

Superb, concise, comprehensive response from Professor de Mattei.

For the record, I've read all the documents leading up to and from the 2014-2015 Synods as well as Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* – cumbersome and tedious as they were. De Mattei's commentary is spot on. – John Vennari

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([Rorate Caeli](#)) With the post-synod Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, published on April 8th, Pope Francis has officially given his opinion on marital moral issues which have been under discussion for two years now.

At the Consistory of 20th and 21st of February 2014, Francis had entrusted the task of introducing the debate on this theme to Cardinal Kasper. Cardinal Kasper's theses, according to which the Church must change Her matrimonial praxis, formed the *leit motiv* of the two Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015 and now forms the basis of Pope Francis' Exhortation.

In the course of these two years, illustrious cardinals, bishops, theologians and philosophers have intervened in the debate to demonstrate that there must be an intimate coherence between the Church's doctrine and praxis. Pastoral care in fact, is based on dogmatic and moral doctrine. "There cannot be pastoral care that is in dissonance with the Church's truths and morality, in contrast with Her laws and not oriented to the ideal achievement of the Christian life!" revealed Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, in his opening address at the Umbrian Ecclesiastical Tribunal on March 27th 2014.

In the weeks preceding the post-synod Exhortation, public and private interventions to the Pope from cardinals and bishops intensified, in the aim of averting the promulgation of a document crammed full of errors, revealed by the great number of amendments that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had made to the draft. Francis did not back off, and seems to have entrusted the last re-writing of the Exhortation, or at least some of its key passages, into the hands of some of his trusted theologians who attempted to reinterpret St. Thomas in the light of Hegelian dialectic.

From this a text has emerged that is not ambiguous, but clear – in its vagueness. The theology of praxis in fact excludes any doctrinal affirmation, by leaving the outlining of human conduct and acts to history. For this, as Francis affirms, "it is understandable" that on the crucial issue of the divorced and remarried, "that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases" (no.300). If we are convinced that Christians, in their conduct, need

not conform to absolute principles, but should listen to “the signs of the times” it would be contradictory to formulate rules of any kind.

Everyone was expecting the answer to one basic question: Can those who have remarried civilly after a first marriage, receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist? The Church has always given a categorical no to this question. The divorced and remarried cannot receive Communion since their life situation objectively contradicts the natural and Christian truth on marriage, signified and effected by the Eucharist (*Familiaris Consortio* 84).

The answer of the post-synod Exhortation is, instead: along general lines — no, but “in certain cases” – yes. (no.305, note 351). The divorced and remarried in fact must be: “integrated” and not excluded (299). Their integration “can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted” (no 299) without excluding sacramental discipline (no.336).

What is obvious is this: the prohibition to receive Communion for the divorced and remarried is no longer absolute. The Pope does not authorize, as a general rule, Communion to the divorced, but neither does he prohibit it.

In an interview with *Il Foglio*, March 15th 2014, Cardinal Caffarra, against Kasper, stressed: “Here doctrine is being touched. Inevitably. It can be said that this is not so, on the contrary, it is so. A practice is introduced, that in the long run, determines, not only in Christian people, this idea: there is no marriage that is absolutely indissoluble. And this without question is against the will of the Lord. There is absolutely no doubt about it”.

For the theology of praxis, rules don’t count, only concrete cases. And what is not possible in the abstract, is possible in the concrete. However, as Cardinal Burke noted well: “If the Church permitted the reception of the sacraments (even in one case only) to a person who is in an irregular union, it would mean that, or marriage is not indissoluble and thus the person is not living in a state of adultery, or that Holy Communion is not communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, which instead necessitates the person’s correct disposition, that is to say, contrition for the grave sin and a firm resolution to sin no more.” (Interview with Alessandro Gnocchi, IL FOGLIO, October 14th, 2014).

Furthermore, the exception is destined to become the rule, since the criteria to receive Communion in *Amoris laetitia*, is left to the “personal discernment” of the individuals. This discernment takes place through “conversation with the priest, in the internal forum” (no. 300), “case by case”. However, which pastors of souls will dare forbid the reception of the Eucharist, if “the Gospel itself tells us not to judge or condemn (no.308) and if it is

necessary “to integrate everyone” (no. 297) and “[appreciate] the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to [the Church’s] teaching on marriage?”(no.292).

The pastors wishing to refer to the Church’s commandments, would risk acting – according to the Exhortation — “as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators” (no 310). “For this reason, a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, “sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult cases and wounded families.”

This unprecedented language, harsher than the hardness of heart that reproaches “the arbiters of grace”, is the distinctive trait of *Amoris laetitia*, which, not by chance, Cardinal Schonborn defined as “a linguistic event” during the press conference of April 8th. “My great joy for this document” the Cardinal from Vienna said, is in the fact that it “coherently goes beyond the artificial, exterior, clean division between regular and irregular”.

Language, as always, expresses content. The situations the post-synod Exhortation defines as “the so-called irregular” are those of public adultery and extramarital cohabitations. For *Amoris laetitia*, they fulfill the Christian marriage ideal, even if “in a partial and analogous way” (no. 292). “Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin – which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such – a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end (no.305), “In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments”(note 351).

According to Catholic morality, circumstances, which comprise a context wherein an action is carried out cannot modify the moral nature of the acts, thus rendering right and just an intrinsically evil action. Yet the doctrine of absolute morality and of the intrinsece malum is neutralized by *Amoris laetitia*, which is conformed to the “new morality” condemned by Pius XII in numerous documents and by John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor*. Situation ethics allow the circumstances and, in the final analysis, the subjective conscience of man, to determine what is good and what is evil. Extramarital sexual union is not considered intrinsically illicit, but inasmuch as it is an act of love, assessable according to the circumstances. More generally, evil does not exist in itself just as grave or mortal sin does not exist. The leveling-out between people in a state of grace (regular situations) and people in a state of permanent sin (irregular situations) is not only linguistic: it seems to be subject to the Lutheran theory *simul iustus et peccator*, condemned by the Decree on justification at the Council of Trent (Denz-H, nn. 1551-1583).

The post-synod Exhortation is much worse than Cardinal Kasper's report, against which there has rightly been directed much criticism in books, articles and interviews. Cardinal Kasper had asked some questions; the Exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, offers an answer: open the door to the divorced and remarried, canonize situation ethics and begin a process of normalization of all common-law cohabitations.

Considering that the new document belongs to the non-infallible ordinary Magisterium, it is to be hoped that it is object of an in-depth analytical critique, by theologians and Pastors of the Church, under no illusion of applying "the hermeneutic of continuity" to it.

If the text is catastrophic, even more catastrophic is the fact that it was signed by the Vicar of Christ. Even so, for those who love Christ and His Church, this is a good reason to speak and not be silent. So, let's make ours, the words of a courageous Bishop, Athanasius Schneider:

*"Non possumus!"* I will not accept an obfuscated speech nor a skilfully masked back door to a profanation of the Sacrament of Marriage and Eucharist. Likewise, I will not accept a mockery of the Sixth Commandment of God. I prefer to be ridiculed and persecuted rather than to accept ambiguous texts and insincere methods. I prefer the crystalline "image of Christ the Truth, rather than the image of the fox ornamented with gemstones" (Saint Irenaeus), for "I know whom I have believed", *"Scio, Cui credidi!"* (2 Tim 1: 12). (Rorate Coeli, 2 Novembre 2015).