

Recalling the Amoris-Dubia Drama

Three years ago today, four cardinals of the Holy Roman Church (two of whom have since departed this life) took an extraordinary measure commensurate to the extraordinary times in which we live. In a [letter](#) dated Sept. 19, 2016 and [hand-delivered](#) that same day, Cardinals Walter Brandmüller, Raymond Burke, Carlo Caffarra (RIP), and Joachim Meisner (RIP) addressed Pope Francis as follows:

“Most Holy Father,

Following the publication of your apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, theologians and scholars have proposed interpretations that are not only divergent, but also conflicting, above all in regard to Chapter VIII. Moreover, the media have emphasized this dispute, thereby provoking uncertainty, confusion and disorientation among many of the faithful.

Because of this, we the undersigned, but also many bishops and priests, have received numerous requests from the faithful of various social strata on the correct interpretation to give to Chapter VIII of the exhortation.

Now, compelled in conscience by our pastoral responsibility and desiring to implement ever more that synodality to which Your Holiness urges us, with profound respect, we permit ourselves to ask you, Holy Father, as supreme teacher of the faith, called by the Risen One to confirm his brothers in the faith, to resolve the uncertainties and bring clarity, benevolently giving a response to the *dubia* that we attach the present letter.”

The five [dubia](#) (Latin, “doubts”) concerning *Amoris Laetitia*’s eighth chapter essentially boil down to their Eminences asking the Pope the following questions (correct answers provided):

1. Is it now possible for divorced and civilly ‘remarried’ Catholics to receive absolution in Confession and thus be admitted Holy Communion, all the while continuing to engage in adulterous sexual relations? (No)
2. Are there still “absolute moral norms” which bind in conscience without exception? (Yes)
3. Do those who live “in contradiction to a commandment of God’s law” – for example, the Sixth Commandment (“Thou shalt not commit adultery”) – still find themselves “in an

objective situation of grave habitual sin”? (Yes)

4. Are intrinsically evil acts (like adultery) still intrinsically evil and absolutely forbidden, regardless of one’s circumstances or intentions? (Yes)
5. Must we still affirm that “conscience can never be authorized to legitimate exceptions to absolute moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts by virtue of their object?” (Yes)

As we can see, the cardinals’ *dubia* (questions) concern matters of *basic Catholic doctrine* on faith and morals which any properly catechized Catholic should easily be able to answer. Moreover, one does not need a doctorate in Sacred Theology to understand the gravity of the stakes involved for giving the wrong answers to these questions. As Cardinal Burke [told](#) the Associated Press last September in Rome:

“The *dubia* must have a response sooner or later,” Burke said. “It’s a simple response: Yes or no. That’s all. It’s not complicated.”

I have written about this subject several times over the past two years (see [here](#) and [here](#), for example), so suffice it to say, as I did [back in February](#), that nothing short of a *formal correction* – namely, a public warning (cf. Tit. 3:10-11) before the whole Church (cf. Matt. 18:15-17) to determine pertinacity (obstinate heresy) – will suffice at this late hour.

This is especially true in light of the heretical agenda set for the upcoming [Amazon Synod](#), about which Cardinals Brandmüller and Burke have rightly [sounded the alarm](#).

Providential Meditation

I have no illusions about the formal correction being an easy or pleasant task to accomplish, nor do I doubt that whoever issues it will face persecution – from multiple sources and in multiple forms.

As such, I find today’s meditation in [Divine Intimacy](#) on “Fortitude and Patience” to be quite providential (emphasis added):

“Although courage is needed to face or to undertake hard tasks, it is even more necessary *in order to persevere in them*, above all when they are unpleasant or of long duration, and it is impossible to avoid or change them. In this sense, St. Thomas [Aquinas] teaches that the principal act of *fortitude* is not to attack but *to stand firm in the midst of dangers, and to endure struggles, opposition,*

privations, and persecutions with a virile spirit.

In the spiritual life we meet not only difficulties which can be surmounted and overcome once and for all by a strong act of courage, but we encounter—and this much more frequently—difficult, painful situations from which it is impossible to escape, and which willingly and unwillingly we must face. ... We know that all these things are planned by God for our sanctification and our good; nevertheless, that does not prevent us from feeling the weight of them; suffering is never pleasant, and though we will to accept all for the love of God, we are sometimes tempted to react, to give up, to shake off the yoke, or we are weighed down by sadness and discouragement. What remedy is there? There is the one which Jesus suggested to the Apostles after telling them of the persecutions they would have to endure: *‘In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras,’* in your patience you shall possess your souls (Luke 21:19).^[1]

Let us pray and fast, as Cardinal Burke and Bishop Schneider have [exhorted](#) the entire Church to do, not only for an orthodox outcome to the Amazon Synod (which will surely require divine intervention at this point), but also for Cardinals Burke and Brandmüller, Bishop Schneider, and the rest of the Church’s hierarchy, that they will have the supernatural fortitude they need to resist the Dictator Pope “to the face” (Gal. 2:11).

For our part, *Catholic Family News* remains committed to such [filial resistance](#) as was articulated by Christopher Ferrara, Michael Matt, and [John Vennari](#) (RIP) in their document “[With Burning Concern](#)”, which was providentially published on the same day on which the four cardinals’ *dubia* was hand-delivered to Pope Francis.

[1] Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 845-846.