

More Bad Defenses of “Amoris Laetitia”

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The claim was widely made during the two Synods on the Family that the innovation of allowing persons living in adulterous second unions to receive Holy Communion, as proposed by Cardinal Kasper and others, was not a change in doctrine, but simply in discipline. I did not believe this to be true then (or now) and, apparently, neither did many of the supporters of this innovation.

The first evidence of that was the seemingly universal refusal to identify these unions as adulterous in fidelity to Christ’s words: “Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.” (Lk 16:18) Instead of adulterous these sinful relationships were called “irregular” unions. This tactic reduces Christ’s teaching to the level of a regulation. The use of scare quotes further diminished the stature of Christ’s teaching by casting doubt on whether we should really consider these unions to be irregular at all.

A conference on the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* ^[1] was recently held at Boston College. Further evidence of the rejection of Christ’s plain teaching on marriage, divorce and adultery is found in the reported comments of two speakers: Professor Cathleen Kaveny and Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J.

Kaveny used curious language to describe Our Lord’s teaching on marital fidelity: “Jesus clearly disfavored adultery.” No, Jesus forbade adultery. One can disfavor things that are good in themselves, but simply do not appeal to one for a variety of reasons. One can never claim as good and right something that God has clearly forbidden.

Kaveny continued: “It’s clear that he rejects divorce and remarriage as contrary to the original will of God. But nothing in Jesus’ words or conduct demand that the sin involved in divorce and remarriage must be conceptualized as a sin that continues indefinitely, without the possibility of effective repentance.”

Well, the original will of God remains in force unless God himself has indicated otherwise. Jesus clearly reaffirmed the prohibition of divorce and remarriage, harkening back to God’s original plan for man and woman as revealed in the Book of Genesis.

Understanding the sin involved in divorce and remarriage requires making distinctions. The responsibility for the break-up of marital life falls upon one or both parties, depending upon each

one's degree of culpability. The obtaining of a civil divorce is likewise to be evaluated as to the motives and responsibilities involved: is a divorce sought to free one to enter a new union, or is it sought to obtain legal protection of the financial and other interests of the offended spouse and children?

The decision to enter into an adulterous second union, however, is a public violation of the nature of indissoluble Christian marriage, and of one's wedding vows. It involves the sin of adultery and the public scandal of living in opposition to Christ's commandments.

Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery by Guercino, 1621 [Dulwich Picture Gallery, London]

Effective repentance is always possible. One simply has to cease all adulterous acts and remove oneself from the near occasion of sin. That will involve ending the relationship, or in cases where the good of children or other factors such as advanced age, ill health, economic constraints, etc. require the continuance of a form of common life, undertaking the commitment to live as brother and sister. When those conditions obtain, a return to the sacraments must, as far as possible, avoid giving scandal.

Sadly, Kaveny considers the Church's commitment to fidelity to Christ's words to be unmerciful: "To impose such a requirement in every case is not merciful. And mercy is the ultimate touchstone for the divine lawgiver."

But fidelity to Christ's word is never an imposition, but rather a joyful obligation embraced willingly by the faithful. God's law is always merciful; hence fidelity to that law is a merciful act that instructs us in right behavior. Conversely, that law rebukes us in a salutary way when we fall away from God's clear teaching.

Kaveny adds: "We do not need to disturb Jesus' teaching in order to refine and develop it in these ways, in ways that moral theologians and canon lawyers have always done." Jesus' teaching cannot be disturbed, however, but it can be ignored or falsified. The admittance of invalidly married couples to Holy Communion is not a refinement or development of that teaching, it is a betrayal.

One can claim to uphold a teaching by refining and developing it in a way that totally changes its meaning, but such a claim is false. Either adultery is always wrong, or it is never wrong. There can be no middle ground. To redefine some forms of adultery *as not adultery* is an offense against the plain meaning of Christ's words. It's wishful thinking that endorses immorality and would have the effect of destroying the unity of faith taught by the Church.

Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J., who also spoke at the conference, uttered an incredible statement that dovetails with Kaveny's remarks. He said: "It is no longer possible to judge people on the basis of a norm that stands above all." This is a direct contradiction of how the Church has always understood Christ's teaching.

The Eternal Son of God made man taught as One possessing divine authority. His commandments and judgments are divine, and he entrusted the Church with teaching those commandments and judgments. It is always possible and always necessary for the Church to preach Christ's word in its entirety. Christ stands above us all, in order to raise us from sin, error, and death. It's horrendous to suggest that Christ's teaching should no longer be preached in its plain sense as taught from the beginning by the Church.

So much for the claim, then, that Church doctrine would be untouched when the innovators called for a change in the Church's discipline regarding Holy Communion, and divorced and remarried Catholics. I am reminded once again of the title of Cardinal Sarah's book *God or Nothing* [3]. That is what it comes down to as we experience, with sadness, this escalating crisis over the meaning of God's truth about marriage, divorce, adultery, and Holy Communion.

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[1] conference on the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*:

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/conference-weighs-how-amoris-laetitia-rejects-infantilization-laity>

[2] Image: <http://humanumreview.com/>

[3] *God or Nothing*: <http://amzn.to/2x1wKhL>