The word casuistry has two meanings: "(1) a resolving of specific cases of conscience, duty, or conduct through interpretation of ethical principles or religious doctrine, (2) specious argument."

It is very easy for the first meaning to collapse into the second, especially when one is dealing with an ethical principle that is a negative precept of the natural law respecting intrinsically evil actions that are always and everywhere wrong, regardless of the situation in which they occur. Such is the case with the dogged defenders of Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), which opens the door to absolution and Holy Communion for public adulterers in "second marriages" based on "the concrete complexity of one's limits" (AL 303), which "limits" — in the amorphous category of "certain cases" — supposedly reduce the objective mortal sin of adultery to one that is merely venial and thus no bar to the sacraments.

This, of course, is simply situation ethics disguised by empty verbiage concerning "concrete situations" in life, as if any situation in life were not concrete. But as John Paul II taught in *Veritatis splendor*, the appeal to "concrete reality" in order to circumvent exceptionless moral precepts is absolutely inadmissible:

> "In order to justify these positions, some authors have proposed a kind of double status of moral truth. Beyond the doctrinal and abstract level, one would have to acknowledge the priority of a certain more concrete existential consideration. The latter, by taking account of circumstances and the situation, could legitimately be the basis of certain *exceptions to the general rule* [emphasis in original] and thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law. *A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil. On this basis, an attempt is made to legitimize so-called 'pastoral' solutions contrary to the teaching of the Magisterium*, and to justify *a 'creative' hermeneutic according to which the moral conscience is in no way obliged, in every case, by a particular negative precept* [emphasis added]
>
> "No one can fail to realize that these approaches pose a challenge to the *very identity of the moral conscience* in relation to human freedom and God's law. Only the clarification made earlier with regard to the relationship, based on truth, between freedom and law makes possible a *discernment* concerning this 'creative' understanding of conscience.…

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> "But the negative moral precepts, those prohibiting certain concrete actions or kinds of behaviour as intrinsically evil, *do not allow for any legitimate exception*. They do not leave room, *in any morally acceptable way*, for the 'creativity' of any contrary determination whatsoever. Once the moral species of an action prohibited by a universal rule is concretely recognized, *the only morally good act* is that of *obeying the moral law and of refraining from the action which it forbids*."

How sad, then, to see Cardinal Gerhard Müller, following his sacking as the inconvenient head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, apparently joining the casuist brigade in defending AL's "concrete complexity" canard. In a preface to a book by Rocco Buttiglione, which has been trumpeted by progressives as a repudiation of the four cardinals' *dubia* concerning AL's attempt to smuggle situation ethics into Catholic moral theology, Müller makes an argument worthy of the Pharisees: He declares that the "Spirit's sins can be more serious than flesh's sins. Spiritual pride and avarice introduce into religious and moral life a more profound disorder than impurity resulting from human weakness".

This is moral sophistry. There is no bright line between "sins of the spirit" and "sins of the flesh," nor any categorical ranking of the first as worse than the second. First of all, spiritual disorders and sins of the flesh go together, and pride is often involved — precisely as we see with those who insist their "second marriages" are valid unions and that they are entitled to the sacraments while continuing to engage in what Our Lord Himself called adultery without exception. And the suggestion that the sin of avarice is a "spiritual" sin worse than the "fleshly" sin of committing adultery with a neighbor's wife is laughable, for adultery involves both avarice and lust. Are we supposed to believe that the commission of adultery with a neighbor's wife is less serious than coveting a neighbor's fancy car?

Müller here exhibits the astounding tendency of the current pontificate: excusing or minimizing the gravity of violations of the Sixth Commandment. Yet Our Lady of Fatima warned the seers that "more souls go to hell because of sins of the flesh than for any other reason," as such sins are more commonly committed and less often repented of before death. Incredibly, Müller lends his name to the encouragement of such sins in the name of "human weakness," as if the assistance of God's grace were not even part of the picture.

Müller's preface further argues for a purely casuitical — in the pejorative sense — search for excuses for the continuation of an adulterous relationship. He writes:

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> "Individual Christians can find themselves without their own fault in the harsh crisis of being abandoned and of not being able to find any other way out than entrusting themselves to a person of good heart, and the result is a marriage-like relationship. *A special spiritual discernment of the confessor's internal forum is needed to find a path of conversion and reorientation towards Christ that is right for the person, going beyond an easy adaptation to the relativistic spirit of time or a cold application of dogmatic precepts and canonical dispositions*, in the light of the truth of the Gospel and with the help of the previous grace".

Notice the classic Modernist caricature of Church teaching: "a cold application of dogmatic precepts and canonical dispositions," as if it were cold and merciless to inform a penitent of Our Lord's exceptionless teaching on the indissolubility of marriage: "*Every one* that putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: *and he that marrieth her that is put away from her husband*, commmitteth adultery." (Luke 16:18) The Sixth Commandment does not permit exceptions for an abandoned wife who purports to marry another and thus willingly engages in sexual relations outside of marriage with a partner in adultery, relations which are intrinsically evil — always and everywhere wrong — no matter what the claimed justification. If it were otherwise, then the Commandments would be reduced to mere benchmarks for the heroically virtuous and thereby would cease to be the moral law as such.

The appeal to the hard case is camouflage to smuggle in the general proposition that people who persuade a priest in the confessional that they are "excusable" adulterers, given their particular "concrete circumstances," can receive absolution and Holy Communion, whereas other adulterers would continue to be denied the sacraments if their excuses were not good enough. Müller embraces precisely the "easy adaptation to the relativistic spirit of time" he professes to deplore. But when has a priest-confessor ever played the role of "discerning" the "good" adulterers from the "bad" adulterers in the confessional? Never in the history of the Church. Never, that is, until the appearance of AL.

In an ultimate exercise in Pharisaical casuistry, Müller's preface suggests that in the "internal forum" a priest could admit to the sacraments one who is convinced that his "first marriage" in the Church is invalid, even if "this cannot be canonically proven because of the material context or because of the culture of the dominant mentality" — whatever that means. In essence, Müller argues for the effective equivalent of "self-decreed annulments" without any canonical process, which equates to Catholic divorce — taking place in the confessional, no less!

When the former head of the Vatican's doctrinal department countenances such casuitical

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nonsense for the sake of defending a single errant document issued by a clearly wayward Pope, a document that flies in the face of all Tradition and even the teaching of Pope Francis' two immediate predecessors, there can be no denying that the Church is now in the midst of the most acute stage in what was already the worst crisis in her history.

Here we encounter what Pope Benedict admitted is the true gravamen of the Third Secret of Fatima: not the execution of a Pope on a hill outside a ruined city, which is only the aftermath, but rather an attack on the Church from within by sin running rampant in her human element, leading to the apocalyptic scene in the vision of the "Bishop dressed in White." This is what Sister Lucia meant by "the final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan [over] marriage and the family."

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