

Divorce

Decree

“From the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8)

The unchangeable truth about marriage and sexuality



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Our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word and the eternal Truth in person, restored the original dignity of human nature in a most wonderful manner (“*Qui dignitatem humanae substantiae mirabiliter reformasti*”), also regarding the sexuality of the human being, which was wonderfully created in the beginning (“*mirabiliter condidisti*”).

Through the Fall, the dignity of human sexuality was wounded. Because of the hard heartedness of fallen man, Moses introduced divorce, which was contrary to the absolute indissolubility which God had commanded. Although the Scribes and Pharisees had known the Divine Truth about the beginning of the marriage, they nevertheless endeavored to receive from Jesus, as from a well-known and recognized teacher, the legitimation of the practice of divorce — a practice which was already widely adopted in those times, perhaps for “pastoral reasons.”

The first liars to propose the possibility that doctrine and the pastoral practice might be separated, were precisely these Scribes and Pharisees. They asked Jesus about the basic legitimacy (“*quaecumque ex causa*”) of divorce (cf. Mt 19:3). Jesus proclaimed to them — and through His Gospel He still proclaims to the men of all times — the ever valid and unchangeable Divine truth about marriage:

From the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery. (Mt 19:8b-9)

Jesus restored in all its seriousness and beauty the Divine Truth about marriage and human sexuality. Regarding this Divine Truth which Christ authoritatively proclaimed, He does not admit any sophisms (e.g. annulment of the guilt because of psychological reasons) and any exemptions with reference to an alleged pastoral

practice (perhaps restricted to the individual case), as the Scribes and Pharisees had practiced.

In His teaching, Jesus goes so far as to proclaim: “every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5: 28) This commandment of Christ is universally valid. It means any lustful sexual desire of a person who is not one’s own legitimate spouse is in its intention, in the eyes of God, already a sin against the sixth commandment. Christ thus condemned each deliberate sexual act, and all the more, each corporal sexual act, outside marriage as contrary to the will of God.

Jesus did not present His words as His own teaching, but as the teaching of the Father:

- “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” (Jn 7:16)
- “I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” (Jn 8:26b)
- And “the word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.” (Jn 14:24b)

The same Jesus told the Apostles — and through them all holders of the office of the ecclesiastical Magisterium in all times until the end of time when He will come again — “He who hears you hears me,” (Lk 10:16a) and “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20a)

A long history of contradicting Christ

Notwithstanding the hard heartedness of many of His contemporaries and the “pastoral” sophisms of the Pharisees and Scribes, Christ has solemnly restored the primordial truth about marriage and human sexuality. He entrusted this truth to the Apostles and to their successors so that they may transmit and administer it faithfully as a patrimony which was not made by men and which does not depend on their decisions.

The Apostles were luminous and faithful guardians (“*episcopi et pastores*”, cf. Act 20: 28) and stewards (“administrators”, cf. 1 Cor 4: 1; Tit 1: 7) of this deposit of faith

also in the area which concerns marriage and human sexuality, mindful of the words which Jesus directed to them:

Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? (Lk 12:42)

Throughout the two thousand year life of the Church, there have been repeated attempts to reinterpret the crystal-clear and uncompromising teaching of Christ on the indissolubility of marriage and on the iniquity of any sexual act outside marriage. From the beginning there were the gnostic and dissipate doctrines of Jezabel and of the Nicolaites, which the Apostle John has reprimanded in the churches of Pergamon and Thyatira (cf. Rev. 2: 14-24).

More recently, Martin Luther established a radical contradiction to the doctrine of Christ and to the teaching of the Apostles on marriage when he called marriage a mere “worldly thing” (“*weltlich Dine*”). This opened for the first time in the Christian West, in theory and in practice, the door to divorce (cf. the case of the double marriage of Philipp of Hessen). In the Christian East there has also been frequent circumventions of Christ’s doctrine of marriage under the abuse of the concept of mercy (“*oikonomia*” as it is named in the Orthodox Church).

In West and East this accommodation is always borne from fear and servility towards the adulterous will of the princes of this world. To cite a few examples:

- the Greek episcopate since the reign of Emperor Justinian I;
- the Frankish episcopate in the case of the double marriage of the German Emperor Lothar II;
- and in a particularly blatant manner almost the entire episcopate of England under King Henry VIII.

A more recent example lies in part of the French College of Cardinals acquiescing to Emperor Napoleon’s invalid second marriage. Just a few courageous cardinals protested, whereupon Napoleon forbade them to wear the scarlet and confiscated their wages. In contrast to the politically correct cardinals, who continued to dress

in scarlet, these courageous and faithful cardinals had to wear the black soutane — hence they were called “black cardinals.”

The new Gnostic party

Over the past several years there has emerged within the Church a reforming party, mainly composed of priests, but also including some bishops and cardinals. This party wishes to effect a change in the Roman Catholic Church’s practice which has been unchanged for two thousand years.

The reception of Holy Communion by the divorced who live with a new partner and are civilly remarried has never before been possible, because this would go against the will of God:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers. (1 Cor 6:9a)

The reforming party uses different arguments. Their case is reminiscent of the early Christian Gnostics, for whom there could be always be a contradiction between doctrine and practice. Furthermore their arguments remind one of the theory of Martin Luther concerning the salvific power of faith regardless of lifestyle and even regardless of repentance and true amendment. The Council of Trent, however, taught:

If any one says that there are two parts only of penance, that is, the terrors with which the conscience is smitten upon being convinced of sin, and the faith, generated by the gospel, or by the absolution, whereby one believes that his sins are forgiven him through Christ; let him be anathema.¹

In addition, the above mentioned party tries to justify by means of sophistic and cynical trickery the sin of homosexual acts that cry to heaven. The good qualities of homosexual couples are adduced as a justification for the objectively sinful acts of their sodomitic cohabitating. Nevertheless the truth of the word of God in Sacred Scripture remains fully valid in the same

1 Council of Trent, Session XIV, Can. 4.



Alessandro Manzoni: “There is in man a superstitious tendency which induces him to confide in mere external forms . . . to stifle remorse without repenting: Paganism.”

manner in our days as it was valid in the time of Jesus and the Apostles:

Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6: 9b-10)

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. (Heb 13:4)

The doctrine of Christ on the absolute prohibition of divorce, and hence of the grave sinfulness of re-marriage after divorce, is crystal-clear. The Magisterium of the Church has kept this faithfully for two thousand years, both in theory and in practice. The Council of Trent solemnly defined this divine teaching of Christ as a dogma of faith:

If any one says that the Church has erred, in that she has taught, and does teach, in accordance with the evangelical and apostolic doctrine, that the bond of matrimony cannot be dissolved on account of the adultery of one of the married parties; and that both, or even the innocent one who gave no occasion to the adultery, cannot contract another marriage during the life-time of the other; and, that he is guilty of adultery, who, having put away the adulteress, shall take another wife, as also she, who, having put away the adul-

terer, shall take another husband; let him be anathema.²

Moreover, the First Vatican Council taught definitively:

If anyone says that it is possible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the Church which is different from that which the Church has understood and understands: let him be anathema.³

No Catholic who still takes seriously his baptismal vows should allow himself to be intimidated by the new sophistic teachers of fornication and adultery, even though — sad to say — these teachers hold the office of bishop or cardinal. Such teachers in ecclesiastical offices are certainly no disciples of Christ, but rather disciples of Moses or of Epicurus. This new, purported ‘pastoral doctrine’ of marriage and sexuality takes Christians back to the time before Christ, to an attitude of hard heartedness and blindness of heart towards the original, holy and wise will of God. They take Christians back to an attitude similar to that of the pagans, who don’t know God and His Holy Will.

The Holy Spirit teaches us in Sacred Scripture:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God. (1 Thess 4:3-5)

Only the life which accords to the original Divine Truth regarding marriage and sexuality, i.e. the “truth in Jesus” (“*veritas in Iesu*” Eph 4: 21), which Christ has restored and the Church has unchangingly transmitted, brings new life. That alone matters.

In our day the Holy Spirit admonishes us as well with the following words of Sacred Scripture:

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding,

alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4: 17-24)

In the nineteenth century the famous Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni warned against the danger of a pagan attitude in receiving sacraments, meaning a reception of the sacraments without a radical renunciation of sin, basing oneself only on the exterior ceremonies. He wrote:

Every Catholic will repeat with the Council of Trent, ‘If any one denies, that for the entire and perfect remission of sins, three acts are required of the penitent as the matter of the sacrament of penance — namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction — let him be anathema.’ (Council of Trent, Session XIV, Can. 4.)

Moreover, to receive this sacrament without these dispositions, is a sacrilege and an additional heinous sin. According to the Church, the first and indispensable step to every degree of sanctification is to return to God, to love justice, and to hate sin. There is in man a superstitious tendency, which induces him to confide in mere external forms, and to recur to religious ceremonies in order to stifle remorse, without repenting and atoning for the sins he has committed or renouncing his passions: Paganism. And exactly Paganism accommodated itself to this tendency.⁴

The errors of our age

To maintain the beauty of a life in marriage and family according to the will and the wisdom of God, it has been necessary in all times to resist the spirits of the world and of the flesh. Pope Paul VI said in a homily dur-

2 Council of Trent, Session XXIV, Can. 7.

3 First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, 4. *De fide et ratione*, Can. 3

4 Alessandro Manzoni, *Osservazioni sulla Morale Cattolica* [A Vindication of Catholic Morality], 1819.

ing the last session of the Second Vatican Council:

The Church is always the same and she remains immutable according to the will of Christ in opposition to the profane culture.⁵

The Second Vatican Council warned the Catholics of our day against the scandal of a lifestyle which is contrary to the professed faith:

If the Catholic faithful fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged.⁶

This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.⁷

Pope John Paul II spoke about the current danger of a separation between faith and morality in the life of a Catholic:

The attempt to set freedom in opposition to truth, and indeed to separate them radically, is the consequence, manifestation and consummation of another more serious and destructive dichotomy, that which separates faith from morality. This separation represents one of the most acute pastoral concerns of the Church amid today's growing secularism.⁸

Formal and ritual re-marriage of the divorced ultimately signifies a kind of superstition. Indeed such persons want to justify their new sinful union with an exterior performance of ritual. With typical perspicacity G. K. Chesterton detected the very root of the evil and of the contradiction of the remarriage of divorced:

While free love seems to me a heresy, divorce does really seem to me a superstition. It is not only more of a superstition than free love, but much more of a superstition than strict sacramental marriage; and this point can hardly be made too

plain. It is the partisans of divorce, not the defenders of marriage, who attach a stiff and senseless sanctity to a mere ceremony, apart from the meaning of the ceremony. It is our opponents, and not we, who hope to be saved by the letter of ritual, instead of the spirit of reality. It is they who hold that vow or violation, loyalty or disloyalty, can all be disposed of by a mysterious and magic rite, performed first in a law-court and then in a church or a registry office. There is little difference between the two parts of the ritual; except that the law court is much more ritualistic. But the plainest parallels will show anybody that all this is sheer barbarous credulity.

It may or may not be superstition for a man to believe he must kiss the Bible to show he is telling the truth. It is certainly the most grovelling superstition for him to believe that, if he kisses the Bible, anything he says will come true. It would surely be the blackest and most benighted Bible-worship to suggest that the mere kiss on the mere book alters the moral quality of perjury. Yet this is precisely what is implied in saying that formal re-marriage alters the moral quality of conjugal infidelity.⁹

A second ritual re-marriage of divorced people represents a kind of sacrilege, as Chesterton points out:

The broad-minded are extremely bitter because a Christian who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bounds him to one is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it.¹⁰

The divorce of a valid marriage intrinsically contains frivolity, and generates a spirit and a culture of frivolity. Chesterton described this phenomenon as being proofed by human realism:

The obvious effect of frivolous divorce will be frivolous marriage. If people can be separated for no reason they will feel it all the easier to be united for no reason. A man might quite clearly foresee that a sensual infatuation would be fleeting, and console himself with the knowledge that the connection could be equally fleeting. There seems no particular reason why he should not elaborately



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calculate that he could stand a particular lady's temper for ten months; or reckon that he would have enjoyed and exhausted her repertoire of drawing-room songs in two years. The old joke about choosing the wife to fit the furniture or the fashions might quite logically return, not as an old joke but as a new solemnity; indeed, it will be found that a new religion is generally the return of an old joke.¹¹

When clergy stand up for the admittance of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to Holy Communion, they in fact solemnize people's adultery and their sin against the Sixth Commandment. They give to such faithful the message that their divorce and the continuous violation of their sacramental bonds can become ultimately a positive reality. In other words, such clergy are liars. However in order to cover their evident lie and contradiction to the Word of God, they protect themselves with the mask of using the concept of "Divine mercy" and sentimental expressions like: "to open a door;" "to be pastorally creative;" "to be open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit."

To such a theoretical and practical behavior one can apply George Orwell's astute observation:

Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respect-

5 Paul VI, Homily, 28 October 1965.

6 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 14.

7 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

8 John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 88.

9 G. K. Chesterton, *The Superstition of Divorce* 2, 1920.

10 G. K. Chesterton, *The Tragedies of Marriage*, 1920.

11 G. K. Chesterton, *The Vista of Divorce*, 1920.



George Orwell: "Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."¹²

able, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.¹²

Pope St John Paul II taught:

If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it. They remain irremediably evil acts; per se and in themselves they are not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person. 'As for acts which are themselves sins (*cum iam opera ipsa peccata sunt*),' Saint Augustine writes, 'like theft, fornication, blasphemy, who would dare affirm that, by doing them for good motives (*causis bonis*), they would no longer be sins, or, what is even more absurd, that they would be sins that are justified?' (*Contra Mendacium*, VII, 18) Consequently circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act 'subjectively' good or defensible as a choice.¹³

Pope John Paul II also left to the Church this most clear teaching regarding the authentic meaning of the merciful motherhood of the Church towards sinners:

The Church's teaching, and in particular her firmness in defending the universal and permanent validity of the precepts prohibiting intrinsically evil acts, is not infrequently seen as the sign of an intol-

erable intransigence, particularly with regard to the enormously complex and conflict-filled situations present in the moral life of individuals and of society today; this intransigence is said to be in contrast with the Church's motherhood. The Church, one hears, is lacking in understanding and compassion. But the Church's motherhood can never in fact be separated from her teaching mission, which she must always carry out as the faithful Bride of Christ, who is the Truth in person.

As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm . . . The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection. (*Familiaris consortio*, 33.)

In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness.

Still, a clear and forceful presentation of moral truth can never be separated from a profound and heartfelt respect, borne of that patient and trusting love which man always needs along his moral journey, a journey frequently wearisome on account of difficulties, weakness and painful situations. The Church can never renounce the "the principle of truth and consistency, whereby she does not agree to call good evil and evil good," (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 34); she must always be careful not to break the bruised reed or to quench the dimly burning wick (cf. Is 42:3)¹⁴

The same Pontiff affirmed:

When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the 'poorest of the poor' on the face of the earth. Before the

demands of morality we are all absolutely equal.¹⁵

The new Gnostic clerical party strives in our day to accommodate sexual acts outside a valid marriage (divorced and 'remarried') and suggests that even sexual acts against nature (homosexual behaviour) may ultimately, in some cases, be practically accepted by the Church. They invoke a 'welcoming pastoral style,' abusing in a sentimental manner this expression.

The following luminous words of Pope St Pius X are fully applicable to this topic:

Catholic doctrine tells us that the primary duty of charity does not lie in the toleration of false ideas, however sincere they may be, nor in the theoretical or practical indifference towards the errors and vices in which we see our brethren plunged, but in the zeal for their intellectual and moral improvement as well as for their material well-being. Catholic doctrine further tells us that love for our neighbour flows from our love for God, Who is Father to all, and goal of the whole human family; and in Jesus Christ whose members we are, to the point that in doing good to others we are doing good to Jesus Christ Himself. Any other kind of love is sheer illusion, sterile and fleeting.¹⁶

I conclude with these words of Robert Hugh Benson:

The Catholic Church then is, and always will be, violent and intransigent when the rights of God are in question. She will be absolutely ruthless, for example, towards heresy, for heresy affects not personal matters on which Charity may yield, but a Divine right on which there must be no yielding. Yet, simultaneously, she will be infinitely kind towards the heretic, since a thousand human motives and circumstances may come in and modify his responsibility. At a word of repentance she will readmit his person into her treasury of souls, but not his heresy into her treasury of wisdom. She exhibits meekness towards him and violence towards his error; since he is human, but her Truth is Divine.¹⁷

15 John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 96.

16 St Pius X, *Notre charge Apostolique*, from 15th August 1910.

17 R. H. Benson, *Paradoxes of Catholicism*, 1913, chapter 11.

12 George Orwell, *Politics and the English language*, 1940.

13 John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 81.

14 John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 96.