

ANALYSIS

Blessing gay couples, all the deceptions of *Fiducia supplicans*

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In this text the *Daily Compass* and the *Cardinal Van Thuân Observatory* propose an overall assessment of the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans*. We have allowed some time to pass since its publication in order to favour an accurate and complete reflection. Indeed, the

Declaration raises many serious issues that must be addressed separately, but also and above all in a unified framework. It seems to have taken a fatal step, a turning point in the doctrine and practice of the Church, decisively crossed a boundary. Some commentators have spoken of 'disaster' and 'scandal'. This calls for a responsible and comprehensive analysis.

Some formal observations

The Declaration was published on 18 December 2023. It is signed by the Prefect, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández and, with the formula *ex auctoritate*, by Pope Francis. It was not examined by the assembly of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, but only, as the text states, by the Doctrinal Section. The formula of papal approval is among the weakest: it seems to say only that the pope has been informed, which contrasts with the great magisterial relevance that a Declaration has. A similar thing had happened with the *Responsum* of 2021, which, as we know, said the opposite and towards which Francis had not hidden his impatience. In that case, at the foot of the text, it only said that the pope had been informed.

Two other formal aspects of the Declaration should also be noted. The first is that most of the magisterial references refer to interventions by Pope Francis. There has never been a document so limited in its references to the previous magisterium. It says that the Declaration is 'based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis', as if this were a *unicum*. The third is that the argumentation of the text is very weak and its level is disfigured when compared to the argumentative structure of, for example, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which was also a Declaration like this one, i.e. a document of high magisterial rank.

The central thesis of the Declaration

Fiducia supplicans maintains that Catholic doctrine on marriage and sexuality remains unchanged and that the new indications contained in it are only pastoral and, as such, complete, without denying it, the *Responsum* of 2021, which would have been limited only to the doctrinal field. The pastoral novelty would consist in a revision of the meaning of blessings, providing, in addition to the already doctrinally clarified blessings that take place in liturgical contexts, also blessings in non-liturgical contexts that the Declaration calls "private" or "spontaneous".

These arguments have no plausible foundation. If it is not a lay person who blesses, such as a father blessing his children, but a priest, that blessing is already

liturgical in itself, even if it does not follow a formulation prepared by the competent authority. It is liturgical in substance, because it is given by a priest and therefore involves the Church. It is not only a matter of observing that such a purely pastoral and non-liturgical blessing has never been envisaged by the Church, but also that it does not exist and has not been envisaged and regulated because it cannot exist. And with which another aspect of what the Declaration claims falls apart, namely that the blessing is not an approval of the life situation of the couple being blessed, but only an invocation of God's help to give the couple the strength to develop the positive aspects of their relationship, such as caring for each other and helping each other through life's difficulties. This perspective falls down for two reasons related to what we have seen above: the first is that the already liturgical context, given the presence of the priest, does not allow the blessing of a public reality in serious conflict with God's law; the second is that those positive aspects, if any, are within a couple's relationship of violent mutual exploitation, even if consensual, which disfigures them: if the two commit violence against each other, how can they help each other?

On the 'couple'

A blessing is a sacramental and, as such, requires on the part of the recipient an appropriate disposition through repentance and a willingness to come out of a certain state of life. Under these conditions, the blessing can also be given to the individual person who is in a state of sin. In this sense, yes, the blessing is an openness to God's will and a request for His help to confirm and strengthen repentance and the decision to change one's life. But this is not the case when the blessing is given to an irregular couple, whether heterosexual or homosexual. In this case, the life situation of the persons involved is recognised, confirmed and justified. If the two are blessed as a couple, it is acknowledged that that is a couple, even if it is not, because it is two individuals exploiting each other for their own particular interests.

This applies not only to the same-sex couple but also to de facto cohabitation between a man and a woman. The complementarity here, unlike in the previous case, seems to be there, but this is not the case because the two do not respond to a vocation, with their respective unavailable duties, but only to their individual covenant. To bless a couple that is not a couple is to confirm the false. Moreover, if the two receive the blessing as a couple, it is evident that they do not intend to separate, because they request it as a couple. There is no repentance and no willingness to change life, and therefore the conditions for the blessing are missing. One can go back to saying that not the violent and counter-natured aspects of their relationship are blessed, but only the

positive ones from which there maybe a new start, but as explained above, these positive aspects remain deformed by the negative quality of the couple's relationship, they may be there in the individuals but not in the couple.

Pastoral care that changes doctrine

As we have seen, *Fiducia supplicans* confirms the usual doctrine on the blessings of irregular couples, but then invents a new blessing that is only pastoral. This neutral sphere - i.e. the pastoral-only blessing - does not exist because, as we have seen, every blessing is public and liturgical by its very nature, since it is given by a priest. Instead, if one wishes to uphold this independence, a blessing that does not take doctrinal requirements into account is considered possible. The supposedly neutral pastoral care, which should not affect doctrine, is therefore transformed into the demand for a new doctrine about itself. Pastoral care does not have its own independence or autonomy from doctrine, as many contemporary theological currents claim, since when this independence is affirmed it is done so by enunciating a doctrine, precisely the doctrine of the independence of pastoral care from doctrine.

Praxis does not stand without theory, nor can it be the creator of theory: when it expresses this claim it does so theoretically. Thus the pastoral solution cannot remain merely pastoral, but since it denies doctrine (despite assurances to the contrary which at this point prove instrumental) it understands itself as not dependent on doctrine, that is, capable of changing doctrine itself. This is an inevitable outcome: the new blessings that are considered only pastoral are also doctrinal, both because they deny their own doctrinal dimension by expressing a new doctrine, and because they implicitly call for its reformulation. A new doctrine is already implicitly contained in them. On the contrary, those who propose them already have the new doctrine in mind, which they intend, however, to pursue by pastoral means, that is, by indirectly doctrinal rather than directly doctrinal means. This is nothing new, given that beginning with *Amoris laetitia* we have already had important anticipations of the tendency to make pastoral requirements occasions to turn circumstances into exceptions and thus push for processes of doctrinal renewal, while not saying one wants them, rather claiming that previous doctrines remain confirmed.

The cunning sophisms of the magisterium

With the observations we have now noted, we have touched on the cunning sophistries of the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans*, which claims to say without saying and is therefore misleading. The discourse should, however, be extended to the entire current

pontificate, where word games and the use of language that is not theological but 'social chatter' has manifested itself on many occasions. On this front, the Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* is the most representative text, though by no means unique. The unanswered questions that convey an unstated message, the periods set to 'yes ... but' that insinuate exceptions to the norm, the ambiguity of many expressions (e.g. "the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a generous remedy and nourishment for the weak"), the phrases that exaggerate their components by committing violence to reality and surreptitiously proposing a pre-packaged vision, the colourful and hyperbolic images (such as the "dead stones to be thrown at others" in regard to doctrine) and so on.

Let's try to give some examples with regard to *Fiducia supplicans*. Take this sentence: 'an exhaustive moral analysis should not be set as a precondition for conferring it [the blessing, ed.] No prior moral perfection should be required of them'. When a priest imparts a blessing, he does not ask for any 'moral perfection'. The blessing is also imparted to sinners. The tendentious rhetoric of *Fiducia supplicans* would like to convey the idea that not granting blessings to irregular couples would be like demanding moral perfection, but this is an obvious ideological distortion of reality.

Another example: "in situations that are morally unacceptable from an objective point of view, 'pastoral charity requires us not to simply treat as "sinners" other people whose guilt or responsibility may be mitigated by various factors that affect subjective imputability". Here, as also in equal contexts of *Amoris laetitia*, things are confused: by forbidding the blessing of irregular couples, one is not pronouncing on the subjective responsibility of the persons involved, but on the objective and public opposition of that relationship to "the designs of God inscribed in Creation and fully revealed by Christ the Lord". The sentence is therefore sophistical.

There is also a series of statements focused on attitudes of closure and condemnation, inviting us not to 'lose pastoral charity, which must run through all our decisions and attitudes' and to avoid 'being judges who only deny, reject, exclude'; 'God never turns away anyone who approaches him'. Here, too, we are in the presence of forcings and rhetorical extremes. Not blessing irregular couples does not mean rejecting them, it means welcoming them in truth, which is the first form of respect owed to them.

A final example concerns the use in an ecclesial document of the word 'couple' applied to a situation with respect to which the previous Magisterium never used that word because that reality, both from a natural and a revealed point of view, is not a couple. In this case, the deception is definitely serious, because it already contains a positive evaluation of the irregular relationship that, by using this term, is perceived by

the reader as regular.

It must be remembered that many of the above phrases come directly from Francis' speeches. *Fiducia supplicans* was required by the general development of his teaching that is applied here. Some disruptive outcomes of his 'new paradigm' are concentrated within it.

The deliberate ignoring of the context in which it would be received

Fiducia supplicans, however, also reveals tricks of a different kind, in addition to those related to the use of language. From an argumentative point of view, the Declaration claims to admit the blessings in question as long as they do not lend themselves to being equated with marriage. This reasoning is misleading because the fact that they cannot be equated with marriage because of their liturgical or non-liturgical external form does not resolve the question of whether they have validity in themselves. The intrinsic validity of something does not depend on anything else, but only on its nature. It should be noted that this error of approach is also made by clerics when they deal with the legal recognition of *de facto* and homosexual civil unions in the civil sphere. Francis himself has made this point. Even in these cases, it is argued that such unions can be legally regulated as long as they are distinguished from marriage, not to mention that they are unjust in themselves and by their very nature, and remain so even if the law does not equate them to marriage. The criterion of 'provided they do not ...' is a deceptive reasoning because it avoids ruling on the lawfulness or otherwise of the thing itself.

Another deceptive aspect is to deliberately disregard the factual context in which the new provisions are placed. *Fiducia supplicans* says that irregular blessings should not be placed in a liturgical context, when they have long since been placed there with the acceptance of the ecclesiastical authority itself, which now says the opposite without taking into account that it has already accepted them. In March 2023, thus two years after the *Responsum* was banned, during their *ad limina* visit, the bishops of Belgium informed the pope of the new liturgy they had prepared for the blessing of homosexual couples and Francis, after verifying that they were all in agreement (note: since when is mere agreement of opinion an indication of truth?), told them to continue.

In Germany, the blessing of homosexual couples in Church. and not only in a 'private' and 'spontaneous' form as envisaged by *Fiducia supplicans*, are now standard practice and the Holy See has never made canonical provisions in this regard as requested by some cardinals, indeed, the bishops most exposed on this line have been

appointed to play important roles in the Vatican, first in the 'Council of 9' and then at the head of the Synod on Synodality. At the same time, Francis has written letters of encouragement for associations promoting so-called LGBT rights, approved and supported the work of Father James Martin [HERE and HERE] and Sister Jeannine Gramick who are fighting for those same goals. However, *Fiducia supplicans* is published as if all this were not there, that is, as if there were no context prepared to welcome it and apply it for the purposes it intends (without saying so).

The rejection of natural law

Given our focus on the Social Doctrine of the Church, we intend to mention the negative aspects of *Fiducia supplicans* in this area. Catholic political doctrine in continuity and development of classical political philosophy, has always maintained that marriage and the family are the foundations of civil society. At its origin are not individuals without identity, or with an equal and serial identity, but a man and a woman. That they are a couple is derived from this natural complementary unity, indissoluble and open to life. Social companionship does not arise from human conventions but from the Creator's plan. Reference to natural law is therefore essential, because it expresses a finalistic natural order and removes political life from the arbitrariness of the strongest. The legitimization of political authority is based on natural law. The blessing of irregular couples considers couples what couples are not. It therefore implicitly legitimises a substantial equality between the real couple described above and the irregular pseudo-couple. This is the case even in the absence of an explicit and formal declaration of equality, even in the presence of an assertion contrary to this equality: the act of considering as a couple two individuals who are not a couple is stronger than any other exonerating assertion. It seems evident, therefore, that *Fiducia supplicans* also considerably damages the Social Doctrine of the Church.

The division in the Church

The immediate effects, and even more so in the long term if radical new facts do not intervene, of this Declaration are strongly divisive in the Church, which is split. The uprising of entire episcopal conferences proves this beyond doubt. The rift, however, does not only concern the specific topic, but much more, because it also involves the two incompatible theological visions that lead differently towards the topic in question. This division will characterise every nation, every diocese, every parish, every Catholic community and even every family. It will descend from the learned discussions of theologians to the life of every Catholic with disastrous effects.