

# The Dismantling of Morals and Marriage

## *Amoris Laetitia*: A Ramped-up Program of Diabolic Disorientation

by John Vennari

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*Amoris Laetitia* (the “Joy of Love”) is the much anticipated post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on marriage and the family. Released on April 6, 2016, it runs 260 pages, approximately 59,000 words. Father George Rutler – wryly commenting on the ponderous length of modern Vatican documents – noted that Francis’ text “is nearly two-thirds the length of all the Vatican II promulgations” combined.

Immediately after its release, respected Italian journalist Antonio Socci wrote: “The Apostolic Exhortation is an open act challenging two thousand years of Catholic teaching. And in Catholic circles people are shocked and struck dumb in bewilderment.”

Raymond Cardinal Burke, in a somewhat subdued response, called the document a “personal reflection of the Pope” that is “not [to be] confused with

the binding faith owed to the exercise of the magisterium.”

The eminent Professor Roberto De Mattei said, “If the text is catastrophic, even more catastrophic is the fact that it was signed by the Vicar of Christ.”

In an unprecedented act, 45 conservative Catholic theologians recently issued a detailed Critical Analysis listing points in *Amoris Laetitia* that are “heretical,” “contrary to Sacred Scripture,” “scandalous” and similar censures. They opened their study stating, “The apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* has caused grief and confusion to many Catholics on account of his apparent disagreement with a number of teachings of the Catholic Church on faith and morals.”

Anyone who followed the tumultuous 2014 and 2015 Synods will not be surprised at the Exhortation. The Synods, the synod press conferences,

the synodal texts and the newly-released Exhortation represent one steady stream of modernist revolution.

Amidst great drifts of verbiage – some not bad, some remarkably tedious – Francis effectively canonizes what is called “situation ethics.”

Francis furtively opens the door for Communion to the divorced and “remarried” on a ‘case-by-case’ basis, which destroys key elements of Catholic Moral Theology. In particular, his approach undermines recognition of intrinsically disordered acts, and once this is undermined in one area, it is undermined in all areas.

What is an intrinsically evil act? It is an act evil in and of itself, no circumstance can justify engaging in such an act. Two examples: 1) abortion, and 2) knowingly and willingly condemning an innocent person to jail or to death. Such acts can never be justified by any mitigating circumstances.

Yet Francis’ approach undermines recognition of intrinsically disordered acts, and once this is undermined in one area it is undermined in all areas.

Progressivists immediately celebrated *Amoris Laetitia* as a “radical shift.”

## Situation Ethics

Situation Ethics is the rejection of the universal, binding, immutable norms of morality. That means there is no such thing as a moral act that is intrinsically evil, there is no rule that admits no exceptions. According to this false approach, the morality of an act ultimately depends not on objective truth, but on the individual’s given situation.

The early advocates of situation ethics (as well as contemporary advocates) rebelled against what they call “legalism,” “rigidity” and certain “fixed rules of morality that can never be violated.” Such an approach, as the 1960s advocates of situation ethics complained, “puts rules over people.”

Dr. Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991) was the popular proponent of Situation Ethics of the 1960s, and his ideas spread. Fletcher, an Anglican clergyman (who published the landmark 1966 book *Situation Ethics* and ended his days as an atheist), insisted that in a given situation we need not always act according to objective morality, but rather we “do the loving thing” based on the our given circumstances.

The new pastoral approach coming from Francis' Vatican delivers a new twist to the same error, claiming what is most important is to do the "merciful" thing, in light of the various "concrete circumstances" of the individual.

### Condemned by Pius XII

Situation ethics pre-dates Fletcher's book. As early as 1952, Pope Pius XII denounced situation ethics as follows: "It is an individual and subjective appeal to the concrete circumstances of actions to justify decisions in opposition to the Natural Law and God's revealed will."

Pope Pius also warned in 1952: "The distinctive mark of this morality is that it is in fact in no way based on universal moral laws, for instance, on the Ten Commandments, but on the real and concrete conditions or circumstances in which one must act, and according to which the individual conscience has to judge and choose. This state of things is unique and valid but once for each human action. This is why the supporters of this ethics affirm that the decision of one's conscience cannot be commanded by universal ideas, principles, and laws..." (AAS, 1952, pp. 413-419.)

Not only do we have Pius XII's denouncement of Situation Ethics in 1952, but in 1956 Pius XII's Holy Office explicitly condemned Situation Ethics in all its forms.

Unfortunately, this condemnation means nothing to the Modernist. A key tactic of modernism is to pretend the magisterium has not spoken on certain points. We find in *Amoris Laetitia* an inordinate emphasis on the concrete situations of various individuals, and how this might supposedly mitigate acts that are objectively sinful. This is the language of situation ethics. *Amoris Laetitia* effectively starts with the person's situation, not with immutable moral principles.

The norm of true sacramental marriage is depicted more as an "ideal" rather than a non-negotiable Commandment of Christ. The document treats with inordinate sympathy Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried, as well as those who cohabit, offering one excuse after the next for how such souls find themselves in their fallen condition. True Catholic precepts concerning the proper living of Catholic marriage are depicted as abstract and somewhat out of touch with people's concrete circumstances.



**In 1952 and 1956, Pope Pius XII and his Holy Office condemned “Situation Ethics” in all its forms.**

Here are some samples from *Amoris Laetitia*:

#31: “We do well to focus on *concrete realities*, since ‘the call and demands of the spirit resound in the events of history...’”

#36: “At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and most artificial ideal of marriage, far removed from the *concrete situations* and practical possibilities of real family (the text goes on to speak of this “excessive idealization”).

#301: “The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations [the document

fails to affirm that there are no mitigating factors that can in any way justify acts that are intrinsically evil, such as fornication, adultery, contraception and homosexual acts - jv]. Hence it can no longer be said that all those who live in any ‘irregular’ situations are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule. A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding ‘its inherent values’ or be in a *concrete situation* which does not allow him or her to act different

and decide otherwise without further sin.”

#304: “It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the *concrete life* of the human being.” This effectively casts aside the general rule of law.

Thus, as we saw in situation ethics, we start with “*concrete circumstances*,” and then shape our moral conclusion from this “actual reality.” This demands a new program of dialogue and pastoral discernment that plays down “black and white” moral absolutes. This then grants leeway, in certain cases, to claim that those in objective mortal sin can subjectively be living the life of grace, and be treated as those living the life of grace.

The end result is a new approach that opens the door for the divorced and civilly remarried, based on the difficulties inherent in their concrete situation, to receive the Eucharist.

Commenting on this point, the highly-respected theologian Father Brian Harrison notes the most troubling aspect of Francis’ new document is “its treatment in Chapter 8 of those living in

irregular sexual relationships.”

He continues: “In notes 336 and 351 to paragraphs 300 and 305 respectively, the Holy Father breaks with the teaching and discipline of all his predecessors in the See of Peter by allowing at least some divorced and civilly remarried Catholics (with no decree of nullity and no commitment to continence) to receive the sacraments. Since – the document says – ‘discernment can recognize that in a particular situation no grave fault exists’ owing to a variety of mitigating psychological and other factors, Francis affirms in n. 351 that the Church’s ‘help’ to these Catholics living in objectively illicit relationships can ‘in certain cases . . . include the help of the sacraments.’” The context, notes Father Harrison, indicates this means reception of Penance and the Eucharist while these individuals continue to live in sin.

### **Catholic Morality Dismantled**

This new approach effectively destroys true Catholic moral theology. Situation Ethics cannot be admitted in one instance and not in others. Once situation ethics is granted in one area, it undermines the reality of moral absolutes in every area, and all

morality is cast into a state of subjectivist flux.

Likewise, in the case of opening the sacraments to those living in sin: once it is permitted to divorced and civilly remarried because of varying “concrete circumstances,” and once the situation determines moral action, we can expect cohabitating couples and even homosexuals to claim a right to the Eucharist in light of their varied circumstances.

Chicago’s own Cardinal-designate, Archbishop Blase Cupich, stated publicly in October 2015 that he would give Holy Communion to a practicing homosexual who came to the conclusion in his conscience that he is free to receive the Eucharist, without confession and abandoning his homosexual lifestyle.

Tragically, this same Archbishop Cupich was appointed by Pope Francis to be on a key bishop-making panel in the Vatican. Francis will also elevate Cupich to the dignity of Cardinal in the Consistory of November 19, 2016.

Once moral absolutes are abandoned in the area of the divorced and “remarried” being admitted to the Eucharist, then moral absolutes will go on to

be abandoned in other areas, such as abortion, contraception, homosexuality, euthanasia, medical ethics, just war, surrogate parenting, and the list goes on.

With universal, binding, immutable norms of morality discarded, the practice of what we do becomes an alleged “discernment ” based on the concrete circumstances of the individual, or even the gut-instincts of the individual.

### **What about Natural Law?**

Natural Law, which determines morality based on the intrinsic nature of the act, and on the nature of man himself, is the genuine ethic of the Church and common sense. It is taught within the tried-and-true realism of scholastic philosophy and theology; and as St. Pius X warned in *Pascendi*, Modernists despise scholasticism – the categories, the clear distinctions that allow for no wiggle room. Liberals live in a climate of ambiguity. They hate scholastic precision of language.

Likewise, Natural Law has always been the sworn enemy of situation ethics, as it insists there are certain acts that are intrinsically disordered, and no set of circumstances can justify

committing them.

Not surprisingly, Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* undermines Natural Law, claiming that "natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves *a priori* on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions." (#305)

In other words, Natural Law is only at the level of "inspiration" that one may take or leave as the individual works out his "deeply personal process" of deciding one's own moral behavior.

The entire orientation of Francis' *Amoris Laetitiae* is contra Natural Law, contra "black and white" moral absolutes, pro-subjectivist and pro-situationist. It is the death knell of true Catholic moral theology.

### **Why Do Too Many Catholics Go Along With This?**

Why then do so many Catholics praise the document, or claim there is nothing substantially wrong with it?

We can give five quick reasons:

1) Many Catholics – priests and bishops included – have not received a proper systematic, scholastic formation in

philosophy and theology. Much of their formation is fragmented and deficient, due to the breakdown in seminaries and Catholic higher education as a result of Vatican II. They are not equipped to see the blatant problems staring them in the face.

2) Other Catholics believe they are duty-bound to defend and accept anything that comes from the Pope, even though – as Cardinal Burke noted – the document is a "personal opinion of Francis and is not [to be] confused with the binding faith owed to the exercise of the magisterium."

Yet we know from Pope Innocent III, St. Robert Bellarmine, Suarez and others that it is possible for a Pope to deviate from the truth, and if he does so, Catholics may resist and prevent his will from being enacted (see Father Gruner on this point, pages 20 and 55).

3) Many Catholics are unaware that *Amoris Laetitia* is the full-flowering of a crisis in moral theology, devastating the Church for over 50 years.

Since the time of Vatican II, perverse theologians such as Fathers Joseph Fuchs, Charles Curran, Richard McBrien, Richard McCormick and



**Inside the Lutheran Cathedral where Pope Francis participated in the Lutheran service, the “Rapid Response” team (from left) Patrick Ryan, Michal Semin, Joanna Swords, Coralie Graham – and not shown in photo – James Hanisch and Dan Smith, settled into a quiet corner to pray a Rosary for the conversion of misled souls.**

countless others advanced this situationist, consequentialist, non-absolutist approach to moral theology.

Except for Charles Curran who was eventually silenced (after over 20 years of discussions with Rome) these other delinquent theologians ran rampant, spreading their poison throughout the Church for decades in seminaries and universities, and in once-prestigious Catholic journals such as *Commonweal*, and *Theological Studies* and *America* magazine (especially during the reign of John Paul II, who

took no effective action against them).

One strong voice of opposition was the late Msgr. William Smith, Professor of Moral Theology at Dunwoodie Seminary, who delivered countless lectures in the 70s, 80s and 90s against these perverse theologians and their situationist errors. The key errors he fought have all surfaced in *Amoris Laetitia*.

4) Too many Catholics succumb to the claim that the document does not change doctrine, and is therefore safe. Those who say this fail to

understand how modernism operates. Modernists, as St. Pius X warned, are “full of deceit,” and usually do not announce blatant changes in doctrine (although Francis makes the heterodox statement in #297: “No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel!” which appears to discard the Catholic and Biblical truth that souls are condemned to hell).

Rather, Modernism – by using new language, new emphasis, presenting an overall new atmosphere (“Mercy and Compassion” and “accompaniment”), emphasizing certain aspects of Catholic truth while ignoring others, pretending the magisterium has not spoken on certain points, failing to affirm key doctrinal points that contradict its general trajectory, and introducing new praxis contrary to doctrine – effects a revolution in Catholic attitude and behavior without explicit change of doctrine.

This is exactly how *Amoris Laetitia* operates. Even conservative Philip Lawler referred to Francis’ document as a “subversive” text.

5) Then, of course, there are liberal Catholics who thrill at the new approach. The radical

Cardinal Kasper celebrated that *Amoris Laetitia* effectively “changes everything.”

Now, the next obvious question: Will this not result in a floodgate of sacrilege?

Yes, a floodgate of sacrilege. By canonizing a situation ethics approach, a system which Pius XII and his Holy Office explicitly condemned, Francis opens the door for the divorced and civilly remarried to receive the Eucharist. He is personally responsible for opening the floodgates of sacrilegious Communion that will necessarily follow. Every Eucharistic sacrilege that follows as a result of this document will have his name written upon it. Pray a great deal for the Holy Father.

### What Do We Do?

We cling to the perennial truths of the Faith, publicly resist this latest subversion, teach the truth to those within our sphere of influence, work to prevent Francis’ will from being enacted in this regard, and offer many prayers of reparation, such as taught us at Fatima, for the countless sacrileges that will result from *Amoris Laetitia*. **FC**