

3. *Overriding Principle*: I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it.

Chapter 8: Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness

291: *Church Outreach*: “The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm”.³¹³ Let us not forget that the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital.

292: *Acceptance of Struggle and Imperfection*: ‘Some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way. The Synod Fathers stated that the Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage.

293: *Gradualness in Pastoral Care*: The Synod Fathers: ‘when such unions attain a particular stability, legally recognized, are characterized by deep affection and responsibility for their offspring, and demonstrate an ability to overcome trials, they can provide occasions for pastoral care with a view to the eventual celebration of the sacrament of marriage’.

294: Need for *pastoral discernment* to ‘distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of marriage in its fullness...to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth’

295: *Choice of civil unions or cohabitation* ‘is often not motivated by prejudice or resistance to a sacramental union, but by cultural or contingent situations’ In such cases, respect also can be shown for those signs of love which in some way reflect God’s own love... These couples need to be welcomed and guided patiently and discreetly’

295: *Law of Gradualness*: ‘the human being “knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth”. (JPII)

296: *Non-judgemental Mercy*: The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart... For true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous”.³²⁶ Consequently, there is a need “to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations” and “to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition”.

297. *No condemnation*: No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves. ... As for the way of dealing with different “irregular” situations, the Synod Fathers reached a general consensus, which I support: “In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering

them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them",³²⁸ something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

298: *The Remarried Divorced and those in Irregular situations*: Central section. Encourages discernment; no 'easy recipes exist'.

299: *Integration*: Need for full integration, as key. 'They are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all. Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practised in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted. Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and experience her as a mother who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel.'

300: *Pastoral Discernment and Priest Accompaniment*: 'renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since "the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases",³³⁵ the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same.' Discernment of Conscience: 'For this discernment to happen, the following conditions must necessarily be present: humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it'

301: *Mitigating Factors*: 'it is can no longer simply be said that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.

302: *Mitigating Factors continued*: re moral culpability "'Under certain circum-stances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases.'

303: *Re Conscience*: '[conscience] can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal.'

304: *The Principle of Thomas Aquinas*: Be aware of descending into detail.

305: Check the *application of Moral laws*. 'a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in "irregular" situations, as if they were stones to throw at people's lives.' '...it is possible that in an objective situation of sin – which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such – a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end.' The whole paragraph is very helpful.

306: The path of Charity

307: Check against relativism; 308: recognises the stages of personal growth; 309: Context of mercy;

310: *Church is not a Tollhouse*: 'It is true that at times "we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems". 312: Avoid bureaucratic Morality, foster pastoral discernment. Encourages conversation with pastors.