

NOTES FOR CARDINALS/3

Conclave: Charity never contradicts God's commandments

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*In view of the forthcoming conclave, we are publishing a series of in-depth articles inspired by the document signed by **Demos II** (an anonymous cardinal), which sets out the priorities for the next conclave to resolve the confusion and crisis created by Francis' pontificate.*

Francis' pontificate has been hailed by many, both inside and outside the Church, as a pontificate of mercy. But on closer inspection, during the years of the pontificate that has just ended, we have seen the emergence and enforcement of a position that can be considered a true "heresy of charity", that is, a corruption of both charity and mercy itself. What has crept into some of the Pope's documents, such as the exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*, has been openly supported by the person chosen by the Pope to preside over the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, and now characterises the prevailing line of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family and the Pontifical Academy for Life, presided over by His Excellency Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia.

There is no doubt that Revelation teaches the primacy of charity (cf. Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34), the unifying principle of all Christian morality. But this primacy must be properly understood. First of all, let us recall the difference between charity and mercy, which are often confused. Charity is a theological virtue that unites us to God, "who is loved first and foremost [...] as the cause of our beatitude, while our neighbour is loved as a participant in this beatitude" (cf. *Summa Theologiæ* II-II, q. 26, a. 2). Mercy, on the other hand, is that splendid moral virtue which leads us to have compassion on the misery of our neighbour and which, as a moral virtue, must therefore be regulated by the virtue of prudence and subordinated to obedience to God, the queen of the moral virtues (cf. *Summa Theologiæ* II-II, q. 104, a. 3). It follows that charity can never lead to disobedience of the divine commandments, nor can charity, which is first and foremost union with God, require acts that are contrary to the commandments, an assertion that would involve a clear contradiction of Revelation: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments [...]. He who accepts my commandments and keeps them loves me" (Jn 14:15, 21).

This alleged conflict between charity (and mercy) and the divine law was instead theorised by the last Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, precisely because of a false reduction of charity to fraternal love and a serious misunderstanding of mercy. The claim that charity can justify acts contrary to God's commandments, such as contraception, is a monstrous misunderstanding that undermines Catholic moral teaching at its very foundation. In fact, charity is the supernatural form of every virtue that leads every good human act to the throne of God; it therefore presupposes the

goodness of the act it elevates, but it does not transform a disordered act into an ordered one. The fact that during this pontificate many eminent prelates, appointed by Francis to key positions in the Church's governance, have gone so far as to affirm that charity can justify contraception, the use of IVF, or even uxorio relationships, is a clear sign of the abyss of darkness into which many of the Church's pastors have now fallen.

The new Pope will have the task of picking up the threads of the Church's moral teaching, which was wonderfully enriched during the pontificate of John Paul II, clarifying these attempts at subversion and recovering the meaning of the divine commandments as the foundation of a morally good life, growing in virtue and flourishing in charity. Faced with a moral approach whose basic orientation has run aground (Jesuitically?) in the search for what diminishes or eliminates the moral responsibility of those who commit objectively disordered acts, it will be necessary to respond with the proposal of an integrally good life made possible by divine grace and human good will. The new life that Christ came to bring, communicated and sustained by sacramental life and prayer, is a power that comes from above, not a miserable compromise with human weakness "ad excusandas excusationes in peccatis" (Ps 140:4, Vulgate). The ironic and vivid expression with which Blaise Pascal, in the sixth of his Letters to the Provincials, stigmatised the new morality preached by certain Jesuit circles, is still relevant and illustrative of the new moral paradigm: "iam non peccant, licet ante peccaverint" (they no longer sin, whereas before they sinned).

Another thread that needs to be taken up urgently is undoubtedly the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, a theme that clearly does not only concern the sphere of Christian moral life. This thread has been interrupted by such a divergence between the two that the former has become the object of mere (and optional) erudition, incapable of illuminating and giving shape to the latter. In this context, on the moral level, practice has been transformed into a systematic search for exceptions to the doctrine, which now serves as an unattainable background of values for a fortunate few.

Doctrine is therefore no longer seen as an architectural structure on which life develops with solidity and stability, but as a set of flexible stakes, the meaning of which is to be avoided with agility. From the fact that the moral law, because of its universality, is incapable of understanding the details of the concrete act, which is always circumstantial (hence the need not only for prudence, but also for virtue in general, which recognises and achieves the good through inclination), it is wrongly concluded that the moral act, in order to correspond to the most varied and different

circumstances, can and even must go beyond the "hardness" of the moral law, even contradicting it. Even the use of the term "discernment" and the pathological hypertrophy of conscience have ended up eroding the meaning of natural law and nullifying the existence of moral absolutes.

These are enormous problems, with dramatic practical consequences for the life and eternal destiny of millions of believers; the "life in abundance" that the Lord came to bring (cf. Jn 10:10) seems in fact to have been transformed into a trickle of unhealthy water, which is nevertheless falsely and misleadingly celebrated as the "possible good" that mankind can concretely offer to God. The true 'paradigm shift' can be summarised as follows: evil is good and good is evil.