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**Your Holiness, your reply is not enough. Let us reformulate the Dubia for you.**

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ECCLESIA

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To His Holiness

**FRANCIS**

Supreme Pontiff

Most Holy Father,

We are very grateful for the answers which You have kindly wished to offer us. We would first like to clarify that, if we have asked You these questions, it is not out of fear of dialogue with the people of our time, nor of the questions they could ask us about the Gospel of Christ. In fact, we, like Your Holiness, are convinced that the Gospel brings fullness to human life and responds to our every question.

**The concern that moves us is another:** we are concerned to see that there are pastors who doubt the ability of the Gospel to transform the hearts of men and end up proposing to them no longer sound doctrine but “teachings according to their own likings” (cf. 2 Tim 4, 3). We are also concerned that it be understood that God’s mercy does not consist in covering our sins, but is much greater, in that it enables us to respond to His love by keeping His commandments, that is, to convert and believe in the Gospel (cf. Mk 1, 15).

**With the same sincerity with which You have answered us,** we must add that Your answers have not resolved the doubts we had raised, but have, if anything, deepened them. We therefore feel obliged to re-propose, reformulating them, these questions to Your Holiness, who as the successor of Peter is charged by the Lord to confirm Your brethren in the faith. This is all the more urgent in view of the upcoming Synod, which many want to use to deny Catholic doctrine on the very issues which our *dubia* concern. **We therefore re-propose our questions to You, so that they can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”**

1. Your Holiness insists that the Church can deepen its understanding of the deposit of faith. This is indeed what *Dei Verbum* 8 teaches and belongs to Catholic doctrine. Your response, however, does not capture our concern. Many Christians, including pastors and theologians, argue today that the cultural and anthropological changes of our time should push the Church to teach the opposite of what it has always taught. This concerns essential, not secondary, questions for our salvation, like the confession of faith, subjective conditions for access to the sacraments, and observance of the moral law. **So we want to rephrase our *dubium*: is it possible for the Church today to teach doctrines contrary to those she has previously taught in matters of faith and morals, whether by the Pope *ex cathedra*, or in the definitions of an Ecumenical Council, or in the ordinary universal magisterium of the Bishops**

**dispersed throughout the world (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 25)?**

2. Your Holiness has insisted on the fact that there can be no confusion between marriage and other types of unions of a sexual nature and that, therefore, any rite or sacramental blessing of same-sex couples, which would give rise to such confusion, should be avoided. Our concern, however, is a different one: we are concerned that the blessing of same-sex couples might create confusion in any case, not only in that it might make them seem analogous to marriage, but also in that homosexual acts would be presented practically as a good, or at least as the possible good that God asks of people in their journey toward Him. **So let us rephrase our *dubium*: Is it possible that in some circumstances a pastor could bless unions between homosexual persons, thus suggesting that homosexual behavior as such would not be contrary to God's law and the person's journey toward God? Linked to this *dubium* is the need to raise another: does the teaching upheld by the universal ordinary magisterium, that every sexual act outside of marriage, and in particular homosexual acts, constitutes an objectively grave sin against God's law, regardless of the circumstances in which it takes place and the intention with which it is carried out, continue to be valid?**

3. You have insisted that there is a synodal dimension to the Church, in that all, including the lay faithful, are called to participate and make their voices heard. Our difficulty, however, is another: today the future Synod on "synodality" is being presented as if, in communion with the Pope, it represents the Supreme Authority of the Church. However, the Synod of Bishops is a consultative body of the Pope; it does not represent the College of Bishops and cannot settle the issues dealt with in it nor issue decrees on them, unless, in certain cases, the Roman Pontiff, whose duty it is to ratify the decisions of the Synod, has expressly granted it deliberative power (cf. can. 343 C.I.C.). This is a decisive point inasmuch as not involving the College of Bishops in matters such as those that the next Synod intends to raise, which touch on the very constitution of the Church, would go precisely against the root of that synodality, which it claims to want to promote. **Let us therefore rephrase our *dubium*: will the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome, and which includes only a chosen representation of pastors and faithful, exercise, in the doctrinal or pastoral matters on which it will be called to express itself, the Supreme Authority of the Church, which belongs exclusively to the Roman Pontiff and, *una cum capite suo*, to the College of Bishops (cf. can. 336 C.I.C.)?**

4. In Your reply Your Holiness made it clear that the decision of St. John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*

is to be held definitively, and rightly added that it is necessary to understand the priesthood, not in terms of power, but in terms of service, in order to understand correctly our Lord's decision to reserve Holy Orders to men only. On the other hand, in the last point of Your response You added that the question can still be further explored. We are concerned that some may interpret this statement to mean that the matter has not yet been decided in a definitive manner. In fact, St. John Paul II affirms in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that this doctrine has been taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium, and therefore that it belongs to the deposit of faith. This was the response of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a *dubium* raised about the apostolic letter, and this response was approved by John Paul II himself. **We therefore must reformulate our *dubium*: could the Church in the future have the faculty to confer priestly ordination on women, thus contradicting that the exclusive reservation of this sacrament to baptized males belongs to the very substance of the Sacrament of Orders, which the Church cannot change?**

5. Finally, Your Holiness confirmed the teaching of the Council of Trent according to which the validity of sacramental absolution requires the sinner's repentance, which includes the resolve not to sin again. And You invited us not to doubt God's infinite mercy. We would like to reiterate that our question does not arise from doubting the greatness of God's mercy, but, on the contrary, it arises from our awareness that this mercy is so great that we are able to convert to Him, to confess our guilt, and to live as He has taught us. In turn, some might interpret Your answer as meaning that merely approaching confession is a sufficient condition for receiving absolution, inasmuch as it could implicitly include confession of sins and repentance. **We would therefore like to rephrase our *dubium*: Can a penitent who, while admitting a sin, refuses to make, in any way, the intention not to commit it again, validly receive sacramental absolution?**

**Vatican City, August 21, 2023**

**Walter Card. Brandmüller**

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