

# The Crisis We Are Living

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The publication in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* of Pope Francis' letter confirming the interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia* by the bishops of the Buenos Aires region marked a new phase in the serious crisis affecting the Church. We now know that the pastoral advice of this group of bishops embodies what Pope Francis intended in chapter 8 of *AL*. Pope Francis [wrote to them](#): "The document is very good and completely explains the meaning of chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*. There are no other interpretations." Pope Francis' endorsement had previously been in the form of a private letter. Such a letter does indicate the pope's mind on a certain matter, but it is not an act of official teaching for the whole Church.

With its publication in the *Acta* (along with the Argentinean document) under the new title of *Apostolic Letter*, and further described in an accompanying note as possessing the quality of "authentic magisterium," it is no longer a private letter. And it's no surprise that three Kazakh bishops this week issued [a public statement](#) affirming traditional teaching and (in an extraordinary move) [were quickly joined](#) by former nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò and Archbishop Luigi Negri – with perhaps others to follow.

It's worth noting, however, that the Buenos Aires guidelines leave room for further interpretation by each bishop: "We believe it is convenient, as bishops of the same pastoral region, to agree to certain minimal criteria. We offer them without prejudice to the authority that each bishop has in his own diocese to specify them, complete them, or restrict them." So the guidelines for interpreting *AL* do not ask individual bishops, in the Buenos Aires region or now of the whole world, simply to follow what they propose. Rather, individual bishops can "specify, complete, or restrict" the "minimal criteria." And thus, the papal endorsement also implies that each bishop retains authority in his own diocese.

The advice given in the guidelines seems at first to reaffirm – but then contradicts – the constant teaching and discipline of the Church. The Buenos

Aires bishops write: “When the concrete circumstances of a couple [in a second marriage] make it feasible, especially when both are Christians with a journey of faith, it is possible to propose that they make the effort of living in continence.” The encouragement to live as brother and sister, when their particular circumstances (for example, ill health, young children, advanced age) would make separating inadvisable, in order to receive worthily the help of the sacraments, was clearly taught by Saint John Paul II in various places.



### **Cardinal Kasper and the pope**

The next paragraph, however, teaches the exact opposite: In other, more complex circumstances, and when it is not possible to obtain a declaration of nullity, the aforementioned option may not, in fact, be feasible. Nonetheless, it is equally possible to undertake a journey of discernment. If one arrives at the recognition that, in a particular case, there are limitations that diminish responsibility and culpability (cf. 301-302), particularly when a person judges that he would fall into a subsequent fault by damaging the children of the new union, *Amoris Laetitia* opens up the possibility of access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist (cf. notes 336 and 351). These, in turn, dispose the person to continue maturing and growing with the aid of grace.

Here’s the problem: When a group of bishops teaches that persons in invalid second marriages are free to judge that it is not “feasible” for them to avoid committing acts of adultery, they are telling the faithful that they are not at fault for doing what the Catholic Church teaches to be gravely sinful.

“Feasibility” means “the state or degree of being easily or conveniently done,” and even more precisely “capable of being done, accomplished or carried out.” The avoidance of mortal sin does involve difficulty and inconvenience. But the Church does not teach that grown-up people in their right minds are *incapable* of obeying God’s commandments.

To say to someone that it may be infeasible for him to refrain from acts of adultery is to advise him that, in effect, he is not subject to God’s law in this matter. When pastors tell Catholics living in sin that they are not really guilty of mortal sin as long as they decide that they cannot “feasibly” observe God’s law, the shepherds have seriously failed them.

This unchristian fatalism of denying man’s freedom and ability to avoid committing mortal sin leads to the incredible claim that adultery is not that bad for some people, that they are free to receive both sacramental absolution and Holy Communion without renouncing the intention to commit acts of adultery, and that this reception of the sacraments will “dispose the person to continue maturing and growing with the aid of grace.” This plainly contradicts the Gospel as taught by the Church through the ages.

Cardinal Walter Kasper [recently said](#): “universally valid objective commandments . . . cannot be applied mechanically or by purely logical deduction to concrete, often complex and perplexing, situations.” He denies that this is moral relativism: “[this] has nothing to do with situational ethics that knows no universal commandments, it is not about exceptions to the commandment, but about the question of [*sic*] understood as situational conscience cardinal virtue of prudence.”

To justify this novel position, Cardinal Kasper caricatures the Church’s unwavering fidelity to God’s word as a “mechanical” (read “inhuman”) attempt to apply “purely logical deductions.”

It is offensive to describe fidelity to the Church’s perennial doctrine and discipline in the matter of divorced and remarried Catholics as acting as an unthinking and uncaring machine. Speaking Christ’s truth is the perpetual mission of the Church’s pastors.

As the Kazak bishops rightly say: “The Catholic faith by its nature excludes a formal contradiction between the faith professed on the one hand and the life and practice of the sacraments on the other.”

Yet that is where one arrives if one claims that for some people mortal sin is both inevitable and inculpable. The Gospel is compromised, the

constant Magisterium of the Church is repudiated and those who object to this are stigmatized.

Herein lies the crisis we are living.

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# Confronting the Gay Priest Problem

[Rev. Jerry J. Pokorsky](#)  
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Recently, a priest who was prominent in the pastoral care of those with sex addictions received his fifteen minutes of fame when he [revealed to his congregation at a Sunday Mass](#) and to the *National Catholic Reporter* that he was “gay.” According to news reports, his self-congratulation was met with thunderous applause. In a television interview, he proclaimed there is “nothing wrong with being gay.”

The game plan of a gay priest “coming out” was quite predictable and is politically effective. In revealing his homosexuality, the Midwestern priest was careful to assemble a string of ambiguous assertions that cannot be immediately assailed on grounds of orthodoxy, but when bundled together are morally subversive. Here is the template:

- Claim that sexual transparency is a matter of personal integrity.
- Remind the public that you are a Catholic priest in good standing.
- Proudly proclaim that you are “gay.”
- Cultivate the adulation of your congregation by claiming victim status and the freedom that comes from such an honest revelation.
- As a pre-emptive strike against disciplinary actions by ecclesiastical authorities claim that your self-revelation is truly courageous.
- Feign humility and presume you have become a necessary role model for others.
- Remind us that you and all gays (and members of the alphabet soup of sexual perversion) are created in the image of God (implying our sinful neglect).
- Commit to celibacy (i.e., not to marry), but carefully avoid the term “Christian chastity.”

Each of these assertions, standing alone, would likely withstand ecclesiastical censure. But when woven together, the gay agenda promoting

the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle within the Church comes into a clear focus.

The priest's bishop also responded according to a predictable contemporary ecclesiastical template: "We support [the priest] in his own personal journey and telling his story of coming to understand and live with his sexual orientation. As the Church teaches, those with same-sex attraction must be treated with understanding and compassion."

The bishop probably succeeded in preventing a media firestorm. He also effectively allowed the priest to rise in stature as a gay freedom fighter. The studied moral ambiguity of the clerical gay activist proved to be an effective political buzz saw. The full and beautiful teachings of Christ on human sexuality, however, were further undermined.

Faithful and orthodox Catholics are at a political disadvantage in our gay-friendly culture. We realize that same-sex inclinations – as with all seriously sinful inclinations – cause great suffering and, unrestrained, can become a true slavery that endangers others including adolescents and even young children. But our opposition to the gay agenda is often crudely characterized as hateful and unreasonable. So it a brief sketch of natural law Catholic sexual morality may be helpful.



Male and female sex organs differ and have a unique reproductive function. The body of every human being contains a self-sufficient digestive or respiratory system. But it only contains half of a reproductive system and

must be paired with a half-system belonging to a person of the opposite sex in order to carry out its function. These are undeniable biological facts.

“To engage in sex” is a relational term that implies male and female complementarity. Only a male and a female truly “engage in sex.” In contrast, same-sex “relations” involve the exercise of one’s sexual power, but not according to its self-evident nature. Sodomy is not really relational “sex.” It is merely a masturbatory use of sexual powers. Similarly, there is no such thing as “sexual relations” with a “sex robot” (alas, an emerging technology).

When a priest claims to be “gay and proud,” he is revealing that he has assented to his same-sex attraction. Free and deliberate thoughts have moral implications, as Jesus asserted: “But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5:28) The difference between internal assent and external action is only a matter of a sinful opportunity. An unabashed and proud “gay” priest has already committed sodomy in his heart.

So how might an ecclesiastical superior defend Church teaching if one of his priests (or religious) claims a special dignity by “coming out” as gay? The superior should invoke immutable Christian moral principles in dealing with a self-described gay priest:

- Acknowledge that he is afflicted with “same-sex attraction” (SSA).
- Admit that SSA is an inclination toward mortal sin that if not restrained will lead him and others to eternal damnation.
- Identify and renounce any physical expression of SSA.
- Properly define celibacy to include Christian chastity that precludes all sexual activity in thought, word or deed.
- Invoke Scriptural references condemning sodomy (cf. Genesis and Saint Paul).
- Renounce the use of the word “gay” because it is a political term that has its roots in the homosexual subculture.
- Apologize for encouraging others to publicly reveal their mortally sinful inclinations. (The Eighth Commandment protects natural secrets.)

After a careful inquiry, the superior should release a public statement of clarification, prohibiting the priest from his homosexual activism and taking

further personnel action according to the demands of Catholic morality and Canon Law.

Would a media firestorm ensue? Probably. But the superior would courageously confirm that the studied ambiguity of the gay agenda promoted by the priest is a lie.

During the rite of ordination for priests, the bishop says, “May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.” Priests – and everyone – are in a constant state of change, for the better or for the worse. Fulfilling the duties of Holy Orders or any Christian vocation with true moral integrity is a lifelong task.

If we are going to find our true and final happiness in Christ, we must not only recognize and understand our sinful inclinations, but make firm and constant efforts to overcome them. “Celebrating” those inclinations simply makes no sense – whether the inclination is same-sex attraction or any other deviation from God’s plan for us.

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