

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

## 'Yes to blessing gay couples'. Pope accelerates the revolution

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The union of persons of the same sex may be blessed, as long as it is not confused with a marriage blessing. This is the substance of the 44 paragraphs of the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans* on the pastoral meaning of blessings of the Dicastery for the Doctrine

of the Faith, published yesterday, 18 December 2023, and signed by the Prefect, Cardinal Victor M. Fernández, by the Secretary for the Doctrinal Section, Monsignor Armando Matteo, and by Pope Francis.

**This is the central paragraph of the Declaration:** ""Within the horizon outlined here appears the possibility of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex, the form of which should not be fixed ritually by ecclesial authorities to avoid producing confusion with the blessing proper to the Sacrament of Marriage"".

**The document proposes to offer "new clarifications (...)** on the *Responsum ad dubium* formulated by the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and published on 22 February 2021" (no. 2), in an attempt to meet the needs of those who "did not share the negative response it gave to the question or did not consider the formulation of its answer and the reasons provided in the attached *Explanatory Note* to be sufficiently clear" (no. 3). Fernández's intention is to maintain "the doctrinal aspects" of the *Responsum*, combining them coherently with "the pastoral ones", which in 2021 would not have been adequately taken into account, while instead they would have been promoted by Pope Francis's Responses to the dubia of the five cardinals.

**The line of argument can be summarised in this way:** consistent with the *Responsum*, the Declaration continues to reject blessings or rites that might appear to be endorsements of non-marital unions or that in any way bear a resemblance to nuptial rites. In order to have sufficient room for clarity, the Declaration intends to place blessings "outside of a liturgical framework" (n. 23), as "acts of devotion that 'find their place outside of the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments'" (n. 24).

**Fernández urges:** "The Church, moreover, must refrain from resting its pastoral praxis on the fixity of certain doctrinal or disciplinary schemes (...). Therefore, when people invoke a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be set as a precondition for conferring it" (n. 25). It is therefore in this haliturgical and ritual context that, according to the Instruction, blessings can also be given to irregular and same-sex couples, asking God for the graces they need through them.

**This would therefore be the deepening (cf. no. 26) of the *Responsum* of 2021.** But, once again, of the "inconvenient" documents that precede it, Fernández selects only what serves him, distorting its meaning, for his pre-constituted thesis. Because for *Responsum*, the issue is not simply that of not externally confusing the blessings of these couples with marriage - a problem that could be remedied by the Instruction's proposal. Instead, the point is another, which Fernández does not even mention: what is

blessed when blessing a couple? If it is precisely a couple, it means that a relationship is being blessed; otherwise individuals would be blessed. But, the *Responsum* explained, "to be consistent with the nature of sacramentals, when a blessing is invoked on certain human relationships, it is necessary (...) that what is blessed is objectively and positively ordered to receive and express grace"; and therefore "only those realities that are in themselves ordered to serve those designs [of God in Creation]" can be blessed.

**Now, precisely because such relationships are not ordained to the divine designs**, because they are objectively contrary to them, these couples cannot receive any blessing, as couples. The Church can permit the blessing of a non-Catholic, because, as a human person, he is ordained to the call to the life of grace, but it cannot bless a homosexual couple, because that relationship is in no way ordained to God's designs.

**It has nothing to do, therefore, with the fact that the Church should not require "too many moral prerequisites"** (no. 12), because that would be blessings and not sacraments. It is simply a question of whether or not the object of the blessing is ordered to serve God's designs; not the 'hidden' designs, but those manifested in Creation and Revelation.

**It should be noted that the *Responsum* had reached this conclusion precisely "to be consistent with the nature of sacramentals"**. Whereas, Fernández thought to get out of the bottleneck by continually repeating in the Instruction that blessings are simple gestures, loved by the people, that they should not be subject to the "pretence of control" (n. 12) and therefore should not be ritualized in any way (cf. n. 38). But however much these blessings are not included in the rituals, however much the Instruction intimates that they are never to be given "at the same time as the civil rites of union or even in connection with them" (n. 39), they are still sacramentals and respond to the logic of sacramentals. The priest, when imparting a blessing, even if it is not solemn, even if it is given in the back of the sacristy, acts as a minister of the Church and imparts a sacramental, and the gesture must therefore be consistent with the nature of sacramentals.

**Let us consider the matter from another point of view.** The root of every blessing lies in the original blessing, which we find in the book of Genesis: "And God saw that it was good. God blessed them" (Genesis 1: 21-22). God's blessing is consequent on his gaze resting on a "good thing". God sets His gaze on His work or on the work of mankind, sees that it is good, and blesses, in our case, through the ministry of the Church. But when he lays his eyes on a couple whose sexuality is being lived outside of legitimate marriage, what does he see? He sees something that objectively contradicts

the design of creation and does not bless it. And not even God's ministers can do that.

**One then wonders what happens to all the recommendations not to equate these blessings with marriage**, with which one thinks to resolve the issue, when, in No. 40, this indication is given: "Such a blessing can instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a sanctuary, a meeting with a priest, prayer recited in a group or during a pilgrimage". The blessing actually acquires a public dimension. And what is the point of a blessing in the presence of an assembly if not to give public recognition to these cohabitations? If (with difficulty) one concedes that this is not the intent of this passage of the Instruction, the fact remains that a blessing to a couple given in a public context cannot fail to take on this meaning.

**Therefore, it is simply still not possible to bless an irregular couple as a couple**, due to the very nature of sacramentals and the objective disorder of that relationship. Any minister of the Church who does otherwise takes it upon himself to bless what God cannot bless. Because God, unlike what is happening in this pontificate, does not contradict Himself.

**The axe is now at the root of the tree** (cf. Lk 3:9) and the thoughts of many hearts are being revealed (cf. Lk 2:35). May it not happen that he who raises his hand to bless what the Lord has not commanded to be blessed exposes himself to the fate of those prophets whom the Lord had not sent: "Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Ananias: 'Listen, Ananias! The Lord has not sent you (...) therefore says the Lord: Behold, I am sending you out of the land; this year you shall die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord'" (Jer 28:15-16).