



Msgr. Livio Melina speaks at the Rome Life Forum, May 18, 2018

Diane Montagna/LifeSiteNews

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Former president of Rome's John Paul II Institute corrects today's errors on conscience

ROME, May 28, 2018 (LifeSiteNews) — Conscience is being invoked today in questions of sexual morality and the defense of life because people aren't really convinced of these norms, the former president of the John Paul II Institute on Marriage and the Family in Rome has said.

Speaking during a Q&A session at the 2018 Rome Life Forum, on May 18, respected moral theologian Monsignor Livio Melina said: "Sexual morality and life issues have been privatized as though we were dealing with trivial matters. People invoke conscience instead of admitting the grave obligation both to form the conscience, and to admonish those who do harm through errors that are present in their conscience."

The Rome Life Forum, which gathers pro-life and pro-family leaders from around the world, dedicated the 2018 meeting to the theme of conscience. The choice was inspired by the late Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, who suggested it at last year's event just months before his death.

At this year's forum, held at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome, Msgr. Melina spoke on "Moral conscience and truth in the magisterium of Cardinal Carlo Caffarra."

Following his talk, Msgr. Melina fielded several questions on conscience from conference speakers and participants (see Q&A below).

Msgr. Melina is a tenured Professor of Moral Theology at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, where he served as a President from 2006 till 2016.

On September 8, 2017, by papal decree, Pope Francis established a new Pontifical John Paul II Institute for "Marriage and Family Sciences" to replace the previous academic institution founded by Pope John Paul II in 1981. He tasked the new entity with carrying forward the work of the two recent Synods of Bishops and the apostolic exhortation that came from those meetings, *Amoris Laetitia*.

The decree was issued just two days after the passing of Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, the founding president of the JPPI Institute. As a signatory to the *dubia* given to Pope Francis, Cardinal Caffarra had serious concerns about *Amoris Laetitia*, interpretations of which he found incompatible with John Paul II's teachings and the magisterium of the Church.

Here below is a translation of the Q&A with Msgr. Melina at the May 17-18 Rome Life Forum.

Question 1: Does *Amoris Laetitia* give a reliable summary of the Catholic teaching on conscience?

I believe what is said in *Amoris Laetitia* is true, but it is partial. And so we need to complete or to clarify, or to interpret or even to correct some, let us say, ambivalent expressions in *Amoris Laetitia*. These expressions need to be read in light of *Veritatis Splendor*, which gives a thematic teaching on conscience. *Amoris Laetitia* was not tasked with clarifying the topic of conscience and so I believe a Catholic hermeneutic has to read the ambivalent or incomplete, or even apparently ambiguous expressions within *Amoris Laetitia* in light of the encyclical that is of greater magisterial weight than an apostolic exhortation and which is explicitly dedicated to this subject. It has to find its final hermeneutic in the doctrine on conscience contained in *Veritatis Splendor*.

Question 2: This question comes from Prof. Josef Seifert, who was my professor. How can we reconcile the beautiful reflections on the need to found conscience on the truth with a conscience that obligates and is erroneous in its judgements? This is a difficult question, but I'll try to respond and see what grade my professor gives me.

Conscience always obligates in the name of truth. When it expresses a true judgement it obligates in itself. When it expresses an erroneous judgement it obligates *per accidens*, that is, it obligates only inasmuch as the subject erroneously believes that it is the truth.

In this sense, the value of actions carried out with a true (well formed) conscience, and the value of actions carried out with an erroneous conscience is not the same, because the actions carried out with a true conscience are good actions. The actions carried out with an erroneous conscience are evil actions but not imputable as evil to the subject. And that is why the first duty of the moral agent is to form his conscience in truth. And so it can happen that an erroneous conscience is guilty in the cause of its error, because it didn't commit itself to really forming itself in the truth. And so a conscience that neglects its own formation, that is, a conscience that is not continually seeking the truth, or which is not docile to the instruments that divine providence has offered to man to form his conscience in truth, is a conscience that bears guilt of its error. In technical terms, we say it is a conscience that is guilty *in the cause of its error*.

When, however, a conscience is in error, but it is not aware of its error, it can be obligated, even though it is in error, to act in a certain manner. When one is aware of the gravity of the action that is being carried out, I believe there is also an obligation to make sure own's conscience is correct, especially when this would diverge from a constant magisterium of the Church. And therefore I think that an erroneous conscience can obligate and obligates *per accidens*. It does not lead to performing good actions, but if anything, to actions not guilty. But they could be even more guilty because they are guilty in the cause of the error, and in any case, I think that the value of the two actions are not the same. This is how I would respond.

(From the audience, Prof. Seifert gives Prof. Melina a perfect mark.)

Question 3: Why is the criterion of the primacy of conscience being used to demolish the norms of sexual morality and the moral and anthropological norms, while it goes unmentioned when speaking about topics such as welcoming migrants, ecology, poverty, immigration where a rigid intransigence reigns.

I think the question already contains the response, but I can expand upon it in this sense. I think that conscience is invoked in questions of sexual morality and the defense of life because people aren't convinced of those norms. I think they don't believe that the transgression of those norms brings real harm to a person. I think that sexual morality and moral issues regarding life have been privatized as though we were dealing with trivial things. Therefore, they invoke conscience instead of admitting the grave obligation both to form the conscience and to admonish those who do harm through errors that are present in their conscience.

Question 4: How can we interpret number six of the letter of the bishops of Buenos Aires in line with the Magisterium of *Familiaris Consortio* and *Veritatis Splendor* when it seems to speak of a creative conscience that would allow the divorced and civilly remarried to receive Holy Communion?

I think that here we have to say two things regarding this question. The first is more fundamental but doesn't directly touch on this question.

I think that the question of access to Communion for the divorced and remarried cannot be reduced to an issue of conscience because it is a problem of the truth about the sacrament: about the Sacrament of the Eucharist, about the Sacrament of Penance, and about the Sacrament of Marriage.

First of all, there is a problem of conformity with the form of Christian life that the Eucharist demands and it cannot be reduced to a problem of subjective mitigating circumstances, of the possible guilt one would incur through a second co-habitation after a valid marriage. Even though I find it very difficult to imagine a case of people who can live in a second non-marital union without knowing that they are involved in an adulterous union.

Regarding a “creative” conscience to which the question refers, I believe there are possibilities for using the expression. I don’t have the text of the statement in front of me, a statement that, when I read it, I found confused and also interiorly contradictory. But the concept of creative conscience is criticized in *Veritatis Splendor*, when one attributes to the term “creative” the authority to establish a moral norm or to create a moral norm adapted to the situation which is not dependent on the objective norm that guides Christian action and morality, and of all Christians.

I think that, in a certain sense, one can salvage the idea of a creative conscience if one attributes to this expression *not* the authority to establish exceptions to negative moral norms, but as an expression which indicates the necessary search the conscience has to undertake to find the best, most suitable way to carry out the good. In this sense, there is a “creativity” of human reason, which allows it to search and find the most suitable solutions. But this would be attributed more to prudence than to conscience. However, saying this in this setting embarrasses me because another of my great teachers, a Dominican Father who taught here at the Angelicum, said he would never have used the word “creative” attributing it to man if not by way of a faint analogy since creation is an act proper to God and not of man. However, by way of a faint analogy, one could use it to describe a prudent conscience, or better said, the virtue of prudence inasmuch as it invents it finds solutions in the sphere of good in order to respond in its actions, but never to create exceptions to a negative moral norm.

Ireland and the end of cultural Catholicism

In a global village and a global Church where ethnic identities are dissolving, cultural Catholicism is also disintegrating.

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The ruins of Bective Abby , a Cistercian abbey on the River Boyne in Bective, County Meath, Ireland.
(Jonathan Bowers @jbowersphotography | Unsplash.com)

The vote to allow abortion in Ireland has revealed what we already knew—that Ireland’s Catholic faith has eroded, and the once great and powerful Irish church has become a husk of what it once was.

I am no expert on Ireland, Irish history or the Irish church, but I expect the malaise has the same roots as the decline of the institutional church not only in the other European countries, but also in the decline of cultural Catholicism in the United States.

I understood the impact and influence of cultural Christianity when I was a minister in the Church of England. We used to joke that “C of E” meant “church of everybody” and that people would greet you in the street and say, “Oh, you’re the vicar of St Chad’s? Yes. That’s the church I don’t attend.”

They hadn’t a clue what Christianity was about, but there was a sense that the big old musty medieval building in the middle of the town was somehow “their church” because they were English and after all, it’s the Church of England right?

When I was a Catholic in England it was different. Catholicism was not the national church so you had to belong intentionally either because you were Irish or you were a convert or you were one of those rare birds, an English cradle Catholic...even so your parents or grandparents were either Irish or converts or you might be one of those even rarer birds—a descendent of one of the great recusant families.

Either way, you were Catholic and you were different, and that is a healthy way to be a Christian.

On returning to the States, I was blessed to come to the Diocese of Charleston which comprises the whole state of South Carolina where Catholics are still a suspect minority. Even with the recent growth of Catholicism in the South we are no more than about 5 percent of the population.

Only when I traveled to the cultural Catholic strongholds of Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago did I begin to realize the vast difference between South Carolina Catholicism and Catholicism in the solidly Catholic Northeast. There, like the Irish, the Church had vast holdings of real estate. I visited huge (mostly empty) seminaries, convents, and monasteries. Huge (mostly empty) churches sat on the corner of campuses where once stood the rectory, the convent, the parish school, the high school, the church social hall, and all the rest of the facilities of a wealthy, dynamic, and muscular church.

It was cultural Catholicism that built these great parishes and dioceses in the Northern cities, just like it was cultural Catholicism that strengthened the Catholic Church in Ireland. The fact that the immigrants were members of a minority group and their religion was a minority, strengthened both identities and helped them build a strong Catholicism.

But the problem was that their Catholicism was too linked to their national or ethnic culture. They were Catholic because they were Polish or because they were Italian or because they were Irish or Portuguese, and when, after a few generations, they stopped being Irish, Polish, or Italian and were just American, they also stopped being Catholic.

This accounts for the huge departure of so many American Catholics to either Protestantism or the golf course. When their culture became affluent suburban America rather than Irish or Polish or Italian, they chose a church that suited their new culture better—a nice, respectable suburban Protestant church.....and as a side note, observe how in the post-war period so many Catholic parishes also became nice, snug suburban churches— pretty much indistinguishable from their Protestant neighbors.

What's the old saying? "America is a Protestant country. Even the Catholics are Protestant."

The same collapse of cultural Catholicism can be seen in Ireland. As long as the Irish had a strong national identity—especially as opposed to the hated English—they banded together and they clung to their Catholicism as part of that distinctive identity. Once they joined the European Union and the English turned out to be much more friendly, their strong Irish identity got watered down and their Catholicism with it. When they stopped being Irish, they stopped being Catholic.

When this cultural phenomenon is combined with poor catechesis, the culture of privilege and power among the clergy, the financial and moral corruption of the Church—no wonder Irish Catholicism is sinking fast.

With the rapid advance of mobility and instant global communications, national cultures are

disappearing. In a global village and a global Church where ethnic identities are dissolving, cultural Catholicism is also disintegrating.

And is that such a bad thing?

This is why I would offer the phenomenon of Catholicism in the American South as an interesting model for the future.

In our town of Greenville, South Carolina there is virtually no cultural Catholicism. Yes, there is an Order of Old Hibernians who keep the Irish culture alive, and the Hispanics treasure their cultural links with the faith, as do the Vietnamese, but these are minor currents.

The majority of Catholics in the Southern USA are Catholics not because they are Irish or Italian or Polish, but because they're Catholic.

Our parish is typical, and has a wonderful mix of people from a range of cultural backgrounds: French, Nigerian, Polish, Italian, Irish, Philippino, English, Scottish, Vietnamese, El Salvadoran, Mexican...you name it.

In my opinion, the death of cultural Catholicism can't come too soon.

From it will emerge not only a smaller and more vibrant Church, but also a Church that is truly multi-racial and multi-national...and surely that's an important part of what it means to be Catholic.

But to push this further, what is it that will bind us all together? If it is not our shared Irish, Polish, Vietnamese, or Hispanic culture—what is it?

Here's a radical thought: what if the thing that drew us together was a dynamic new appreciation of our shared Catholic culture? One of the interesting things we have discovered in building a new church in our parish in Greenville South Carolina is that it is our ancient Catholic traditions that unite us.

The beauty of our traditionally styled Romanesque church is appreciated by everyone from all cultural backgrounds. Yes, the architecture is rooted in twelfth-century Italian tradition, but then so is the music, the art, and liturgy of the Church.

All of this is not so much Italian as Catholic. The Gregorian chant and plainsong, like the Romanesque architecture, is timeless and transcends culture. It also transcends the post-Vatican II "American Catholic" culture of folk music, fan-shaped carpeted churches, bland homilies, and the faux egalitarianism that shapes the liturgy.

Those who argue for the Extraordinary Form of the Mass have some good points and some weak

points, but one of their strong points is that a uniform liturgy and language is important because it transcends individual cultural or aesthetic choices in liturgy and therefore unites all of the faithful.

I don't propose any magic solutions, but I predict that over the next few decades we will see cultural Catholicism continue to fade away and a smaller, more vibrant church will emerge in which traditional architecture, music, and liturgy proclaim to the world a Catholicism that looks, feels and smells Catholic (don't forget the incense) and is therefore firm in its identity not as Irish or Polish or Italian or Suburban American, but as Catholic—nothing more and nothing less.

About Fr. Dwight Longenecker > [4 Articles](#)

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May 25th was the burial, not the death, of “Catholic Ireland”

Today, it is clear that Ireland does not have the political or media outlets to oppose the liberal agenda currently unleashed on the Irish people.

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A voter cast his ballot May 25 in Dublin as Ireland held a referendum on its law on abortion. (CNS photo/Max Rossi, Reuters)

Ireland's referendum result on May 25th was a reversal of the 1983 referendum that brought about the Eighth Amendment, Ireland's constitutional safeguard for the unborn. The old two-thirds who voted for the Eighth Amendment have now become the new one-third and vice versa as 1,429,981 (66.4%) voted “Yes” and 723,632 (33.6%) voted “No”.

Some talk of this vote as being symbolic of the ‘death’ of Catholic Ireland. Perhaps it is more realistic to talk of it as just another example of the ongoing burial of Catholicism in Ireland as that country's dominant social, cultural, and political force.

Last Friday, *The Irish Times'* exit poll suggested that the great majority in every age cohort from 18 to 64 were ‘Yes’ voters. Yet, 93% of primary schooling in the Irish Republic is controlled by the Catholic Church. The vast majority of those ‘Yes’ voters would have gone through some form of Catholic education at some time in the past 50 years. Therefore, it raises questions about what is being taught about Catholic morals and what (if any) impact it has upon those pupils attending church-run schools.

Even more depressing was the exit poll carried out by the State broadcaster, RTÉ, which estimated that almost a third of *practicing* Catholics had voted ‘Yes’ to removing the Eighth Amendment.

One other statistic to consider is this: last autumn only six men began training for the priesthood at Ireland's national seminary, Maynooth. That is the lowest intake of seminarians since Maynooth's foundation in 1795.

However one measures it, Catholic Ireland has been in steep decline for generations—a downward spiral caused or not helped by a number of factors, including the many clerical abuse scandals. This latest referendum result is just another public defeat in a long line for the Church in Ireland.

The question of what really 'died' in Ireland last Friday is perhaps more worrying still.

For all the feminist talk of 'pride' in the outcome of the poll, given the subject matter there should have been at least a scintilla of restraint, especially now as any form of 'shame' on this subject seems no longer allowed. The sight of 'celebrations' at the outcome of the referendum should cause all to take stock and consider what exactly is being celebrated. Abortion is never a cause for rejoicing; from whatever perspective it is, at the very least, a tragedy.

So, it was not just respect and love for life that died in Ireland last Friday. Judging from the media images of these 'celebrations', common human decency was also dealt a mortal blow. These were the first casualties of this referendum result. Unfortunately, they shall likely not be the last.

The other thing that 'died' is a sense of robust political discourse in the Irish Republic. There is now an Irish political establishment that is wholly liberal on issues such as abortion. It is backed to the hilt in this 'progressive' drive by the Irish media. Today, it is clear that Ireland does not have the political or media outlets to oppose the liberal agenda currently unleashed on the Irish people. No doubt this agenda will continue to be dressed in words such as 'modern', 'inclusive', and 'tolerant'. Of course, it is none of these things, but in the public square there are just too few to point this out. In due course, those who do oppose this state-sponsored agenda will be silenced, sidelined, or worse.

In light of the landslide vote for abortion, some brave voices, such as Breda O'Brien, the sole pro-life voice on *The Irish Times*, talked of Irish pro-lifers learning from other pro-life movements abroad and of resisting the changes that are now to be put in place. It is too early to say where the Irish pro-life movement goes from here, but one thing is clear: it will not be given as much airtime in the Irish media. In addition, its ability to be taken seriously by politicians, all too aware of what the word 'landslide' means for their political futures, also remains to be seen.

The pro-life movement in Britain gains some of its support from the fact that for 50 years there has been legalised abortion in that jurisdiction. British pro-lifers have all seen and heard horror stories a plenty, so much so they know that abortion is *not* the answer for any pregnant woman but the beginning of many woes.

Ireland has yet to realise this fact. It has yet to have grubby 'abortion clinics' on its back streets, staffed by medical staff too ashamed to tell people socially what it is they do for a living.

Ireland has yet to have the global industrial complex of abortion providers come to its land, businessmen and women who have a vested interest in ensuring there is a demand for their endless supply.

Ireland has yet to have the trauma, often invisible but there none the less, of the countless women—and, indeed, men—for whom abortion was presented as a simple solution only for those same women to be maimed both physically and emotionally for the rest of their days as a result.

In light of the reality of abortion in other states, the celebrations upon the streets of Dublin and elsewhere by the triumphant ‘Yes’ campaigners seem hollow. In fact, these public display are as much of a lie as the new ‘health provision’ now being offered to Irish women.

In a matter of days, many things have died in Ireland—not least the illusion that it is a Catholic country. And at the center is the real and horrible fatality: that unborn children of a once Catholic nation will not see the light of day because of a plebiscite on who should be allowed to live and who should die.

About K. V. Turley > [60 Articles](#)

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