

In the firestorm that followed publication of the Müller preface, the Cardinal has since walked back his statements — but not convincingly, in my opinion. In a telephone interview, [translated into English by Life Site News](#), the Cardinal affirms that “The *Dubia* are authoritative and clearly legitimate....” Yet, early this year, the Cardinal slammed the “*dubia* cardinals,” declaring that “what astonished me is that it was made public, trying to force the pope to say yes or no. I do not like this. It harms the church to talk about these things in public.” Not exactly a direct contradiction, but certainly a different tune from what the Cardinal is singing now.

The Cardinal went on to state that in his preface to Buttiglione’s book he was not proposing any “exception” to the ban on Holy Communion for validly married Catholics who purport to divorce their spouses and enter “second marriages,” but rather was merely referring to situations that arise in Latin America and elsewhere, where people marry “informally” without benefit of a priest, or “under regimes that persecute the Church, where it isn’t possible to be married canonically” and only a natural union based on consent is possible.

But even natural, non-sacramental marriages are indissoluble outside of the [Pauline](#) and the [Petrine](#) privileges. Yet in his attempted walk-back, Müller argues that with natural marriages based on consent, when the parties separate and purport to remarry “everything depends on the internal forum, on their honesty in acknowledging if there was consent...” That simply isn’t so. The canonical forum, not the so-called “internal forum,” would still be needed to adjudicate the nullity of any purported natural marriage before the Church could approve of a canonical union with a new partner.

Moreover, Müller’s preface speaks of much broader circumstances than merely third-world anomalies. He writes: “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.” There is no limitation to natural marriages of possibly dubious validity.

And, of course, Buttiglione’s book, to which Müller lent his name, argues precisely for “exceptions” to the Church’s Eucharistic discipline even in the case of marriages according to canonical form. In fact, while trying to walk back his preface, Müller only reaffirms his support for Buttiglione’s and AL’s opening to Holy Communion for public adulterers when he declares that “These are cases of unconscious Christians, who are baptized but unbelieving, *who may have gotten married in the Church to please their grandmother, but without a real awareness*. Here it becomes a problem when, after many years, they return to the faith and then question the marriage. There are many such cases. Benedict XVI also looked at the issue. So what’s to be done?”

What does the Cardinal mean by “What is to be done?” He knows very well what is to be done: the same thing that has always been done before Pope Francis. That is, the one purporting to remarry in such a case must seek an annulment, and if one is not granted on grounds of lack of consent then he or she must accept that he/she is still validly married to the first and only spouse and cannot marry another. One cannot simply declare a “self-annulment” “self-decreed annulment” through “discernment” in the “internal forum” and then receive the sacraments while engaging in sexual relations with someone to whom one is not married.

Furthermore, even if this sort of self-granted pseudo-annulment were possible for pastoral purposes — and it isn’t — what about the second “union,” which is likewise without canonical form? Is the Church now supposed to recognize civil unions following divorce as valid marriages, or else permit Church weddings following a self-granted “annulment” in the “internal forum” without any declaration of nullity under canon law? Müller, signing on to Buttiglione’s sophistry, cracks open the door to chaos even as he purports to deny that he advocates any exceptions to the indissolubility of marriage.

And so, the Cardinal continues to talk out of both sides of his mouth. And yet even this equivocating prelate was too conservative for Pope Francis. With defenders of the indissolubility of marriage like these, it is no wonder the Church is now involved in a “final battle” over marriage and family.