

NEW MORALITY

Blessing without converting: the model is *Amoris laetitia*

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**Luisella
Scrosati**



Opposition to the Declaration of 18 December continues to grow. Africa is by now a 'no-fly zone' for *Fiducia supplicans* (FS), while other bishops' conferences, individual bishops and religious and priestly communities are joining their voices of dissent: Hungary,

Poland, Ukraine, Peru, Brazil. The majority of bishops try to defend themselves by demonstrating the obvious confusion created by the document, despite Cardinal Fernández's claim of clarity. A more complete and adequate analysis of the document came instead from the heart of Europe, from the bishop of Bayonne, Lescar and Oloron, Marc Aillet, who showed how the document fails to overcome three basic issues: the blessing, even if not properly liturgical, remains a sacramental; the problem of the blessing of a 'couple' persists; the pastoral ends up conflicting with the doctrine that, in words, was not intended to change.

In any case, there is no question that FS is a blatantly divisive act for the unity among Catholics, including a substantial proportion of pastors.

The blessing of 'irregular' couples and homosexual cohabiters constitutes the crowning achievement of the approach of much moral theology, for several decades now, as well as the not-so-hidden plot of *Amoris Lætitia* (AL). FS, on closer inspection, is nothing more than an extension of what AL, in the 'authentic' interpretation given by the Pope in his letter to the bishops of Buenos Aires (and perhaps who else?), already permitted: access to sacramental life for couples living together more uxorio. At the basis of the permission was what Pope Francis baptised as the "via caritatis" (cf. AL 306), in reality nothing more than a sort of "plan B" to be implemented "in front of those who have difficulty in fully living the divine law". It is the way of the "possible ways of responding to God" (AL 305), of the archaic and devastating "possible good" (AL 308).

But what is this 'via caritatis' really? It is nothing more than the old, worn-out, stale Jesuit morality (of decadent Jesuitism) that nauseated Blaise Pascal and that brilliant mind, in the sixth of the eighteen 'Provincial Letters', had so effectively summarised: "one no longer sins, while before one sinned: iam non peccant, licet ante peccaverint". A new (mediocre) 'miracle' that does not convert the sinner, but the sin, and which implies a conception of God's law as a rigid obstacle to be avoided, a heavy burden to be lightened, a bitter pill to be sweetened.

In short, the good Lord has gone easy on us, but we, more merciful than He is, deal with this flaw in His law.

"Nothing escapes our foresight," exclaimed the Jesuit interlocutor of the letter, convinced that this gradual softening of morals was necessary because of the widespread corruption of "the men of today" (this timeless ideal category for all subversion!), who, "since we cannot make them come to us, we must be the ones to meet them; otherwise they would abandon us; worse still, they would let themselves go completely. The foresighted, good and merciful shepherd is more concrete and efficient

than that divine grace which, after all, proves to be not always so ready to come to man's aid. And so, 'without however offending the truth', the Jesuit in the letter was keen to emphasise, we must find a gentler, less rough path than that taken by the lovers of the integrity of the law. "The fundamental project of our Society [of the Society of Jesus, ed.] for the good of religion is not to reject anyone so as not to make people despair," the Jesuit good-naturedly concluded.

"Nothing escapes our mercy," Pope Francis retorted today. 'Everyone, everyone' must enter the Church; the 'man of today' is overwhelmed by circumstances that constitute mitigating factors for personal responsibility such as 'affective immaturity, the strength of contracted habits, the state of anguish or other psychic or social factors' (AL 302). So extenuating as to empty the divine command of its concrete meaning. Woe to the Pastor, insists Francis, who feels "satisfied only by applying moral laws to those who live in 'irregular' situations, as if they were stones thrown at people's lives" (AL 305), thus becoming the cause of people's estrangement and their despair. FS blesses - literally - this approach and universally sanctions it, through the simplest and most widespread priestly act. Which, despite the reassuring refrain that one does not change doctrine - "without however offending the truth"! - plastically realises the great maxim denounced by Pascal: "one no longer sins, whereas before one sinned". Precisely because today one blesses what one could not bless before.

In fact, it must be said, despite Pope Francis' attempt to pull Pascal to his side with last year's Apostolic Letter, the French genius' critique goes straight to the heart of this pontificate which reinterprets the justification of the sinner in its own way: from 'making the sinner righteous', by the work of divine grace, to justifying him, by dissolving his imputability. For Catholic theology, grace makes one righteous because it deeply heals, restores vigour for penance, nourishes the virtues; for the new morality in action, it is a matter of leaving the sinner in the mire, deluding him to cover real evil with possible good, appeasing with a beautiful blessing, or even with admission to sacramental life, a conscience that instead needs to be shaken.

The sinner is thus 'justified' by the change of words, by the search for endless excuses, by sophisms that have no other purpose than to soften an alleged rigidity of the law. A sharp reversal of how the Christian faith, rooted in the Old Covenant, has always understood and lived God's law: a yoke that liberates, a burden that lifts, a bitter food that heals. The Rule of St Benedict, which forged Latin Christendom, expressed with profound wisdom the dynamic of God's law that guides to salvation: 'If (...) something a little more rigorous (paululum restrictius) is introduced, do not let yourself

be immediately seized with fear and do not stray from the path of salvation, a path that cannot but be narrow at first. If you proceed (...) your heart will expand, and you will run on the path of God's commandments with inexpressible sweetness of love" (RB, Prologue, 47-49).

For when one perseveres in beseeching the Lord to come to our rescue, so that we may love him by fulfilling His commands, grace comes, enters into the narrow recesses of our shrunken heart and heals it, until it expands out of all proportion. And so, truly, "one no longer sins, whereas before one sinned", because man is healed. It is the *via veritatis* and the *via orationis et pœnitentiæ* that lead to the authentic *via caritatis*; not the posticcios, mediocre and presumptuous Jesuitical adjustments.

Not these gimmicks, but God's commands and His grace man needs. For it is only of these that Revelation affirms: "The law of the Lord is perfect, it refreshes the soul (...). The commands of the Lord are just, they make the heart rejoice; the commands of the Lord are clear, they give light to the eyes" (Ps 19:8-9).