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## **This Business of "Loyalty Oaths"**

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There are many aspects of the current "Apostolic Visitation" of active women's communities in the United States and the investigation of the "doctrinal adherence" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious which trouble me.

But few aspects of this whole enterprise seem to me as egregious as the so-called "loyalty oath" required of anyone who is an official "inquisitor" in this process. It is very similar to oaths required of theology professors at Catholic institutions, parish pastors, and others in official institutional capacities. But I had never had occasion to actually read it until the current "visitation" process was launched. And I was appalled.

This oath goes far beyond a simple profession of faith. It says, for example, that "I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act." In another section, the oath-taker promises to "accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals."

It implies that the oath-taker would accept future pronouncements of the Pope or Bishops, the content of which is as yet unknown.

Such an oath, it seems to me, is contrary to our American values, and an affront to Christian conscience. As Catholics, we are called by numerous church documents, especially those of the Second Vatican Council, to read the "signs of the times," be open to the call of the Holy Spirit and "after serious consideration of the teachings of the Magisterium" what our conscience dictates, even if it differs from official teaching.

And, as a church community, we are strongest when we abandon the urge to impose uniformity, and begin to recognize and dialogue around the diversity of thinking we all know exists among us.

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