



## **FIRST WOUND:**

### **The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia***

Jorge Bergoglio, the cardinal of Buenos Aires, was elected pope in 2013 and took the name Francis.

In 2015, he convened a synod on the family in Rome and published the results a year later in the post-synodal letter “*Amoris Laetitia*.” This synod also discussed the problem of those people who live in a second intimate union while the ecclesial marriage still exists. The term “remarried divorcees” is generally used for this situation.

The papal letter, however, became a stumbling block for not a few of the faithful, because in relation to the problem addressed, a door was opened that under certain circumstances it would be possible to receive Holy Communion. This new direction differed considerably from the previous ecclesiastical practice. It was article 305 of this letter, with note 351, which in a certain way became a kind of “Gretchen question”. In this article it was laid down that believers could be admitted to the sacraments “in the midst of an objective situation of sin,” “on the basis of mitigating factors.”

This statement was in direct contradiction to the Church's previous doctrinal tradition, which was also held unchanged by Francis' two immediate predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

John Paul II, in his letter “*Familiaris Consortio*,”<sup>1</sup> reaffirmed in Article 84 the practice of the Church “of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried” unless they “take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.” In 1994, Pope Benedict XVI had rejected the push by the bishops of the Upper Rhine region, who wrote to Rome seeking access to the sacraments for “remarried divorcees.” In his reasoning, he referred to the teaching of the Church, which cannot allow this.

As the late German philosopher Robert Spaemann made clear in a 2016 interview with CNA<sup>2</sup>, “the Church has no authority, without prior conversion, to approve disordered sexual relationships through the administration of the sacraments, thereby anticipating God's mercy.”

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/33812/full-text-interview-with-robert-spaemann-on-amoris-laetitia>

In spite of all attempts to interpret the change as a continuation of previous teaching, those critics who see in this a break with the previous doctrinal tradition have to be justified.

It was four cardinals who addressed the Pope with this problem in a "dubia", in order to get clarity from their point of view about certain questions which arose from this letter in relation to the situation addressed. They did not receive an answer, nor were they granted an audience to clarify this matter with the Pope. It should be added that a number of clerics and other persons wrote to the Pope pointing out further questionable formulations on the part of the pontiff, which from their point of view contradicted the previous teachings of the Church or at least were not formulated clearly enough for them. They, too, did not receive an answer.

On the other hand, the bishops of the pastoral region of Buenos Aires wrote a letter entitled "Basic Criteria for the Application of Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*", in which they stated that "if one comes to recognize that, in a concrete case, there are limitations that mitigate responsibility and guilt (...), *Amoris Laetitia* opens the possibility of access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist." Pope Francis responded to this letter by pointing out that "the writing is very good and fully explains the meaning of Chapter VIII of '*Amoris Laetitia*'. There are no other interpretations"<sup>3</sup>.

From all this it is evident that the new pope was striving for a change in sacramental practice.

As a result, unfortunately, what Prof. Spaemann feared and formulated in the above-mentioned article also happened:

*"According to the respective passages from Amoris Laetitia, not only remarried divorcés but also everyone living in some certain "irregular situation" could, by further nondescript "mitigating circumstances", be allowed to confess other sins and receive Communion even without trying to abandon their sexual conduct - that means without confession and conversion."*

Developments within Church practice have confirmed his predictions.

For some believers, a decisive moment now came: do I follow the Church's previous teaching and see the Pope's chosen direction as an erroneous deviation, or do I follow the path that Pope Francis wants to lead the Church in this important matter?

For me personally, I have answered this question at least since the letter *Amoris Laetitia* and the controversial passage from Article 305 with the corresponding footnote 351: The Pope deviates from the truth here and I cannot follow him.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/popes-letter-argentine-bishops-amoris-laetitia-part-official-record>

As it can be seen in other essential questions of the doctrine and practice of the Church, one discovers now, in some respects, the tendency to put aside the objective consideration of the given situation. Instead, one turns more to the personal situation of the person concerned. This is called a paradigm shift (change of perspective). It is true that the given objective situation is not completely faded out, it steps more into the background and can turn into an ideal. However, in this way it loses its normative character.

Let us look at the concrete problem:

From the Catholic teaching, sacramental marriage is indissoluble. Only the death of one of the partners allows a new marriage or the establishment of a marriage invalid by the Church. If these two conditions are not present, a second marriage cannot be contracted because it is objectively contrary to the marriage covenant. Expressed in religious language, this means that in such a case one does not live in the state of grace and therefore cannot have access to the reception of Holy Communion. One lives, so to speak, in a perpetual adultery.

Opposed to the clarity of this teaching, with the corresponding requirement of conversion to leave a wrong path, is the now more common practice of Catholics who, for a variety of reasons, have entered into a second intimate union, but still wish to participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

To make this possible, the Church expects repentance for the violation of the marriage. If children have resulted from the second union, the Church allows them to continue living together in the irregular situation if the partners lead an abstinent life, that is, do not perform intimate acts that are reserved for marriage alone. This commitment allows them access to the sacraments.

These previous ecclesiastical requirements are now being modified under the influence of the relevant passages of *Amoris Laetitia*. Access to Holy Communion can now also become possible under certain circumstances - in agreement and consultation with a priest and the formation of one's own conscience - for people who live in a situation that is objectively disordered from the Church's point of view. According to point 303 of *Amoris Laetitia*, in some situations conscience can come to decisions that do not correspond to the divine commandments, but are based on the circumstances of a situation. This approach is called situational ethics!

In order to become aware of the scope of this change introduced by "*Amoris Laetitia*", it is useful to listen to what Pope John Paul II had established in *Familiaris Consortio*<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation "*Familiaris consortio*", art. 84.

*“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.”*

This fundamental position is now no longer maintained in its clarity: instead, in *Amoris Lætitia*, Pope Francis now authorizes individual priests and pastors to examine each case with regard to the administration of the holy sacraments (penance and communion). Without making this dependent on sexual abstinence, in case an external separation is not possible for certain reasons, he now no longer generally excludes those who live in an irregular situation (this also applies to unmarried cohabitants) from receiving the sacraments.

Accordingly, the door has opened to a new practice, which has also largely entered into the life of the Church!

For some Christians, this new regulation is an act of mercy, which takes a more differentiated view of the pastoral situation and is intended to integrate the people concerned more fully into the life of the Church. There is no doubt that some of the affected people get into such a disorderly situation due to the most adverse circumstances and need a sensitive pastoral accompaniment. The Pope also wants to consider the reception of the Holy Eucharist as a remedy that comes to the aid of man!

But with this new approach to the problem, is a greater mercy really effective?

It cannot be overlooked that "in many church communities a practice of receiving communion has long since developed which deviates from the objective ecclesiastical norms. For many years, certain circles within the church have repeatedly called for the church to adapt its moral standards to the "reality of life" of many people. This practice, which sprang from acts of disobedience to directives, has now, as it were, been given retrospective blessing.

Obviously, a false concept of mercy has taken effect here, which is perhaps better described on the human level as compliance. True mercy, however, has truth and justice as its basis. God's mercy, therefore, cannot be a softening of the requirement of God's holiness, which is called to keep the commandments of God without reservation.

The loving mercy of our heavenly Father consists in being always ready to forgive and to raise up mankind, who often sins and is weak, in case of appropriate repentance. This is always combined - albeit with great patience - with the call to repentance, namely to bring life into harmony with God's directives.

This also applies to the situation of those Catholics who have entered into an irregular second union. True pastoral care can only mean supporting them to act again in accordance with the directives of the Church, going back to the practice in force before *Amoris Laetitia*.

One should give those Catholics who find themselves in such a situation, concrete help to deepen their spiritual life. They should intensively use the meditation of the Word of God in order to get the strength from the Word of God to redirect their lives in order to live in harmony with the objective reality. There are many other ways to help them and start a healing process. However, the administration of Holy Communion is not this. That would be a kind of deception, capable of confusing both the soul itself and other people. If the soul is not in the state of grace, then receiving Holy Communion is a sacrilege.

If the person concerned decides to follow God's instructions and live only that kind of communion which does not violate God's commandments, then it can lead to a great spiritual revival. God will understand this act as a declaration of love to Him and will respond with great affection. If one becomes weak in this serious way of cultivating abstinence, then the way to holy confession is open.

The Lord will even offer that all the struggles and attentions that one now takes upon oneself to respond to His love can serve as atonement for one's own and others' sins. This, in turn, can motivate one to be all the more responsible with the grace that God has associated with sincere devotion to Him and the commandments of the Church.

The direction given by the current Church leadership is therefore misleading. It will not contribute to the strengthening of marriages and families, but to their weakening. Unfortunately, it is a deception with far-reaching consequences.

We will also encounter this "spirit of deception" in the further cases which I will explain in the following. Thus, it will become apparent that the aberration of *Amoris Laetitia* is not a single case - as serious as it is - but that there is a "different spirit" at work that wants to put itself in the place of God as unrecognized as possible. We will rediscover him in the other issues that will come up.

Obviously, this is not sufficiently perceived in the present hierarchy of the Church. One can even assume that those shepherds who follow Pope Francis in content believe they are serving the Church. Thus, they are involved in the deception. This, however, is tragic, because the faithful no longer receive clear directives on which they normally depend and also gladly follow. Misguided directions, however, cannot be followed, even if they come from the top of the church. This is commanded by love for the Lord and thus by love for the truth. The ship of the church has slipped dangerously and those who are supposed to steer it have not yet come to their senses! This increasingly causes a serious emergency, which can only be overcome by looking to the Lord of the church!