

▼ Introduction

▼ Communion of the Divorced and Remarried

- Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “*Amoris Laetitia*” – contains shocking statements that seem to open up the possibility for those who are divorced and remarried (therefore, publicly living in sin) to receive Holy Communion.
- A surprising number of actions by Pope Francis seem to confirm the interpretation of the document in this light, viz. that now it is possible for those living in habitual sin to receive Holy Communion. Notably, the Pope’s response to the guidelines issue by the Buenos Aires bishops, in which they explicitly allow for the possibility of Holy Communion being given. In the Pope’s response – which later was added to the official Acts of the Holy See, he approves the guidelines and says further, “there is no other interpretation.”

▼ The “dilemma” which we are faced with, in this matter of giving communion to the divorced and remarried is as follows:

- On the one hand, we have two millennia of Church teaching which declares that no one living in a state of sin is apt to receive Holy Communion – doing so would be a sacrilege, and a very serious one, because Christ is really, truly, substantially present in the Holy Eucharist.
- On the other hand, we have the Pope, who is suggesting that it *could* be possible, in certain circumstances, to give Holy Communion to those living in the state of sin.
- Our question is: are we to promote the teaching of the Pope, and allow for the possibility of giving communion to the divorced and remarried? Or are we to reject this teaching?
- To put it more concretely (since the matter does indeed terminate in a practical action): what must a priest do if his bishop, citing *Amoris Laetitia*, demands that he give communion to a couple who are not really married, but living in sin?
- If he gives communion to them, he follows the injunction of his bishop, but he seems to contradict the perennial teaching of the Church.
- If he refuses them communion, then he upholds what the Church has always taught, but seems to “disobey” the command of his bishop.

▼ The Dilemma and the “*Correctio Filialis*”

- ▼ **When we are faced with a dilemma such as this one, where a legitimate superior commands something that seems to contradict a still higher authority (that of God), there are only two possible courses of action.**
 - We can follow the injunction of the superior. And then I need to explain why I seem to be ignoring the higher authority, that of God.
 - Or else I can refuse to comply with the injunction of the superior, and then I need to explain why I am not being disobedient (which Christ clearly condemns).

- ▼ **First of all, if we obey the legitimate superior, then we need to explain why we seem to be ignoring the higher authority. Generally, people pose two ways to do this:**
 - “Blind obedience,” i.e. it isn’t my job to reconcile what my superior says and what a higher authority may command. I just trust the superior blindly, that is, I do whatever he says no matter what, without looking into anything.
 - Reconcile the command of the legitimate superior with the higher authority, showing that they are actually in agreement. Or, if this is not possible, then invoke another principle, e.g. infallibility, to show that the two must *be* reconcilable, even if we cannot see it.

- ▼ **On the other hand, if we do not follow the command of the legitimate superior, then we need to explain how this is not a real disobedience. Here, too, there are two ways to do this:**
 - Claim that the person who issues the command is not actually a superior at all, and therefore no obedience or recognition is owed to him anyway. We are not disobeying their authority because they have no authority at all.
 - Realize that a superior can only command what is in accordance with God’s own law, i.e. his authority is limited. If I were to “obey” him, I would be disobeying God, which is never possible. Therefore, my “disobedience” to the superior is actually an obedience to God.

- ▼ **To come back to the situation of communion for the divorced and remarried for a moment: 62 Catholic clergy and lay scholars privately sent a “correctio filialis” to the Pope (they later made this public, when they received no response from the Pope).**
 - In this document, they outline clearly what they consider to be contradictions between what the Pope says and divinely revealed statements, i.e. statements which Catholics must assent to, otherwise they would repudiate the faith and be in heresy.

- The authors make clear that they uphold the authority and the infallibility of the Pope, but that this authority and infallibility only extend so far – “Most Holy Father, the Petrine ministry has not been entrusted to you that you might impose strange doctrines on the faithful, but so that you may, as a faithful steward, guard the deposit against the day of the Lord’s return.”
- Therefore, they say they will follow rather the Church’s perennial teaching, which is the faith given by Jesus Christ, Who is God Himself.
- Likewise, with respect, they wish to point out the contradictions and urge the Pope, for the good of the Church, to exercise his authority properly and uphold what he has no power to contradict.
- In this respect, the authors of the “correctio” correctly lay out what has always been the Church’s understanding of obedience and its limits.

▼ The Current Crisis

- **If we come back to our two possibilities in face of an apparent contradiction of the authority and of God, we can see that, generally speaking, they define the landscape in the Church today as regards the present crisis.**
- ▼ **What are we commanded to do by our legitimate superiors?**
 - In the concrete, priests are commanded not to perform any function without the approval of the hierarchy (which is the normal procedure) – but, we are told, the price of this approval is the acceptance of certain doctrinal positions.
 - Again, the faithful are told only to seek out priests who have the approval of the hierarchy because they have accepted these doctrinal positions.
- ▼ **What are these doctrinal positions?**
 - That Vatican II represents a legitimate continuity in the teachings of the Church due to the living nature of tradition.
 - That the Novus Ordo Missae suffers from no doctrinal defects, but embodies liturgical and doctrinal continuity with the Traditional Mass.
 - The SSPX claims that these two doctrinal positions are false, i.e. that there is a contradiction between them and what the Church has always taught.
- **As we saw above, there are two courses of action open: either the priests and the faithful follow these commands of the hierarchy, thereby accepting those doctrinal positions; or else the priests and the faithful do not follow the injunction of the hierarchy.**

- ▼ In either course of action, we have to give some kind of reason for our action in face of the apparent contradiction which exists. Broadly speaking, this gives us four different positions:
- Those who accept these doctrinal positions, but who say that they need not investigate these matters. The Pope and the Bishops have all told us to do them, so we just follow and that's the end. **This is the position of "blind obedience," and it also summarizes the position of those who do not take the time to investigate the situation in the Church today.**
 - Those who accept these doctrinal positions, but who claim that there is no real contradiction between them and the perennial teaching of the Church. They say this, either because they think they can reconcile everything, or because they invoke infallibility, as if to say: there must be a reconciliation, even if you cannot figure it out, because otherwise the Pope would not be infallible. **This is, more or less, the position of the FSSP and other Catholics who claim that the SSPX is in real disobedience.**
 - Those who refuse these doctrinal positions and do not follow the commands because they say that those who issue them actually have no authority at all. These doctrinal positions are heretical and so, by the very fact of pronouncing them, those men lose their office; or else such statements prove that they never had the office in the first place. **This is, broadly speaking, the position of the sedevacantists.**
 - Those who refuse these doctrinal positions and do not follow the commands, not because those who put them forward have lost their authority, but because such statements contradict a higher authority, that of God Himself. **This is the position of the SSPX in the current crisis.**
 - This broad division gives us a kind of context to discuss obedience and its limits. In order to justify the SSPX position, we will have to answer a series of objections about authority and about the situation in the Church today.
 - Note, before we go on, that more and more Catholics are having to face these kinds of dilemmas. The whole topic of communion given to the divorced and remarried is a notable example, because it received such widespread attention in the Church – also because it is so clear that there is a *real* contradiction there.

▼ The Objections

▼ First Objection

- Many of the saints seem to counsel absolute and unquestioning obedience, even in matters which are unreasonable. Therefore, shouldn't we obey the Church authorities blindly, without question? True obedience cannot make exceptions!

▼ Second Objection

- No contradiction between Church authorities and previous Church teaching is possible, at least not when we are speaking about the Pope or the majority of the Catholic bishops. This is due to the charism of infallibility. We also have Christ's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. How could the Pope go astray in matters of faith? How could the majority of Bishops all be wrong?

▼ Third Objection

- How can you have the audacity and the arrogance to claim that you have discovered a contradiction between the Church's perennial teaching and the current Church authorities? You may have overlooked something, and it would be temerarious to claim that you see the matter clearly. Therefore, it is much safer to obey.

▼ Fourth Objection

- If there really is so deep a disagreement between the Church authorities and the Tradition which it is their specific job to defend, then they are heretics and have forfeited their office. We need not ask any further questions: they have no right to command any more, and that's the end of the matter.

▼ Reply to the First

- ▼ To reply to the first objection, we have to mention some preliminary points about obedience. We can find these points clearly outlined by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Diuturnum Illud* (June 29, 1881).

- ▼ **Man is social by nature, meaning that, in order to reach his physical and moral perfection, he needs some kind of society. First of all, this will be the family, and secondly, the city, or a perfect society able to supply for man's needs.**
 - “God, Who is the Author of nature, wills that man should live in a civil society.”
- ▼ **Now, society cannot exist without someone to govern it, so that the many wills of the members may be directed towards one goal, which is the common good.**
 - “God has willed that in a civil society there should be some to rule the multitude.”
 - St. Thomas Aquinas points out that, even before Original Sin, man would have lived in society under an authority (see Prima Pars, Q96, a4).
 - Those who govern the society must have the power to compel the citizens to obey, i.e. “those by whose authority the State is administered must be able so to compel the citizens to obedience that it is clearly a sin in the latter not to obey.”
 - Now, no man has this power of himself. “This power resides solely in God, the Creator and Legislator of all things; and it is necessary that those who exercise it should do it as having received it from God. ‘There is one lawgiver and judge, who is able to destroy and deliver.’ (James 4:12).”
- ▼ **We can draw some conclusions from these preliminary points.**
 - **First and foremost: God is the sole source of all authority. All power comes from God, period. Christ to Pilate: “Thou shouldst not have any power against me unless it were given thee from above.” (Jn. 19:11)**
 - **Second: men receive authority from God to exercise over others. Therefore it is clear that they have no authority to compel men to do what God forbids – they cannot have any such authority, since then God would contradict Himself.**
 - ▼ **Third: the purpose of the authority which men receive is to lead society to the common good, i.e. a good common to all.**
 - The question of the “common good” is an intricate one, and we cannot go into it here, but see some other conferences I’ve given for a philosophical approach to understanding it.

▼ **Finally, and in conclusion: the commands and laws which human superiors issue must therefore be within the ambit of their authority and must direct men to the common good of that society.**

- A law which is outside of the scope of the human authority is no law. The state cannot command me to reveal what I have heard in the confessional, for example. That is no law.
- A law which does not lead to the common good, but goes against it, is no law, since it would thereby contradict the very reason for which God gave authority. For example, the state cannot legalize abortion. Such goes directly contrary to the common good of society, and is no law. No one has a right to an abortion, no matter what the state says.
- Yet, if a law is within the scope of the human authority, and if it is not against the common good, it does bind those who are subject to it.

▼ **Obedience is a virtue**

- **On account of what we have just said, an act of obedience – that is, following the legitimate commands of a legitimate authority – is a good and praiseworthy action. Moreover, the habit which helps us to make these acts of obedience is a moral *virtue*.**
- **Every moral virtue of man is governed by his reason, since man is a rational creature. We have likewise seen that the commands of superiors must be in accord with the common good of man, i.e. they must be in accord with right reason and the purpose of man's existence.**

▼ **Therefore, with obedience, as with every other moral virtue, we can speak about two ways of failing to act according to the virtue:**

- **First is by defect, or falling short: we fall short of the virtue of obedience when we do not fulfill the rightful commands of our superiors. This is simply called “disobedience.”**
- **Second is by excess, or going past what would be virtuous: we exceed the virtue of obedience when we slavishly or indiscreetly follow the commands of a human authority. Why is this a problem? Because it removes our reason from the equation. We act as robots, which is not obedience, but slavish copying.**

▼ **Every moral virtue seeks to achieve the mean, which is between the extremes and above them.**

- For example, courage has a defect – cowardice, which is lack of boldness and too much fear – and an excess – foolhardiness, which is too much boldness and not enough fear. Courage lies between these two extremes, as a kind of blend of boldness and fear. But it is also on a level above the extremes because the principle of an act of courage is *reason*, whereas the principle of an act of cowardice or of foolhardiness is not reason but emotion.
- Likewise, with obedience we have a defect, which is disobedience, and an excess, which is slavish or false obedience. True obedience lies between these two extremes, but it is also on a level above them. The man who disobeys does not act by reason, since he contradicts what would lead him to his own good. Likewise, the man who slavishly obeys does not act by reason, since he does not see the command of his superior as coming from the authority of God Himself.
- An act of true obedience always has reason as its principle: the subject understands that the command of the superior is legitimate and therefore receives its authority directly from God. Accordingly, he follows the command because it is from God.

▼ Solution to the Objection

- **The Catholic Faith never counsels blind or slavish obedience. This is not a virtue at all, but a falling away from virtue. Man is a rational creature and his acts must be governed by his reason. Therefore, blind obedience is not obedience at all.**
- ▼ **Moreover, when the saints counsel “unquestioning obedience,” they mean to exclude the error by defect: many justify their disobedience with spurious reasons coming from pride.**
 - The saints cannot be understood to counsel blind or slavish obedience, since they would be contradicting Scripture itself: “But Peter and the apostles answering, said: We ought to obey God, rather than men.” (Acts 5:29).
 - They do warn us to be careful when we think we see a problem with what the superior commands. Here, we must step carefully.
- **None of these principles change when we speak about the Church authorities, who are human and therefore receive their authority from God and are answerable to Him and His law. There is a limit even to their authority.**
- **As rational creatures and Catholics, we have a duty to practice the *virtue* of obedience. We do not have a duty to be slavishly or falsely obedient.**

- In the crucial matters which concern our eternal salvation, and in face of the evident crisis which the Church is facing, we must take the time to examine matters and understand where true obedience lies.

▼ Reply to the Second

▼ There are two questions which this objection raises:

- First, can the Pope and the Bishops be mistaken? Are they always right? This is the question about the gift of infallibility.
- Second, when we are talking about an ecumenical council (Vatican II) and a liturgical discipline (the Novus Ordo Missae), how could the Pope and so many bishops get it wrong? That doesn't seem possible.

▼ To answer the first question, about infallibility

▼ We won't go into a lot of detail about infallibility – it's a topic in and of itself. But we first have to dispel a common misconception, which is sometimes unstated, namely, that infallibility somehow makes the Pope or the bishops unable to make a mistake or unable to speak error.

- This is just a misunderstanding of the doctrine of infallibility.
- Vatican I said it clearly: "For the Holy Ghost was not promised to the successors of Peter that by His revelation they might disclose new doctrine, but that by His help they might guard sacredly the revelation transmitted through the apostles and the deposit of Faith, and might faithfully set it forth."
- Therefore, if a Pope discloses a new doctrine, he is not protected by the gift of infallibility.

▼ Second, history shows that bishops and even Popes have been mistaken.

- That bishops have been mistaken is abundantly clear from the Church's history, and (unfortunately) from the situation in the Church today.
- ▼ That Popes have been mistaken, either in their actions or their words, is also pretty clear. We won't go into great detail here, but we can mention, most notably:
 - St. Paul correcting St. Peter, Gal. 2:11: "But when Cephas was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

- Pope Liberius, who was at the time of the Arian heresy and who unjustly excommunicated St. Athanasius.
 - Pope Honorius, who, in an official letter, seems to claim that Our Lord had only one will. He did not intend to dogmatically define anything, but the letter is indefensible in light of Catholic doctrine.
 - Pope John XXII, who taught in sermons, even while he was Pope, that those who die in the state of grace and go to heaven do not enjoy the Beatific Vision except after the Last Judgment.
- ▼ Finally, it is the opinion of the Fathers and of many theologians that such mistakes are possible. We will quote more below, but here we can quote St. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Galatians 2:11:
- “There being an imminent danger for the Faith, prelates must be questioned, even publicly, by their subjects. Thus, St. Paul, who was a subject of St. Peter, questioned him publicly on account of an imminent danger of scandal in a matter of Faith. And, as the Glossa of St. Augustine puts it (Ad Galatas 2.14), ‘St. Peter himself gave the example to those who govern so that if sometimes they stray from the right way, they will not reject a correction as unworthy even if it comes from their subjects.’” (Summa Theologiae, IIa IIae, Q. 33, A. 4)
- ▼ The second question said that it seems as though a whole ecumenical Council and a liturgical discipline cannot possibly be wrong.
- ▼ **Note that this seems to be the “sticking point” for a lot of people.**
- This is really the reason we are doing the whole crisis series, because we have to establish that there is an undeniable contradiction between some statements in Vatican II and the Faith; and also that the Novus Ordo Missae contains doctrinal defects.
 - If we can establish that those contradictions are really there, then the rest follows: we ought to obey God rather than men.
 - Note, too, that it may be difficult to see *how* all this reconciles with an accurate understanding of infallibility, but that does not change the *fact* that we are in a crisis. Some things are going to be obscure, but that is all the more reason to hold on to what we know to be true, which is the unchanging Magisterium of the Church throughout the past 2,000 years.

- Nevertheless, we will be addressing these topics in more precise detail in later episodes.
- ▼ For now, to support the possibility of errors being presented even from the highest authorities, we can cite various sources, Popes, doctors of the Church, and theologians. Some of these are really striking.
- ▼ First, some of the Popes:
- Pope Innocent III († 1216): “The pope should not flatter himself about his power, nor should he rashly glory in his honor and high estate, because the less he is judged by man, the more he is judged by God. Still the less can the Roman Pontiff glory, because he can be judged by men, or rather, can be shown to be already judged, if for example he should wither away into heresy, because ‘he who does not believe is already judged.’ (St. John 3:18) In such a case it should be said of him: ‘If salt should lose its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trampled under foot by men.’” (Sermo 4)
 - Pope Adrian VI († 1523): “If by the Roman Church you mean its head or pontiff, it is beyond question that he can err even in matters touching the faith. He does this when he teaches heresy by his own judgement or decretal.” [This was in a commentary he wrote before he was Pope, and which was published initially without his knowledge but saw multiple editions.]
 - Pope Pius IX († 1878): “If a future pope teaches anything contrary to the Catholic Faith, do not follow him.” (Letter to Bishop Brizen)
- ▼ Then, saints and theologians:
- The first Doctor of the Church, St. Athanasius († 373), told us that “Catholics faithful to Tradition” can be “reduced to a handful” – this was during the Arian crisis, which affected the Pope also.
 - St. Vincent of Lerins († 445): “What then should a Catholic do if some portion of the Church detaches itself from communion of the universal Faith? What choice can he make if some new contagion attempts to poison, no longer a small part of the Church, but the whole Church at once? Then his great concern will be to attach himself to antiquity which can no longer be led astray by any lying novelty.” (Commonitory)
 - The theologian Sylvester Prieras, O.P. († 1523) discussed the resistance of a corrupt pope at some length. He asked, “What should be done in cases where the pope destroys the Church by his evil actions?” and “What should be done if the pope wishes unreasonably to abolish the laws of church or

state?” His answer was as follows: “He would certainly be in sin, and it would be unlawful to allow him to act in such a fashion, and likewise to obey him in matters which are evil; on the contrary, there is a duty to oppose him while administering a courteous rebuke.”

- The theologian Tommaso Cardinal de Vio Gaetani Cajetan O.P. († 1534) declared: “It is imperative to resist a pope who is openly destroying the Church.” (De Comparata Auctoritate Papae et Concilio)
- The canonist and theologian, Fr. Francisco de Victoria, O.P. († 1546) said: “According to natural law, violence may lawfully be opposed by violence. Now, through the acts permitted and the orders of the kind under discussion, the Pope does commit violence, because he is acting contrary to what is lawful. It therefore follows that it is lawful to oppose him publicly. Cajetan draws attention to the fact that this should not be interpreted as meaning that anybody whosoever can judge the Pope, or assume authority over him, but rather that it is lawful to defend oneself even against him. Every person, in fact, has the right to oppose an unjust action in order to prevent, if he is able, its being carried out, and thus he defends himself.” (Obras, pp. 486-7)

▼ Reply to the Third

- ▼ First, we have to note that this objection is not really an argument at all, but a kind of cop-out.
 - It does not pretend to address the actual arguments we bring forward to show that there is a contradiction between the Faith and various propositions that current Church leaders are saying.
 - Instead, it merely claims that we are incapable of making such a judgment, or that doing so would be rash.
 - In some way, this rejoins the first objection – if we are never competent to see that a human authority may be exceeding its bounds or contradicting God’s own authority, then all that is left to us is blind obedience.
 - But against this, we have the injunction of Our Lord Himself: “By their fruits, you shall know them.” This implies some kind of determination that the fruits are good or bad.

- Obviously, we cannot rush to make these judgments: we must take our time, and we must give the benefit to the authority. But to claim that such judgments are always impossible is untenable.
- ▼ Second, the SSPX is not the only one who is noting that there are contradictions.
- ▼ Many more Catholics are beginning to see the same thing.
- I cited the “correctio filialis” above – that is a perfect example, because the authors are clearly claiming there is a contradiction.
 - They cite also the “dubia” or doubts that four cardinals submitted privately to Rome about “Amoris Laetitia.” Such a procedure is precisely the respectful way to proceed. But Rome never answered those dubia.
 - Archbishop Lefebvre proceeded in the same way with respect to various errors of Vatican II, first submitting “dubia” to Rome. The answer he received was dismissive, nor did it clarify anything.
- ▼ Additionally, the progressives in the Church are also claiming there are contradictions. Yet, in many instances, Rome is not clarifying the true doctrine, but either remaining silent, or else repeating the very statements that lead to confusion.
- Take the example of giving communion to the divorced and remarried again: the Pope has repeatedly expressed that such a procedure is pastorally possible. This just adds to the confusion and makes it seem as if he is contradicting the perennial practice of the Church.
- ▼ Finally, if we interpret the objection in the best way possible, we could read it as more of a question to the SSPX: how can you be so sure you are right?
- This kind of question holds of a lot of weight with people, as does invoking “the safer course.” “Well, it’s safer just to obey.”
 - The problem is that we cannot just stop there. Maybe the safer course is to obey; maybe we do not have enough certainty – but in that case, you have to present an argument! You have to attempt to address the difficulties. You cannot hide behind “safety” without saying why that course might be safer – it might be more dangerous!

- ▼ To answer the question about how we are certain is fairly straightforward, in fact:
 - First, the principles surrounding the question of obedience and its limits are beyond debate. They are clearly affirmed by nature itself and by the Church.
 - Therefore, the only real question is whether we are really being asked to ascribe to something that contradicts Catholic doctrine.
 - The kind of certainty we need to have here is that certainty that is sufficient for human action – what we call “moral certainty,” or a certainty that excludes all *prudent* doubt.
 - Now, based on Church teaching readily available AND based on the specific warnings the Popes have given about various errors AND based on the admissions of those in the hierarchy today about what they are claiming... moral certainty is possible.
 - This is why Archbishop Lefebvre used to say that a child with his catechism could detect some of the errors of today: it’s right in front of him. For example, his catechism says, “Only those in the state of grace can receive Holy Communion, because it is the Body and Bloody of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” But now the Pope says, “Sometimes those not in the state of grace can do so without sin.” That’s a contradiction.

▼ Reply to the Fourth

- ▼ This last objection is what will lead, more or less directly, to the sedevacantist position, viz. the position that there is currently no lawfully constituted Pope.
 - The podcast series will address this topic specifically in a later episode, so I will leave that discussion for now.
- ▼ Nevertheless, there are a few things to point out here:
 - ▼ Authority is from God and willed by God, and therefore so is obedience. But, if you are ready to throw out the highest authority on earth, you have to explain how we are still expected to live a life of obedience. Sedevacantism is going to have some pretty serious consequences *in practice*.
 - This is why, in his wisdom, Archbishop Lefebvre established the SSPX as a hierarchical order within the Church.

- He knew how important the life of obedience was, and we have to maintain true obedience, even if we are in a crazy situation in the Church.
- ▼ **This position seems to ignore the many quotations we gave above: it is possible for a Church authority to speak errors, but this does not mean he forfeits his office. Rather, his inferiors still owe him respect and must correct him in all charity, precisely because he maintains his office.**
 - Where is the line, then, between this situation and one who forfeits his office?
 - A clear argument has to be given about where this line is and why it has been crossed in this particular situation in the Church.
- ▼ **In some ways, this objection rejoins the second objection: infallibility means the Pope cannot make mistakes; but he has made mistakes; therefore, he is not Pope.**
 - The problem is an oversimplification of the question of infallibility.
 - If we are going to go in this direction, we had better have a *very clear* notion of what infallibility covers.
 - This is why Archbishop Lefebvre repeatedly said that the sedevacantist position was too simplistic a “solution”: it is easy to throw everything out; it is much harder to live a life of obedience under superiors who are not preaching the truth. Yet the latter was often the lot of the saints – and they held to the spirit of true obedience despite the many challenges they faced.

• Conclusion