

HETEROGENESIS OF ENDS

Pope challenged by disciples of his own progressive openings

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**Luisella
Scrosati**



Gabriel Ringlet is a Belgian priest and theologian of those who like to call themselves 'free thinkers'. But, he is not just any priest. In fact, he is Professor and Pro-Rector Emeritus at the Catholic University of Louvain, that recently distinguished itself by

contesting the Pope. ([see here](#)).

Gabriel Ringlet's contestations, from the lofty height of his eighties, are 'historical' and wide-ranging: opposed to Ordinatio sacerdotalis which reiterated the impossibility of conferring Holy Orders on women, challenger of Benedict XVI's doctrinal rigidity, in favour of legal and 'accompanied' euthanasia and sympathetic to dialogue between the Catholic Church and Freemasonry. And most recently he is a protester of Pope Francis for his recent words categorically against abortion.

'Look, it's baffling,' he replies to a journalist from [Belgian broadcaster RTBF](#) in a radio programme last 30 September, who provokes him. 'And it's not only disconcerting, it's an insult to doctors who are attentive to very real suffering and who work within a legal framework. The Pope does not seem to realise this, or does not want to listen. And I would add, on a completely different level, that this is serious'.

According to Ringlet, the gravity of Francis' words lies in his ethical view, regarding abortion, unable to grasp the "nuances": 'From a theological point of view, ethics is a very serious matter. It is a complex thing that requires nuance, that requires accepting difficult situations. In some circumstances, ethics may require transgressing a situation. This is the case with some cases of abortion, some cases of euthanasia, where this transgression can be entirely legitimate. It seems that all this has disappeared and that this theology, which is a truly elementary theology, an essential theology, is no longer part of our thinking. So this statement by the Pope on the plane really, really puzzled me'.

The Belgian theologian therefore reproaches the Pope for having addressed the issue of abortion without admitting exceptions, calling any abortive act homicide, without grasping nuances and without considering the circumstances. In more technical terms, Ringlet points the finger at moral absolutes, i.e. those prohibitions of the moral law that always apply, without exception, because the act performed is intrinsically evil, and instead claims a more elastic ethics, an ethics capable of grasping significant exceptions that would require transgressing the moral prohibition.

It is like rereading some of the allusions in *Amoris Lætitia* and especially the assertions of several commentators, who were tearing their hair out to show that it is precisely classical morality - which Ringlet would call elementary and essential - that admits exceptions even in moral absolutes, by the virtue of epicheia, the possible good, the gradualness of the law (passed off as the law of gradualness), the absolute sovereignty of discernment. It is like reading the interviews and texts of Don Aristide

Fumagalli, Don Maurizio Chiodi, and Don Davide Guenzi, all 'prudent' demolishers of moral absolutes with their openness to contraception, homologous artificial insemination, and homosexuality, and diligent assertors of making allowances for circumstances, in the name of which Ringlet has chastised the Pope. And, curiously enough, all **recently appointed as consultants** to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF). By the Pope.

The point is that the prohibition against killing an innocent person is a moral absolute, which Pope Francis is rightly so keen to reiterate in reference to abortion and euthanasia, just as much as that of preventing conception by means of contraceptive acts, or joining together a woman who is not one's wife or a man who is not one's husband. There is no reason to think that the Pope was not sincerely convinced by his words against abortion, an opposition that he has expressed on several occasions; but there is more than one reason to doubt that he realises that it is precisely the approach of his pontificate, through above all the appointments to decisive posts of certain figures, who are certainly not 'inferior' to the Belgian theologian, that has given theoretical support to reproaches such as those that Ringlet has levelled against the Pope. Because the ethics of exceptions admits no exceptions: if there are circumstances that can transform adultery into an imperfect realisation of marriage, then there must be similar circumstances that transform abortion into an imperfect support for nascent life. If contraception can be configured as the present possible good for a couple to preserve the conjugal union, then abortion can be configured as the *hic et nunc* possibility for a doctor to go out of his way to help a woman suffering.

By a sort of heterogenesis of ends, the pope now finds himself impacted by the unintended consequences of his own initiated processes; and even if time is greater than space, there is a moment when time returns what is sown, in a very specific space.

It's up to Pope Francis to decide what he wants to do: if he intends to continue condemning without ifs and buts, as we hope, abortion and euthanasia for what they are, i.e. murders, then he must coherently return to sender the people he has just appointed to the DDF and close the game on contraception and adultery once and for all. Otherwise he will find himself cornered by the faithful disciples of his openness, who accept no exceptions (precisely). And apparently no further qualms either.