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Pope's answers to dubia: paradigm of confusion

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Let us continue our analysis of Pope Francis' answers to the five dubia presented to him by Cardinals Brandmüller, Burke, Sandoval, Sarah and Zen. For the first part of the analysis, click [here](#).

The answer to the second *dubium* is objectively embarrassing. The pope was asked, in the first formulation, whether it is possible to accept “as a ‘possible good’ objectively sinful situations, such as same-sex unions, without departing from revealed doctrine”. And the Pope does not answer. He states respectively that: 1. marriage is only between a man and a woman; 2. that therefore rituals or sacramentals that lead to confusing other unions with marriage must be avoided; 3. that there can be "forms of blessing, requested by one or more persons, that do not convey an erroneous conception of marriage"; 4. that these decisions in individual circumstances "need not become a norm (...) that constantly and officially authorises procedures or rules for all kinds of matters".

This answer clashes head-on with the *Responsum* of 2021, which the Pope himself had authorised. Which pope are we to believe? The Ladaria version or the Fernandez version? But the answer also clashes with the statements of Monsignor Bonny and the decisions of the Belgian bishops (see [here](#)), who authorised, with the Pope's consent, to impart a public blessing "not only to divorced people in a new union, but to everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves". So much for individual circumstances! And it also clashes with the decision of the Flemish bishops (see [here](#)), who, in the name of *Amoris Lætitia*, prepared a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples. Isn't the institution of a rite part of the 'procedures or rules' proscribed by the Pope's letter? Yet the pope has not lifted a finger against this decision. Again: which pope are we to believe?

Pope Francis also avoids confirming the objective sinfulness of homosexual acts, referring, in a concessive sentence, to generic situations “which from an objective point of view are not morally acceptable”, and emphasising immediately afterwards the attenuation of subjective imputability.

Responding to the fourth *dubium*, Pope Francis states, recalling *Lumen Gentium*, 10, that the baptismal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood essentially differ. He recalls what was transmitted by Saint John Paul II, who "taught that it is necessary to affirm 'definitively' the impossibility of conferring priestly ordination on women". But then, inappropriately, Bergoglio himself writes: "To be rigorous, we recognise that a clear and authoritative doctrine on the exact nature of a 'definitive statement' has not yet been exhaustively developed. It is not a dogmatic definition, yet it must be respected by all. No one can publicly contradict it, yet it can be the subject of study, as in the case of the validity of ordinations in the Anglican Communion”.

Perhaps Fernandez had not yet had time to take a look at what the department he

presided over had churned out years ago. Nor to consult a simple dictionary, since he did not take the trouble to remove this nonsense from the published text. In the *Illustrative Doctrinal Note of the concluding formula of the Professio fidei* (1998), the CDF explained that definitive declarations must be given the same "full and irrevocable", "firm and definitive" assent that is given to dogmatic definitions, with the difference that these are "doctrines *de fide credenda*", while the former are "doctrines *de fide tenenda*". It is therefore not simply a matter of not "contradicting them publicly", but of adhering to them also internally in a firm, full, irrevocable manner. The Note adds that "whoever denied them would be assuming a position of *rejection of the truth of Catholic doctrine and would therefore no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church*". As for being the object of study, we all agree (but dogmatic definitions are in themselves also "objects of study": otherwise, what are they for?), but the Note specifies that this study serves to deepen "the intelligence of both realities and words", so that one can arrive at "proclaiming some of these doctrines also as dogmas of divine and Catholic faith". The Note, lo and behold, intervened specifically on the priestly ordination reserved to men "to be considered definitively, insofar as it is founded on the written Word of God, constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church" and therefore "proposed infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium". The only development on this subject can be to "progress to the point of defining such doctrine to be believed as divinely revealed". How is it that the Pope has not at all referred to this Note that is so clear and "Tucho" has not made appropriate additions?

In his reply to the fifth *dubium*, the Pope could not set himself explicitly against the canons and teachings of the Council of Trent... So he seems to have chosen the strategy of making that teaching inapplicable. Francis explains that, with regard to the penitent's repentance, "there is no mathematics here, and once again I must remind you that the confessional is not a customs house". In short, there is no way to determine whether a person is repentant, and in any case the confessional is not the place to decide 'who passes and who does not'. Indeed, the Pope even goes so far as to say that "for people with a seriously wounded self-esteem, pleading guilty is a cruel torture"; so don't disturb other people's pride! The "very act of approaching confession" as a "symbolic expression of repentance and seeking divine help" is enough. Which, if logic is still valid, means that the priest must always absolve. Because the priest absolves during confession, not during a talk; and therefore if a person who approaches confession already 'symbolically' (sic!) manifests his repentance, then the priest cannot but absolve him. The Catholic teaching affirmed in the first line is deserted throughout the rest of the text.

The third question concerned the authority of a Synod of Bishops (which in the

meantime, is no longer even of the Bishops). And not even here does the Pope give an answer; indeed, perhaps it is precisely on this point that Francis evades the question altogether. Already in the first formulation, the sense of the question was very clear: "It asks whether synodality can be the supreme regulative criterion of the Church's permanent government". In a nutshell, is the Synod of Bishops consultative or does it have, *per se*, binding deliberative power? Does it discuss issues or settle them? Does it stand as a third subject of supreme power in the Church or not?

Francis acknowledged that "the supreme and full authority of the Church is exercised either by the Pope in virtue of his office or by the episcopal college together with its head, the Roman Pontiff", but in fact he did not exclude that in its turn, the Synod could also do so, assuming a deliberative function. The answer was definitely important, since people like Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, in a recent speech at the Training Day *The Synod interrogates communication. Communication interrogates the Synod*, held at the Lumsa University, advocated (see [here](#)) precisely the transition not only of the Synod, but of all the Church's consultative bodies, including the parish pastoral council, from consultative to deliberative. Is this the meaning of the Church's much trumpeted 'synodal nature'?

So, can the Church contradict itself? Are homosexual unions still a grave sin? Can women be ordained priests or at least deaconesses in the future? If one does not repent, can one be absolved? Is the Synod consultative or deliberative? If the ordinary reader were asked to briefly answer the questions posed here, in the light of the Pope's letter, it is likely that they would answer: "Maybe yes, maybe no, I don't know". Give us back the negatives and affirmatives.