

The Most Rev. Aldo di Cillo Pagotto, SSS
The Most Rev. Robert F. Vasa
The Most Rev. Athanasius Schneider



Preferential Option for **THE FAMILY**

**100 Questions and Answers
relating to the Synod**

With a preface by His Eminence
Jorge Arturo Cardinal Medina Estévez

Edizioni Supplica Filiale

The Most Rev. Aldo di Cillo Pagotto, SSS

ARCHBISHOP OF PARÁIBA (BRAZIL)

The Most Rev. Robert F. Vasa

BISHOP OF SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA (USA)

The Most Rev. Athanasius Schneider

AUXILIARY BISHOP OF ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)

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Via Nizza 110 – 00198 Rome, Italy
www.supplicafiliale.org
Email: segreteria.supplicafiliale@outlook.com

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Preface

That the family finds itself in a real and profound crisis in many regions appears to be an objectively true assessment. Facing this reality, it would not be a wise attitude to ignore or minimise this crisis. We must take it into account, try to evaluate its scope and magnitude, and strive to find ways to overcome it. This is the goal pursued, with realism and hope, by this booklet *Preferential Option for the Family* that I now introduce.

The crisis of the family is not the only one afflicting the world today. There are others, and it is not uncommon to find they are mutually related and condition one another. For example, we can think about the use of falsehood in all its forms as a ‘legitimate’ resource to address complex situations; the proliferation of selfish behaviour; the scandalous gaps between those who enjoy a disproportionate and even luxurious well-being and the crowd of those who lack even the strictly necessary; the monstrous expansion of drug trafficking and addiction, and other events that threaten the very roots of human society.

Some believe that the solution to these problems lies mainly in multiplying laws and controls. Without denying the real importance of these social resources, a Christian should remember the words of Jesus: “For from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man” (Mt 15:19 ff; Mk 7:21-23). It is of the essence, therefore, to have a conversion of the heart, without which external instruments will only have a limited and short-lived effectiveness.

Now then, a conversion of the heart presupposes a radical purification of thought, as St. Paul warns: “And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). Many realities of this world bear the imprint of the evil one (cf. 1 Jn 5:19), whom Jesus called “a liar and

the father of lies” (Jn 8:44), and his footprint is manifested mainly as errors with the appearance of truth which falsify the options for what is the genuine good of human beings.

Naturally, in the field of the family, a conversion of the heart requires a lively awareness of its nature as an image of God’s spousal love for His people, and of the love of Christ for His Church. The Christian family is born of a sacramental bond, of an outpouring of grace and, as such, of a call to holiness to those who must live their faith in the marital state and with parental responsibilities, which are not limited to temporal welfare but must be projected to the sphere of grace during this earthly pilgrimage in order to end happily in the destiny of glory and blessedness to which our baptismal vocation calls us.

By its very nature, the Christian family is a substantive religious reality, not just an accident that can indifferently be present or not. For Christian spouses, as for every disciple of Christ, the programmatic statement of St. Paul stands: “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord” (Rom 14:8). And that happens in all circumstances, so that no one can escape the joyful fact of having received the baptismal consecration, and, for those who are married, of living in a “home church.” Hence the responsibility of parents to proclaim the faith to children, and the importance of daily family prayer before the altar or image presiding the home.

Like all Christians, the members of a family may have weaknesses and still commit sins. In such cases they can resort to the infinite and fatherly mercy of God, Who calls them to conversion through a sincere repentance, which, as the Council of Trent teaches, is a “sorrow of the soul and detestation the sin committed, together with the resolution not to commit it again” (see Denz. 1676).

Jorge Arturo Cardinal Medina Estévez

Foreword

What is this booklet about?

This is a handbook prepared with the method of questions and answers which summarises a few issues in a clear and simple way, particularly from the standpoint of Church doctrine on marriage and the family.

It addresses difficult but fundamental issues regarding the family in the modern world; not only those dealt with at last year's Extraordinary Synod of Bishops but also others being debated among intellectuals, journalists and commentators, believers and unbelievers, who want the Catholic Church to adopt their own vision of things. Many of these issues will likely re-emerge in the next Synod and will undoubtedly be covered by the mass media, the blogosphere and social networks, arguably the sectors which most immediately affect and shape public opinion today.

What is the scope of this study?

While the family is a very broad topic, the size of this volume is necessarily limited. We seek to draw from the enormous wealth that this issue holds for Church pastoral policy by dealing with topics such as the ecclesiastical status of marriage, the family seen as a small domestic Church, the vocation to holiness in marriage, family prayer, and parents as the first teachers of the Gospel to each other and to their children. About each of these topics, a whole book could be written which would greatly help the evangelisation of the family. We sincerely hope that the points presented here will be taken into account at the Synod of 2015.

But the pastoral needs of the moment also require us to be entirely clear on crucial and delicate points debated in the latest Synod whose interpretation was partially distorted by some theological schools with overwhelming support from the mass-media. It therefore seems appropriate to reiterate some fundamental doc-

trinal truths and pastoral requirements essential to the problem of the family, whose real situation is quite different from the one they would have us believe.

What readership is this booklet written for?

It is designed primarily to serve as a guide for bishops, priests, religious, catechists, individual faithful in positions of responsibility in the Church, and also lay people concerned about the growing problems of the family and wishing to counter the reckless and powerful anti-family offensive of the mass-media.

“Men refuse to do what is prescribed by the word of God. In fact, they consider the divine word itself hostile by the mere fact that it commands. Even as I repeat this word, I fear that I too will be considered an enemy by some. But after all, what do I care? The God who makes me strong pushes me to talk and not fear the protests of men. Whether they like it or not, I will speak!”

(Saint Augustine of Hippo, Sermon IX, On Marriage, No. 3).

– I –

The Synod of Bishops and its Authority

01 QUESTION: **What is a Synod of Bishops?**

ANSWER:

The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution of the Catholic Church, established by Pope Paul VI with the *Motu Proprio Apostolica sollicitudo* (15 September 1965) in order to advise and help the Pope govern the universal Church and implement the greater “collegiality” called for by the Second Vatican Council. The Synod is convened by the Pope and meets in three forms: ordinary general meeting, extraordinary general meeting, and special meeting.

02 QUESTION: **Do the conclusions of the Synod of Bishops have magisterial value, and are they therefore binding on the faithful?**

ANSWER:

The Synod is a solely consultative assembly that has no Magisterial weight in and of itself. As for its decision-making power, it receives this only from the Pope if and when he decides to impart it, like any other assembly. However, as a rule, the Pope is inspired by the synod’s conclusions to publish a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, which proposes the findings of the Synod to the whole Church.

03 QUESTION: **Can the Synod of Bishops change Church doctrine in points related to faith or morals?**

ANSWER:

Neither the Synod of Bishops nor any other Church authority has the competence to change the doctrine of the Church.

“[The Church] does not...evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and

evangelical. Since the Church did not make either of these laws, she cannot be their arbiter – only their guardian and interpreter. It could never be right for her to declare lawful what is in fact unlawful, since that, by its very nature, is always opposed to the true good of man” (Bl. Paul VI, enc. *Humanae vitae*, 25 July 1968, No.18).

“A doctrine which lasted for centuries and has been constantly reaffirmed by the Church cannot be changed without risking the credibility of the Church” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, *I divorziati risposati e i Sacramenti dell’Eucaristia e della Penitenza*, [The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance, Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, p. 24).

04 QUESTION: If not the Synod, can at least the Pope change the teaching of the Church on fundamental points of moral theology, such as sacramental marriage?

ANSWER:

Many key points of moral theology, such as the doctrine on sacramental marriage, are of direct divine institution and therefore cannot be changed by any ecclesiastical authority, not even by the Supreme Pontiff.

“It seems quite clear then that the non-extension of the Roman Pontiff’s power to ratified and consummated sacramental marriages is taught by the Church’s Magisterium as a doctrine to be held definitively” (St. John Paul II, address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, 21 January 2000).

05 QUESTION: If not doctrine, can at least Church discipline in matters of marriage and family be changed by the Synod?

ANSWER:

The Synod has no authority to change the discipline of the Church in matters of marriage and family. Only the Roman Pontiff can do it, and always consistent with the revealed Truth and the salvation of souls.

“Discipline cannot be deemed as a merely human and changeable reality, but has a much broader meaning. Discipline also includes the Law of God, such as the Commandments, which are not subject to change although not being directly of a doctrinal nature; the same can be said of all the rules of divine right. Discipline often includes everything that a Christian must believe in his life commitment to be a faithful disciple of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, *I divorziati risposati e i Sacramenti dell’Eucaristia e della Penitenza* [The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance], Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, p. 29).

06 QUESTION: **Some argue, however, one does not convene two Synods on the family to reiterate existing doctrine. Are we therefore on the eve of a “pastoral turnaround”?**

ANSWER:

If it is true that you do not convene a synod only to reaffirm doctrine, neither can you call one to weaken it. Indeed, one should prevent certain forces to venture into making proposals that contradict it or endorse a slippery and ambiguous language that hides the real problems and upright solutions.

– II –

The Preparation for the 2014 Synod on the Family

07 QUESTION: **How did the project of the Synod of Bishops on the family come up?**

ANSWER:

On 11 May 2013, the Pontifical Council for the Family published the “Preparatory Document” on the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic, “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” set to take place in the Vatican from 5 to 19 October 2014. This Extraordinary Assembly, according to the Pope’s desire, was meant to prepare the Ordinary Assembly to be held in the Vatican from 4 to 25 October 2015. It is, therefore, a Synod on the family divided into two phases with one year in between.

08 QUESTION: **What was the original idea of the Synod?**

ANSWER:

The Synod’s organisers wanted to have a concrete vision of the situation of the family in modern society in order to start a new theological and pastoral reflection.

The *Relatio Synodi*, that is, the final document of the 2014 Synod, affirms the importance of “*listening* in order to look at the reality of the family today in all its complexities, both lights and shadows” (*Relatio Synodi*, Introduction no. 4).

09 QUESTION: **What was this “listening” about?**

ANSWER:

In order to know the actual situation of the family in modern society and to listen to their needs, before the 2014 Synod a *Ques-*

tionnaire was put together and later annexed to the Preparatory Document sent to the bishops and to many Catholic organizations around the world with the aim of collecting suggestions formulated by the “people of God.”

- 10 QUESTION: **Was this Questionnaire formulated so as to obtain a true and complete picture of the current situation of the family?**

ANSWER:

As we will see later, authoritative scholars have expressed numerous concerns about the *Questionnaire*, showing that it excluded many realities and problems, even important ones, while presenting a partial or exaggerated version of others. However, one can see that a reorganization of the most challenging issues was made both in the *Lineamenta* and in the new Questionnaire for the 2015 Synod, although their surprise reappearance (as happened in the Synod of 2014) cannot be excluded.

- 11 QUESTION: **Does that mean that the questions of the Questionnaire did not reflect the real and crucial problems of the family?**

ANSWER:

Some questions on the *Questionnaire* seemed formulated to receive a certain type of answers that presented a partial view of reality. Indeed, according to information provided by the media, many answers received by the Synod, above all from certain European countries, gave prominence to marginal issues over central, emotional over doctrinal and pathological situations over normal ones. In essence, the image of the family that arises from the answers seems to resemble less the real one than the one the secularist culture propagates through the mass media.

“During the Year of the Family, prayer should first of all be an encouraging witness on the part of those families who live out their human and Christian vocation in the communion of the home. How many of them there are in every nation, diocese and parish! With reason it can be said that these families make up ‘the norm’” (St. John Paul II, *Gratissimam sane*, Letter to Families, 2 February 1994, No. 5).

- 12 QUESTION: **Can you give me an example of this?**

ANSWER:

An example of bias is the third part of the *Relatio Synodi* titled “Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives.” It identifies the different types of couples in order to develop a specific pastoral

care. Based on the word count, here is the percentage of attention the document gives each of the following categories:

Boyfriends: 7%

Married: 7%

Cohabiting or civilly married: 17%

Divorced / remarried: 61%

Homosexuals: 7%

“The broad question that the issue [of the family] encompasses, and in fact is almost summed up in one important question, albeit rather marginal and secondary – reception of Holy Communion by divorcees – when the most relevant issues should be sought on a higher level: to see why these people have such difficulty to access the Eucharist; in other words, what the meaning of Christian marriage and its peculiarities are” (cf. Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, *I divorziati risposati e i Sacramenti dell'Eucaristia e della Penitenza*, [“The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance,” Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, p. 7).

According to Cardinal de Paolis in his above-quoted address, Philippe Cardinal Barbarin, Archbishop of Lyon, even told the press that although the bishops were called to talk about marriage, they found themselves in a situation that required discussing about the divorced and remarried.”

13 QUESTION: Which are, then, the families now in trouble and deserving of aid and protection?

ANSWER:

Many types of families today face real and serious problems. Take, for example families that are facing challenges which threaten their integrity or the Christian education of their children; large families that do not receive sufficient support from the community or the state (and, sometimes, even from their pastors). Or families in economic or psychological difficulty such as single parent-families in which the father or mother is alone and unable to make a living or have had their children taken away; we think of families with disabled or drug addicted children, those marked by conflicts or scandals, uprooted from their environment, persecuted because of their faith, unfairly discriminated against or exiled for political reasons (cf. St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 77).

These are the families in real difficulty that deserve preferential attention from the Synod. “But it is also proper to recognise the value of the witness of those spouses who, even when abandoned

by their partner, with the strength of faith and of Christian hope have not entered a new union.... For this reason they must be encouraged and helped by the pastors and the faithful of the Church” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 20).

14 QUESTION: What are the most used words in the Questionnaire and in the Synod’s texts?

ANSWER:

Of course, after the word *family*, the most used ones are *life, love, pastoral, mercy, affection, woman*. The word *doctrine* occurs only three times and in marginal contexts; the words *morality, virtue, fidelity* and *chastity* appear only once. Important family-related words such as *commitment, adultery, contraception, abortion*, are entirely absent (cf. Enrico Cattaneo, *Non solo famiglia. Ecco le parole chiave del Sinodo*, [Not Just Family: Here Are the Synod’s Key Words], in *La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana*, 3 February 2015).

– III –

The Church and the Family

15 QUESTION: In the past, a synod dealt specifically with the family several times. Why should we again visit this subject today?

ANSWER:

Because the family profoundly involves man’s personal, social and historical reality. Moreover, the family is not only the mother-cell of society and the “sanctuary of life,” but also and above all the “domestic church” (*Lumen gentium*, No. 11).

Especially today the family is subjected to a process that risks changing not only its vital conditions but also its genetic heritage, as many sociologists have warned (cf. e.g., Pierpaolo Donati, *Famiglia: il genoma che fa vivere la società* [The Genome that Makes Society Live], Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2013, chap. VI). To remedy this danger, the Church has made many efforts by teaching and establishing study centres; but more disenchanted observers admit that “we have been speaking for decades now about the ‘new evangelization,’ but the results are rather scarce.... The urgent question that we have to ask ourselves is: what is missing in our efforts to evangelise and announce Jesus Christ? Which way should we go?” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, *I divorziati risposati e i Sacramenti dell’Eucaristia e della Penitenza*, [“The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance,” Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, pp. 5 & 29).

“The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 47).

“The future of evangelization depends in great part on the ‘Church of the home.’ This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God’s plan....In places where anti-religious legislation endeavours even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, ‘the Church of the home’ remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 52).

16 QUESTION: Is there is a relationship between the crisis of the family and the laws now in force around the world?

ANSWER:

As a well-known legal maxim says, “today’s law will become tomorrow’s custom,” that is, in the long run the public will accept as lawful what the state determines as legitimate. For example, divorce-favouring legislation creates a trend that influences the mentality of the faithful against the stability and indissolubility of marriage. Therefore, in order to save the natural or sacramental marriage from extinction, Catholics must counter the divorce mentality spread by civil laws.

Prophetically, Pope Leo XIII thus expressed himself on the occasion of the legislative approval of divorce in France.

“Truly, it is hardly possible to describe how great the evils that flow from divorce are. Matrimonial contracts are by it made variable; mutual kindness is weakened; deplorable inducements to unfaithfulness are supplied; harm is done to the education and training of children; occasion is afforded for the breaking up of homes; the seeds of dissension are sown among families; the dignity of womanhood is lessened and brought low, and women run the risk of being deserted....Further still, if the matter be duly pondered, we shall clearly see these evils to be the more especially dangerous, because, divorce once being tolerated, there will be no restraint powerful enough to keep it within the bounds marked out or presumed. Great indeed is the force of example, and even greater still the might of passion. With such incitements it must needs follow

that the eagerness for divorce, daily spreading by devious ways, will seize upon the minds of many like a virulent contagious disease, or like a flood of water bursting through every barrier” (Leon XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, 10 February 1880, Nos. 156-158).

In fact, 135 years later, Prof. Stephan Kampowski, Professor at the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family finds that “The mere existence of the legal institution of divorce has greatly contributed to the spread of this attitude. The law has an educational effect. The mere existence of a divorce law in secular society indicates....that marriage is not meant to last but that it is rather a temporary arrangement” (cf. J.J. Pérez-Soba & S. Kampowski, *Il vangelo della famiglia nel dibattito sinodale* [The Gospel of the Family in the Synod Discussion], Cantagalli, Siena 2014, pp. 122-123).

“A broken family can, for its part, consolidate a specific form of ‘anti-civilization’, destroying love in its various expressions, with inevitable consequences for the whole of life in society” (St. John Paul II; *Gratissimam sane*, Letter to Families, 2 February 1994, No. 13).

17 QUESTION: **In addition to the law, are there factors that have led or contributed to the crisis of the family?**

ANSWER:

The crisis of the family is the result of a process of cultural and moral decadence often accentuated by the lack of prayer and interior life.

Selfishness, lust, adultery, divorce, abortion, contraception, artificial insemination, sexual (dis)education, crisis of parental authority, a renunciation by parents to make the effort to educate their children, to say nothing of pornography and drug addiction: all these factors have encouraged an increasing deterioration of the family situation. This situation, however, is not the result of an inevitable and unstoppable historical evolution but is caused by a profound moral and cultural subversion fuelled by the sexual revolution that broke out in 1968 under the banner of “I own myself” and “it is forbidden to forbid,” advocating individual freedom without rules or limits.

18 QUESTION: **Are these degrading factors isolated, each having its own explanation? Or are they part of a process of cause and effect?**

ANSWER:

Recent history shows that less serious factors have prepared the advent of more serious ones, so they should not be considered

in isolation but as phases of a single and gradual destructive process leading to the ruin of the family. Consequently, every concession to disintegrating factor is not a barrier to prevent the worst but a bridge to slide down the slope; for example, accepting divorce has not prevented the advent of civil unions, indeed has paved the way for them.

“Not all the sponsors of these new doctrines are carried to the extremes of unbridled lust; there are those who, striving as it were to ride a middle course, believe nevertheless that something should be conceded in our times as regards certain precepts of the divine and natural law. But these likewise, more or less wittingly, are emissaries of the great enemy who is ever seeking to sow cockle among the wheat” (Pope Pius XI, enc. *Casti Connubii*, 31 December 1930).

- 19 QUESTION: **Would it not be appropriate, as was said in the Synod, to emphasise “the fact that evangelization needs clearly to denounce cultural, social and economic factors” that weaken the family? (*Relatio post disceptationem*, No. 33)?**

ANSWER:

Without neglecting economic and social problems, it must be said that the family crisis has mainly religious and moral roots.

Both in the analysis of the situation and in the choice of solutions we must be careful not to replace the doctrinal-moral criterion with an empirical one such as the sociological criterion, which can falsify the pastoral planning by creating the illusion that a socio-economic reform could resolve the crisis of the family.

- 20 QUESTION: **The Synod’s *Relatio post disceptationem* reads: “De facto marriages are very numerous, not because of a rejection of Christian values concerning the family and matrimony but primarily because celebrating a marriage is too expensive. As a result, material poverty leads people into de facto unions” (No. 38). Does this not confirm that economic conditions are responsible for the current family crisis?**

ANSWER:

In fact, the cohabitation phenomenon began precisely in rich and well-educated ambiances whose progressive ideological approach has led to a rejection of marriage as a “petty bourgeois custom.” The origins of “de facto couples” thus has less an economic matrix than an ideological one, consisting in a refusal of the family as a traditional homestead. Over time this refusal, touted by the media, has become a rampant social phenomenon.

“The times in which we are living tend to restrict family units to two generations. Often this is the case because available housing is too limited, especially in large cities. But it is not infrequently due to the belief that having several generations living together interferes with privacy and makes life too difficult” (St. John Paul II, *Gratissimam sane*, Letter to Families, 2 February 1994, No. 10).

- 21 QUESTION: **So is the crisis of the family caused not so much by sociological but rather psychological factors, that is, “a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity [which does] not always help greater maturity to be reached” (*Relatio Synodi*, No.10)?**

ANSWER:

The anomalous psychological factors described above are rather symptoms than causes of the family crisis. Healing them requires a correct conception of man, of his spiritual life, and of his supernatural destiny. Without giving up the use of natural factors, a pastoral solution to the current crisis must be based primarily on the truths of the faith and on the practice of supernatural virtues.

– IV –

The Sexual Revolution

- 22 QUESTION: **According to some Synod fathers, recent historical developments have favoured an anthropological-cultural change that now affects all aspects of life and requires profound changes in the Church’s pastoral ministry and perhaps also in some obsolete aspects of the traditional doctrine on man and the family. Could these be signs of the times?**

ANSWER:

“...The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 4). In other words, the signs of the times must be judged according to the Gospel.

For the Church, the sole desirable “new man” and the only radical change man can undergo is operated by sanctifying grace, which elevates him to the supernatural level and makes him “like unto God.” Even very powerful historical-cultural factors cannot change human nature; they can elevate or degrade it, but not change its substance. Recent changes have in fact occurred because of an induced cultural revolution that has changed trends,

habits and mentalities, first in society and then also in individuals. These changes cannot simply be accepted as if they were a moot point; rather, they should be evaluated on the basis of a moral judgment in the light of the Divine Law and the natural law, which are taught by the Church.

23 QUESTION: Isn't the reference to the "sexual revolution" merely an excuse to oppose the inevitable evolution of customs?

ANSWER:

The sexual revolution is a fact easily verifiable by historical and social study and can be measured in the serious consequences it has produced over the last 60 years.

This revolution claims that humanity will become happy only when it can freely express its instincts, especially the sexual one, by abolishing any rule that can limit its expansion, whether legal, moral, or religious. This requires abolishing not only the "bourgeois society" but also and above all the family by rendering its formation impossible or by relativizing it to the point of including any type of union, even homosexual.

The expression "sexual revolution" was launched in 1936 with a book by the same name which had as subtitle, "Sexuality in the cultural struggle for the socialist restructuring of man." Its author was the Austrian Wilhelm Reich, a leading member of a school that combines Freud's psychoanalytic theories with Marx's social ones. These ideas were spread by Herbert Marcuse and theoreticians of the 1968 Sorbonne Revolution.

Philosopher Jean-Marie Meyer denounced this ideology from the even broader perspective of a neo-evolutionary materialist current inspired in Darwin, according to which man, family, sexuality, person etc. are outmoded notions destined to be replaced by a new state of affairs freed from such prejudices (cf. J-M Meyer, "Famiglia, Natura e Persona" [Family, Nature and Person] in *Lexicon, Termini ambigui e discussi su famiglia, vita e questioni etiche* [Lexicon of Ambiguous Terms and Controversial Topics on Family, Life and Ethical Issues] by the Pontifical Council for the Family, 2006, Centro Editoriale EDB, pp. 469-473).

24 QUESTION: Isn't the sexual revolution a spontaneous phenomenon that manifests impulses and needs of contemporary society?

ANSWER:

The sexual revolution has not been and still is not a spontaneous phenomenon but one produced and directed by well-organised

and financed ideological groups and lobbies. They fuel certain disorderly tendencies in modern man to achieve a carefully planned revolutionary design. These lobbies are made up by thousands of small groups of activists aided by an international political-financial system and by a well-oiled mass media propaganda machine.

25 QUESTION: Isn't the sexual revolution a positive evolution of a culture which has allowed greater personal freedom?

ANSWER:

Such a conception of personal liberty is false and dangerous because it is understood as the ability to choose rather than adhere to the good.

The sexual revolution has not favoured greater freedom but rather a greater enslavement of man to his baser instincts and led us back “to the seedy depths of paganism.” It has aroused among citizens a kind of war of all against all to ensure the greatest possible sexual pleasure (F. López-Illana, *Matrimonio, separazione, divorzio e coscienza* [“Matrimony, Separation, Divorce, and Conscience”], in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Lexicon. Termini ambigui e discussi su famiglia, vita e questioni etiche* [Lexicon of Ambiguous Terms and Controversial Topics on Family, Life and Ethical Issues] by the Pontifical Council for the Family, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 2006, pp. 683-700).

From the religious point of view, the sexual revolution has alienated many people from the natural order created by God, from the Redemption operated by Jesus Christ, and from the sanctification operated by the Holy Spirit through the Church. Thus, the sexual revolution marked a counter-historical return to old pagan customs in which sexual satisfaction prevailed over the sense of duty and responsibility, and the sexual act was separated from true love and procreation (Cf. JJ Pérez-Soba & S. Kampowski, op. cit. chap. 1).

26 QUESTION: What aspect of this process of sexual revolution most seriously threatens the family today?

ANSWER:

It undoubtedly is gender ideology. It theorises that man is born dominated by a “perverse and polymorphic” anarchic instinct that can tend toward any erotic object and builds any identity and sex role (precisely called gender). Therefore, everyone has the right to freely choose one of many possible genders and eventually change it according to his or her own new “sexual orientation”.

According to this ideology, male-female sexual diversity and thus husband-wife and father-mother differences are not derived

from nature but imposed by an arbitrary “culture” through a discriminatory and repressive system. This phenomenon is perpetuated by institutions (family, school, church) that mould the education of children and prevent them from choosing their favourite “sexual orientation” and “reproductive role”.

The sexual revolution seeks to liberate children and adults from this repressive system in order to create a “sexually classless society” by “deconstructing” sexual and reproductive roles and social institutions, especially family, school, and religion. For this end, it seeks to forbid school curricula, family “re-education” and religious “updating” programs from teaching morality and faith, replacing them with gender ideology (Cf. O. Alzamora Revoredo, *Ideologia di genere: pericoli e portata* [Gender Ideology: Dangers and Scope, in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Lexicon* cit. pp. 545-560).

Clearly, this revolution, launched at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995 promotes a dangerous sexual, cultural and social anti-Christian subversion which has crept into many Catholic circles and so far seems to worry more parents than shepherds.

– V –

The 2014 Synod’s Approach on Church-World Relationships

27 QUESTION: The Synod’s procedural approach assigns a primary role to “listening” to the faithful. How should one evaluate this novelty?

ANSWER:

In her procedures, the Church has always started from the Truths of the Faith, drawn from the Word of God and from Tradition, and then developed a pastoral policy to achieve it in real life in order to illuminate and guide men to eternal salvation. As an ancient motto says, “become what you are,” that is, fulfil your mission. Not surprisingly, Pope John Paul II gave the title of “Family, Become What You Are!” to a paragraph of his *Familiaris Consortio* dedicated to the tasks of the Christian family.

The Synod’s tendency was to do the opposite, that is, to start from concrete situations in order to develop a pastoral policy and discipline accommodated to them. Thus, according to the great canonist Velasio de Paolis, one is in danger of slipping toward

“situation morals.” Yet, in so doing, one implicitly proclaims the motto: “Be what you become,” that is, adapt yourself to the prevailing trends.

This method assumes the conception of “historicism”, which does not start from the revealed Truth but from the concrete historical situation. Some claim that the Church should adapt herself in order to “animate” that situation in a Christian way, while others say she should do so in order to survive.

“In fact, the dialogue with the world has turned into adaptation and perhaps also led to a certain worldliness and secularization of the Church, which ended up not having enough grip on the culture of the time and penetration with her own message. This has led to a crisis inside the Church....In the laudable attempt to dialogue with modern culture, the Church runs the risk of putting aside the realities that are typical and specific to her, that is, the Divine Truth, and of adapting herself to the world. Of course this would be done not by denying but by failing to propose her truth or by hesitating to propose ideals of life that are conceivable and feasible only in the light of faith and with the help of grace. The Church runs the risk of diluting her truer and more profound message for fear of being rejected by modern culture or not being welcomed by it” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, [“The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance,” Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, pp. 7 & 30).

28 QUESTION: But has this approach really been endorsed by one of the Synod Fathers?

ANSWER:

An important Synod Father has reportedly stated: “There is also a theological development, all theologians say so. Everything is not static: we march in history, and the Christian religion is history, not ideology. The current context of the family is different from that of thirty years ago, at the time of [St. John Paul II’s] *Familiaris Consortio*. Without history, I do not know where we are going; if we deny this, we remain two thousand years behind” (*Corriere della Sera*, 4 October 2014).

29 QUESTION: Can we therefore say that the Christian religion evolves and changes with the winds of history?

ANSWER:

The Christian Religion is not historical evolution, changeable and contradictory, but revealed Truth, Source of Life and Way of

salvation, which identifies with Jesus Christ: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). The Saviour commanded His Church to evangelise humanity, not to be evangelised by it; to guide men, not to be guided by them; to sanctify history, not to be sanctified by it. The Catholic Church has the mission to proclaim the Good News, sanctify humanity, and lead souls to eternal life. Therefore, the *Mater, Magistra et Domina gentium* is the Church, not human history or the world.

The fact remains that new problems require satisfactory answers, which, however, must still be faithful to the intangible deposit of faith.

30 QUESTION: Is it true that the moral teachings of the Church have lost touch with real life because they are based on a bygone reality and require a profound adjustment to the concrete situation?

ANSWER:

By definition, the teachings of the Church, even in the moral field, are *Catholic*, that is, concern the whole and not the part and are therefore permanent and universal, valid always and everywhere. The Greek Fathers used to call them “everlasting treasure” (*Thèma eis aèi*) because they are based on two immutable realities: human nature created by God and the eternal truths revealed by Jesus Christ. If anything, it is the “modern world” that has “lost touch” with the truth on many important issues and has divorced from the Church, going wayward and suffering the collapse we are now witnessing.

The historical transformation of society is a result of cultural and moral errors. The Church should not adapt to these errors or their consequences but rather identify, denounce, and remedy them. Therein lies a real “update” of her ministry.

31 QUESTION: Are the recent changes in family and sexual life part of modern culture and the fruit of an inevitable historical evolution that should not be condemned but merely understood?

ANSWER:

The cultural and social changes caused by the sexual revolution are too easily seen as inevitable and irreversible; in fact, they often are only ephemeral pathological manifestations of a curable spiritual disease. At any rate, no human facts escape moral judgment; indeed, all of them can and should be evaluated with the yardstick of truth and justice as St. Paul often does also by listing conducts unacceptable for Christians (Rom. 1: 26-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9).

Recently, the well-known moralist Carlo Cardinal Caffara, Archbishop of Bologna, speaking about a certain mindset that should be avoided in the Church exemplified with the case of a “feel-good attitude that considers the culture [of the sexual revolution] I talked about an unstoppable historical process. So they propose to compromise with it by saving what seems capable of being recognised as good” (Carlo Cardinal Caffara, “Tre strade per costruire la verità del matrimonio [Three Ways to Build the Truth of Marriage] in *Avvenire*, 12 March 2015).

32 QUESTION: What questions, then, should one ask about the current divorce between the Church and the world?

ANSWER:

The questions are: Why did the “modern world” repudiate the teachings of the Church on so many key issues? Which historical process has led to the current divorce between the world and the Church? How can the Church “heal the wounds” of contemporary society and nurse it back to health without being infected by its illness? By answering these questions one will see to which real situations the Church’s pastoral care should be adapted and to what extent this is possible without denying her moral doctrine.

It does not help to get busy just to stem the worst and most sensational effects of the crisis. Evil can only be eliminated if one employs the right medicine and uproots the evil roots that produce it. But to do that, pastors must avoid emotionalism, make a correct diagnosis, and then prescribe the most effective cure (cf. Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, [“The Divorced and Remarried and the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance,” Keynote Address at the Regional Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Umbria, 8 January 2015, pp. 6-9).

– VI –

Moral Teaching and Pastoral Practice

33 QUESTION: Many say that the Synod will not change the moral doctrine on the family but only “update” Church pastoral care in this matter. Is that quite true?

ANSWER:

Some bishops argue the aim is not only to “update” pastoral policy but also to decide on changes concerning doctrine.

This view supposes that the traditional moral doctrine is now contradicted not only by the practice of many believers, which is

a fact, but also by the demands of the ecclesial ministry, which raises a question of law. In order to resolve this contradiction it is proposed that the law be adapted to the facts, i.e., that moral doctrine be “deepened” and adapted to the needs of the “new pastoral” policy, consistent with the need to “listen” to the people of God. Instead, what the Church needs is a real reform which restores the behaviour of Christians back to the purity of morals and doctrinal integrity, both of which have been abandoned.

Other prelates have even expressed a view that could be summarised thus: “A sexual relationship which is objectively sinful largely loses its negative moral character if both partners maintain this relationship on a regular basis and show mutual loyalty.” If this fallacy were to be applied to other situations, one would be able to say, for example: “If two accomplices regularly steal from a store and remain faithful to their mutual covenants, this will significantly reduce the negative character of the crime.”

34 QUESTION: Even if no doctrinal change but only a new “pastoral approach” is proposed, can pastoral policy be changed without implicitly changing doctrine as well?

ANSWER:

Just as the body cannot be separated from the soul that informs it, so also pastoral practice cannot be completely separated from the moral doctrine that justifies it. Therefore, a change in pastoral policy can easily result, at least implicitly, in a change of the implied doctrine.

Moreover, there are no neutral practices; every practice presupposes a theory, a philosophical position, a particular understanding of the human being, society and history. The very concept of practice presupposes an end toward which one tends or an ideal to be attained. Indeed, a practice is considered valid when it achieves the end to which it tended. Therefore, practice presupposes an ideal to be translated into action. In our case, the concept of “pastoral practice” only has meaning and value if it presupposes the true idea of Church, humanity, and family.

“Pastoral care is an art based on dogmatic morality, spirituality, and the law, in order to act prudently according to the concrete case. There can be no pastoral ministry in disharmony with the truths of the Church and her morals, at variance with her laws, or not oriented at achieving the ideal of Christian life. A pastoral policy at variance with the truth believed and lived by the Church...

would easily turn into arbitrariness harmful to Christian life itself” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, Keynote Address cit., p. 26).

For his part, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Robert Cardinal Sarah, recently stated: “The idea of placing the Magisterium in a beautiful reliquary detaching it from a pastoral practice that could evolve according to circumstances, fashions and passions is a form of heresy, a dangerous schizophrenic pathology” (La Stampa, 24 February 2015).

35 QUESTION: If not the doctrine as such, is it at least reasonable for a new pastoral policy to change Church discipline on the family?

ANSWER:

It depends on what is meant by “discipline”. Often, this term refers to a mere system of practical rules that help man in his thinking and activities. In this sense it can be modifiable. In fact, in the Catholic Church there are conventional and changeable disciplinary provisions but also disciplinary rules of divine origin – for example, the Ten Commandments – which therefore cannot be changed by Church authorities.

Some rules of discipline on marriage and the family are of divine origin, were reaffirmed and completed by Jesus Christ himself, and therefore cannot be modified by any Church authority.

“Pastoral care must not be understood as if it were somehow in conflict with the law. Rather, one should begin by assuming that the fundamental point of encounter between the law and pastoral care is *love for the truth*” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of 22 February 2007, No. 29).

36 QUESTION: On many issues of sexual morality, shouldn’t the Church adapt to the mentality and practice of a majority of the faithful, who today require more flexibility?

ANSWER:

The Church has the maternal mission of saving the faithful by also sanctifying them in their family life; therefore, the faithful are the ones that have to adapt to the moral teachings of the Church by practicing the truth preached by Jesus Christ. Moreover, as Giacomo Cardinal Biffi, the retired archbishop of Bologna wittily put it, while pastors have the task of shepherding their flock and bringing the lost sheep back to the fold, they should nevertheless avoid getting lost themselves by chasing after reckless or rebel sheep.

The majority opinion of the faithful is not a “*locus theologicus*” properly speaking and even less a “source of Revelation.” Moreover, current public opinion, even the Church, has long been manipulated by cultural lobbies and mass-media promoters of a radically anti-Christian revolution. Furthermore, the then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote very substantial pages on the invalidity of the majority criterion in moral matters.

“A serious pastoral problem arises from the fact that many people today judge Christian marriage exclusively with worldly and pragmatic criteria. Those who think according to the “spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12) cannot understand the sacramentality of marriage. The Church cannot respond to the growing incomprehension of the sanctity of marriage by pragmatically accommodating the supposedly inevitable, but only by trusting in ‘the Spirit which is from God’” (Gerhard Ludwig Cardinal Müller, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “On the Indissolubility of Marriage and the Debate Concerning the Civilly Remarried and the Sacraments,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 5).

37 QUESTION: Would it not be the case for the Church, imitating the Mosaic Law, to promote greater tolerance towards “pitiful cases” such as those of people living in “irregular situations”?

ANSWER:

Such a tolerance would lead to replacing the Law of the Gospel with that of Moses, placing the faithful at risk of falling into that “hardness of heart” that forced Moses to allow divorce among the Jewish people

“The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble (cf. Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-9). He abrogates the accommodations that had slipped into the old Law (cf. Mt 19:7-9)” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2382).

“The Church never tires of teaching and of bearing witness to this truth. While certainly showing maternal understanding for the many complex crisis situations in which families are involved, as well as for the moral frailty of every human being, the Church is convinced that she must remain absolutely faithful to the truth about human love. Otherwise she would betray herself” (St. John Paul II, *Gratissimam sane*, Letter to Families, 2 February 1994, No. 11).

38 QUESTION: **Is it true that the tolerance for irregular marriage situations has produced positive results in other churches or religions?**

ANSWER:

Not at all. Indeed, in Protestant countries this method of tolerance has produced catastrophic results.

“Has this tolerance perhaps led to a spiritual rebirth of the Anglican Church? Are Lutherans in Germany thriving? Are we perhaps seeing a new springtime of liberal Presbyterians in the United States? The sociological data appear to say precisely the opposite,” affirm professors of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family (cf. Pérez-Soba Kampowski, op. cit., p. 38).

39 QUESTION: **It is said that the number of practicing Catholics drops when they are asked for strict observance of certain moral precepts such as marital fidelity. Is it not the case to mitigate the rigor of precepts that have become unpopular?**

ANSWER:

Persons in irregular situations are unlikely practitioners. Moreover, the number of practicing faithful does not drop, indeed grows when you ask for the observance of certain moral precepts; such is the case with the number of religious vocations, which does not drop but grows when novices are asked for a more rigorous commitment.

“On the other hand, the churches and ecclesial realities in growth are those that, in terms of morality, put forward proposals very difficult and contrary to the dominant culture,” states Prof. Kampowski, based on a study by American sociologist Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God* (Pérez-Soba Kampowski, op. cit., p. 38).

40 QUESTION: **Given that many faithful today do not follow Catholic morality, would it not be appropriate to tolerate certain irregular situations in order to attract more people to the Church?**

ANSWER:

A single and indeed unlikely possibility that some persons in irregular, that is, illegitimate or even immoral situations might increase their religious practice cannot be pursued at the stiff cost of denying Gospel morality and the Church Magisterium and weakening the faith of believers in good standing.

Thus, if the Church were to change her two thousand year old doctrine and practice on marriage, she would lose credibility on all that she might teach in future.

Personal Conscience and Magisterium

- 41 QUESTION: **What right does the Church have to meddle in people's private lives?**

ANSWER:

The Church is not a cultural lobby of ideological propaganda but a society of divine origin that received from Jesus Christ the mission of guiding souls to the truth, holiness, and eternal salvation. Since this salvation depends mainly on the morality of private daily life, the Church has the duty and therefore the right to orient that life in such a way that it may be an occasion of salvation rather than one of perdition.

- 42 QUESTION: **Given that the moral teachings of the Church are general rather than absolute guidelines, can they not admit many concrete exceptions?**

ANSWER:

As the saying goes, any possible exceptions cannot disprove the rule but only confirm it. In assessing a concrete case, casuistry takes into account aggravating and mitigating circumstances, which do not change the absoluteness of principles or the certainty of judgements.

“Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature “incapable of being ordered” to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances” (St. John Paul II, enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 80).

- 43 QUESTION: **Doesn't the “freedom of the children of God” require, as Most Rev. Stephan Ackermann, Bishop of Trier put it, that “we have to respect the decisions that people make according to their conscience”?**

ANSWER:

Personal decisions are admissible only if they conform to truth and justice. For this to happen it is not enough for them to have been made with a “sincere conscience.” Personal conscience is not infallible, nor is the will impeccable, as claimed by liberal and libertarian ideology.

“In their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 50).

44 QUESTION: Many people think that we should return to the primacy of conscience. All in all, is it not better to entrust to people’s consciences the solution of their moral problems?

ANSWER:

Marriage and family issues are essentially social and public, and those related to sacramental marriage are eminently sacred and ecclesiastical. But above all, conscience can only make a just judgment if it is well formed and well informed.

For many reasons ranging from inability to incompetence to obfuscation, a person’s conscience is unable to find solutions to many moral problems. After all, no one is an infallible and impartial judge of himself. Why would there be courts, then, including ecclesiastical ones?

“Man cannot attain that true happiness for which he yearns with all the strength of his spirit, unless he keeps the laws which the Most High God has engraved in his very nature. These laws must be wisely and lovingly observed” (Bl. Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, No. 31).

45 QUESTION: Is there no risk of oppressing individual consciences, especially in the moral field?

ANSWER:

To bind a conscience to its obligations towards truth and justice does not mean to oppress it but rather to free it, allowing it to know its proper end and to fulfil its duty. The honour of a conscience consists precisely in freely reflecting and obeying the natural law and the Divine law.

“Of itself, [a person’s] conscience is not an arbiter of the moral actions that it suggests. One’s conscience is the interpreter of an inner and higher standard; it did not create itself... Conscience is not the source of good and evil; it is feeling, listening to a voice which is rightly called the voice of conscience; it is a reminder of how an action must comply with a requirement extrinsic to man so that he can be true and perfect. In other words, it is the subjective and immediate intimation by a law which we must call natural, although many people today do not want to hear about natural law” (Pope Bl. Paul VI, speech of 12 February 1969).

46 QUESTION: If even practicing Catholics no longer consider certain sexual practices as opposed to Church teaching, how can we ask them to obey a doctrine which they no longer understand or accept?

ANSWER:

In many fields, people are required to follow obligations they do not understand nor want, but which are binding nonetheless. Failure to understand a duty does not exempt from fulfilling it. At best, lack of understanding of a ban is a factor that mitigates the responsibility of the faithful but does not take it away from them.

At any rate, if the faithful no longer understand a moral doctrine, the blame does not fall on the doctrine but above all on those who should teach it in a clear and convincing way.

– VIII – **Marriage and Family**

MARRIAGE: NATURE, PURPOSE, AND CHARACTERISTICS

47 QUESTION: Are the precepts of natural law indeed morally binding?

ANSWER:

The precepts of the natural law are morally binding because they were created by God, the Author of nature, and expressed in the Ten Commandments.

“True, a bond can sometimes be a burden or constraint like chains holding a prisoner. But it can also be a powerful aid and a sure guarantee, like the rope that binds a mountaineer to his fellow climbers or as the ligaments that connect the parts of the human body and make it nimble and free in its movements” (Ven. Pope Pius XII, speech of 22 April 1942).

48 QUESTION: If marriage is an institution of natural law, does that not make sacramental marriage superfluous? Shouldn't the Church settle for civil marriage?

ANSWER:

In Christianity, the purpose of marriage is not only to beget new citizens for society but also new elects for Heaven and nourish the spiritual and human communion of the spouses. For this end, Jesus Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, endowing it with spiritual content and supernatural means and inserting it into

the plan of salvation. In marriage, a baptised person cannot separate the civil contract from the sacramental nature.

“For, first, there has been vouchsafed to the marriage union a higher and nobler purpose than was ever previously given to it. By the command of Christ, it not only looks to the propagation of the human race, but to the bringing forth of children for the Church, ‘fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God’ (Eph 2:19) so that ‘a people might be born and brought up for the worship and religion of the true God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’...In Christian marriage the contract is inseparable from the sacrament, and for this reason, the contract cannot be true and legitimate without being a sacrament as well. For Christ our Lord added to marriage the dignity of a sacrament; but marriage is the contract itself, whenever that contract is lawfully concluded. Marriage, moreover, is a sacrament, because it is a holy sign which gives grace, showing forth an image of the mystical nuptials of Christ with the Church” (Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, Nos. 10-23-24).

49 QUESTION: **Is it true, as they say today, that there are various forms of marriage and family?**

ANSWER:

According to natural and divine law, there is only one form of marriage: the monogamous and indissoluble union between one man and one woman; there is only one type of family: the one consisting of father, mother, and their children. All other forms of cohabitation are substantially different from the family and cannot be placed on the same footing, let alone be assimilated by it. The faithful who live together unmarried, only civilly married, or divorced and remarried are in irregular situations that cannot be considered true and proper families, even if these situations entail the fulfilment of other moral responsibilities.

As the well-known moralist Carlo Cardinal Caffarra, Archbishop of Bologna has warned, if the Church were to accept “multiple” forms of marriage or family, for example if she declared as licit a person’s cohabitation with anyone but his or her legitimate heterosexual spouse and thus admitted a kind of “Catholic divorce”, she would dissolve the very definition of marriage and favour the “deconstruction” of the family now advocated by her enemies (cf. Carlo Cardinal Caffarra, “Sacramental Ontology and the Indissolubility of Marriage,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 7).

“Concubinage, rejection of marriage as such, or inability to make long-term commitments: all these situations offend against

the dignity of marriage; they destroy the very idea of the family; they weaken the sense of fidelity. They are contrary to the moral law” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2390).

50 QUESTION: Is marriage not a form of association among people, a simple social contract to live together?

ANSWER:

Marriage is not reduced to a private contract between two persons but is a real public act that gives rise to a society, indeed the mother cell of society: the family. Therefore, marriage is an institution founded on the natural law which, if contracted between Catholic faithful becomes a sacred oath governed by divine right because Our Lord raised it to the dignity of a sacrament, making it a symbol of the espousal between the Creator and his creature and between the Redeemer and His Church.

“Marriage, in fact, is not an event that concerns only the persons actually getting married. By its very nature it is also a social matter, committing the couple being married in the eyes of society” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 68).

“None of us belongs exclusively to himself, so everyone is called to assume, in his inmost depths, his own public responsibility. Thus, marriage as an institution is not an undue interference by society or authorities; instead, it is an intrinsic requirement of the covenant of conjugal love” (Benedict XVI, speech of 6 June 2005).

51 QUESTION: Man is free by nature and marriage is a voluntary union. But then, how can a person be forced by the natural law to respect constraints and obligations no longer wanted or felt, such as the indissolubility of marriage?

ANSWER:

A person’s true freedom is to fulfil the purpose of his nature and for this end he must comply with precise moral constraints and obligations such as those provided by the natural law.

“Conjugal communion is characterised not only by its unity but also by its indissolubility.... It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly...the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage.... To bear witness to the inestimable value of the indissolubility and fidelity of marriage is one of the most precious and most urgent tasks of Christian couples in our time” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 20).

“One must not forget the anthropological value of indissoluble marriage: it withdraws the spouses from caprice and from the tyr-

anny of feelings and moods. It helps them to survive personal difficulties and to overcome painful experiences. Above all, it protects the children, who have the most to suffer from marital breakdown” (Gerhard Ludwig Cardinal Müller, “On the Indissolubility of Marriage and the Debate Concerning the Civilly Remarried and the Sacraments,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 5).

52 QUESTION: Being a form of voluntary association between free persons, why couldn't the marriage contract be dissolved at will by the spouses?

ANSWER:

Before being a contract, marriage is a divine institution whose properties and laws have been established by God himself. One of those properties is indissolubility. In the marriage covenant, the human will intervenes only in the decision to marry and to do so with a specific person, but does not determine its nature

“Yet although matrimony is of its very nature of divine institution, the human will, too, enters into it and performs a most noble part. For each individual marriage, inasmuch as it is a conjugal union of a particular man and woman, arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses; and this free act of the will, by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage, is so necessary to constitute true marriage that it cannot be supplied by any human power. This freedom, however, regards only the question whether the contracting parties really wish to enter upon matrimony or to marry this particular person; but the nature of matrimony is entirely independent of the free will of man, so that if one has once contracted matrimony he is thereby subject to its divinely made laws and its essential properties.... Therefore the sacred partnership of true marriage is constituted both by the will of God and the will of man. From God comes the very institution of marriage, the ends for which it was instituted, the laws that govern it, the blessings that flow from it; while man, through generous surrender of his own person made to another for the whole span of life” (Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, Nos. 6-9).

53 QUESTION: Why should marriage necessarily be monogamous, that is, a contract with only one person? Would it not be possible to accept polygamy – either polygyny (a man with several women) – or polyandry (a woman with several men)?

ANSWER:

It was God Himself that established marriage as the union of one man and one woman to form “one flesh” (Gn 2:24). It turns out

that its monogamous character also is a great asset for the couple, notably by strengthening conjugal love for mutual loyalty.

“And although afterwards this primeval law was relaxed to some extent by God, the Supreme Legislator, there is no doubt that the law of the Gospel fully restored that original and perfect unity, and abrogated all dispensations as the words of Christ and the constant teaching and action of the Church show plainly.... Nor did Christ Our Lord wish only to condemn any form of polygamy or polyandry, as they are called, whether successive or simultaneous, and every other external dishonourable act, but, in order that the sacred bonds of marriage may be guarded absolutely inviolate, He forbade also even wilful thoughts and desires of such like things: ‘But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.’... This conjugal faith, however, which is most aptly called by St. Augustine the ‘faith of chastity’ blooms more freely, more beautifully and more nobly, when it is rooted in that more excellent soil, the love of husband and wife which pervades all the duties of married life and holds pride of place in Christian marriage” (Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, Nos. 20-21-23).

“Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love” (Benedict XVI, *Deus charitas est*, n.11).

54 QUESTION: In the pre-synodal debate some people proposed that access to marriage take place in stages, i.e. that the engaged couple gradually move to the situation of spouses, experiencing phases of cohabitation that test their maturity and ultimate commitment to the sacramental oath (cf. Fulvio De Giorgi, *La personalizzazione dello sguardo. Per un rinnovamento della pastorale familiare*, [A Personalised Glance: For a Renewal of Family Pastoral Care], in *Il Regno*, yearly, 2009, Bologna 2010, pp. 57-67). Couldn't one admit this gradualness in order to prevent hasty or flawed marriages from becoming indissoluble?

ANSWER:

Church doctrine and pastoral policy have never admitted any kind of gradual or temporary marriage, also called “trial marriages.” The consent given by the engaged couple at the sacramental act of marriage immediately makes them spouses. Moreover, it is known that those who only marry later, after a long “trial period”

living as husband and wife are precisely the category most at risk of separation and divorce (cf. Tony Anatrella, *Heureux époux. Essai sur le lien conjugal* [Happy Spouses: An Essay on the Conjugal Bond], Flammarion, Paris 2007, chap. II).

55 QUESTION: What is the purpose of marriage? Is it perhaps, as they say nowadays, affective cohabitation between two persons and especially the satisfaction of sexual attraction through the carnal union of the spouses?

ANSWER:

In marriage, especially Christian marriage, mutual help and the biological complementarity of the spouses are a good and legitimate end ordained for the perpetuation of the species and the upbringing of offspring. By nature, the sexual attraction that arises from marriage is oriented to procreation. It is a gift of God that allows us to fulfil the biblical commandment “be fruitful and multiply.”

“By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children... human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men” (*Gaudium et spes*, Nos. 50-51).

ADULTERY

56 QUESTION: Could a “pastoral approach” lead to toleration of adultery, thus making, in some cases, what was once considered sinful to be no longer so in the future?

ANSWER:

Adultery, that is, intercourse between a married person and another different from his or her legitimate spouse is a sin condemned by Jesus Christ himself: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mt. 10:11-12, 1 Cor 6:9ff, Tm 1;8-10). Sacred Scripture sees adultery as a symbol of idolatry and infidelity to the marriage covenant between God and his people (cf. Hos 2:7; Jer. 5:7; Jer 13:27).

No “pastoral approach” can justify what is wrong in God’s eyes. The consideration of persons or circumstances in adultery does not change the sinful nature of the act.

“Living a married life with a partner who is not one’s husband or wife is an intrinsically evil act that can never be justified for any

reason. And Catholic moral doctrine recently reiterated by Pope John Paul II in the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ...deals with divine law which, by its nature, covers all cases and admits no exceptions” (Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, Keynote Address cit., p. 23).

57 QUESTION: **In order to find a pastoral solution to cases of adultery, could one not begin tolerating or at least considering it benevolently by lessening its moral gravity and demoting it to a venial sin, easily forgivable without repentance or penance?**

ANSWER:

Adultery is objectively a grave sin and as such can be forgiven if the sinner has manifested not only sincere repentance but also a purpose of amendment, that is, of ending the adulterous behaviour.

Contrition is “sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again” (*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Chap. IV).

“It is clear, therefore, that any kind of spousal relationship outside of this [sacramental] bond will always be an unfaithful and hence adulterous relationship... Forgiveness can be given only with true repentance, which removes the situation of sin. While it is obvious that adultery can be forgiven, it is equally true that it could not be the only sin to be forgiven without repentance” (Pérez-Soba, *La verità del sacramento sponsale* [The Truth of the Nuptial Sacrament] in Pérez-Soba and Kampowski, op. cit. p. 80).

DIVORCE, SEPARATION, DECLARATION OF NULLITY

58 QUESTION: **Almost all Christian churches allow divorce. Why is the Catholic Church alone so determined to reject it?**

ANSWER:

The Church rejects divorce because marriage, as a rule, is indissoluble not by convention but by natural and divine law. As for sacramental marriage, as said earlier, it is a sign of the covenant between God and humanity, and particularly of the marriage between the Redeemer and his spouse, the Church. Therefore, marriage must be as unique and indissoluble as that alliance. It is no coincidence that the Catholic Church is the only one to have developed a real theology of marriage.

“From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive... Thus the marriage

bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptised persons can never be dissolved. This bond... is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1638-1640).

59 QUESTION: Doesn't rejection of divorce violate personal freedom and dignity?

ANSWER:

A person's dignity also entails making and keeping indissoluble commitments such as matrimony. Moreover, divorce is contrary to the dignity of the spouses and especially the most vulnerable ones, because it takes away the certainty of union and places them in the possibility of being abandoned and burdened with heavy consequences for which they are not responsible. To this should be added its harmful effects on children's psychological and moral education, as attested by numerous scientific studies.

60 QUESTION: Does the Church not accept marital separation as a form of divorce?

ANSWER:

Divorce and separation are two very different realities in terms of morality and law. The separated couple, though no longer living together, are not divorced but remain married before God and the Church. Separation is an evil tolerated by the Church with sorrow and for serious prudential reasons only when all alternatives are impractical and in order to avoid greater evils. In fact, sometimes it can be preferable to allow the separation to prevent the damage caused by living together.

"The Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. the spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1649).

"In such hard cases, the Church has always permitted the spouses to separate and no longer live together. It must be remembered, though, that the marriage bond of a valid union remains intact in the sight of God, and the individual parties are not free to contract a new marriage, as long as the spouse is alive" (Gerhard Ludwig Cardinal Müller, "On the Indissolubility of Marriage and the Debate Concerning the Civilly Remarried and the Sacraments," in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 5).

61 QUESTION: Does the Church not accept marriage annulment perhaps as a form of divorce?

ANSWER:

When after a well-documented canonical process the Church declares that a marriage should be regarded as null and void, she does not dissolve the marriage bond but declares that it never existed because of some incurable defects in its origin. So this is not an “annulment” but a finding of invalidity, which, while involving a civil divorce, is very much different from divorce.

62 QUESTION: Could one not foresee that one day the ecclesiastical authority will at times admit divorce, if only to pastorally solve some “special cases”?

ANSWER:

“If the will of the spouses, having made the contract, can no longer dissolve the marriage bond, could this perhaps be done by the authorities, who are superior to the spouses and were established by Christ for the religious life of men? The bond of Christian marriage is so strong that, if it has attained full stability with the use of conjugal rights, no power in the world, not even Ours, that is, of the Vicar of Christ, can rescind it” (Ven. Pope Pius XII, speech of 22 April 1942).

63 QUESTION: What to think of divorced and civilly remarried couples?

ANSWER:

Divorced and remarried couples are objectively in the state of mortal sin; and when it becomes public, it is aggravated by scandal. Their union may not be allowed by the Church nor authenticated by any para-matrimonial ceremony. In order to be forgiven and reinstated to full ecclesial communion, they have a duty to repent of their sin and correct their situation.

“Contracting a new union, even if it is recognised by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2384).

“The respect due to the sacrament of Matrimony, to the couples themselves and their families, and also to the community of the faithful, forbids any pastor, for whatever reason or pretext even of a pastoral nature, to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. Such ceremonies would give the impression of the celebration of a new sacramentally valid marriage, and would thus lead people into error concerning the indissolubility of a validly contracted marriage” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 84).

64 QUESTION: How, then, should two divorced and remarried persons behave who for very serious reasons are unable to interrupt their cohabitation?

ANSWER:

“Where...circumstances make it impossible to cease cohabitation, the Church encourages these members of the faithful to commit themselves to living their relationship in fidelity to the demands of God’s law, as friends, as brother and sister... This path, if it is to be possible and fruitful, must be supported by pastors and by adequate ecclesial initiatives, nor can it ever involve the blessing of these relations, lest confusion arise among the faithful concerning the value of marriage” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, No. 29).

Obviously, also in these cases people are obliged by the general rule of avoiding scandal, an obligation all the more serious because in their case the danger of scandal is greater. “They also need to avoid scandal, because whereas their condition as divorced and remarried is perhaps widely known in their communities, the fact that they do not live as husband and wife is not so clear” (Velasio Cardinal De Paolis, *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, op. cit. chap. 9).

65 QUESTION: Could perhaps a divorced person with dependent children remarry to ensure his or her own economic and emotional stability, and especially that of the children?

ANSWER:

It certainly is a painful situation which, nevertheless, cannot be resolved by sin. An additional evil does not erase or compensate the first but only aggravates it.

– IX –

**Communion for the Separated,
Divorced, and Divorced-Remarried**

66 QUESTION: Can a separated person receive the sacrament of Holy Communion?

ANSWER:

A person separated from his or her spouse, if not in a stable union with another person, can receive the sacramental communion, of course provided that he or she is in the state of grace.

67 QUESTION: **Can a person who has suffered divorce through no fault of his own but has not remarried receive sacramental communion?**

ANSWER:

A person who has suffered a divorce but has not remarried may receive sacramental communion, of course provided that he or she is in the state of grace.

68 QUESTION: **Can a divorced and remarried person receive sacramental communion?**

ANSWER:

Whatever his or her subjective intentions, a person known to be divorced and civilly remarried is objectively “in a state of manifest grave sin” (Code of Canon Law, No. 915); therefore, he cannot receive the Eucharist. If he did, since it is a public sin, he would add the sin of scandal to the sacrilege of receiving Holy Communion while objectively “in a state of manifest grave sin”.

“If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God’s law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities. Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1650).

“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” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 84).

69 QUESTION: **Could a divorced and remarried person convinced in conscience of being able to receive the Eucharist do so rightly, and could the priest give him or her Holy Communion?**

ANSWER:

“Pastors and confessors, given the gravity of the matter and the spiritual good of these persons as well as the common good of the

Church, have the serious duty to admonish them that such a judgment of conscience openly contradicts the Church's teaching" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by the Divorced and Remarried Members of the Faithful," 14 September 1994, No. 6).

70 QUESTION: **This prohibition, however, is only a provision of the Code of Canon Law (can. 915). In the future, could it possibly be changed by a new discipline?**

ANSWER:

"The prohibition found in the cited canon, by its nature, is derived from divine law and transcends the domain of positive ecclesiastical laws: the latter cannot introduce legislative changes which would oppose the doctrine of the Church" (Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, "Declaration Concerning the Admission to Holy Communion of Faithful Who Are Divorced and Remarried," 24 June 2000, No. 1).

71 QUESTION: **Can a divorced and remarried person make at least a spiritual Communion?**

ANSWER:

In order to participate in the fruits of the sacrament of Communion by its reception or through spiritual Communion, one must be in the state of grace (Council of Trent, Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist, Chapter VIII). In this sense, persons in the state of grave sin, such as adulterers, do not receive such fruits. However, these persons can and should aspire to unite themselves with Christ by asking for the graces necessary to abandon sin and lead a virtuous life.

72 QUESTION: **Receiving the Eucharist could not possibly become, even with the divorced and remarried, a spiritual medicine that promotes their full conversion?**

ANSWER:

Those who receive the Eucharist are not merely taking a spiritual medicine but actually the Body and Blood of Christ and must be worthy to do so by being in the state of grace. But the divorced and remarried are objectively in the state of mortal sin. So, if they receive Communion they risk committing a sacrilege and their Communion would not be a medicine but rather a spiritual poison. If a celebrant admits such a sacrilegious Communion, either he does not believe in the Real Presence of Christ or in the fact that being divorced and remarried is a situation of mortal sin.

"I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent [De Eucharistia, canon XI] gave concrete expression to the

Apostle Paul's stern warning when it affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, "one must first confess one's sins, when one is aware of mortal sin (1Cor 11, 29)" (St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003, No. 36).

73 QUESTION: Is a divorced and remarried person "excommunicated" and therefore out of the Church?

ANSWER:

A divorced and remarried person remains a baptised person, continues being a member of the Church, and as such is obliged to observe the precepts, such as attending Mass on days of obligation. However, the Church never abandons but rather encourages him to participate in the life of the Church and use the means of salvation at his disposal to purify himself and return to God's friendship. When participating in the life of the Church, a divorced and remarried person should avoid behaviour that could cause scandal, whereby a false impression is given that their status in the Church is regularised.

"[In spite of their situation,] the divorced and remarried continue to belong to the Church, which accompanies them with special concern and encourages them to live as fully as possible the Christian life through regular participation at Mass, albeit without receiving communion, listening to the word of God, Eucharistic adoration, prayer, participation in the life of the community, honest dialogue with a priest or spiritual director, dedication to the life of charity, works of penance, and commitment to the education of their children" (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 22 February 2007, No. 29).

"Toward Christians who live in this situation...priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptised persons. They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1651).

74 QUESTION: To be re-admitted to the Eucharist, it is not enough for a public sinner to be genuinely repentant?

ANSWER:

To be re-admitted to the Eucharist, the divorced and remarried should also express an effective resolution not to sin again,

that is, to reform. This means to end the scandalous situation such as breaking all unlawful bonds. Only in this way does the sinner show he has converted and is ready to do penance.

Now, if the divorced and remarried is unable leave the house in which he coexists with the adulterous spouse, for example because he is obliged to care for their children’s education, he must still commit to live chastely with his partner, that is, “under the same roof but not in the same bed.”

75 QUESTION: Is it true, as Cardinal Walter Kasper has said that in the early Church there was widespread tolerance for the reception of Communion by the divorced and remarried?

ANSWER:

No Council in antiquity and no Church Father admitted sacramental communion for divorced and civilly remarried faithful as a rule. This is demonstrated by some recent studies such as one by the well-known patrologist Henri Crouzel SJ, titled *Divorziati “risposati”*. *La prassi della Chiesa primitiva*, (Cantagalli, Siena 2014 [Remarried Divorcees: The Practice in the Early Church], which refutes Cardinal Kasper’s thesis.

The quotations by Cardinal Kasper are incorrect and not contextualised with citations from the same sources. “In so doing, he [Kasper] puts to rest a manifest fact: the number of texts by the Fathers that absolutely deny that possibility is far higher and the texts are more forthright and clearer than the excerpts the Cardinal quotes” (Pérez-Soba and Kampowski, op. cit. p. 97).

At any rate, the outcomes of general councils and particular synods are valid only “if they themselves correspond to the demands of the authentic tradition in terms of both form and content,” consistent with the golden rule of St. Vincent of Lérins: “quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus” (cf. Walter Cardinal Brandmüller, “Unity and Indissolubility of Marriage,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 5).

76 QUESTION: The Orthodox Churches can bless, with a special rite, a second marriage they do not consider a sacrament but as a solution to avoid a greater sin. After this blessing, the divorced and civilly re-married are admitted to the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion. Could the Catholic Church imitate their example?

ANSWER:

The Orthodox churches’ theology on marriage is quite different from the Catholic one. At any rate, the case of the aforementioned

practices accepted in the Orthodox Churches is a historical detour resulting from the submission of those churches to the temporal power. It is neither justifiable nor applicable to the Catholic Church. This is demonstrated by Msgr. Cyril Vasil', SJ, secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, in his essay on "Separation, Divorce, Dissolution of the Bond, and Remarriage: Theological and Practical Approaches of the Orthodox Churches," in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 4).

77 QUESTION: How come some Synod Fathers have insisted on proposing the admission of the divorced and remarried to Communion?

ANSWER:

Even in the Church, many are seduced by the subjective idea that everyone has an equal right to everything, and to deny a possibility granted to others is unacceptable discrimination. But receiving Communion is not a "human right" and therefore the Church can deny it to those who do not qualify for being incapable or unworthy.

Although receiving Communion is highly recommendable for a genuine and full participation in the Mass (cf. Council of Trent, Sess. 22 Chap. VI; cf. also Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 55), one cannot say that a person who does not receive Communion does not fulfil his obligation.

– X –

Homosexuality and same-sex unions

78 QUESTION: Homosexual tendencies seem to be natural; isn't their satisfaction, therefore, a legitimate act?

ANSWER:

"Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder" (Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, "Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons," 1992, No. 2). Persons with this inclination should be treated with kindness and compassion and encouraged to the practice of chastity (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2358-2359).

Conversely, if they are freely carried out, homosexual *acts* which necessarily involve the use of sexuality against its natural

end must be condemned because those who engage in them are morally culpable.

“Sacred Scripture...presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity (cf. Gn. 19:1-29; Rm 1:24-27; 1Cor 6:9-10; 1Tim 1:10). Tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered’. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2357).

79 QUESTION: Could we not say that the love between two homosexual lovers, if not identical is at least similar to that between husband and wife?

ANSWER:

“Today, the term “love” has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings,” as Pope Benedict XVI aptly put it (*Enc. Deus caritas est*, No. 2). This specific Question includes two different realities: the erotic attraction (or “love of concupiscence”) and a higher form of love called “love of predilection” which can exist without any sexual connotation between persons of the same or different sex (e.g., paternal love, maternal love, filial love, fraternal love, love between friends).

In addition to the mere erotic attraction, this love of predilection is what brings a man and a woman to choose each other as spouses in order to produce offspring and to practice “conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross” (Pope St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 13). Since homosexual unions are incapable of fulfilling nature’s procreative end and are therefore gravely sinful, they cannot objectively serve as foundation to this higher form of love which is conjugal charity.

80 QUESTION: Couldn’t two cohabiting persons of the same sex regularise their union by contracting matrimony?

ANSWER:

Marriage, being by nature the union between two people of the opposite sex destined to procreate children together, can only be celebrated between a male and a female.

Two persons of the same sex cannot contract a valid marriage, nor can their cohabitation constitute a family in the true sense of the word. Their union is neither according to nature nor open to life, and as such it is morally illicit.

81 QUESTION: **A bishop has argued that recognizing same-sex couples constitutes “a discourse of civilization.” Another even went so far as to suggest that homosexual unions, if not equated with, should at least be assimilated by marriage, for example by authorizing them with a priestly blessing. Is this assimilation possible?**

ANSWER:

A homosexual union is not merely affective coexistence among friends but erotic cohabitation between lovers which involves the use of unnatural sexuality. Therefore, homosexual unions are gravely sinful and cannot be compared to marriage, nor can they be blessed by the Church. Instead, we must oppose recent attempts to legalise such unions in any form whatsoever.

“If, from the legal standpoint, marriage between a man and a woman were to be considered just one possible form of marriage, the concept of marriage would undergo a radical transformation, with grave detriment to the common good” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons,” 28 March 2003, No. 8 – text approved by St. John Paul II).

82 QUESTION: **How could a compassionate and understanding person condemn homosexuals to the prospect of constantly repressing their instincts?**

ANSWER:

Like everybody else, homosexually inclined persons are bound by the moral law to control their unruly passions and live chastely according to their state.

“Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2359).

– XI – Some Keywords in the Synod's debate

“TALISMANIC WORDS”

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- 83** QUESTION: A Synod document has said that the Church's pastoral care must also establish a “conversion in language” (*Relatio post disceptationem*, No. 29.) Before, during and after the Synod, the debate on the situation of the family has seen the rise of some keywords that contain a certain approach to the problem. For example, since its Preparatory Document (n. 1) the Synod highlighted “the widespread welcome being given today to the teaching on divine mercy and tenderness towards hurt persons in geographical and existential suburbs.” How should we evaluate these keywords?

ANSWER:

“Hurt persons”, “mercy”, “welcome”, “tenderness”, “deepening”, are examples of words susceptible of being used in a unilateral and simplified way and in this sense can have a kind of talismanic effect.

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- 84** QUESTION: **What Are “Talismanic Words”?**

ANSWER:

A “talismanic word”, while legitimate in itself, carries strong emotional content, and as such is perceived as being entirely flexible and changeable, assuming different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. This elasticity makes it susceptible to being used for propaganda purposes and abused for ideological ends.

For example, a talismanic word is a useful tool to create an “unperceived ideological transshipment,” i.e., a process that changes a target person's mindset without his realising it, moving him from a legitimate to an illegitimate position. Manipulated by propaganda, the talismanic word gradually assumes meanings ever closer to the ideological positions to which the target persons are being led (cf. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, *Unperceived Ideological Transshipment and Dialogue*).

This process can be easily applied also to the Church community. In fact, the use of certain words and not others can push the faithful to replace a moral judgment with a sentimental one or a substantial judgment with a formal one, coming to regard as good, or at least tolerable, what at first was considered bad.

“DEEPENING”

85 QUESTION: **Are there examples of “talismanic words” used in the debate around the Synod?**

ANSWER:

Take the word “deepening”. In common parlance, it means obtaining a more profound understanding of a concept or a reality so as to clarify its fundamentals. Instead, it is employed in mass media propaganda to promote a change of judgment on a concept or reality, obviously with a permissive spin, even to the point of denying its foundation.

“The so-called ‘deepening’ constitutes, in the intentions of its promoters, substantial changes in the doctrine hitherto taught by the Magisterium and should therefore be labelled rather as a break with Tradition. In fact, they are small steps in the direction of a norm which would revolutionise the very structure of ecclesiastical discipline to the point that...it would entail...a real break with the doctrine of the Magisterium.... I find rather hypocritical the use of the label ‘deepening’ to propagate a reform of the Church that ends up by abolishing the dogmatic foundations of her faith and discipline” (Msgr. Antonio Livi, former dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical Lateran University, *Approfondimento della dottrina? No, è tradimento* [Doctrinal Deepening? Not, It’s Treason], in *La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana*, 21 December 2014).

86 QUESTION: **However, can we perhaps say that the current situation of insensitivity requires that the truth and moral norms be proposed and applied gradually, according to the consciences of individuals and of public opinion?**

ANSWER:

Gradual awareness of the moral law does not relieve the faithful from the obligation of coming to know and to practice it entirely.

“Married people...cannot however look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future: they must consider it as a

command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy. And so what is known as ‘the law of gradualness’ or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with ‘gradualness of the law,’ as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God’s law for different individuals and situations” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 34).

“HURT PERSONS”

87 QUESTION: **Who might be, then, the “hurt persons”?**

ANSWER:

In the current discussion, this formula refers to people living in the state of grave and public sin: cohabiting, divorced and remarried, homosexual couples, and so on. By calling them “hurt persons” one avoids expressing a moral judgment and highlights only one aspect, true but secondary, of their concrete situation with a term designed to arouse compassion: they are merely “hurt persons,” as if they were innocent victims not culpable of a serious fault.

Obviously, one’s normal reaction facing a “hurt person” is to try and help him. In our case, any moral judgment about the divorced and remarried is avoided as inappropriate so as to not exacerbate his or her psychological suffering. Conversely, one is invited to show “mercy” and “tenderness” as the only feeling recommended and deemed permissible to assess his situation and make a suitable plan of pastoral care. However, at the end of this process this feeling of compassion risks going so far as to justify the sinful condition, thus changing the doctrinal judgment of the Magisterium in order not to make the “hurt person” suffer even more.

88 QUESTION: **But is this not the attitude suggested by the famous parable of the “Good Samaritan”?**

ANSWER:

On the contrary, here the magnificent parable of the “Good Samaritan” is misunderstood. In fact, read according to today’s dominant mentality it would lead to a paradoxical conclusion. The rescuer is so worried about saving the wounded from further suffering and minimizing the seriousness of his illness as to spare him from painful treatments that might save him; pain relievers should suffice. Consequently, the evil becomes chronic. Even worse, in order not to give the injured person guilty feelings the rescuer re-

frains from warning him to avoid the dangerous road in which he was hurt. As a result, the poor fellow, badly cured and ill-advised, will again risk falling into past misfortunes.

“MERCY”

89 QUESTION: Another key word used around the Synod discussion was “mercy.” If God always forgives sinners, should the Church not use mercy by mitigating her rigor on irregular situations and removing the prohibition on access to the sacraments?

ANSWER:

“This...misses the mark when adopted as an argument in the field of sacramental theology. The entire sacramental economy is a work of divine mercy, and it cannot simply be swept aside by an appeal to the same. An objectively false appeal to mercy also runs the risk of trivializing the image of God, by implying that God cannot do other than forgive. The mystery of God includes not only his mercy but also his holiness and his justice. If one were to suppress these characteristics of God and refuse to take sin seriously, ultimately it would not even be possible to bring God’s mercy to man....God’s mercy does not dispense us from following his commandments or the rules of the Church” (Gerhard Ludwig Cardinal Müller, “On the Indissolubility of Marriage and the Debate Concerning the Civilly Remarried and the Sacraments,” in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, Ignatius Press, chap. 6).

“‘Mercy’ is another word easily exposed to misunderstanding....Since it is linked to love, like love it is presented in opposition to law and justice. But it is well known that there is no love without justice and truth or acting against the human or divine law. St. Paul says the rule is ‘love that does the works of the Law’ (Gal 5: 13-18)....Facing divine law one cannot oppose mercy with justice, rigor of the law with forgiveness and mercy....The fulfilment of a divine commandment is not and cannot be seen as opposed to love and mercy. Indeed, every commandment of God, even the most severe, bears the mark of divine love, though not of merciful love. The commandment of the indissolubility of marriage and chastity in marriage is a gift from God and cannot be opposed to God’s mercy...In the concrete case, recourse to mercy would be nothing but a direct violation of God’s law” (Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, Keynote Address cit., pp. 27 and 22).

90 QUESTION: In the debate around the Synod, mercy leads one to consider irregular situations not from the point of view of law and duty but from that of understanding and forgiveness, an approach “not based on moral judgments but on people’s vulnerability” (*Wir sind Kirche*). Is this not a typically Christian approach to the issue?

ANSWER:

The Church cannot behave like a charlatan who deceives the suffering by giving him potions that numb the pain but aggravate the disease. Indeed, like the genuine “good Samaritan” who is a figure of Christ, the Church must act as a wise physician that seeks to heal the spiritually sick and hurt by using more effective, though painful, medicines to free them from illness and spare them from dangerous relapses. This presupposes that the Church not hide from patients the seriousness of their situation nor diminish their responsibility but rather open their eyes and hearts even before healing their wounds.

Care certainly must be merciful, bearing in mind the person’s vulnerability. But this precaution must favour the cure, not prevent it with the illusion that palliatives could heal a seriously ill person who refuses efficacious medicines. Nor should the *vulnerability* of a patient suffering from painful therapy be confused with the *sensitivity* of those who refuse to be cured.

“The path of the Church...is always that of Jesus, mercy. This does not mean to underestimate the dangers or let in wolves in sheepskin but to welcome the repenting prodigal son with determination and courage in order to heal the wounds of sin” (Pope Francis, speech of 15 February 2015 at the Consistory of Cardinals).

91 QUESTION: In the Synod discussion, “mercy” is the guiding principle of every pastoral approach. Shouldn’t this criterion override the requirements of the moral teaching in such a way as to change its judgement?

ANSWER:

Mercy may exceed justice but not violate it, otherwise it would be unjust; nor can it deny the truth, otherwise it would be false. Furthermore, by the very fact that it operates in the practical field, mercy cannot interfere in the doctrinal field and thus change the moral judgment on a person’s conduct. Otherwise, such “mercy” would fall under the well-known biblical condemnation: “Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Is. 5:20).

“One cannot identify love with mercy. The latter certainly is an aspect of love, and it is love inasmuch as it communicates a good that eliminates all evil. But love can, and sometimes must, be expressed with a denial of mercy understood as benevolent condescension, or even worse, approval” (Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, Keynote Address cit., p. 22).

“As a virtue, mercy is no stranger to justice....We cannot make room for unjust mercy since that would be a profound falsification of the Divine Revelation. ...Consequently, an unjust action is never merciful. What differentiates mercy from sheer compassion is that the purpose of mercy is to ‘remove the misery of others’. In other words, mercy is active against the evil that the other person suffers. Mercy is not a false consolation whereby people call something a ‘lesser evil’ while not freeing the sufferer from it.... Mercy is born from love for the person so as to cure him from the evil of infidelity that afflicts and prevents him from living his covenant with God. It is something quite different from consenting to infidelity without transformation through interior grace as if God would cover our sins without converting and cleaning our heart. This is an important difference between the Catholic and Lutheran dogmatic conceptions of justification” (JJ Pérez-Soba, *La verità del Sacramento Sponsale* [The Truth of the Spousal Sacrament], in Pérez-Soba and Kampowski, op. cit. pp. 60, 70-71-75).

92 QUESTION: But, after all, shouldn't the Church be a merciful Mother even before a wise Teacher and stern Judge?

ANSWER:

“In the field of conjugal morality the Church is Teacher and Mother and acts as such. As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life. The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ...The Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection. As Mother, the Church is close to the many married couples who find themselves in difficulty over this important point of the moral life...But it is one and the same Church that is both Teacher and Mother. And so the Church never ceases to exhort and encourage all to resolve whatever conjugal difficulties may arise without ever falsifying or compromising the truth... Accordingly, the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine and never be separated from it...To diminish in no way the saving teaching

of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 33).

“Now it is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ; but this must always be joined with tolerance and charity, as Christ Himself showed in His conversations and dealings with men. For when He came, not to judge, but to save the world, was He not bitterly severe toward sin, but patient and abounding in mercy toward sinners?” (Bl. Paul VI, enc. *Humanae Vitae*, No. 29).

– XII – Applications of Mercy to the Family Situation

93 QUESTION: **Today there is so much ignorance in matters of marriage, its purposes and duties. Does this not mean that a majority of marriages should be considered null?**

ANSWER:

Ignorance should be remedied by a serious preparation for marriage which involves teaching doctrine. It is indeed curious to note that many people today who ask for a loosening of Church moral discipline in face of this ignorance are the same who earlier defended loosening moral education, which caused ignorance in the first place.

“Remote preparation for marriage is extremely important and it might be a good idea to start before young people in a given society tend to become sexually active, which in the West would mean before adolescence....Clearly, the Church is called to tend to people’s wounds and heal them, but as any good doctor knows, prevention is the best medicine. Young people are much more open to talk about the virtue of chastity than is usually believed” (Stephan Kampowski, *Una vita vissuta nel tempo* [A Life Lived in Time], in Pérez Soba- Kampowski, cit. p. 134-135)

94 QUESTION: Shouldn't a pastoral approach marked by mercy facilitate processes to declare the marriage bond null and void?

ANSWER:

According to the eminent canonist Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, the current process of nullity ensures full justice to the parties involved, so there would be no need to change it in its present structure (cf. Raymond Cardinal Burke, "The Canonical Nullity of the Marriage Process as the Search for the Truth," in *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, chap. 9).

Obviously, the real pastoral solution is to make sure that marriages are contracted consciously and validly and by rendering eventual nullity procedures available at all levels, including the less learned. But it is not prudent to question the validity of many marriages just to please the tiny minority of divorced and remarried who seek to receive Communion without amendment.

"Charity without justice is not charity, but a counterfeit, because charity itself requires that objectivity which is typical of justice and which must not be confused with inhuman coldness. In this regard, as my Predecessor, Venerable Pope John Paul II, said in his Address on the relationship between pastoral care and the law: 'The judge... must always guard against the risk of misplaced compassion, which could degenerate into sentimentality, itself pastoral only in appearance' (speech of 18 January 1990, No. 5). One must avoid pseudo-pastoral claims that would situate questions on a purely horizontal plane, in which what matters is to satisfy subjective requests to arrive at a declaration of nullity at any cost, so that the parties may be able to overcome, among other things, obstacles to receiving the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. The supreme good of readmission to Eucharistic Communion after sacramental Reconciliation demands, instead, that due consideration be given to the authentic good of the individuals, inseparable from the truth of their canonical situation. It would be a false 'good' and a grave lack of justice and love to pave the way for them to receive the sacraments nevertheless, and would risk causing them to live in objective contradiction to the truth of their own personal condition" (Benedict XVI, Speech to the Roman Rota, 29 January 2010).

– XIII –

The Role of Supernatural Grace in the Commitment to Family Chastity

- 95 **QUESTION:** Today’s man seems incapable of making definitive commitments which bind for a lifetime. As a result, monogamous and indissoluble marriage appears impractical to most people. Does the Church not seem perhaps excessively idealistic in requiring family members to practice the virtues of fidelity and chastity?

ANSWER:

God does not ask man to attain an impracticable end or comply with a commitment beyond his strength. If natural forces are insufficient, Providence gives man supernatural forces adequate to fulfil his mission. Our Lord Jesus Christ does not ask spouses, parents or children for something impossible. He gives them sufficient grace to strengthen the family according to its mission.

“The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 59).

- 96 **QUESTION:** How is it possible to live in a state of chastity?

ANSWER:

“All Christ’s faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2348). The Church teaches that both the absolute chastity outside of marriage and the relative chastity within marriage are according to nature and therefore theoretically possible. However, in practice, because of the Original Sin, to durably maintain chastity is possible only with the help of grace, which makes a heavy commitment become light: “For my yoke is sweet and my burden light” (Mt. 11:29-30). Once the habit of lust is replaced with that of chastity, the latter becomes a rewarding virtue.

“Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2339).

97 QUESTION: **Although in theory chastity is perhaps feasible, how can it be practiced in our dissolute age dominated by pan-sexuality?**

ANSWER:

It has always been difficult to maintain chastity; it is even more so in modern society where ambiances, culture and the media favour lust. Today more than ever, in order to maintain chastity the faithful must run counter to the mainstream, which especially requires the help of divine grace through prayer, asceticism, and penance. But then again, to live chastely now is more deserving and rewarding than in the past.

“Man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 17)

98 QUESTION: **How is it possible for two spouses to live in a state of conjugal chastity?**

ANSWER:

Conjugal chastity is the condition for a healthy and fruitful marriage and family, which are socially beneficial. Therefore, its practice must be possible; indeed it becomes easy if we resort to the help of grace and to supernatural means.

“This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realise (Mt. 19:10). However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy (Mt. 19, 29-30)...By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1615).

99 QUESTION: **Does it not seem obvious that the cause of the family is lost and there is nothing left to do?**

ANSWER:

In fact there is a whole lot to do, and urgently! Instead of complaining about the situation and resigning themselves to the worst, it is time for Christians to get down to work to recover the lost ground and employ all necessary means, bearing in mind that “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13) .

“Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always. Loving the family means identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. Loving the family means endeavouring to create for it an environment favourable for its development. The modern Christian family is often tempted to be discouraged and is distressed at the growth of its difficulties; it is an eminent form of love to give it back its reasons for confidence in itself, in the riches that it possesses by nature and grace, and in the mission that God has entrusted to it” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 86).

100 QUESTION: **What are the duties and responsibilities of educators and public authorities?**

ANSWER:

“We take this opportunity to address those who are engaged in education and all those whose right and duty it is to provide for the common good of human society. We would call their attention to the need to create an atmosphere favourable to the growth of chastity so that true liberty may prevail over license and the norms of the moral law may be fully safeguarded... never allow the morals of your peoples to be undermined. The family is the primary unit in the state; do not tolerate any legislation which would introduce into the family those practices which are opposed to the natural law of God” (Bl. Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, Nos. 22-23).

We conclude by saying that the Holy Family of Nazareth is the model of the family par excellence because it realises the communion of love and its sacred and inviolable character. For the salvation of the family, the Popes have recommended devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this perspective, God will succour families in difficulty with His almighty Grace, Our Lady will assist them with her motherly protection, and the Church will help them with her word, prayer, sacraments, and active charity.



— “For the clarity of its theological approach, and for the remarkable clarity and fidelity of its reading of the traditional Magisterium on the family, I believe that this booklet can be a very valuable tool to help the Christian people live through the trial of this internal debate in the Church – which is not always free nor sensible – as an occasion to mature their faith. Indeed, maturation in the faith is the only reason of the trials God allows the entire Christian people to go through, beginning with the most humble, that is, the most holy. With my best wishes for a broad and successful dissemination.”

**The Most Rev. Luigi Negri, Archbishop of Ferrara-Comacchio,
Abbot of Pomposa, Italy**

— “I am in full support and encourage the publication and distribution of the book: *Preferential Option for the Family: One Hundred Questions and Answers Relating to the Synod*. This book can be a helpful instrument for all readers who take seriously the concept that ‘The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family’” (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 47).

**The Most Rev. Anthony Sablan Apuron, OFM Cap., D.D.,
Archbishop of Agaña (Guam, USA)**

— “*Preferential Option for the Family - 100 Questions and Answers relating to the Synod* is very useful since it presents the answers to urgent problems confronting the modern family in a doctrinally well-reasoned manner. The method of questions and answers allows quick searches and responses to questions of interest, making it very easy to use.”

**The Most Rev. Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz,
Archbishop of Minsk-Mohilev, Belarus**

— “I am convinced of doing a good deed by recommending the reading of the booklet, *Preferential Option for the Family*, and may Divine Providence favour its wide dissemination. A work on this topic was necessary, for by employing theological, moral and prudential arguments, this book will be a light at the present time, when so many factors are threatening the basic institution of society. Naturally, I augur that Our Lady of Good Success may bestow her choicest graces upon all those who read it, and gladly give them my episcopal blessing.”

**The Most Rev. Patricio Bonilla Bonilla, OFM,
Vicar Apostolic of San Cristobal, Galápagos, Ecuador**