consensus. The fact is that Pope Pius IX attributed far more import­
ance to the consensus of Catholic theologians than Germain Grisez is
willing to grant to it.

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RESPONSE TO FRANCIS SULLIVAN'S REPLY

In an article that appeared in this journal in the same issue as John
Ford's and mine, Joseph A. Komonchak asserted that "there is some­
thing like a consensus theologorum that the magisterial tradition be­
hind HV's condemnation does not constitute an infallible exercise of
the teaching office." That was an alleged consensus—the kind whose
importance I belittle. However, I do not belittle the importance of
authentic theological consensus, about which Pius IX taught.

Indeed, Ford and I noted in our article that Tuas libenter teaches
"that the universal and constant consensus of Catholic theologians
holding a point as pertaining to faith is evidence that the matter is one
handed on by the ordinary magisterium of the Church dispersed
throughout the world." Then, having indicated "that the historical
evidence shows that Catholic bishops dispersed throughout the world
agreed in one judgment on the morality of contraception," we invoked
the "constant consensus of Catholic theologians in modern times" as
one fact among others that help gauge the "weight of this uniform
teaching," and cited forty-one works to illustrate that consensus.
Since the previously existing ecclesial consensus was absent in 1978,
we also argued that, once something has been taught infallibly, sub­
sequent dissent cannot negate it.

While a few theologians contributing to the pre-1962 consensus held
that Pius XI had defined the teaching on contraception in Casti con­
nubii and a few others explicitly held that it had been taught infallibly
by the ordinary magisterium, most moralists, who seldom or never
assigned theological notes, said nothing about the teaching's status.
Still, most manifested the conviction that the prohibition of contracep­
tion somehow pertains to faith, generally by treating it as a divine
command and invoking some scriptural text. Hence, the teaching on

258–312, at 272.
3 Ibid. 278–80.
4 Ibid. 273–74, 310.
5 See John C. Ford, S.J., and Gerald Kelly, S.J., Contemporary Moral Theology 2:
6 See Ford and Grisez, "Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magiste-
contraception met Pius IX’s condition: it was “held to belong to the faith by Catholic theologians with universal and constant consensus.”

Of course, many today will belittle the importance of that pre-1962 consensus. Some contemporary theologians deny infallibility altogether, and quite a few deny that it can extend to specific moral norms. Loci theologici and their use have changed, so that neither uninterrupted Christian tradition nor repeated and forceful papal reaffirmations of a traditional teaching impress those who deny it. With Catholic theology in this state, the absence of a theological consensus about the status of moral teachings no longer has the significance it would have had in 1863.

Moreover, Pius IX’s teaching regarding the positive significance of a theological consensus following upon and bearing witness to the teaching of the ordinary magisterium spread throughout the world does not entail a corresponding negative significance for the absence of such a consensus. In other words, Pius clearly meant to specify sufficient conditions for identifying a nondefined doctrine as pertaining to faith, but it does not follow (and is hardly likely) that he regarded those conditions as necessary—say, for determining in 1863 the status of the doctrines subsequently defined in Pastor aeternus.

In sum, I acknowledge that Sullivan has drawn from Tuas libenter a theological argument for the importance of the consensus of Catholic theologians. Still, considering the state of Catholic theology today and the distinction between the significance of the presence of theological consensus and the significance of its absence, I remain convinced that, for theologians, lack of consensus for a position is no argument against it.

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