

"Amoris laetitia": a need for clarification in order to avoid a general confusion

The paradox of the contradictory interpretations of "Amoris laetitia"

The recently published Apostolic Exhortation "Amoris laetitia" (AL), which contains a plethora of spiritual and pastoral riches with regard to life within marriage and the Christian family in our times, has unfortunately, within a very short time, led to very contradictory interpretations even among the episcopate.

There are bishops and priests who publicly and openly declare that AL represents a very clear opening-up to communion for the divorced and remarried, without requiring them to practice continence. In their opinion, it is this aspect of sacramental practice, which, according to them, is now to undergo a significant change that gives AL its truly revolutionary character. Interpreting AL with reference to irregular couples, a president of a Bishops' Conference has stated, in a text published on the website of the same Bishops' Conference: "This is a disposition of mercy, an openness of heart and of spirit that needs no law, awaits no guideline, nor bides on prompting. It can and should happen immediately".

This opinion was further confirmed by the recent declarations of Father Antonio Spadaro S.J., after the Synod of Bishops in 2015, that the Synod had established the "foundations" for the access of divorced and remarried couples to communion by "opening a door" that had still been closed during the previous Synod in 2014. Now, as Father Spadaro alleges in his commentary on AL, his prediction has been confirmed. There are rumours that Father Spadaro was a member of the editorial group behind AL.

The way to abusive interpretations appears to have been paved by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn himself, who said, during the official presentation of AL in Rome, with regard to irregular unions, that: "My great joy as a result of this document resides in the fact that it coherently overcomes that artificial, superficial, clear division between 'regular' and 'irregular'". Such a statement suggests that there is no clear difference between a valid, sacramental marriage and an irregular union, between venial and mortal sin.

On the other hand, there are bishops who claim that AL ought to be read in the light of the perennial magisterium of the Church and that AL does not permit access to communion for divorced and remarried couples, not even in exceptional cases. This statement is fundamentally correct and desirable. In fact, the content of every Magisterial text must, as a rule, be in its content consistent with the former teachings of the Magisterium of the Church, without any break.

It is no secret, however, that divorced and remarried couples are admitted to Holy Communion in a number of churches, without their being required to practice continence. It must be admitted that

certain statements in AL could be used to justify an abusive practice that has already been going on for some time in various places and circumstances in the life of the Church.

Certain statements of AL are objectively vulnerable to misinterpretations

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has invited us all to make a contribution to reflection and dialogue on the sensitive issues surrounding marriage and the family. “The thinking of pastors and theologians, if faithful to the Church, honest, realistic and creative, will help us to achieve greater clarity” (AL, 2).

If we analyze certain statements of AL with intellectual honesty within their proper context, we find ourselves faced with difficulties when trying to interpret them in accordance with the traditional doctrine of the Church. This is due to the absence of the concrete and explicit affirmation of the doctrine and constant practice of the Church, founded on the Word of God and reiterated by Pope John Paul II, who said, "However the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage. Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who ... are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that ... they take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

Pope Francis had not established "a new general norm of Canon Law, applicable to all cases" (AL n. 300). He says, however, in note 336: "This is also the case with regard to sacramental discipline, since discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists". Obviously referring to the divorced and remarried, the Pope says in AL, no. 305 that, "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." In note 351, the Pope clarifies his statement by saying that "in some cases, this may include the help of the sacraments".

In the same chapter VIII of AL, n. 298, the Pope speaks of the divorced involved in “a second union consolidated over time, with new children, proven fidelity, generous self giving, Christian commitment, a consciousness of its irregularity and of the great difficulty of going back without feeling in conscience that one would fall into new sins. The Church acknowledges situations “where, for serious reasons, such as the children’s upbringing, a man and woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate””. In note 329, the Pope cites the document *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council; unfortunately, he does so in an incorrect fashion, because in the passage in question, the council refers only to valid Christian marriage. The application of this statement

to divorced persons may cause the impression that a valid marriage is to be equated to the union of divorced persons, if not in theory, then in practice.

The admission of divorced and remarried persons to Holy Communion and its consequences

Unfortunately, AL contains no verbal quotes of the principles underlying the moral teaching of the Church in the form in which they are formulated in no. 84 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* of Pope John Paul II, particularly on the following topics of paramount importance: "fundamental choice" (*Veritatis splendor*, nos. 67-68), "mortal and venial sin" (ibid., n. 69-70), "proportionalism, consequentialism" (ibid., no. 75), "martyrdom and universal and unchanging moral norms" (ibid., no. 91 et seq.). However, a verbal quote from *Familiaris Consortio* n. 84 and of some of the most significant affirmations in *Veritatis splendor* would render AL unassailable by heterodox interpretations. General allusions to moral principles and to the doctrine of the Church are certainly insufficient in a controversial matter that is both sensitive and of fundamental importance.

Representatives of the clergy and even of the Episcopate are already affirming that according to the spirit of Chapter VIII of AL, the possibility that in exceptional cases, the divorced and remarried may be admitted to Holy Communion without being required to live in perfect continence cannot be excluded.

If we accept such an interpretation of the wording and spirit of AL, we must, if we want to be intellectually honest and respect the law of non-contradiction, also accept the following logical conclusions:

- The sixth Divine Commandment, which prohibits any sexual act that does not take place within a valid marriage, would no longer be universally valid, but would admit exceptions. In the present case, this would mean that the divorced could practice the conjugal act and even be encouraged to do so to help them maintain "mutual fidelity", cf. AL, 298. There could therefore be "fidelity" in a lifestyle that directly contradicts the express will of God. However, to encourage and legitimize acts that are and will always be, as such, contrary to the will of God, would mean to contradict Divine Revelation.
- The words of Christ himself: "What therefore *God has joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Mt 19 :6) would no longer apply always and to all spouses, without exception.
- It would be possible, in a special case, to receive the sacrament of Penance and Holy Communion while intending to continue one's direct violations of God's commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20, 14) and "What therefore *God has joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Mt 19, 6; Gen 2, 24).
- The observance of these commandments and of the word of God would, in such a case, be a matter of theory rather than of practice, and would, therefore, lead the divorced and remarried into "deceiving themselves" (James 1: 22). It would, therefore, be possible to believe perfectly in the

divine nature of the six Commandment and in the indissolubility of marriage without however acting accordingly.

- The divine word of Christ : “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if a wife divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery” (Mark 10, 12) would no longer be universally valid, but would be subject to exceptions.
- A permanent, deliberate and free violation of God’s sixth Commandment and of the sacredness and indissolubility of true and valid marriage (in the case of divorced and remarried couples) would no longer be always a grave sin, that is to say, a direct opposition to the will of God.
- There could be cases of serious, permanent deliberate and free violation of one of the other commandments of God (e.g. in the case of a lifestyle of financial corruption) in which the person concerned could be granted access to the sacraments due to mitigating circumstances, without such access being made contingent upon a sincere resolution henceforth to abstain from such acts of sin and scandal.
- The permanent and infallible teaching of the Church would no longer be universally valid, particularly the teaching confirmed by Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 84 and by Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 29, according to which the precondition for admission to the sacraments of the divorced and remarried is perfect continence.
- The observance of the sixth commandment of God and of the indissolubility of marriage would become an ideal that is not attainable by all, but only by a kind of elite.
- The uncompromising words of Christ commanding men to observe the commandments of God always and in all circumstances, and even to take upon themselves considerable suffering in order to do so, in other words, to accept the Cross, would no longer be valid as absolute truth: "And *if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be cast into hell*" (Mt 5, 30).

Admitting couples living in "irregular unions" to Holy Communion and allowing them to practice acts that are reserved for spouses in a valid marriage would be tantamount to the usurpation of a power that does not belong to any human authority, because to do so would be a pretension to correct the Word of God himself.

The danger of the Church’s collaboration in spreading the “plague of divorce”

Professing the eternal doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church teaches: "The Church, since she is faithful to her Lord, cannot recognize the union of people who are civilly divorced and remarried. “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (*Mark 10:11-12*). The Church manifests an attentive solicitude toward such people and encourages them to a life of faith, prayer, works of charity and the Christian education of their children. However, they cannot

receive sacramental absolution, take Holy Communion, or exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities as long as their situation, which objectively contravenes God's law, persists" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 349)

Living in an invalid marital union and constantly contradicting the commandment of God and the sacredness and indissolubility of marriage signifies not to live in the truth. To declare that the deliberate, free and habitual practice of sexual acts in an invalid marital union could, in individual cases, no longer constitute a grave sin is not the truth, but a serious lie, and will therefore never bring genuine joy in love. Consequently, to grant permission to such persons to receive Holy Communion would be a bluffing, a hypocrisy and a lie. The Word of God in Scripture is still valid: "He who says 'I know him', but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him"(1 John 2: 4).

The Magisterium of the Church teaches us about the universal validity of the Ten Commandments: "Since they express man's fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, grave obligations. They are fundamentally immutable, and they oblige always and everywhere. No one can dispense from them" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2072). Those who claimed that God's commandments, including the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" admit of exceptions and that, in some cases, people should not be held accountable for the fault of divorce were the Pharisees and, later, the Christian Gnostics of the second and third centuries.

The following statements of the Magisterium are still valid because they are part of the infallible Magisterium as expressed by the universal and ordinary Magisterium: "The *negative precepts* of the natural law are universally valid. They oblige each and every individual, always and in every circumstance. It is a matter of prohibitions which forbid a given action *semper et pro semper*, without exception. ... are kinds of behaviour which can never, in any situation, be a proper response. ... The Church has always taught that one may never choose kinds of behaviour prohibited by the moral commandments expressed in negative form in the Old and New Testaments. As we have seen, Jesus himself reaffirms that these prohibitions allow no exceptions: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments... You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness" (*Mt 19:17-18*)" (St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, 52).

The Magisterium of the Church teaches us even more clearly: "A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time "from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim 1: 5; cf. 3: 9; 2 Timothy 1: 3; 1 Peter 3 21; Acts 24, 16)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1794).

In the event of a person committing objectively sinful moral acts in full awareness of the sinfulness of such acts, freely and deliberately, and with the intention of repeating such acts in the future, it is impossible to apply the principle of imputability for a fault because of mitigating circumstances. The application of the principle of imputability to such divorced and remarried couples would constitute hypocrisy and a Gnostic sophism. If the Church were to admit such people to Holy Communion even in a single case, it would contradict its own doctrine, give public testimony

against the indissolubility of marriage and thus contribute to the spreading of the "plague of divorce" (II Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 47).

In order to avoid such an intolerable and scandalous contradiction, the Church, in its infallible interpretation of the divine truth of moral law and of the indissolubility of marriage, has, for two thousand years, steadfastly observed the practice of admitting to Holy Communion only those divorced who live in perfect continence and "remoto scandalo", without any exception or exceptional privilege.

The first pastoral task that the Lord entrusted to His Church was to teaching, the doctrine (cf. Mt 28, 20). The observance of the commandments of God is intrinsically linked to doctrine. For this reason the Church has always rejected any contradiction between doctrine and practical life, referring to such contradictions as "gnostic" or as the heretical Lutheran theory of "simul iustus and peccator". There should be no contradictions between the faith and the daily life of the children of the Church.

When dealing with the observance of the express commands of God and the indissolubility of marriage, we cannot speak of opposing theological interpretations. If God says, "thou shalt not commit adultery", no human authority could say "in some exceptional cases or for a good purpose you can commit adultery".

The following assertions of Pope Francis are very important; the Pope speaks about the integration of the divorced and remarried in the life of the Church: "This discernment can never prescind from the Gospel demands of truth and charity, as proposed by the Church. ... The following conditions must necessarily be present: humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching. ... There can be no risk that a specific discernment may lead people to think that the Church maintains a double standard" (AL, 300). These laudable statements in AL, however, remain without concrete specifications on the question of the obligation of the divorced and remarried to separate or at least to live in perfect continence.

When it is a question of the life or death of the body, no physician would express his opinions in an ambiguous manner. The doctor cannot tell the patient: "You have to decide whether or not to take the medicine in accordance with your conscience, while at the same time respecting the laws of medicine". Such behaviour on the part of a doctor would very likely be considered irresponsible. And yet, the life of our immortal soul is more important, since it is on the health of the soul that its fate for eternity depends.

The liberating truth of penance and of the mystery of the Cross

To say that remarried divorcees are not public sinners in the Church is a pretense of wrong facts. The true condition of all members of the Church militant on earth, moreover, is that of sinners. If the divorced and remarried say that their voluntary and deliberate acts against the sixth commandment of God are not always sinful or, at least, do not constitute major sins, they are deceiving themselves and the truth will not be in them, as St. John says: "If we say," We have no sin, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and

just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us "(1 John 1: 8-10).

The acceptance on the part of the divorced and remarried of the truth that they are sinners and even public sinners will not deprive them of their Christian hope. Only the acceptance of reality and truth will enable them to take the path of a fruitful penitence according to the words of Jesus Christ.

It would be very beneficial to restore the spirit of the early Christians and of the time of the Fathers of the Church, when there was a living solidarity with public sinners on the part of the faithful; however, this solidarity was based on the truth. There was nothing discriminatory in such solidarity; on the contrary, the whole Church participated in the penitential progress of public sinners by prayers of intercession, tears, acts of expiation and acts of charity for their benefit.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* teaches that "even those who have strayed from the Lord's command and are still living in this state (divorced and remarried) may obtain from God the grace of conversion and salvation, if they persevere in prayer, penance and charity "(n. 84).

During the first centuries, public sinners were integrated into the praying community of the faithful and were instructed to kneel, with arms raised, to implore the intercession of their brothers. Tertullian gives us this moving testimony: "The body cannot rejoice when one of its members is suffering. It must suffer and strive for recovery in its entirety. When you stretch out your hands towards the knees of your brothers, it is Christ that you touch, it is Christ that you implore. Similarly, when they weep over you, it is Christ who sympathizes" (*De paenitentia*, 10, 5-6). St. Ambrose of Milan found similar words: "The whole church took upon herself the burden of the public sinner, suffering with him through tears, prayers and pain" (*De paenitentia* 1, 81).

It is true, of course, that the forms of the penitential discipline of the Church have changed. However, the spirit of this discipline must remain alive in the Church at all times. Today, priests and bishops relying on certain statements of AL are beginning to imply to the divorced and remarried that their condition does not render them public sinners from an objective point of view. They tranquillize them by stating that their sexual relations are not a grave sin. Such an attitude does not correspond to the truth. They are depriving the divorced and remarried of the possibility of a radical conversion to the obedience of God, letting these souls live in an illusion. Such a pastoral approach is very easy, cheap and costs nothing. There are no tears, prayers and intercessory works inspired by brotherly love to be offered for the benefit of the divorced and remarried.

In admitting the divorced and remarried to Holy Communion, even in exceptional cases, without asking them to stop performing acts contrary to the sixth commandment of God, and also presumptuously declaring that their manner of life is not a serious sin, we take the easy way out by pushing aside the scandal of the cross. Such pastoral care of the divorced and remarried is ephemeral and misleading. To all those who advocate this cheap and easy way out for the divorced and remarried, Jesus is still addressing the words, "Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou art an offence unto me because your thoughts are not those of God, but of men!" What Jesus said to his disciples was that "If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16: 24-25).

Regarding the pastoral care of divorced and remarried couples, we must rekindle in our day the spirit of following Christ through the truth of the cross and of penance, which alone can bring lasting joy, avoiding ephemeral pleasures that are ultimately misleading. The following words of Pope Gregory the Great are not only truly applicable to our current situation, but also shine a bright light on it: "We must not become too attached to our earthly exile, the conveniences of this life must not make us forget our true homeland lest our spirit become drowsy in the midst of these amenities. For this reason, God combines his gifts with visitations or punishments, to ensure that everything that delights us in this world becomes bitter for us and the soul is filled with the fire that always rekindles in us the desire of heavenly things and enables us to progress. This fire makes us suffer with pleasure, crucifies us gently and fills us with a joyful sadness" (*In Hez.*, 2, 4, 3).

The spirit of the genuine penitential discipline of the early Church always remained alive in the Church at all times, until today. We have a shining example of it in the Blessed Laura Vicuna del Carmen, born in 1891 in Chile. Sister Azocar, who took care of Laura, recalled: "I remember that the first time I explained the sacrament of marriage, Laura fainted, probably because she understood from my words that her mother was living in mortal sin as long as she remained with that gentleman. During that time in Junín, only one family lived in accordance with God's will." Therefore, Laura multiplied her prayers and penances for her mother. She received her first communion on June 2, 1901 with great fervour; she wrote the following resolutions: "1. I want to love and serve you all my life, oh my Jesus; for this, I offer you my soul, my heart and my whole being. - 2. I prefer to die rather than offend you by sin; so I want to distance myself from anything that could separate me from you. - 3. I promise to do my best, even if I have to offer great sacrifices, that you may be ever more known and loved, and to repair the offences inflicted upon you daily by men who do not love you, especially the ones you receive from those who are close to me. - Oh, my God, grant me a life of love, mortification and sacrifice!" But her great joy was clouded by seeing her mother, present at the ceremony, not receiving communion. In 1902, Laura offered her life for her mother who was living with a man in an irregular union in Argentina. Laura multiplied her prayers and sacrifices for the true conversion of her mother. A few hours before she died, she called her mother to her bedside and said to her, "Mother, I am going to die. I have asked Jesus for this and my prayers have been heard. Almost two years ago, I offered my life for the grace of your conversion. Mother, will I not have the joy of seeing you repent before I die?" Her mother, shocked and overwhelmed, made the promise: "Tomorrow morning I will go to the church and I will go to confession." Laura caught the eye of the priest attending her and said: "Father, my mother has just promised to abandon this man; bear witness to her promise!" Then she added: "Now I can die happy!" With these words, she expired on 22 January 1904 in Junin de los Andes (Argentina), at the age of 13, in the arms of her mother, who rediscovered her faith and put an end to the irregular union in which she had been living.

The admirable example of the life of the young girl now known as Blessed Laura is a demonstration of the seriousness with which a true Catholic treats the sixth commandment of God and the sacredness and indissolubility of marriage. Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to avoid even the appearance of approving an irregular or adulterous union. The Church has always faithfully preserved and transmitted this divine command in its doctrine and practice, without any ambiguity. With the offering of her young life, Blessed Laura certainly did not intend to represent one of several possible different doctrinal or pastoral interpretations. One does not offer one's life

for a possible doctrinal or pastoral interpretation, but for an immutable and universally valid Divine truth. This truth has been demonstrated by a large number of saints who offered their lives, beginning with Saint John the Baptist to the simple faithful today whose name only God knows.

The need for “Veritatis laetitia”

Fortunately, there can be no doubt that AL contains theological affirmations, as well as spiritual and pastoral guidelines of great value. However, realistically speaking, it is insufficient to say that AL should be interpreted according to the traditional doctrine and practice of the Church. If an ecclesiastical document – which, in our case, is neither definitive nor infallible – is found to contain elements likely to give rise to interpretations and applications that could have dangerous spiritual consequences, all members of the Church, and especially the bishops, as the fraternal collaborators of the Supreme Pontiff in effective collegiality, have a duty to report this and respectfully request an authentic interpretation.

In questions concerning Divine Faith, the Divine commandments and the sacredness and indissolubility of marriage, all members of the Church, from the simple faithful to the highest representative of the Magisterium, must join in the effort to keep intact the treasure of faith and practice. In fact, it was the Second Vatican Council that taught: "The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2: 20.27), cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" (St. Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.* 14 27), they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Thess 2: 13). Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints (cf. Jude 3) penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life" (*Lumen gentium*, 12). The Magisterium, for its part, is "not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been transmitted" (II Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 10).

It was the Second Vatican Council that encouraged all the faithful and especially the bishops to express their concerns and observations without fear, for the good of the Church as a whole. Servility and political correctness have introduced a pernicious evil into the life of the Church. The famous bishop and theologian of the Council of Trent, Melchior Cano O.P., said these memorable words: "Peter does not need our lies or flattery. Those who close their eyes to the facts and indiscriminately defend every decision of the Supreme Pontiff are those who contribute most to undermining the authority of the Holy See. They destroy its foundations instead of strengthening them."

Our Lord has taught us clearly what constitutes true love and the true joy of love: "*He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me*" (John 14, 21). When he gave man the sixth commandment and ordered him to observe the indissolubility of marriage, God gave it to all men without exception, not just to an elite. Already in the Old Testament, God said: "This commandment which I have given you today is certainly not beyond your strength and reach"

(Deuteronomy 30, 11) and "If you want to, you shall keep the commandments to remain faithful to his will" (Ecclesiasticus 15, 15). And Jesus said to all, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Which commandments? And Jesus answered, thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery" (Mt 19: 17-18). From the teaching of the apostles, we have received the same doctrine: "For to love God is to keep His commandments. And His commandments do not weigh heavily upon us" (1 John 5: 4).

There is no true, supernatural and eternal life without keeping the commandments of God: "I command you to observe his commandments. I have set before you life and death. Choose life!" (Deuteronomy 30, 16.19). There is therefore no real life and no real, genuine joy of love without truth. "Love consists in living according to his commandments" (2 John 6). The joy of love is the joy of the truth. The authentically Christian life consists in the life and in the joy of truth: "Learning that my children live in the truth, there is nothing that brings me greater joy" (3 John 4).

St. Augustine explains the intimate connection between joy and truth: "I ask them all whether they do not prefer the joy of truth to that obtained by lies. And they do not hesitate over this question any more than over the question of happiness. For the happy life is the joy of the truth, we all want the joy of the truth" (*Confessions*, X, 23).

The danger of general confusion with regard to the indissolubility of marriage

For some time already, we have seen, in some places and environments of the life of the Church, the tacit abuse of the admission of divorced and remarried couples to Holy Communion without requiring them to live in perfect continence. The unclear statements in Chapter VIII of AL have given a new dynamism to the declared advocates of the admission of divorced and remarried couples to Holy Communion in special cases.

We now observe the phenomenon of the abuse beginning to spread even more in practice, since those in favour of it are now feeling justified to some extent. There is also obviously some confusion with respect to the interpretation of the relevant assertions in Chapter VIII of the AL. This confusion is increased by the fact that everyone, both supporters of the admission of the divorced and remarried to Holy Communion and their opponents, are saying that "The doctrine of the Church concerning this issue has not changed".

Taking due account of historical and doctrinal differences, our situation shows some parallels and analogies with the general confusion caused by the Arian crisis in the 4th century. At that time, the apostolic and traditional faith in the true divinity of the Son of God was secured by means of the term "consubstantial" ("homoousios"), dogmatically proclaimed by the universal Magisterium of the Council of Nicaea I. The profound crisis of faith, accompanied by an almost universal confusion, was caused mainly by the refusal or avoidance strategies to use and profess the word "consubstantial" ("homoousios"). Instead, the clergy and mainly the episcopate began to propose alternative expressions that were ambiguous and imprecise, such as, for instance, "similar in substance" ("homoiousios") or simply "similar" ("homoios"). The formula "homoousios" adopted by the universal Magisterium of that time expressed the full and true divinity of the WORD with so much precision that it left no space for equivocal interpretation.

In the years 357-360, almost the entire episcopate had become Arian or Semi-Arian as a result of the following events: in 357, Pope Liberius signed one of the ambiguous formulations of Sirmium, in which the term "homoousios" was eliminated. Furthermore, the pope, in a scandalous move, excommunicated St. Athanasius. St. Hilary of Poitiers was the only bishop who dared to rebuke Pope Liberius severely for these ambiguous acts. In 359, the parallel synods of the Western episcopate in Rimini and that of the Eastern episcopate in Seuleukia had accepted fully Arian formulas that were even worse than the ambiguous formula signed by Pope Liberius. Describing the confusion of those times, St. Jerome said: "Everyone was surprised to realize that they had become Arians" ("Ingemuit totus orbis, et arianum se esse miratus est": *Adv Lucif*, 19).

Arguably, in our time, confusion is already spreading with regard to the sacramental discipline for divorced and remarried couples. There is therefore a very real basis for the assumption that the confusion may reach truly vast proportions, if one fail to propose and proclaim the following formula of the universal and infallible Magisterium: "Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance, which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples" (S. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84). This formula is unfortunately and incomprehensibly missing in AL. However, the apostolic exhortation inexplicably contains the following statement: "In such situations, many people, knowing and accepting the possibility of living "as brothers and sisters" which the Church offers them, point out that if certain expressions of intimacy are lacking, it often happens that faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffers" (AL, 298, n. 329). Such a statement leaves the impression of a contradiction with regard to the perennial teaching of the universal Magisterium, as formulated in the cited passage from *Familiaris Consortio* 84.

There is an urgent necessity for the Holy See to confirm and re-proclaim the cited formula of *Familiaris Consortio* 84, perhaps in the form of an authentic interpretation of AL. This formula may be seen, to some extent, the "homoousios" of our days. The lack of such a formal and explicit confirmation of the formula of *Familiaris Consortio* 84 from the Apostolic See could contribute to major confusion with regard to sacramental discipline, with the subsequent gradual and inevitable repercussions on doctrinal questions. This would lead to a situation to which it would be possible, in the future, to apply the following statement: "Everyone was surprised to find that divorce had been accepted in practice" ("Ingemuit totus orbis, et divortium in praxi se accepisse miratus est").

Confusion in sacramental discipline with regard to divorced and remarried couples, with its inevitable doctrinal implications, would contradict the nature of the Catholic Church, such as it was described by St. Irenaeus in the second century: "The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered around the world, keeps them carefully as though inhabiting a single house, and she believes in an identical manner, as though she had only one soul and one heart, and she preaches, teaches and transmits in a unanimous voice, as though having only one mouth" (*Adversus haereses*, I, 10, 2).

The See of Peter, that is, the sovereign Pontiff, is the guarantor of the unity of the faith and of apostolic sacramental discipline. Considering the confusion regarding sacramental practice in

respect of the divorced and remarried, and the many differing interpretations of AL amongst priests and bishops, one may consider justified the call on our beloved Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ, the "sweet Christ on earth" (St. Catherine of Siena), to order the publication of an authentic interpretation of AL, which must necessarily contain the explicit proclamation of the disciplinary principle of the universal and infallible Magisterium concerning the admission of divorced and remarried couples to the sacraments, according to the formulation in *Familiaris Consortio* 84.

In the great Arian confusion of the 4th century, St. Basil the Great made an urgent appeal to the pope of Rome, asking him to give through his word a clear direction, so as finally to ensure unity in the thought of faith and charity (cf.. *Ep.* 70).

An authentic interpretation of AL by the Apostolic See would bring to the entire Church ("claritatis laetitia") the joy in clarity. Such clarity will ensure the joy in love ("amoris laetitia"), a love and a joy that would not be "according to the minds of men, but to the mind of God" (Mt 16, 23). And this is what counts for the joy, the life and the eternal salvation of the divorced and remarried, and of all men.

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