

Declaration of Fidelity to the Church’s Unchangeable Teaching on Marriage and to Her Uninterrupted Discipline

We live in an age when numerous forces seek to destroy or deform marriage and the family. Indeed, secular ideologies take advantage of and aggravate the family’s crisis, the result of a process of cultural and moral decadence. This process leads Catholics to adapt to our neo-pagan society. Their “conforming to the world” (Rom. 12:2) is often fostered by a lack of faith—and therefore of supernatural spirit to accept the mystery of the Cross of Christ—and an absence of prayer and penance.

The Second Vatican Council’s diagnosis of the ills affecting the institution of marriage and family is more valid than ever: “Polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements have an obscuring effect. In addition, married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation” (Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Dec. 7, 1965, n. 47).

Until recently, the Catholic Church remained the stronghold of true marriage and family, but errors about these two divine institutions are widespread today in Catholic circles, particularly after the Extraordinary and Ordinary Synods on the family, held in 2014 and 2015, respectively, and the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

In the face of this offensive, the undersigned feel morally obliged to declare their resolve to remain faithful to the Church’s unchangeable teachings on morals and on the Sacraments of Marriage, Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and to Her timeless and enduring discipline regarding those sacraments.

I. Regarding Chastity, Marriage and the Rights of Parents

1. We firmly reiterate the truth that all forms of cohabitation more uxorio (as husband and wife) outside of a valid marriage gravely contradict the will of God in His holy commandments and, consequently, cannot contribute to the moral and spiritual progress of those involved or of the society.

“By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus, a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love ‘are no longer two, but one flesh’ (Matt. 19:6). As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.... Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state” (Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Dec. 7, 1965, n. 48).

2. We firmly reiterate the truth that marriage and the conjugal act have both procreative and unitive purposes and that each and every conjugal act must be open to the gift of life. Moreover, we affirm that this teaching is definitive and irreformable.

“Excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means. Neither is it valid to argue, as a justification for sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive, that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one, or that such intercourse would merge with procreative acts of past and future to form a single entity, and so be qualified by exactly the same moral goodness as these. Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (Rom 3:8)—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general. Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of

otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong” (Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968, n. 14).

3. We firmly reiterate the truth that so-called sex-education is a basic and primary right of parents, which must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home, or in educational centers they choose and control.

“Another very grave danger is that naturalism which nowadays invades the field of education in that most delicate matter of purity of morals. Far too common is the error of those who with dangerous assurance and under an ugly term propagate a so-called sex-education, falsely imagining that they can forearm youths against the dangers of sensuality by means purely natural, such as a foolhardy initiation and precautionary instruction for all indiscriminately, even in public; and, worse still, by exposing them at an early age to the occasions, in order to accustom them, so it is argued, and as it were to harden them against such dangers” (Pius XI, Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, Dec. 31, 1929, n. 65).

“It will then be your duty to your daughters, the father’s duty to your sons, carefully and delicately to unveil the truth [of the mysterious and marvelous laws of life] as far as it appears necessary, to give a prudent, true and Christian answer to those questions, and set their minds at rest” (Pius XII, Allocution to Mothers of Italian Families, Oct. 26, 1941).

“[Education of public opinion is] in this field perverted by propaganda which one does not hesitate to call evil, even if at times it takes its origin from Catholic sources and aims at making headway among Catholics—and even if those who promote it do not seem aware that they are deluded by the spirit of evil. Here We intend to speak of writings, books, and articles regarding sexual initiation.... Even the principles so wisely illustrated by Our Predecessor Pius XI, in the Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, on sex-education and questions connected whereto are set aside—a sad sign of the times! With a smile of compassion they say: ‘Pius XI wrote these things twenty years ago for his own times! The world has gone a long way since then!’... Fight together, without timidity or human respect, to halt and curtail these movements which authorize and mask themselves under any name or patronage” (Pius XII, Allocution to a Group of French Fathers of Families, Sept. 18, 1951).

“It is recommended that respect be given to the right of the child or young person to withdraw from any form of sexual instruction imparted outside the home. Neither the children nor other members of their family should ever be penalized or discriminated against for this decision” (Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*, Dec. 8, 1995, n. 120).

“When teaching Catholic doctrine and morality about sexuality, the lasting effects of original sin must be taken into account, that is to say, human weakness and the need for the grace of God to overcome temptations and avoid sin” (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, Dec. 8, 1995, n. 123).

“No material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age, individually or in a group. This principle of decency must safeguard the virtue of Christian chastity. Therefore, in passing on sexual information in the context of education for love, the instruction must always be ‘positive and prudent’ and ‘clear and delicate.’ These four words used by the Catholic Church exclude every form of unacceptable content in sexual education” (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, Dec. 8, 1995, n. 126).

“Today parents should be attentive to ways in which an immoral education can be passed on to their children through various methods promoted by groups with positions and interests contrary to Christian morality. It would be impossible to indicate all unacceptable methods. Here are presented only some of the more widely diffused methods that threaten the rights of parents and the moral life of their children. In the first place, parents must reject secularized and anti-natalist sex education, which puts God at the margin of life and regards the birth of a child as a threat. This sex education is spread by large organizations and international associations that promote abortion, sterilization and contraception. These organizations want to impose a false lifestyle against the truth of human sexuality” (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Guidelines for Education within the Family*, Dec. 8, 1995, nn. 135-6).

4. We firmly reiterate the truth that the definitive consecration of a person to God through a life of perfect chastity is objectively more excellent than marriage, because it is a kind of spiritual marriage in which the soul is wedded to Christ. Sacred virginity was recommended by our Divine Redeemer and Saint Paul as a state of life that is complementary to, but objectively more perfect than marriage.

“This doctrine of the excellence of virginity and of celibacy and of their superiority over the married state was, as We have already said, revealed by our Divine Redeemer and by the Apostle of the Gentiles; so too, it was solemnly defined as a dogma of divine faith by the holy council of Trent, (Sess. XXIV, can 10) and explained in the same way by all the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Finally, We and Our Predecessors have often expounded it and earnestly advocated it whenever occasion offered. But recent attacks on this traditional doctrine of the Church, the danger they constitute, and the harm they do to the souls of the faithful lead Us, in fulfillment of the duties of Our charge, to take up the matter once again in this Encyclical Letter, and to reprove these errors which are so often propounded under a specious appearance of truth” (Pius XII, Encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, Mar. 25, 1954, n. 32).

II. Regarding Cohabitation, Same-sex Unions and Civil Remarriage After Divorce

5. We firmly reiterate the truth that the irregular union of a cohabitating man and woman, or that of two individuals of the same sex, can never be equated to marriage, deemed morally licit, or legally recognized, and that it is false to affirm that these are family forms that can offer a certain stability.

“Hence the nature of this contract, which is proper and peculiar to it alone, makes it entirely different both from the union of animals entered into by the blind instinct of nature alone in which neither reason nor free will plays a part, and also from the haphazard unions of men, which are far removed from all true and honourable unions of will and enjoy none of the rights of family life. From this it is clear that legitimately constituted authority has the right and therefore the duty to restrict, to prevent, and to punish those base unions which are opposed to reason and to nature” (Pius XI, Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, December 31, 1930).

“The family cannot be put on the same level as mere associations or unions, and the latter cannot enjoy the particular rights exclusively connected with the protection of the conjugal commitment and the family based on marriage, a stable community of life and love, the result of the total and faithful gift of the spouses, open to life” (John Paul II, Address to the Second Meeting of European Politicians and Lawmakers [organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family], Oct. 23, 1998).

“It is useful to understand the substantial differences between marriage and de facto unions. This is the root of the difference between the family originating in marriage, and the community that originates in a de facto union. The family community comes from the covenant of the spouses’ union. The marriage that comes from this covenant of conjugal love is not created by any public authority: it is a natural and original institution that is prior to it. In de facto unions, on the other hand, reciprocal affection is put in common but, at the same time, the marriage bond, with its original public dimension that gives the foundation to the family, is absent” (Pontifical Council for the Family, Declaration on Family, Marriage and “de facto” Unions, July 26, 2000).

6. We firmly reiterate the truth that the irregular unions of cohabitating Catholics who never married in the Church, or divorcees who are remarried civilly (not married in God’s eyes), radically contradict and cannot express the good of Christian marriage, neither partially nor analogously, and should be seen as a sinful way of life or as a permanent occasion of grave sin. Furthermore, that it is false to affirm that they can be an occasion made of constructive elements leading to marriage, for in spite of any material similarities they may present, a valid marriage and an irregular union are two wholly different and opposite moral realities: One is according to the will of God, and the other disobeys it, and is therefore sinful.

“Today there are many who vindicate the right to sexual union before marriage, at least in those cases where a firm intention to marry and an affection which is already in some way conjugal in the psychology of the subjects require this completion, which they judge to be connatural. This is especially the case when the celebration of the marriage is impeded by circumstances or when this intimate relationship seems necessary in order for love to be preserved. This opinion is contrary to Christian doctrine, which states that every genital act must be within the framework of marriage.... Through marriage, in fact, the love of married people is taken up into that love which Christ irrevocably has for the Church (Eph. 5:25-32), while dissolute sexual union (1 Cor. 6:12-20) defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit which the Christian has become” (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, Dec. 29, 1975, n. VII).

“We can identify and understand the essential difference between a mere de facto union—even though it claims to be based on love—and marriage, in which love is expressed in a commitment that is not only moral but rigorously juridical. The bond reciprocally assumed has a strengthening effect, in turn, on the love from which it arises, fostering its permanence to the advantage of the partners, the children and society itself” (John Paul II, Address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, Jan. 21, 1999).

7. We firmly reiterate the truth that irregular unions cannot carry out the objective demands of God’s law. They cannot be deemed morally good or be recommended as a prudent and gradual fulfilment of the divine law, even to those who seem not to be in a position to understand, appreciate or fully carry out this law’s demands. The pastoral “law of gradualness” requires a decisive break with sin, together with progress towards the complete acceptance of God’s will and His loving demands.

“If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it. They remain ‘irremediably’ evil acts; per se and in themselves they are not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person. ‘As for acts which are themselves sins (cum iam opera ipsa peccata sunt), Saint Augustine writes, like theft, fornication, blasphemy, who would dare affirm that, by doing them for good motives (causis bonis), they would no longer be sins, or, what is even more absurd, that they would be sins that are justified?’ (Contra Mendacium, VII, 18). Consequently, circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act ‘subjectively’ good or defensible as a choice” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 81).

“At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as ‘normal’ and attractive, and even to glamourize, situations which are in fact ‘irregular’” (John Paul II, Letter to families *Gratissimam sane*, Feb. 2, 1994, n. 5).

III. Regarding Natural Law and the Individual Conscience

8. We firmly reiterate the truth that, in the deeply personal process of making decisions, the natural moral law is not a mere source of subjective inspiration but rather God’s eternal law, in which the human person participates. The conscience is not an arbitrary source of good and evil, but a reminder of how an action must comply with a requirement that is extrinsic to man, namely the subjective and immediate intimation of a superior law, which we must call natural.

“The natural law is written and engraved in the heart of each and every man, since it is none other than human reason itself which commands us to do good and enjoins us not to sin....’ The force of law consists in its authority to impose duties, to confer rights and to sanction certain behavior.... ‘The natural law is itself the eternal law, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them towards their right action and end; it is none other than the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the universe’” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 44, quoting Leo XIII, Encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum* and Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2).

9. We firmly reiterate the truth that a well-formed conscience, capable of discerning rightly in complex situations, will never reach the conclusion that, given the person’s limitations, his remaining in a situation which objectively contradicts

the Christian understanding of marriage can be his best response to the Gospel. To presume that the weakness of an individual's conscience is the criterion of moral truth is unacceptable, and incapable of being incorporated into the Church's praxis.

"The fundamental obligations of the moral law are based on the essence and the nature of man, and on his essential relationships, and thus they have force wherever we find man. The fundamental obligations of the Christian law, in the degree in which they are superior to those of the natural law, are based on the essence of the supernatural order established by the Divine Redeemer. From the essential relationships between man and God, between man and man, between husband and wife, between parents and children; from the essential community relationships found in the family, in the Church, and in the State, it follows, among other things, that hatred of God, blasphemy, idolatry, abandoning the true faith, denial of the faith, perjury, murder, bearing false witness, calumny, adultery and fornication, the abuse of marriage, the solitary sin, stealing and robbery, taking away the necessities of life, depriving workers of their just wage (James 5:4), monopolizing vital foodstuffs and unjustifiably increasing prices, fraudulent bankruptcy, unjust manoeuvring in speculation—all this is gravely forbidden by the divine Lawmaker. No examination is necessary. No matter what the situation of the individual may be, there is no other course open to him but to obey" (Pius XII, Address On the errors of situational morals, Apr. 18, 1952, n. 10).

"When on the contrary they disregard the law, or even are merely ignorant of it, whether culpably or not, our acts damage the communion of persons, to the detriment of each" (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 51).

"The negative precepts of the natural law are universally valid. They oblige each and every individual, always and in every circumstance. It is a matter of prohibitions which forbid a given action semper et pro semper, without exception, because the choice of this kind of behavior is in no case compatible with the goodness of the will of the acting person, with his vocation to life with God and to communion with his neighbor. It is prohibited—to everyone and in every case—to violate these precepts" (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 52).

"Even in the most difficult situations man must respect the norm of morality so that he can be obedient to God's holy commandment and consistent with his own dignity as a person. Certainly, maintaining a harmony between freedom and truth occasionally demands uncommon sacrifices, and must be won at a high price: it can even involve martyrdom" (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 102).

10. We firmly reiterate the truth that people cannot look at the Sixth Commandment and the indissolubility of marriage as mere ideals to strive after. Rather, these are commands from Christ Our Lord, which help us with His grace to overcome difficulties, through our constancy.

"It is in the saving Cross of Jesus, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the Sacraments which flow forth from the pierced side of the Redeemer (cf. Jn 19:34), that believers find the grace and the strength always to keep God's holy law, even amid the gravest of hardships.... Only in the mystery of Christ's Redemption do we discover the 'concrete' possibilities of man. 'It would be a very serious error to conclude...that the Church's teaching is essentially only an 'ideal' which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a 'balancing of the goods in question.' But what are the 'concrete possibilities of man'? And of which man are we speaking? Of man dominated by lust or of man redeemed by Christ? This is what is at stake: the reality of Christ's redemption. Christ has redeemed us! This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence' (Address to those taking part in a course on 'responsible parenthood,' Mar. 1, 1984).... God's command is of course proportioned to man's capabilities; but to the capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who, though he has fallen into sin, can always obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit." In this context, appropriate allowance is made both for God's mercy towards the sinner who converts and for the understanding of human weakness. Such understanding never means compromising and falsifying the standard of good and evil in order to adapt it to particular circumstances. It is quite human for the sinner to acknowledge his weakness and to ask mercy for his failings; what is unacceptable is the attitude of one who makes his own weakness the criterion of

the truth about the good.... An attitude of this sort corrupts the morality of society as a whole, since it encourages doubt about the objectivity of the moral law in general and a rejection of the absoluteness of moral prohibitions regarding specific human acts, and it ends up by confusing all judgments about values” (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, nn. 102-4).

11. We firmly reiterate the truth that the conscience which admits that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the Gospel’s demands for marriage cannot honestly conclude that remaining in such sinful situation is the most generous response one can give to God, nor that this is what God Himself is asking from the soul at this time, since either conclusion would deny grace’s almighty power to bring sinners to the fullness of Christian life.

“No one, however much justified, should consider himself exempt from the observance of the commandments; no one should use that rash statement, once forbidden by the Fathers under anathema, that the observance of the commandments of God is impossible for one who is justified. For God does not command impossibilities, but by commanding admonishes thee to do what thou canst and to pray for what thou canst not, and aids thee that thou mayest be able (St. Augustine, De Natura et Gratia, 43, 50). His commandments are not heavy (1 John 5:3) and his yoke is sweet and burden light (Matt. 11:30). For they who are the sons of God love Christ, but they who love him, keep His commandments, as He Himself testifies (John 14:23); which, indeed, with the divine help they can do.... For God does not forsake those who have once been justified by His grace, unless He be first forsaken by them. Wherefore, no one ought to flatter himself with faith alone, thinking that by faith alone he is made an heir and will obtain the inheritance” (Council of Trent, Decree on justification, chap. 11).

“A Christian cannot be unaware of the fact that he must sacrifice everything, even his life, in order to save his soul. Of this we are reminded by all the martyrs. Martyrs are very numerous, even in our time. The mother of the Maccabees, along with her sons; Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, notwithstanding their new-born children; Maria Goretti, and thousands of others, men and women, whom the Church venerates—did they, in the face of the ‘situation’ in which they found themselves, uselessly or even mistakenly incur a bloody death? No, certainly not, and in their blood they are the most explicit witnesses to the truth against the ‘new morality’” (Pius XII, Address Soyez les bienvenues to the Catholic World Federation of Young Women, Apr. 18, 1952, n. 11).

“Temptations can be overcome, sins can be avoided, because together with the commandments the Lord gives us the possibility of keeping them: ‘His eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin’ (Sir. 15:19-20). Keeping God’s law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible. This is the constant teaching of the Church’s tradition, and was expressed by the Council of Trent” (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 102).

12. We firmly reiterate the truth that, despite the variety of situations, personal and pastoral discernment can never lead divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage to conclude, in good conscience, that their adulterous union can be morally justified by “fidelity” to their new partner, that withdrawing from the adulterous union is impossible, or that, by doing so, they expose themselves to new sins, or lack Christian or natural fidelity to their adulterous partner. We cannot talk of faithfulness in an illicit union that violates God’s Commandment and the indissoluble bond of marriage. The thought of loyalty between adulterers in their mutual sin is blasphemous.

“Against the ‘ethics of situations’ We set up three considerations, or maxims. The first: We grant that God wants, first and always, a right intention. But this is not enough. He also wants the good work. A second principle is that it is not permitted to do evil in order that good may result (Rom. 3:8). Now this new ethic, perhaps without being aware of it, acts according to the principle that the end justifies the means” (Pius XII, Address Soyez les bienvenues to the Catholic World Federation of Young Women, Apr. 18, 1952, n. 11).

“Some authors have proposed a kind of double status of moral truth. [They pretend that] beyond the doctrinal and abstract level, one would have to acknowledge the priority of a certain more concrete existential consideration. The latter, by taking account of circumstances and the situation, could legitimately be the basis of certain exceptions to the general

rule and thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law. A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil. On this basis, an attempt is made to legitimize so-called 'pastoral' solutions contrary to the teaching of the Magisterium, and to justify a 'creative' hermeneutic according to which the moral conscience is in no way obliged, in every case, by a particular negative precept" (John Paul II, Enc. Veritatis Splendor, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 56).

13. We firmly reiterate the truth that divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage and who, for most serious reasons, such as the children's upbringing, cannot satisfy the grave obligation to separate, are morally obliged to live as "brother and sister" and to avoid scandal. In particular, this means the exclusion of all displays of intimacy proper to married couples, as these would be sinful per se, and, in addition, would scandalize their own children, who would thus conclude that they are legitimately married, or that Christian marriage is not indissoluble, or that engaging in sexual activity with a person who is not one's legitimate spouse is not a sin. Given the delicacy of their situation, they must be particularly attentive to the occasions of sin.

"Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they 'take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples'" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, Nov. 22, 1981, n. 84).

IV. Regarding Discernment, Responsibility, State of Grace and State of Sin

14. We firmly reiterate the truth that those divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage and who choose their situation with full knowledge and consent of the will are not living members of the Church, as they are in a state of serious sin that prevents them from possessing and growing in charity. Furthermore, we stress that Pope Saint Pius V in his Bull Ex Omnibus Afflictionibus against the errors of Michael du Bay, also known as Baius, condemned the following moral opinion: "Man existing in the state of mortal sin, or under the penalty of eternal damnation can have true charity" (Denz. 1070).

"According to St. Thomas, in order to live spiritually man must remain in communion with the supreme principle of life, which is God, since God is the ultimate end of man's being and acting. Now sin is a disorder perpetrated by the human being against this life-principle. And when through sin, 'the soul commits a disorder that reaches the point of turning away from its ultimate end God to which it is bound by charity, then the sin is mortal; on the other hand, whenever the disorder does not reach the point of a turning away from God, the sin is venial' (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 72, a. 5). For this reason venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity and therefore eternal happiness, whereas just such a deprivation is precisely the consequence of mortal sin" (John Paul II, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, Dec. 2, 1984, n. 17).

"Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery. If a husband, separated from his wife, approaches another woman, he is an adulterer because he makes that woman commit adultery, and the woman who lives with him is an adulteress, because she has drawn another's husband to herself" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2384).

15. We firmly reiterate the truth that there is no halfway point between being in the grace of God or being deprived of it by mortal sin. The way of grace and spiritual growth for someone living in an objective state of sin consists in abandoning

that situation, and returning to a path of sanctification which gives glory to God. No “pastoral approach” can justify or encourage people to remain in a sinful state, opposed to God’s law.

“It still remains true that the essential and decisive distinction is between sin which destroys charity and sin which does not kill the supernatural life: There is no middle way between life and death” (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Dec. 2, 1984, n. 17).

“‘Care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of ‘fundamental option’—as is commonly said today—against God,’ seen either as an explicit and formal rejection of God and neighbor or as an implicit and unconscious rejection of love. ‘For mortal sin exists also when a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something gravely disordered.... [T]he person turns away from God and loses charity. Consequently, the fundamental orientation can be radically changed by particular acts. Clearly, situations can occur which are very complex and obscure from a psychological viewpoint, and which influence the sinner’s subjective imputability. But from a consideration of the psychological sphere one cannot proceed to create a theological category...understanding it in such a way that it objectively changes or casts doubt upon the traditional concept of mortal sin’” (John Paul II, *Enc. Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 70).

16. We firmly reiterate the truth that, since God is omniscient, revealed and natural law provide for all particular situations, especially when they forbid specific actions in any and all circumstances, branding them as “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*).

“It will be asked, how the moral law, which is universal, can be sufficient, and even have binding force, in an individual case, which, in the concrete, is always unique and ‘happens only once.’ It can be sufficient and binding, and it actually is because precisely by reason of its universality, the moral law includes necessarily and ‘intentionally’ all particular cases in which its meaning is verified. In very many cases it does so with such convincing logic that even the conscience of the simple faithful sees immediately, and with full certitude, the decision to be taken” (Pius XII, *Address Soyez les bienvenues to the Catholic World Federation of Young Women*, Apr. 18, 1952, n. 9).

“There exist acts which, per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object. These acts, if carried out with sufficient awareness and freedom, are always gravely sinful” (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Dec. 2, 1984, n. 17).

“Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature ‘incapable of being ordered’ to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed ‘intrinsically evil’ (*intrinsece malum*): they are such always and per se, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.... In teaching the existence of intrinsically evil acts, the Church accepts the teaching of Sacred Scripture. The Apostle Paul emphatically states: ‘Do not be deceived: neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God’ (1 Cor. 6:9-10)” (John Paul II, *Enc. Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 80).

17. We firmly reiterate the truth that the complexity of situations and the varying degrees of responsibility among cases (due to factors that may restrict the ability to make a decision) do not allow pastors to conclude that those in irregular unions are not in an objective state of manifest grave sin, and to presume in the external forum that those in such unions who are not ignorant of the marriage rules have not deprived themselves of sanctifying grace.

“The individual may be conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous and powerful external factors. He may also be subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition. In not a few cases such external and internal factors may attenuate, to a greater or lesser degree, the person’s freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. But it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free. This truth cannot be disregarded in order to place the blame for individuals’ sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people. Above all, this would be to deny the person’s dignity and freedom, which are manifested—even though in a negative and

disastrous way—also in this responsibility for sin committed. Hence there is nothing so personal and untransferable in each individual as merit for virtue or responsibility for sin” (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Dec. 2, 1984, n. 16).

“It is always possible that man, as the result of coercion or other circumstances, can be hindered from doing certain good actions; but he can never be hindered from not doing certain actions, especially if he is prepared to die rather than to do evil” (John Paul II, *Enc. Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 52).

18. We firmly reiterate the truth that, since man is endowed with free will, each knowing and voluntary moral act he does must be imputed to him, its author, and that, absent proof to the contrary, imputability must be presumed. Exterior imputability is not to be confused with the inner state of conscience. Notwithstanding that “*de internis neque Ecclesia iudicat*” (the Church does not judge what is internal – only God can do this), the Church can nevertheless judge acts that are directly contrary to the Divine Law.

“Though it is necessary to believe that sins neither are remitted nor ever have been remitted except gratuitously by divine mercy for Christ’s sake, yet it must not be said that sins are forgiven or have been forgiven to anyone who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins, resting on that alone, though among heretics and schismatics this vain and ungodly confidence may be and in our troubled times indeed is found and preached with untiring fury against the Catholic Church. Moreover, it must not be maintained, that they who are truly justified must needs, without any doubt whatever, convince themselves that they are justified” (Council of Trent, Decree on justification, chap. 9).

“When an external violation has occurred, imputability is presumed unless it is otherwise apparent” (Code of Canon Law, can. 1321, § 3).

“Every act directly willed is imputable to its author” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1736).

“The judgment of one’s state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one’s conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The Code of Canon Law refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who ‘obstinately persist in manifest grave sin’ [can. 915] are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion” (John Paul II, *Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Apr. 17, 2003, n. 37).

V. Regarding the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist

19. We firmly reiterate the truth that, in dealing with penitents, confessors should assist them to examine themselves on the specific duties of the Commandments, help them to reach sufficient repentance and to accuse themselves fully of grave sins, as well as to advise them to embrace the path of holiness. In so doing, the confessor is bound to admonish penitents regarding objectively serious transgressions of God’s Law, and to ensure they truly desire absolution and God’s pardon, and are resolved to re-examine and correct their behavior. Even though frequent relapse into sins is not in itself a motive for denying absolution, it cannot be given without sufficient repentance, or the firm resolution to avoid sin in the future.

“The truth, which comes from the Word and must lead us to him, explains why sacramental confession must not stem from and be accompanied by a mere psychological impulse, as though the sacrament were a substitute for psychotherapy, but from sorrow based on supernatural motives, because sin violates charity towards God, the Supreme Good, was the reason for the Redeemer’s sufferings and causes us to lose the goods of eternity.... Unfortunately many of the faithful today approach the sacrament of Penance without making a complete accusation of their mortal sins in the sense just mentioned by the Council of Trent. Sometimes they react to the priest confessor, who dutifully questions them about the necessary completeness, as if he were allowing himself an undue intrusion into the sanctuary of conscience. I hope and pray that these unenlightened faithful will be convinced, also by virtue of this present teaching, that the norm requiring

completeness in kind and number, insofar as can be known from an honestly examined memory, is not a burden imposed on them arbitrarily, but a means of liberation and serenity. It is also self-evident that the accusation of sins must include the serious intention not to commit them again in the future. If this disposition of soul is lacking, there really is no repentance: this is in fact a question of moral evil as such, and so not taking a stance opposed to a possible moral evil would mean not detesting evil, not repenting. But as this must stem above all from sorrow for having offended God, so the intention of not sinning must be based on divine grace, which the Lord never fails to give anyone who does what he can to act honestly.... It should also be remembered that the existence of sincere repentance is one thing, the judgement of the intellect concerning the future is another: it is indeed possible that, despite the sincere intention of sinning no more, past experience and the awareness of human weakness makes one afraid of falling again; but this does not compromise the authenticity of the intention, when that fear is joined to the will, supported by prayer, of doing what is possible to avoid sin” (John Paul II, Letter to the Apostolic Penitentiary, Mar. 22, 1996, nn. 3-5).

20. We firmly reiterate the truth that divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage and do not separate, but rather remain in their objective state of adultery, can never be considered by confessors and other pastors of souls as living in an objective state of grace, able to grow in the life of grace and charity and entitled to receive absolution in the Sacrament of Penance, or be admitted to the Holy Eucharist, unless they express contrition for their state of life and firmly resolve to abandon it—even though, subjectively, these divorcees may not feel culpable, or not fully so, for their objectively grave sinful situation, due to conditioning and mitigating factors.

“I am referring to certain situations, not infrequent today, affecting Christians who wish to continue their sacramental religious practice, but who are prevented from doing so by their personal condition, which is not in harmony with the commitments freely undertaken before God and the church.... Basing herself on these two complementary principles [of compassion and truthfulness], the Church can only invite her children who find themselves in these painful situations to approach the divine mercy by other ways, not however through the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist until such time as they have attained the required dispositions. On this matter, which also deeply torments our pastoral hearts, it seemed my precise duty to say clear words in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, as regards the case of the divorced and remarried, and likewise the case of Christians living together in an irregular union” (John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Dec. 2, 1984, n. 34).

“Any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reprovved” (John Paul II, *Motu proprio Misericordia Dei*, Apr. 7, 2002, n. 3).

“It is clear that penitents living in a habitual state of serious sin and who do not intend to change their situation cannot validly receive absolution” (John Paul II, *Misericordia Dei*, Apr. 7, 2002, n. 7 c.).

21. We firmly reiterate the truth that, as regards divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage and live openly more uxorio (as husband and wife), no responsible personal and pastoral discernment can sustain that sacramental absolution or admission to the Eucharist is permitted, under the claim that, due to diminished responsibility, no grave fault exists. The reason for this is because their possible lack of formal culpability cannot be a matter of public knowledge, while their outward state of life objectively contradicts the indissoluble character of Christian marriage and that union of love between Christ and the Church, which is signified and effected by the Holy Eucharist.

“The Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church’s teaching about the indissolubility of marriage” (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Nov. 22, 1981, n. 84).

“In recent years, in various regions, different pastoral solutions in this area have been suggested according to which, to be sure, a general admission of divorced and remarried to Eucharistic communion would not be possible, but the divorced

and remarried members of the faithful could approach Holy Communion in specific cases when they consider themselves authorized according to a judgement of conscience to do so. This would be the case, for example, when they had been abandoned completely unjustly, although they sincerely tried to save the previous marriage, or when they are convinced of the nullity of their previous marriage, although unable to demonstrate it in the external forum or when they have gone through a long period of reflection and penance, or also when for morally valid reasons they cannot satisfy the obligation to separate. In some places, it has also been proposed that in order objectively to examine their actual situation, the divorced and remarried would have to consult a prudent and expert priest. This priest, however, would have to respect their possible decision to approach Holy Communion, without this implying an official authorization. In these and similar cases it would be a matter of a tolerant and benevolent pastoral solution in order to do justice to the different situations of the divorced and remarried. Even if analogous pastoral solutions have been proposed by a few Fathers of the Church and in some measure were practiced, nevertheless these never attained the consensus of the Fathers and in no way came to constitute the common doctrine of the Church nor to determine her discipline.... In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ, the Church affirms that a new union cannot be recognized as valid if the preceding marriage was valid. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Holy Communion as long as this situation persists" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the reception of Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried members of the faithful, Sept. 14, 1994, nn. 3-4).

"The reception of the Body of Christ when one is publicly unworthy constitutes an objective harm to the ecclesial communion: it is a behavior that affects the rights of the Church and of all the faithful to live in accord with the exigencies of that communion. In the concrete case of the admission to Holy Communion of faithful who are divorced and remarried, the scandal, understood as an action that prompts others towards wrongdoing, affects at the same time both the sacrament of the Eucharist and the indissolubility of marriage. That scandal exists even if such behavior, unfortunately, no longer arouses surprise: in fact it is precisely with respect to the deformation of the conscience that it becomes more necessary for Pastors to act, with as much patience as firmness, as a protection to the sanctity of the Sacraments and a defense of Christian morality, and for the correct formation of the faithful" (Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Declaration Concerning the admission to Holy Communion of faithful who are divorced and remarried, June 24, 2000, n. 1).

22. We firmly reiterate the truth that subjective certainty in conscience about the invalidity of a previous marriage by divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage (although the Church still sees their previous marriage as valid) is never sufficient, on its own, to excuse one from the material sin of adultery, or to permit one to disregard the canonical assessment and sacramental consequences of living as a public sinner.

"The mistaken conviction of a divorced and remarried person that he may receive Holy Communion normally presupposes that personal conscience is considered in the final analysis to be able, on the basis of one's own convictions (cf. Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 55), to come to a decision about the existence or absence of a previous marriage and the value of the new union. However, such a position is inadmissible (cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 1085 § 2). Marriage, in fact, because it is both the image of the spousal relationship between Christ and his Church as well as the fundamental core and an important factor in the life of civil society, is essentially a public reality.... Thus the judgment of conscience of one's own marital situation does not regard only the immediate relationship between man and God, as if one could prescind from the Church's mediation, that also includes canonical laws binding in conscience. Not to recognize this essential aspect would mean in fact to deny that marriage is a reality of the Church, that is to say, a sacrament" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Communion by the divorced and remarried members of the faithful, Sept. 14, 1994, nn. 7-8).

23. We firmly reiterate the truth that "Baptism and Penance are as purgative medicines, given to take away the fever of sin, whereas this sacrament [the Holy Eucharist] is a medicine given to strengthen, and it ought not to be given except to them who are quit of sin" (Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 80, a.4, ad 2). Those who receive the Holy Eucharist are indeed partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ and must be worthy to do so by being in the state of grace.

Divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage, and thus lead an objective and publicly sinful lifestyle, risk committing a sacrilege by receiving Holy Communion. For them, Holy Communion would not be medicine but a spiritual poison. If a celebrant goes along with their unworthy Communion, either he does not believe in the Real Presence of Christ, or in the indissolubility of marriage, or in the sinfulness of living more uxorio (as husband and wife) outside a valid marriage.

“It is to be recalled that the ‘Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins—that is proper to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church’” (Sacred Congregation for the Liturgy and the discipline of Sacraments, Circular Letter concerning the integrity of the Sacrament of Penance, Mar. 20, 2000, n. 9).

“The prohibition [of giving the Eucharist to public sinners] found in the cited canon [can. 915], by its nature, is derived from divine law and transcends the domain of positive ecclesiastical laws: the latter cannot introduce legislative changes which would oppose the doctrine of the Church. The scriptural text on which the ecclesial tradition has always relied is that of St. Paul: ‘This means that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord. A man should examine himself first only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks a judgment on himself’ (1 Cor. 11:27). ...Any interpretation of can. 915 that would set itself against the canon’s substantial content, as declared uninterruptedly by the Magisterium and by the discipline of the Church throughout the centuries, is clearly misleading. One cannot confuse respect for the wording of the law (cfr. can. 17) with the improper use of the very same wording as an instrument for relativizing the precepts or emptying them of their substance. The phrase ‘and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin’ is clear and must be understood in a manner that does not distort its sense so as to render the norm inapplicable. The three required conditions are: a) grave sin, understood objectively, being that the minister of Communion would not be able to judge from subjective imputability; b) obstinate persistence, which means the existence of an objective situation of sin that endures in time and which the will of the individual member of the faithful does not bring to an end, no other requirements (attitude of defiance, prior warning, etc.) being necessary to establish the fundamental gravity of the situation in the Church; c) the manifest character of the situation of grave habitual sin.

“However, there are divorced and remarried Catholics who for serious reasons – for example, raising their children – are unable to ‘fulfil the obligation of separating’, but who ‘take up the commitment to live in complete continence, that is, to abstain from the acts proper to spouses’ (Familiaris Consortio, n. 84), and who on the basis of that intention have received the sacrament of Penance. Such Catholics are not in a situation of habitual grave sin.” Given that the fact that these faithful are not living more uxorio is per se occult, while their condition as persons who are divorced and remarried is per se manifest, they will be able to receive Eucharistic Communion only remoto scandalo.... In those situations, however, in which these precautionary measures have not had their effect or in which they were not possible, the minister of Communion must refuse to distribute it to those who are publicly unworthy. They are to do this with extreme charity, and are to look for the opportune moment to explain the reasons that required the refusal. They must, however, do this with firmness, conscious of the value that such signs of strength have for the good of the Church and of souls.... Bearing in mind the nature of the above-cited norm (cfr. n. 1), no ecclesiastical authority may dispense the minister of Holy Communion from this obligation in any case, nor may he emanate directives that contradict it” (Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Communion of faithful who are divorced and remarried, nn. 1-4).

24. We firmly reiterate the truth that, according to the logic of the Gospel, men who die in the state of mortal sin, unreconciled with God, are condemned to hell forever. In the Gospels, Jesus frequently speaks about the danger of eternal damnation.

“If [the Catholic faithful] fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged” (Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium, Nov. 21, 1964, n. 14).

“Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes

exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1861).

VI. Regarding the Church's Maternal and Pastoral Attitude

25. We firmly reiterate the truth that the clear teaching of the truth is an eminent work of mercy and charity, because the first saving task of the Apostles and their successors is to obey the Savior's solemn command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

"Catholic doctrine tells us that the primary duty of charity does not lie in the toleration of false ideas, however sincere they may be, nor in the theoretical or practical indifference towards the errors and vices in which we see our brethren plunged, but in the zeal for their intellectual and moral improvement as well as for their material well-being.... Any other kind of love is sheer illusion, sterile and fleeting" (Pius X, Encyclical *Notre Charge Apostolique*, Aug. 15, 1910).

"The Church is always the same and she remains immutable according to the will of Christ and the true tradition that perfected her." (Paul VI, Homily, Oct. 28, 1965).

"It is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ; but this must always be joined with tolerance and charity, as Christ Himself showed in His conversations and dealings with men. For when He came, not to judge, but to save the world, was He not bitterly severe toward sin, but patient and abounding in mercy toward sinners?" (Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968, n. 29).

"The Church's teaching, and in particular her firmness in defending the universal and permanent validity of the precepts prohibiting intrinsically evil acts, is not infrequently seen as the sign of an intolerable intransigence, particularly with regard to the enormously complex and conflict-filled situations present in the moral life of individuals and of society today; this intransigence is said to be in contrast with the Church's motherhood. The Church, one hears, is lacking in understanding and compassion. But the Church's motherhood can never in fact be separated from her teaching mission, which she must always carry out as the faithful Bride of Christ, who is the Truth in person. 'As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm... The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection.'" (John Paul II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, Aug. 6, 1993, n. 95).

26. We firmly reiterate the truth that the impossibility of giving absolution and Holy Communion to Catholics living manifestly in an objective state of grave sin, such as those who cohabit, or the divorcees who have attempted a civil marriage, stems from the Church's maternal care, since She is not the owner of the Sacraments, but rather the "faithful steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1).

"As teachers and custodians of the salvific truth of the Eucharist, we must always and everywhere preserve this meaning and this dimension of the sacramental encounter and intimacy with Christ.... We must always take care that this great meeting with Christ in the Eucharist does not become a mere habit, and that we do not receive Him unworthily, that is to say, in a state of mortal sin.... We cannot, even for a moment, forget that the Eucharist is a special possession belonging to the whole Church. It is the greatest gift in the order of grace and of sacrament that the divine Spouse has offered and unceasingly offers to His spouse. And precisely because it is such a gift, all of us should in a spirit of profound faith let ourselves be guided by a sense of truly Christian responsibility.... The Eucharist is a common possession of the whole Church as the sacrament of her unity. And thus the Church has the strict duty to specify everything which concerns participation in it and its celebration" (John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae Cenae*, Feb. 24, 1980, nn. 4-12).

“This does not mean that the Church does not take to heart the situation of these faithful, who moreover are not excluded from ecclesial communion. She is concerned to accompany them pastorally and invite them to share in the life of the Church in the measure that is compatible with the dispositions of divine law, from which the Church has no power to dispense” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communion by the divorced and remarried*, Sept. 14, 1994, n. 6).

“In pastoral action one must do everything possible to ensure that this is understood not to be a matter of discrimination but only of absolute fidelity to the will of Christ who has restored and entrusted to us anew the indissolubility of marriage as a gift of the Creator. It will be necessary for pastors and the community of the faithful to suffer and to love in solidarity with the persons concerned so that they may recognize in their burden the sweet yoke and the light burden of Jesus. Their burden is not sweet and light in the sense of being small or insignificant, but becomes light because the Lord—and with him the whole Church—shares it. It is the task of pastoral action, which has to be carried out with total dedication, to offer this help, founded in truth and in love together” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communion by the divorced and remarried*, Sept. 14, 1994, n. 10).

“Through the centuries, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance has developed in different forms, but it has always kept the same basic structure: it necessarily entails not only the action of the minister—only a Bishop or priest, who judges and absolves, tends and heals in the name of Christ—but also the actions of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction” (John Paul II, *Misericordia Dei*, Apr. 7, 2002, proem).

VII. Regarding the Universal Validity of the Church’s Constant Magisterium

27. We firmly reiterate the truth that the doctrinal, moral and pastoral questions concerning the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Marriage shall be resolved by interventions of the Magisterium and, by their very nature, preclude contradictory interpretations of that teaching, or the drawing of substantially diverse practical consequences from it on the ground that each country or region can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its tradition and local needs.

“The underlying principle of these new opinions is that, in order to more easily attract those who differ from her, the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some of her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions. Many think that these concessions should be made not only in regard to ways of living, but even in regard to doctrines which belong to the deposit of the faith. They contend that it would be opportune, in order to gain those who differ from us, to omit certain points of her teaching which are of lesser importance, and to tone down the meaning which the Church has always attached to them. It does not need many words, beloved son, to prove the falsity of these ideas if the nature and origin of the doctrine which the Church proposes are recalled to mind. The Vatican Council [*Constitutio de Fide Catholica*, chap. IV] says concerning this point: ‘For the doctrine of faith which God has revealed has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention to be perfected by human ingenuity, but has been delivered as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared. Hence that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother, the Church, has once declared, nor is that meaning ever to be departed from under the pretense or pretext of a deeper comprehension of them.’” (Leo XIII, *Encyclical Testem Benevolentiae*, Jan. 22, 1899).

“One of the primary duties of the Apostolic Office is to disprove and condemn erroneous doctrines and to oppose civil laws which are in conflict with the Law of God, and so to preserve humanity from bringing about its own destruction” (Pius X, Consistory speech, Nov. 9, 1903).

“The Church, the ‘pillar and bulwark of the truth,’ ‘has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth.’ ‘To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles,

including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2032).

“It is of the utmost importance that in moral as well as in dogmatic theology all should obey the magisterium of the Church and should speak as with one voice” (Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968, n. 28).

“It falls to the universal Magisterium, in fidelity to Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to teach and to interpret authentically the depositum fidei. With respect to the aforementioned new pastoral proposals, this Congregation deems itself obliged therefore to recall the doctrine and discipline of the Church in this matter” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Communion by the divorced and remarried*, Sept. 14, 1994, n. 4).

VIII. The Ever Youthful Voice of the Fathers of the Church

“It comes to pass that, while [the pastors of souls] delight in being hustled by worldly tumults, they are ignorant of the things that are within, which they ought to have taught to others. And from this cause undoubtedly, the life also of their subjects is benumbed.... For when the head languishes, the members fail to thrive; and it is in vain for an army to follow swiftly in pursuit of enemies if the very leader of the march goes wrong. No exhortation sustains the minds of the subjects, and no reproof chastises their faults.... [T]he subjects are unable to apprehend the light of truth, because, while earthly pursuits occupy the pastor's mind, dust, driven by the wind of temptation, blinds the Church's eyes” (Saint Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, II, 7).

“Even penance itself, when by the law of the Church there is sufficient reason for its being gone through, is frequently evaded through infirmity; for shame is the fear of losing pleasure when the good opinion of men gives more pleasure than the righteousness which leads a man to humble himself in penitence. Wherefore the mercy of God is necessary not only when a man repents, but even to lead him to repent” (Saint Augustine, *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe et Caritate*, 82).

“Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. A penitent is an undisgraced convict. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance raises the fallen, mourning knocks at the gate of Heaven, and holy humility opens it” (Saint John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, 25).

Conclusion

While our neo-pagan world wages a general attack against the divine institution of marriage, and the plagues of divorce and sexual depravity spread everywhere, even within the life of the Church, we, the undersigned bishops, priests and Catholic faithful, consider it our duty and privilege to declare, with one voice, our fidelity to the Church's unchangeable teachings on marriage and to Her uninterrupted discipline, as received from the Apostles. Indeed, only the clarity of truth will set people free (John 8:32) and enable them to find the true joy of love, by living a life in accordance with the wise and saving will of God, in other words, avoiding sin, as maternally requested by Our Lady in Fatima, in 1917.

August 29, 2016

Feast of the beheading of Saint John the Baptist (*beheaded for upholding the truth on marriage*)