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***Accompanying, discerning and
integrating the fragility of couples:
Pastors and theologians at a
crossroads***

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Plan

1. It took three years to arrive at *Amoris Laetitia*
2. The traditional disjunction between the doctrinal and the pastoral as the root of the problem
3. Perspectives after *Amoris Laetitia*

1. It took three years to arrive at *Amoris Laetitia*

1.1. The synodal process

- * Temporal extension
- * Discernment
- * Consultation of all the baptized
- * *Sensus fidei*
- * Three risks

1. It took three years to arrive at *Amoris Laetitia*

1.2. The 1st Belgian consultation (2014)

- * 1'283 french-language questionnaires (184 from groups)
 - * 306 flemish-language questionnaires (60 from groups)
- expectations of an evolution, especially in our subject

1. It took three years to arrive at *Amoris Laetitia*

1.3. Fears and disappointments

- * “All that trouble – for such a small result!”
- * Fear of « rigorists »
- * Disappointment in pastoral work
 - intention of Pope Francis to bypass the primary traditional reading that posits an antithesis between the doctrinal and the pastoral

2. The traditional disjunction between the doctrinal and the pastoral as the root of the problem

- 2.1. *Amoris Laetitia* and “doctrine”
- 2.2. “The discernment of ‘irregular’ situations”
- 2.3. “They are not excommunicated”
- 2.4. The children as a pastoral priority

2.1. *Amoris Laetitia* and “doctrine”

59. “Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defense of a dry and lifeless doctrine.”

2.1. *Amoris Laetitia* and “doctrine”

3. “Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it.”

→ The word “norm”

2.2. “The discernment of ‘irregular’ situations”

* Nr. 297, 301, 305

* Inverted comas !

Footnote :

“Around us we find various families in so-called irregular situations – I don’t really like this word – and it causes us to wonder.” catechesis, June 24, 2015

Pope Francis, catechesis on June 24, 2015

2.3. "They are not excommunicated"

* A strong affirmation

243: "It is important that the 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]."

“In these decades, in truth, the Church has been neither insensitive nor lazy. Thanks to the in-depth analysis performed by Pastors, led and **guided by my Predecessors, the awareness has truly grown** that it is necessary to have a fraternal and attentive welcome, in love and in truth, of the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of the marital sacrament: **in fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated – they are not excommunicated! – and they should absolutely not be treated as such: they are still a part of the Church.**” catechesis, August 5, 2015

2.3. "They are not excommunicated"



- * A sentence that most Catholics find obscure

297: "No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves. Naturally, **if someone flaunts an objective sin as if it were part of the Christian ideal, or wants to impose something other than what the Church teaches**, he or she can in no way presume **to teach or preach** to others; this is a case of something which separates from the community (cf. *Mt* 18:17)

2.3. “They are not excommunicated”

* Looking for the Pope’s thinking like a “matryoshka doll”

299: Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework can be surmounted. Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and experience her as a mother who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel.”

300. "What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since "the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases" [335], the consequences or effects of a rule need not always necessarily be the same" [336]."

= matryoshka doll 1

→ Looking for the Pope's thinking like a
"matryoshka doll"

5 matryoshka dolls

AL 300



AL footnote
336



EG 47



EG footnote 51
St Ambrose
& St Cyrille



Footnote 336: This is also the case with regard to sacramental discipline, since discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists. In such cases, what is found in another document applies: cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 44 and 47.

= matryoshka doll 2

EG47. "One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself the "door": baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak [51]. = **matryoshka doll 3**

EG Footnote 51:

Saint Ambrose of Milan on the forgiveness of sins by means of the eucharist, and Saint Cyril of Alexandria on the unworthiness of everyone (himself included) to receive the eucharistic communion.

= matryoshka doll 4



2.4. The children as a pastoral priority

299. "This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important."

246.

300. "The divorced and remarried should ask themselves: how did they act towards their children when the conjugal union entered into crisis."

2.4. The children as a pastoral priority

41. "A crisis in a couple's relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds [16]."

3. Perspectives after *Amoris Laetitia*

- 3.1. The magisterial “fragility” of the Exhortation
- 3.2. “An implementation that is feeling its way”
- 3.3. A synodality that must be put into practice

3.1. The magisterial “fragility” of the Exhortation

3. “Since “time is greater than space,” I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium.”

3.2. "An implementation that is feeling its way"



3.2. “An implementation that is feeling its way”

“But what does this mean concretely? Many people ask this question, and rightly so.”

Card. Schönborn

308. "I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, "always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street" [356 (EG 45)]."

3.3. A synodality that must be put into practice

“It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” Pope Francis

3. “Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its tradition and local needs. For “cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle ... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied” [3]”

And now: "A Point of No Return"?

"Something has changed in the ecclesial discourse" Card. Schönborn

"above all a 'linguistic event,' just like *Evangelii Gaudium*." Id.

"In these two hundred pages (...), it is his style, and the Pope wants people to speak about the affairs of life in the most concrete way possible, especially when it is a question of the family, one of the most elementary realities of life." Id.

“The great joy that this document gives me is due to the fact that it coherently bypasses the artificial, external, and clear-cut division between those who are **‘regular’** and those who are ‘irregular,’ and that it puts all the world under the common authority of the Gospel, in keeping with the words of Saint Paul: ‘For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all’ (Rom 11:32).” Card. Schönborn

→ Synodality