

October 15, 2017

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**May the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts,
so that we may now what is the hope that belongs to us all**

God is the breath inside the breath who energizes us from within

It seems obvious that God guides us first from within, but it's not always that simple when looking at the relationship between church teaching and the conscience of the individual.

I read two articles this past week entitled: "*Conference Rejects 'Infantilization' of Laity*," by Joshua McElwee, NCR, 10/5/17, and "*Conference revisits 'Amoris Laetitia'*", by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, NCR, 10/10/17. Both of these conferences dealt with the topic of Respecting the Conscience of Families. The following are some excerpts from these conferences.

At a conference for U.S. bishops and theologians to consider how to better implement [Amoris Laetitia](#), Francis' 2016 Letter on Family Life, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said that Pope Francis is focusing on how "*families are the privileged place in which God reveals divine reality. Often the hierarchical church treats families as a kind of a laboratory to do pastoral practice or theology. Rather families are a privileged place where God is active, where God is alive and God is doing something new.*"

"Much of the conference centered on the respect *Amoris Laetitia* shows toward the ability of families to discern and take decisions about what is best for them. Cupich nodded toward this with a personal story about his grandparents, Croatian immigrants who lived in Omaha, Nebraska. "He said that the last of their four children, Roseanne, had emotional and mental handicaps. Because Roseanne could become violent, the couple made the decision to put her in a facility that could give her appropriate care. Their parish priest, a monsignor, said they could not '*abandon*' their child. Cupich recalled his grandmother saying, '*We are going to take the child to the home. Monsignor doesn't have to live with Roseanne.*'

"The infantilizing of the laity has its historical roots which views laypeople as objects of clerical control: '*pay, pray and obey*', or as Pius X notes in his 1906 encyclical, [Vehementer Nos](#), 'the right of the laity is to allow itself to be led.'

Francis however sees the family as *'the protagonist of its own destiny. Couples become the subjects of their history, even as pastors and confessors retain a role of accompaniment and listening,'* He says. *'Amoris Laetitia'* calls for pastors to respect decisions laypeople make in conscience after a process of discernment. *'We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them,'* the pope wrote in the document. *'The replacement of conscience is an act of domination, again colonization. It is an abuse of power. The formation of conscience, on the other hand, is life-giving ministry.'*

"Regarding divorce and remarriage, Cathleen Kaveny, a theologian and civil lawyer at Boston College, spoke about how the church has considered people who have been divorced and remarried without first obtaining annulments. *'It's clear,'* she says, *'that Jesus rejects divorce and remarriage as contrary to the original will of God. But nothing in Jesus' words or conduct must be conceptualized as a sin that continues indefinitely, without the possibility of effective repentance.* She said. *'We do not need to disturb Jesus' teaching according to our preferences, which certain moral theologians and canon lawyers have done.'*

"The lack of a positive reception of *Amoris Laetitia* by many priests and even bishops was seen as a major problem for the document. Young priests trained during the papacies of John Paul and Benedict, are often suspicious of the document. They were trained to enforce rules that excluded people rather than welcomed them. Many are confused; some are outright antagonistic.

"On the other hand, alienated Catholics often do not see Francis' teaching being implemented in their parishes. When they experience condemnation and exclusion, they leave never to return. The vitriol from some opponents of Francis is discouraging to them. The critics are a small minority in the church. In the past, they could complain to Rome, where they would get a sympathetic hearing. Now the dissidents are out of step with the pope. They do have few followers among the laity though, as the Pew Research Center shows."

We saw an example of needing to respect the consciences of individuals in the recent Bishops' Synod in Rome regarding remarriage and receiving communion. After much debate, the Synod voted in the practice of *"leaving it to people's conscience whether they could receive, but under the guidance of a priest or bishop'.* Some bishops, priests and theologians objected to this as a change in church doctrine, while others saw this as a necessary change in pastoral practice. Pope Francis was clear about this himself this past week when he said that a single regulation cannot be applied equally to every pastoral situation in the world-wide church.

And Now to Us

As always, we need to bring what we're looking at down to you and to me by considering the follow questions:

† Do you feel you are being treated as an infant in the church?

† If not, you will be happy where you are.

† If you do feel you are being treated as an infant in the church,

† What would be different for you if you felt treated less like one?

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