



NATIONAL CATHOLIC
REGISTER

VATICAN | NOV. 15, 2016

Cardinal Burke on *Amoris Laetitia* Dubia: 'Tremendous Division' Warrants Action

In an exclusive Register interview, he elaborates about why four cardinals were impelled to seek clarity about the papal exhortation's controversial elements.

Edward Pentin

Four cardinals asked Pope Francis five *dubia* questions, or “doubts,” about the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) in a bid to clear up ambiguities and confusion surrounding the text. On Nov. 14, they went public with their request, after they learned that the Holy Father had decided not to respond to their questions.

In this exclusive interview with the Register, Cardinal Raymond Burke, patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, explains in more detail the cardinals' aims; why the publication of their letter should be seen as an act of charity, unity and pastoral concern, rather than as a political action; and what the next steps will be, if the Holy Father continues to refuse to respond.

Your Eminence, what do you aim to achieve by this initiative?

The initiative is aimed at one thing only, namely the good of the Church, which, right now, is suffering from a tremendous confusion on at least these five points. There are a number of other questions as well, but these five critical points have to do with irreformable moral principles. So we, as cardinals, judged it our responsibility to request a clarification with regard to these questions, in order to put an end to this spread of confusion that is actually leading people into error.

Are you hearing this concern about confusion a lot?

Everywhere I go I hear it. Priests are divided from one another, priests from bishops, bishops among themselves. There's a tremendous division that has set in in the Church, and that is not the way of the Church. That is why we settle on these fundamental moral questions which unify us.

Why is Chapter 8 of Amoris Laetitia of such particular concern?

Because it has been the font of all of these confused discussions. Even diocesan directives are confused and in error. We have one set of directives in one diocese; for instance, saying that priests are free in the confessional, if they judge it necessary, to permit a person who is living in an adulterous union and continues to do so to have access to the sacraments — whereas, in another diocese, in accord with what the Church's practice has always been, a priest is able to grant such permission to those who make the firm purpose of amendment to live chastely within a marriage, namely as brother and sister, and to only receive the sacraments in a place where there would be no question of scandal. This really has to be addressed. But then there are the further questions in the *dubia* apart from that particular question of the divorced and remarried, which deal with the term “intrinsic evil,” with the state of sin and with the correct notion of conscience.

Without the clarification you are seeking, are you saying, therefore, that this and other teaching in Amoris Laetitia go against the law of non-contradiction (which states that something cannot be both true and untrue at the same time when dealing with the same context)?

Of course, because, for instance, if you take the marriage issue, the Church teaches that marriage is indissoluble, in accord with the word of Christ, “He who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.” Therefore, if you are divorced, you may not enter a marital relationship with another person unless the indissoluble bond to which you are bound is declared to be null, to be nonexistent. But if we say, well, in certain cases, a person living in an irregular marriage union can receive holy Communion, then one of two things has to be the case: Either marriage really is not indissoluble — as for instance, in the kind of “enlightenment theory” of Cardinal [Walter] Kasper, who holds that marriage is an ideal to which we cannot realistically hold people. In such a case, we have lost the sense of the grace of the sacrament, which enables the married to live the truth of their marriage covenant — or holy Communion is not communion with the Body and Blood of Christ. Of course, neither of those two is possible. They contradict the constant teachings of the Church from the beginning and, therefore, cannot be true.

Some will see this initiative through a political lens and criticize it as a “conservative vs. liberal” move, something you and the other signatories reject. What is your response to such an accusation?

Our response is simply this: We are not taking some kind of position within the Church, like a political decision, for instance. The Pharisees accused Jesus of coming down on one side of a debate between the experts in Jewish Law, but Jesus did not do that at all. He appealed to the order that God placed in nature from the moment of creation. He said Moses let you divorce because of your hardness of heart, but it was not this way from the beginning. So we are simply setting forth what the Church has always taught and practiced in asking these five questions that address the Church's constant teaching and practice. The answers to these questions provide an essential interpretative tool for *Amoris Laetitia*. They have to be set forth publicly because so many people are saying: "We're confused, and we don't understand why the cardinals or someone in authority doesn't speak up and help us."

It's a pastoral duty?

That's right, and I can assure you that I know all of the cardinals involved, and this has been something we've undertaken with the greatest sense of our responsibility as bishops and cardinals. But it has also been undertaken with the greatest respect for the Petrine Office, because if the Petrine Office does not uphold these fundamental principles of doctrine and discipline, then, practically speaking, division has entered into the Church, which is contrary to our very nature.

And the Petrine ministry, too, whose primary purpose is unity?

Yes, as the Second Vatican Council says, the Pope is the foundation of the unity of the bishops and of all the faithful. This idea, for instance, that the Pope should be some kind of innovator, who is leading a revolution in the Church or something similar, is completely foreign to the Office of Peter. The Pope is a great servant of the truths of the faith, as they've been handed down in an unbroken line from the time of the apostles.

Is this why you emphasize that what you are doing is an act of charity and justice?

Absolutely. We have this responsibility before the people for whom we are bishops, and an even greater responsibility as cardinals, who are the chief advisers to the Pope. For us to remain silent about these fundamental doubts, which have arisen as a result of the text of *Amoris Laetitia*, would, on our part, be a grave lack of charity toward the Pope and a grave lack in fulfilling the duties of our own office in the Church.

Some might argue that you are only four cardinals, among whom you're the only one who is not retired, and this is not very representative of the entire Church. In that case, they might ask: Why should the Pope listen and respond to you?

Well, numbers aren't the issue. The issue is the truth. In the trial of St. Thomas More, someone told him that most of the English bishops had accepted the king's order, but he said that may be true, but the saints in heaven did not accept it. That's the point here. I would think that even though other cardinals did not sign this, they would share the same concern. But that doesn't bother me. Even if we were one, two or three, if it's a question of something that's true and is essential to the salvation of souls, then it needs to be said.

What happens if the Holy Father does not respond to your act of justice and charity and fails to give the clarification of the Church's teaching that you hope to achieve?

Then we would have to address that situation. There is, in the Tradition of the Church, the practice of correction of the Roman Pontiff. It is something that is clearly quite rare. But if there is no response to these questions, then I would say that it would be a question of taking a formal act of correction of a serious error.

In a conflict between ecclesial authority and the Sacred Tradition of the Church, which one is binding on the believer and who has the authority to determine this?

What's binding is the Tradition. Ecclesial authority exists only in service of the Tradition. I think of that passage of St. Paul in the [Letter to the] Galatians (1:8), that if "even an angel should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."

If the Pope were to teach grave error or heresy, which lawful authority can declare this and what would be the consequences?

It is the duty in such cases, and historically it has happened, of cardinals and bishops to make clear that the Pope is teaching error and to ask him to correct it.

Edward Pentin

is the Register's Rome correspondent.

<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/cardinal-burke-on-amoris-laetitia-dubia-tremendous-division-warrants-action>