In brief, dissenters reframe things we take for granted by offering new ways of viewing issues or by putting them into contexts that we did not previously think possible. Dissenters expand our imaginations. They are upside-down thinkers, terribly annoying to us when we are too attached to the security of our ideas or habits, but very necessary if we want to know what God wills of us. The leader who does not cultivate an atmosphere in which dissent is valued risks the judgment that he/she wants to be God, and not right-minded person, versed in the lessons of Genesis, wants to have that said of him/her!” (Page 113)