

## What is *Amoris Laetitia*?

*Amoris Laetitia* (the “Joy of Love”) is the much anticipated post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on marriage and the family. Released on April 6, it runs 260 pages, approximately 59,000 words. Father George Rutler, wryly commenting on the exorbitant length of modern Vatican documents, notes that Francis’ text “is nearly two-thirds the length of all the Vatican II promulgations.”

## What are we to think of *Amoris Laetitia*?

Respected Italian journalist Antonio Socci wrote: “The Apostolic Exhortation is an open act challenging two thousand years of Catholic teaching. And in Catholic circles people are shocked and struck dumb in bewilderment.” Raymond Cardinal Burke, in a somewhat subdued response, called the document a “personal reflection of the Pope” that is “not [to be] confused with the binding faith owed to the exercise of the magisterium.” The eminent Professor Roberto De Mattei said, “If the text is catastrophic, even more catastrophic is the fact that it was signed by the Vicar of Christ.” These assessments are accurate.

## Should we be surprised?

Anyone who followed the tumultuous 2014 and 2015 Synods will not be surprised at the Exhortation. The Synods, the synod press conferences, the synodal texts and the newly-released Exhortation represent one steady stream of modernist revolution.

## What is a key problem with the document?

Amidst great drifts of verbiage – some not bad, some remarkably tedious – Francis effectively canonizes situation ethics. He furtively opens the door for Communion to the divorced and remarried on a ‘case-by-case’ basis, which destroys key elements of Catholic Moral Theology. In particular, his approach undermines recognition of intrinsically disordered acts, and once this is undermined in one area, it is undermined in all areas. Progressivists immediately celebrated *Amoris Laetitia* as a “radical shift.”

## What is situation ethics?

Situation Ethics is the rejection of the universal, binding, immutable norms of morality. There is no such thing as a moral act that is intrinsically evil, there is no rule that admits no exceptions. According to this false approach, the morality of an act ultimately depends not

on objective truth, but on the individual's given situation.

The early advocates of situation ethics (as well as contemporary advocates) rebelled against what they call "legalism," "rigidity" and certain "fixed rules of morality that can never be violated." Such an approach, as the 1960s advocates of situation ethics complained, "puts rules over people."

Dr. Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), the Anglican clergyman and principal proponent of modern situation ethics (who published the landmark 1966 book *Situation Ethics* and ended his days as an atheist), insisted that in a given situation, we need not always act according to objective morality, but rather, we "do the loving thing" based on the our given circumstances. The new pastoral approach coming from Francis' Vatican delivers a new twist to the same error, claiming what is most important is to do the "merciful" thing, in light of the various "concrete circumstances" of the individual.

## **Did not Pius XII warn against situations ethics?**

Yes, situation ethics pre-dates Fletcher's book. British scholar Peter Vardy quotes Pius XII's 1952 statement against situation ethics as follows: "It is an individual and subjective appeal to the *concrete circumstances* of actions to justify decisions in opposition to the Natural law and God's revealed will."

## **What else did he say against the "situation ethics" morality?**

Pope Pius also warned in 1952: "The distinctive mark of this morality is that it is in fact in no way based on universal moral laws, for instance, on the Ten Commandments, *but on the real and concrete conditions or circumstances in which one must act*, and according to which the *individual conscience* has to judge and choose. This state of things is unique and valid but once for each human action. This is why the supporters of this ethics affirm that the decision of one's conscience cannot be commanded by universal ideas, principles, and laws..." (AAS, 1952, pp 413-419)

## **And did not the Pius XII's Holy Office condemn situation ethics?**



In 1956, the Holy Office explicitly condemned Situation Ethics in all its forms. The document warned that the “new morality” has “insinuated itself even among Catholics, despite the fact that it is contrary to moral doctrines as taught and applied by the Catholic Church. Situation Ethics rests not upon principles of objective ethics rooted in being itself, but rather it claims to transcend the limitation of objectivity. Promoters of the system maintain that the ultimate and decisive norm of human activity is not some objective order of right, determined by the law of nature and certainly known in virtue of that law. Rather, they assert that the correct rules of moral action lie in some intimate light and judgment rooted in the mind of each individual person [follow your conscience]. This subjective intimation enables one who is placed in a *particular concrete situation* to determine for himself what he is morally obliged to do in each *hic et nunc* [“here and now”] case. There is no dependence on any immutable rule of action external to man; there is no measure of truth and rectitude beyond oneself; man suffices for his own moral guide.”\*

The Holy Office warned that the system of situation ethics “produces traces of modernism and relativism” and “wanders far from the Catholic teaching handed down through the ages.”

The Congregation of the Holy Office condemned this Situation Ethics, by whatever name it may be called, and interdicted its being taught in Catholic schools or its being propagated or defended in books, writings of any kind or in conferences.

Unfortunately, this condemnation means nothing to the modernist. A key tactic of modernism is to pretend the magisterium has not spoken on certain points.

**There seems to be a lot in the Exhortation about**

## “concrete circumstances”?

We find in *Amoris Laetitia* an inordinate emphasis on the *concrete situations* – the language of situation ethics – of various individuals, and how this might supposedly mitigate acts that are objectively sinful. *Amoris Laetitia* effectively starts with the person's situation, not with immutable moral principles. The norm of true sacramental marriage is depicted more as an “ideal” rather than a non-negotiable Commandment of Christ. The document treats with *inordinate* sympathy Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried, as well as those who cohabit, offering one excuse after the next for how such souls find themselves in their fallen condition. True Catholic precepts concerning the proper living of Catholic marriage are depicted as *abstract* and somewhat out of touch with people's *concrete circumstances*.

Here are some samples from *Amoris Laetitia*:

#31: “We do well to focus on *concrete realities*, since ‘the call and demands of the spirit resound in the events of history...’”

#36: “At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and most artificial ideal of marriage, far removed from the *concrete situations* and practical possibilities of real family (the text goes on to speak of this “excessive idealization”).

#301: “The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations [the document fails to affirm there are no mitigating factors that can in any way justify acts that are intrinsically evil, such as fornication, adultery, contraception and homosexual acts – JV]. Hence it can no longer be said that all those who live in any ‘irregular’ situations are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace [discarding of the moral absolute, a key tenet of situation ethics – JV]. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule. A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding ‘its inherent values’ or be in a *concrete situation* which does not allow him or her to act differently and decide otherwise without further sin.”

#304: “It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the *concrete life* of the human being.”

As is found in situation ethics, we start with “*concrete circumstances*,” and then shape our moral conclusion from this actual reality. This demands a new program of dialogue and pastoral discernment that plays down “black and white” moral absolutes. This then grants leeway, in certain cases, to claim that those in objective mortal sin can subjectively be living

the life of grace, and *be treated as those living the life of grace*.

Hence we read in #305, “Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing *in the midst of limits*. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth...”

## What is the end result?

The end result is a new approach that opens the door for the divorced and civilly remarried, based on the difficulties inherent in their concrete situation, to receive the Eucharist.

Commenting on this point, theologian Father Brian Harrison notes the most troubling aspect of Francis' new document is “its treatment in Chapter 8 of those living in irregular sexual relationships.” He continues: “In notes 336 and 351 to paragraphs 300 and 305 respectively, the Holy Father breaks with the teaching and discipline of all his predecessors in the See of Peter by allowing at least some divorced and civilly remarried Catholics (with no decree of nullity and no commitment to continence) to receive the sacraments. Since ‘discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists’ owing to a variety of mitigating psychological and other factors, Francis affirms in n. 351 that the Church’s ‘help’ to these Catholics living in objectively illicit relationships can ‘in certain cases . . . include the help of the sacraments’.”

The context, notes Father Harrison, indicates this means reception of Penance and the Eucharist while these individuals continue to live in sin.

## What does this do to Catholic Moral Theology?

It effectively destroys true Catholic moral theology. Situation Ethics cannot be admitted in one instance and not in others. Once situation ethics is granted in one area, it undermines the reality of moral absolutes in every area, and all morality is cast into a state of subjectivist flux.

Likewise in the case of opening the sacraments to those living in sin: once it is permitted to divorced and civilly remarried because of varying “concrete circumstances,” and once the situation determines moral action, we can expect cohabitating couples and even homosexuals to claim a right to the Eucharist in light of their varied circumstances.

Also, once moral absolutes are abandoned in this area, they will go on to be abandoned in other areas, such as abortion, contraception, homosexuality, euthanasia, medical ethics, just

war, surrogate parenting, the list goes on. With universal, binding, immutable norms of morality discarded, the *praxis* becomes an alleged discernment based on the concrete circumstances of the individual, or even the gut-instincts of the individual. In such a system, even the person who does good may end up doing so not because of adherence to objective truth, but because he happens to possess the correct subjectivist dispositions in a given circumstance.

## What about Natural Law?

Natural Law, which determines morality based on the intrinsic *nature* of the act, and on the *nature* of man itself, is the genuine ethic of the Church and common sense. It is taught within the tried-and-true realism of scholastic philosophy and theology (and as St. Pius X warned in *Pascendi*, Modernists despise scholasticism).

Likewise, Natural Law has always been the sworn enemy of situation ethics, as it insists there are certain acts that are intrinsically disordered, and no set of circumstances can justify committing them.

Not surprisingly, Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* undermines natural law, claiming that “natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions.” (#305)

In other words, natural law is only at the level of “inspiration” that one may take or leave as the individual works out his “deeply personal process” of deciding one’s own moral behavior.

The entire orientation of Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* is *contra* natural law, *contra* “black and white” moral absolutes, pro-subjectivist and pro-situationist. It is the death knell of true Catholic moral theology.

## Will this affect the teaching of moral theology?

Yes, Francis requests that the approach found in *Amoris Laetitia* be assimilated into the teaching of moral theology itself.

We read in #311: “The teaching of moral theology should not fail to incorporate these considerations, for although it is quite true that concern must be shown for the integrity of the Church’s moral teaching [a brief swing of incense to traditional Catholic morality – jv],

special care should always be shown and emphasize and encourage the highest and most central values of the Gospels, particularly the primacy of charity as a response to the completely gratuitous offer of God's love."

This notion of the "primacy of charity" is not accurate.

## Why is it not accurate?

Truth must always be primary. Truth is the "adequation of the intellect with the extra-mental reality" (that is, the correspondence of the intellect with the objective reality outside of our mind) as the scholastics and common sense teach. Speaking and safeguarding the truth, especially in moral matters, is the ultimate charity – the ultimate wishing the "good" of the other.

Francis' "primacy of charity" in moral theology confuses the exercise of the intellect with the exercise of the will. Truth is for the *intellect*, whereas charity is carried out in the *will*. The will is a blind faculty that depends upon the intellect to present its object which is the good. For the will to be properly ordered, the intellect must possess and adhere to the truth. Truth is always paramount.

The advocacy for "primacy of charity" in moral theology has been with us for decades, but such an approach is disordered. Once charity is in any way cut loose from doctrine [objective truth], or elevated above doctrine, then any aberration is possible, including a false sentimentalism disguised as mercy and compassion.

Yet Francis gives the impression he considers the primacy of truth in moral theology as an "inadequate theological conception" that "puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, His mercy" (#311-312), and he wants his new approach to be "incorporated in the teaching of moral theology."

## Is this all that is wrong with *Amoris Laetitia*?

An entire book, yes, even a week-long seminar could be given to discuss the myriad of problems, deficiencies and dangers contained in *Amoris Laetitia*. This short Q & A merely spotlights the problem of situation ethics in the document, a key error on which many errors in the text are based.

Why then do so many Catholics praise the document, or claim there is nothing substantially wrong with it?



We could give five quick reasons:

1. Many Catholics, priests and bishops included, have not received a proper systematic, scholastic formation in philosophy and theology. Much of their formation is fragmented and deficient, due to the breakdown in seminaries and Catholic higher education as a result of Vatican II. They are not equipped to see the blatant problems staring them in the face.
2. Other Catholics believe they are duty-bound to defend and accept anything that comes from the Pope, even though – as Cardinal Burke noted – the document is a “personal opinion” of Francis and is not [to be] confused with the binding faith owed to the exercise of the magisterium.” Yet we know from Pope Innocent III, St. Robert Bellarmine, Suarez and others that it is possible for a Pope to deviate from the truth, and if he does so, Catholics may resist and prevent his will from being enacted.
3. Many Catholics are unaware that *Amoris Laetitia* is the full-flowering of a crisis in moral theology, devastating the Church for over 50 years. Since the time of Vatican II, perverse theologians such as Fathers Joseph Fuchs, Charles Curran, Richard McBrien, Richard McCormick and countless others advanced this situationist, consequentialist, non-absolutist approach to moral theology. Except for Charles Curran who was silenced, these other delinquent theologians ran rampant, spreading their poison throughout the Church for decades (especially during the reign of John Paul II, who took no effective action against them). One strong voice of opposition was the late Msgr. William Smith, Professor of Moral Theology at Dunwoodie Seminary, who delivered countless lectures in the 70s, 80s and 90s against these perverse theologians and their situationist errors. (As the Irish would say, it is a good thing Msgr. Smith is dead, for if he were alive, *Amoris Laetitia* would have killed him.)
4. Too many Catholics succumb to the claim the document does not change doctrine, and is therefore safe. Those who say this fail to understand how modernism operates. Modernists, as St. Pius X warned, are “full of deceit,” and usually do not announce blatant changes in doctrine (although Francis makes the heterodox statement in #297: “No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel!” which appears to discard the Catholic and Biblical truth that souls *are* condemned to hell). Rather, Modernism, by using new language, new emphasis, presenting an overall *atmosphere* (“Mercy and Compassion”), emphasizing certain aspects and ignoring others, pretending the magisterium has not spoken on certain points, failing to affirm key doctrinal points that contradict its general trajectory, and introducing *new praxis* contrary to doctrine, effects a revolution in Catholic attitude and behavior. This is exactly how *Amoris Laetitia* operates. Even conservative Philip Lawler referred to Francis’ document as a “subversive” text.
5. Then, of course, there are liberal Catholics who thrill at the new approach. The radical



Cardinal Kasper celebrated that *Amoris Laetitia* effectively “changes everything.”

## **Will this not result in a floodgate of sacrilege?**

By canonizing a situation ethics approach, a system which Pius XII's Holy Office explicitly condemned, Francis opens the door for the divorced and civilly remarried to receive the Eucharist. He is personally responsible for opening the floodgates of sacrilegious Communion that will necessarily follow. Every Eucharistic sacrilege that follows as a result of this document will have his name written upon it. God help him!

## **Is there nothing we can do?**

We publicly resist this latest subversion, teach the truth to those within our sphere of influence, and work to prevent Francis' will from being enacted in this regard.

We also make reparation for the countless sacrilegious Communion that will result from *Amoris Laetitia*. A good place to start is by often repeating the prayer of reparation taught by the Angel to the children of Fatima in 1916: “Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifferences whereby He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of Thee the conversion of poor sinners.”

\* Translation and summary of Holy Office document from Father A. Carr, Proceedings from the Catholic Theological Society of America, Twelfth Annual Convention, June 24-26, 1957. Original Holy Office Latin text at *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1956, pp. 144-145. See reproduction of original Latin text below.

## ACTA SS. CONGREGATIONUM

### SUPREMA SACRA CONGREGATIO S. OFFICII

#### INSTRUCTIO

AD ORDINARIOS OMNES NECNON AD MAGISTROS IN SEMINARIIS, IN ATHENAEIS, VEL IN STUDIORUM UNIVERSITATIBUS DOCENTES ET AD LECTORES IN STUDIIS DOMIBUS RELIGIOSORUM: DE « ETHICAE SITUATIONIS ».

Contra doctrinam moralem eiusque applicationem in Ecclesia catholica traditam multis in regionibus etiam inter catholicos spargi coepit systema ethicum quod plerumque nomine cuiusdam « Ethicae Situationis » venit, quamque dicunt non dependere a principiis ethicae obiectivae (quae ultimam in « Esse » fundatur), sed cum ea non solum in eadem linea poni, sed eidem super or dinari.

Auctores qui hoc systema sequuntur decisivam et ultimam agendi normam statuunt non esse ordinem obiectivum rectum, naturae lege determinatum et ex hac lege certo cognitum, sed intimum aliquod mentis uniuscuiusque individui iudicium ac lumen, quo ei in concreta situatione posito innotescit quid sibi agendum sit. Haec igitur hominis ultima decisio secundum eos non est, sicut ethica obiectiva apud auctores maioris momenti tradita docet, legis obiectivae ad particularem casum applicatio, attentis simul ac ponderatis, secundum regulas prudentiae, particularibus « situationis » adiunctis, sed immediatum illud internum lumen et iudicium. Hoc iudicium saltem multis in rebus ultimam nullam normam obiectivam, extra hominem positam atque ab eius persuasione subiectiva independente, quoad suam obiectivam rectitudinem ac veritatem est mensuratum, neque mensurandum neque mensurabile, sed sibi ipsi plene sufficit.

Secundum hos auctores « naturae humanae » conceptus traditionalis non sufficit, sed recurrendum est ad conceptum naturae humanae (« existentis » qui quoad plurima non habet valorem obiectivum absolutum, sed relativum tantum ideoque mutabilem, exceptis fortasse illis paucis elementis atque principiis quae ad naturam humanam metaphysicam (absolutam et immutabilem) spectant. Eiusdem valoris tantum relativi est traditionalis conceptus « legis naturae ». Perplura autem quae hodie circumferuntur tamquam legis naturae postulata absoluta, nituntur secundum eorum opinionem et doctrinam in dicto conceptu naturae existentis, ideoque non sunt nisi relativa et mutabilia atque omni semper situationi adaptari queunt.

Acceptis atque ad rem deductis his principiis, dicunt atque docent homines in sua quisque conscientia non imprimis secundum leges obiectivas, sed mediante lumine illo interno individuali secundum intuitionem personalem iudicantes, quid ipsis in praesenti situatione agendum sit, a multis conflictibus ethicis aliter insolubilibus praeservari vel facile liberari.

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Multi quae in huius « Ethicae Situationis » systemate statuuntur, rei veritati sanaeque rationis dictamini contraria sunt, relativismi et modernismi vestigia produnt, a doctrina catholica per saecula tradita longe aberrant. Variis systematibus Ethicae non catholicae in non paucis assertis affinia sunt.

Quibus perpensis, ad avertendum « Novae Moralis » periculum, de quo Summus Pontifex Pius Pp. XII in Allocutionibus diebus 23 Martii et 18 Aprilis 1952 habitis locutus est, et ad doctrinae catholicae puritatem et securitatem tuendam, haec Suprema Sacra Congregatio Sancti Officii interdicat et prohibet hanc « Ethicae Situationis » doctrinam, quovis nomine designetur, in Universitatibus, Athenaeis, Seminariis et religiosorum formationis domibus tradi vel approbari, aut in libris, dissertationibus, acroasibus seu, ut aiunt, conferentiis, vel quocumque alio modo propagari atque defendi.

Datum Romae, ex Aedibus S. S. Congregationis S. Officii, die 2 Februarii a. 1956.

SB I. Card. PIZZARDI, Ep. Albanensis, Secretarius

Acta Apostolicae Sedis, vol. XLIV (1952), p. 270 ss. et p. 413 ss.

Pope Pius XII's Holy Office condemned Situation Ethics in all its forms on February 2, 1956 ([www.cfnnews.org](http://www.cfnnews.org))

See also:

- [Francis' Zombie Apocalypse](#)
- [Video: CFN Media 14 – Francis' Rich Church and "Exhortation" Fraud](#)
- [Amoris Laetitia and The Great Façade](#)
- [De Mattei: If the text is catastrophic, even more catastrophic is the fact that it was signed by the Vicar of Christ...](#)
- [Socci: The Apostolic Exhortation is a turning-point in Catholic Doctrine](#)
- [Francis Post-Synodal Exhortation released](#)