

Pfarrer-Initiative Deutschland

Zusammenschluss reformorientierter Priester und Diakone

Your Eminences,

You have made your letter to Pope Francis with questions concerning the handling of persons who have remarried after divorce public. In turn we as priests and deacons feel invited to present our perspective publically in the hope of contributing to clarity.

It is the duty of the church to proclaim God's grace and mercifulness - regardless of the developmental phase or particular impasse of guilt a person is presently in and guide him or her into a renewed possibility for continued growth in the love of God, love of other, love of the world and love of the self.

Until now the view of the Catholic church concerning marriage and the ethics of marriage denied those persons whose marriages failed and who entered a new partnership the chance to receive the spiritual elixir of the church for their distinctive growth and maturation in the form of the sacraments.

The world-wide ecological connection among people, the knowledge of manifold unconscious impulses that influence our behavior and the now known mechanisms of psychic repression make us conscious in our time of the fact that we are always enmeshed in guilt and sin even after an honest confession.

In light of this, the traditional distinction between a stance of grace following confession and a condition of great sin in which divorced and remarried persons allegedly live in categorically, loses its meaning.



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Confession does not mean placement in a sin- and guilt-free condition, rather a renewed direction towards possible spiritual growth and maturation and a new willingness to recognize and accept one's own Christian calling moving forward from the present situation.

Modern psychology as well as history have given testimony to the phenomenon that both individuals as well as entire populations can move through situations of serious guilt to achieve key, future-oriented processes of maturation.

In turn, Jesus' prohibition of divorce cannot be understood as a dictate of exclusion from the sacramental elixir of the church, rather as a challenge for married couples and the church alike to give the greatest attention to and take the greatest possible effort to understand the essence and meaning of spiritual maturation as well as possible blocks in the marriage relationship and in a family in order to provide support for spiritual and psychic growth.

The fact that until now the Catholic church has not taken Jesus' prohibition of divorce in this sense seriously enough is a sad fact. The traditional reaction of the church to punish divorced people who remarry with exclusion from the sacraments is in light of present psychological knowledge concerning the psychodynamics of people in a relationship an alarming neglect and in the view of many a shallow and primitive way to deal with an extremely difficult problem as well as being no help for those who expect and seek it.

The "confusion" allegedly created by "Amoris Laetitia" is reminiscent of the confusion evoked by the Second Vatican Council. Prior, the faithful were accustomed to having their lives so clearly regulated by the dictates and prohibitions of the church that they knew, for instance, how many grams of meat eaten on a Friday distinguished a slight transgression from a serious sin. Then suddenly things were not so clearly regulated, and the faithful were supposed to shape their lives according to the principles of the good news and the church which allowed room for individual decisions. People who had learned to dutifully obey church authorities but who were not used to following their own trained and sensitive conscience, were very unsettled.

The path from authoritarian dutifulness to mature Christianity was for some a very unpleasant challenge. This problem has apparently reappeared in the question of the church's marriage

ethics. And it can be supposed that the "confusion" of "Amoris Laetita" for some priests and bishops derives from the fact that it (the marriage and family pastoral of "Amoris Laetita") takes individuals truly seriously and requires a real effort to come close, understand and guide. This is a very discerning and challenging pastoral which requires great human empathy and a profound knowledge of the psychodynamic processes involved in relationships. Further, such a pastoral is much more time consuming than being simply required to tell the faithful what is allowed and not allowed and the consequences.

For a long time we have been making an effort to provide discerning pastoral guidance in the spirit of "Amoris Laetita". But those who have primarily strived to proclaim church laws and regulations and maintain compliance to these will rightfully be placed in a hopefully healing state of unsettlement and confusion.

So we ask you to guide and strengthen those who suffer from unsettlement and confusion in this sense so they can learn to trust their own conscience and in turn find their way to becoming mature Christians.

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