



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
Consilium Internationale
FAMILY COMMISSION
Fr. Hernán Eguzquiza, TOR

Translation: Mary Stronach

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY: THE REALITY AND CHALLENGES

1. OBSERVE

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD?¹

The social reputation of Catholic marriages is falling. The numbers of 2018 weddings. Daily Newspaper *El País*. Madrid, Spain.

Barely one third of weddings celebrated every year in Spain (163,430 in 2018, some 5.9% less than the previous year) are conducted with the Catholic rite, and 47% of children are now being born out of marriage. These are data from the National Statistics Institute, which confirms an unstoppable process of the secularization of society.

BAPTIZED NON-BELIEVERS WHO GO INTO A RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE²

At the end of its recent six-year term, the International Theological Commission (ITC) published the final document on *reciprocity between faith and the sacraments in the sacramental economy*. A relevant part of the text is devoted to a theological problem whose pastoral consequences are no small thing: the sacramental value of marriage for baptized non-believers. It is a document whose fundamental intention is to highlight the intrinsic bond that unites faith and the celebration of the sacraments. Since baptism is the sacrament of faith, the very notion of “baptized non-believers” is paradoxical, to say the least. However, this is a factual situation, and is unfortunately widespread. In view of this situation, pastoral mistakes should be avoided when baptized non-believers ask to marry “in the church.”

Therefore, when personal faith is lost (this grace that heals and perfects nature, as Saint Thomas would say), it is increasingly unlikely that those who marry intend to do what the Church expects when they celebrate the wedding, and, therefore, it is legitimate to doubt the validity of the sacrament celebrated under these conditions. The fact is that the perception of this truth of marriage is threatened when it is not cultivated in a personal and community environment of a lived faith. Ultimately, it is up to pastors to discern what the intention of baptized non-believers is when they ask to get married “in the Church.”

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¹ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/12/07/madrid/1575736565_490254.html

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² <http://www.gliscritti.it/blog/entry/5214>

2. JUDGE

IN VIEW OF THIS REALITY: [what] the church tells us in *Amoris Laetitia* ³

Announce the Gospel of the family today

200. The Synod Fathers emphasized that Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through “their joy-filled witness as domestic churches.”[225]...It is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning. Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for “an effort at evangelization and catechesis directed to the family.”[228] that will guide it in this regard.

201. “This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems.”[229] Pastoral care for families “needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one’s dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness”. [232]

202. “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony.”[232] Along with a pastoral outreach aimed specifically at families, this shows the need for “a more adequate formation... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers.”[233]

The challenge of accompaniment in difficult situations

241. In some cases, respect for one’s own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill-treatment. In such cases, “separation becomes inevitable. At times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference.” [257] Even so, “separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain.”[258]

242. The Synod Fathers noted that “special discernment is indispensable for the pastoral care of those who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral care must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialized counselling centres in dioceses.”[259] At the same time, “divorced people who have not remarried, and often bear witness to marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life. The local community and pastors should accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty.”[260]

243. It is important that those divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. "They are not excommunicated" and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.[261] These situations "require careful discernment and respectful accompaniment. Language or conduct that might lead them to feel discriminated against should be avoided, and they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity." [262]

244. A large number of Synod Fathers also "emphasized the need to make the procedure in cases of nullity more accessible and less time consuming, and, if possible, free of charge." [262] The slowness of the process causes distress and strain on the parties. My two recent documents dealing with this issue [264] have simplified the procedures for the declarations of matrimonial nullity. With these, I wished "to make clear that the bishop himself, in the Church over which he has been appointed shepherd and head, is by that very fact the judge of those faithful entrusted to his care." [265] "The implementation of these documents is therefore a great responsibility for Ordinaries in dioceses, who are called upon to judge some cases themselves and, in every case, to ensure the faithful an easier access to justice. (cf. *Mitis Iudex*, art. 2-3)". [266]

245. The Synod Fathers also pointed to "the consequences of separation or divorce on children, in every case the innocent victims of the situation." [267] Apart from every other consideration, the good of children should be the primary concern, and not overshadowed by any ulterior interest or objective. I make this appeal to parents who are separated: "Never ever, take your child hostage! You separated for many problems and reasons. Life gave you this trial, but your children should not have to bear the burden of this separation or be used as hostages against the other spouse. They should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and their father speak well of their mother." [268]

246. The Church, while appreciating the situations of conflict that are part of marriage, cannot fail to speak out on behalf of those who are most vulnerable: the children who often suffer in silence. Today, "despite our seemingly evolved sensibilities and all our refined psychological analyses, I ask myself if we are not becoming numb to the hurt in children's souls... Such harmful experiences do not help children to grow in the maturity needed to make definitive commitments. For this reason, Christian communities must not abandon divorced parents who have entered a new union, but should include and support them in their efforts to bring up their children. "How can we encourage those parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and practical faith, if we keep them at arm's length from the life of the community, as if they were somehow excommunicated? ...Helping heal the wounds of parents and supporting them spiritually is also beneficial for children, who need the familiar face of the Church to see them through this traumatic experience. Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times."

250. The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception.[275] During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided,[276]

particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God's will in their lives.[277].

251. In discussing the dignity and mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, "as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family." It is unacceptable "that local Churches should be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies should make financial aid to poor countries dependent on the introduction of laws to establish 'marriage' between persons of the same sex." [278]

OFS Constitutions - Article 24.3

The brothers and sisters should collaborate with the efforts undertaken in the Church and in society to affirm both the value of fidelity and respect for life and to provide answers to the social problems of the family.

Reflect in your fraternity:

1. Considering the statistics cited in the daily newspaper, **El País** in Spain, discuss the present reality of matrimony in our community.
2. In our community currently, do we see that baptized non-believers access religious marriage? If there are some, how do they assume married and family life?
3. What is demanded of the Church because of the reality that married couples and families live today?
4. What does the pontifical document **Amoris Laetitia** propose as we face the reality of those who are divorced and those who have re-married?
5. What does Pope Francis say in this document about families that have children who have homosexual tendencies? What is your position regarding same sex marriage?

3. ACT

- In view of all that we have shared, what could we do as a fraternity to live what Article 24.3 of the Constitutions invites us to to?

4. CELEBRATE

In our closing prayer, let us pray for those families who, today, are going through the reality upon which we have been reflecting.