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If It Walks Like A Duck

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NCR Today

All the bread of good faith that American sisters have offered Francis has been returned with a stone.

The Pope won't reconsider the indictment against the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. He might have decided to hear arguments again, but he hasn't. The coerced outcome may be somewhat different, but the appeal on the charges is lost.

It's likely we'll hear many attempts to find glimmers of hope. There will be a renewal of calls for further talks and reports of cordial treatment by Vatican officials.

Perhaps talks will ensue, but unless the sisters adopt a more challenging strategy, the discussion will be confined to "how" discipline will be administered rather than "whether." A more benign chastisement is still chatisement.

The problem is false hope that anything of substance will change on the Vatican's side. And from Rome's point of view why should it? Either LCWR did go against the grain of papal pronouncements or it didn't. Benedict and Francis say it did and they have a reasonable case. The sisters can either agree without apology, as valid theology with which most American Catholics concur, or disagree with solid reasons. A third option has gained ground too: keep on walking a fine line, ministering lovingly and justly without promoting dissenting theology, in the expectation that history will vindicate that theology.

But Rome isn't going to do more than reiterate the charges. Popes don't contradict one another.

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