

ARTICLE 92

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

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Confusion Abounds

The Confused & Confusing Cardinal

A recent headline in an Irish weekly newspaper stated “Children must be priority when marriages fail – top cardinal”. The article then went on to state “One of the Pope’s closest advisers on the family has insisted that when dealing with marital breakdown, the Church must put the needs of children ahead of a simplistic application of rules.” I have to say that I find this problematic, but first I also want to look at something else this Cardinal adviser to the Pope said whilst visiting Ireland ahead of next year’s world meeting of families.

According to the newspaper in question, during a lecture the cardinal gave in Limerick and referring to the four cardinals who submitted five dubia to Pope Francis he said, “I think I have given personally an answer to one of them – but not in public – and I gave a clear answer to their questions. And the answer is very easy. To all the questions you can say ‘yes’. Does Pope Francis question the indissolubility of marriage? The answer is ‘no’. Does he teach the classical teaching on marriage and family? The answer is ‘yes’.”

The First Dubium

The first of the dubia by the four cardinals referred to is this.

“It is asked whether, following the affirmations of “Amoris Laetitia” (nn. 300-305), it has now become possible to grant absolution in the Sacrament of Penance and thus to admit to Holy Communion a person who, while bound by a valid marital bond, lives together with a different person “more uxorio” (in a marital way) without fulfilling the conditions provided for by “Familiaris Consortio” n. 84 and subsequently reaffirmed by “Reconciliatio et Paenitentia” n. 34 and “Sacramentum Caritatis” n. 29. Can the expression “in certain cases” found in note 351 (n. 305) of the exhortation “Amoris Laetitia” be applied to divorced persons who are in a new union and who continue to live “more uxorio”?”

Can Public Adulterers receive Holy Communion?

Simplified, what this question asks is, “can those who are living in an objective state of adultery be granted absolution without a firm purpose to amend their way of life and to refrain from the sin of adultery?”

If this question can be answered with a 'yes', as the visiting cardinal has said, then this would clearly contradict what Pope St John Paul II taught in Familiaris Consortio no 84 where he said.

What did Pope St John Paul II say?

“Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, **can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage.** This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.” (Familiaris Consortio 84)

In this passage of Familiaris Consortio, Pope St John Paul II teaches that absolution, which is a necessary requirement for receiving Holy Communion in such cases, can **only** be granted to those divorced persons who are now living in a non marital second union, who are willing to live as brother and sister, that is, they must refrain from the sexual act which is proper to marriage. In actual fact, these people should be sleeping in different rooms from one another for the simple reason that they are not married and need to avoid near occasions of sin.

The Cardinal is Denying Church Teaching

In answering 'yes' to the first of the dubia, this visiting cardinal is saying that absolution **can** be granted without the requirement to abstain from the sexual act which is reserved to marriage, contrary to what Pope St John Paul II stated above. This cardinal is actually denying Catholic Church teaching on confession, which requires of the penitent a 'firm purpose of amendment'. The cardinal confuses the issue by adding his own questions after saying that one can answer 'yes' to the first of the dubia. He asks, "Does Pope Francis question the indissolubility of marriage? The answer is 'no'. Does he teach the classical teaching on marriage and family? The answer is 'yes'."

Pope Francis has not Answered the Dubia

But to date, Pope Francis has not answered the dubia. Is the visiting cardinal saying that Pope Francis' answer to the first of the dubia is 'yes'? This cardinal would not dare to take such a liberty even though this is what he seems to be implying. If you read what the cardinal says carefully, you will see that he makes no such claim for Pope Francis. He tells us "I think I have given personally an answer to one of them – but not in public – and I gave a clear answer to their questions."

Now with all due respect to this visiting cardinal, the other four cardinals did not submit their dubia to him for his personal opinions. These four cardinals are not looking for the Pope's opinions either. Let us be very clear on the matter of the dubia. The four cardinals who submitted the dubia were fully aware of what the correct answers to the dubia are when they submitted the dubia. They were not seeking clarification for themselves, they were seeking to have those cardinals and bishops, who are publicly contradicting Catholic Church teaching in very subtle and dishonest ways, corrected and prevented from further spreading their errors in order to protect the faithful. The primary concern of the cardinals who submitted the dubia is to protect the flock of Christ from the harm caused by those who manipulate and distort Church teaching for their own disordered ends. The five dubia constitute both an act of charity and an act of mercy.

A Magisterial Answer is Required

What they sought was a magisterial answer which this visiting cardinal, because he is not the Pope, is unable to give! The cardinal is causing confusion by claiming an authority that he does not possess and by trying to imply that his views are shared by Pope Francis. We do not need more confusion in these times we are living in. Another sad aspect of this recent situation is that there were five Irish bishops present at the cardinal's talk, none of whom have issued a public clarification on the erroneous opinions of the visiting cardinal.

Now, to get back to the original headline which stated that children must be the priority when marriages fail, and the newspaper's opening statement that "the Church must put the needs of children ahead of a simplistic application of rules." There are several problems with this statement.

Marriages do not Fail – People Fail to Live up to their Commitments!

The first and most glaring problem is the simple fact that, marriages do not fail! To understand why this is the case we need to realise that marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. A sacrament is a channel of grace, and the sacraments, coming as they do, from God, cannot fail. Do we hear talk about the 'failure of baptism' or talk about when 'the sacrament of confession fails'? Or how about when an ordained priest goes off to have a relationship with a woman and gets her pregnant? Do we say that the sacrament of Holy Orders failed or that the sacrament of Holy Orders broke down? This would be simple nonsense.

Marriages do not fail or breakdown! People fail. We fail to live up to our baptismal charism and we fail to adequately use and to submit to the grace of the sacrament given to us in marriage. And why do people fail? We fail because we choose to live sinful lives! Our sinfulness is the real problem that we have in this world. In chapter 4 of St Matthew's Gospel, the first words of Jesus after he has returned from the temptation in the desert are "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) Penance is the sign of repentance, the sign that one no longer wishes to break off communion with God through sin.

The Acceptance of Divorce

This is not a matter of being clever with words but sadly, too many of our churchmen accept divorce. They tacitly accept not just divorce, but no-fault divorce, even though divorce is contrary to what Christ teaches. In Matthew 19 Christ says "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19:6) Those who are living, in what many now euphemistically call 'irregular unions', are still married in the eyes of God to the person to whom they professed their marital vows.

Another problem with the statement "the Church must put the needs of children ahead of a simplistic application of rules" is that it implies that the Catholic Church in the past has put the simplistic application of rules ahead of the needs of children. The cardinal, speaking in relation to marriages where one or other of the spouses (or both of them) have failed to live up to their sacramental commitments, seems to blame the Catholic Church for failing the children. He says "in the past the Church too often focused on sexual sins to the detriment of the well being of abandoned spouses and the children of both valid and 'irregular' unions."

Separating Cause and Effect

The cardinal is trying to separate the effects of the sin, from the sin itself. The reason that the Catholic Church focuses on the sin, even if it is 'sexual sin', is quite simply, because the sin is the root cause of all of the problems for the spouses and for the children. The cardinal also speaks about justice, "It's very often a matter of justice in the family crises, what is due to the other, what is due to the children, what do they really need?", however, the cardinal seems almost blind to the fact that the injustice in these cases is primarily the injustice of adultery, of failing to keep the marital bond.

Married Parents are Best for Children

If you want to help children when their parents have separated, or divorced, or are thinking of it, then you must first and foremost fight for the restoration of the marriage. Catholics can never accept divorce! Trying to look out for the children's interests in a marital conflict without first and foremost looking out for and defending the sacramental bond of marriage itself, is like trying to console a hungry child without offering the child food. It is the sinfulness of the divorce, the sinfulness of adultery, and the sinfulness of the breaking up of the family home that causes the children's problems. You will not solve the children's problems unless you can bring their parents back together as they should be and as God expects them to be! God established the rules for marriage. God condemned adultery in not just one, but in two separate commandments. It is God's laws that the visiting cardinal seems to have a problem with, and to reduce God's laws to "in the past the Church too often focused on sexual sins to the detriment of the wellbeing of abandoned spouses and the children of both valid and 'irregular' unions." is absolutely scandalous and the scandal is so much the greater because so many poorly catechised Catholics fail to see the problem.

Let me finish by clearing up another point that has become confused of late. We hear a lot of talk about the abandoned spouse who bears no fault for the breakup of the family home. An abandoned spouse, who does not consent to the adulterous relationship of their spouse with another, and who does not enter into an adulterous relationship themselves, is not forbidden from receiving Holy Communion. A spouse who has had a divorce issued against them to which they did not agree, and who is not living in a second union, is not forbidden from receiving Holy Communion. Those who appear to be so solicitous for those living in objective adultery without seeking reconciliation of the marriage or without requiring adulterers to repent and to 'go and sin no more', are practising a deceitful and a false compassion which is contrary to Christ's teaching.

My next article will deal with a case that this cardinal presented in order to justify the reception of Holy Communion for certain people who are divorced and in an adulterous relationship. This case is far more dangerous because of who this cardinal is, and because it endangers the faith of ordinary Catholics.

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