

## ON THE FORMAL CORRECTION OF POPE FRANCIS

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It is more than four months since the dubia concerning the teaching of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* were sent to Pope Francis by Cardinals Brandmüller, Burke, Caffarra and Meisner. As is well known, the dubia requested the Pope to dispel doubts about the content of *Amoris Laetitia* by authoritatively confirming that the document did not make five claims that contradicted Catholic tradition and divine revelation. After these dubia were made public, Cardinal Burke stated that 'if there is no response to these questions, then I would say that it would be a question of taking a formal act of correction of a serious error.'

The prospect of a formal correction of Pope Francis raises two important questions. 1) Should the correction be aimed at the profession of heresy on the part of the Pope ? 2) If Pope Francis is openly professing heresy, why are the four cardinals the only persons in the Catholic hierarchy proposing to correct him for it ? Why is there not a general protest against such a betrayal of the faith among the Catholic hierarchy ?

### I. The formal correction of a Pope

The first question breaks down into two parts ; a) are the positions for which Cardinal Burke proposes to correct the Pope in fact heretical ? b) has the Pope undoubtedly upheld these positions ?

The answer to this first part is straightforward. Cardinal Burke has characterised... the denials of Catholic teaching referred to by the dubia as heresies, that is, as denials of divinely revealed truth. He has asserted that the truths being denied are not only divinely revealed, but are fundamental components of divine revelation ; "... here we're dealing also with a very fundamental truth, two fundamental truths really : The truth about Holy Matrimony and the truth about the Holy Eucharist. And if this confusion doesn't stop, we will have a situation where you will have within the Church large bodies of people who don't believe the Catholic Faith." One can add that the teachings about exceptionless moral norms referred to by the dubia are also fundamental truths, since they have to do with the content of every divinely revealed moral teaching. The heretical character of these denials has been demonstrated by the author of this article in an earlier discussion (at <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2016/12/article-considerations-on-dubia-of-four.html>), and has been fully explained by other Catholic authors.

Cardinal Burke's position on the character of Pope Francis's profession of these heresies is less clear, and calls for some discussion. He has stated that "the very form of *Amoris Laetitia*, and, actually, the words of the Pope within the document, indicate that it is not an exercise of the papal magisterium."

This could mean several things.

It could mean that an apostolic exhortation as such is not an exercise of the papal magisterium, and hence that *Amoris Laetitia* is not such an exercise. This is implausible; if such exhortations are not exercises of the magisterium, what are they for? However, we can be confident that Cardinal Burke does not mean this. He has cited the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* as an exercise of the papal magisterium in support of the claim that the divorced and remarried should not receive communion.

It could mean that the form of words used in the passages of *Amoris Laetitia* that seem to uphold the heresies mentioned in the dubia are not suitable to express a magisterial teaching. It is true that not every statement in an apostolic exhortation (or in any other official teaching instrument of the papal magisterium) need express a papal teaching. These documents can express personal opinions of the pope that are not binding on the faithful. It is true that the statements of *Amoris Laetitia* are not expressed in a form that would make them infallible pronouncements. But a magisterial utterance by the Pope does not have to be infallible in order to be an authoritative exercise of the papal magisterium. And the terms in which the objectionable passages of *Amoris Laetitia* are expressed do not present their contents as mere expressions of the personal opinion of the Pope. They do speak of the Pope's own opinion, but this opinion is also presented by the document as the correct understanding of the Gospel teaching. This is a form of expression that presents its contents as being magisterial teaching; if the Pope says in an official document that a certain position is the teaching of the Gospel, he is saying in his official capacity that Catholics are bound to accept and follow that teaching.

It could refer to the contents of the objectionable passages in *Amoris laetitia* rather than to the official character of the document or the terms in which these passages are expressed, and be claiming that since these passages make claims that are contrary to the Catholic faith, they do not constitute magisterial teaching. Such a claim assumes that the passages do indeed contain heretical content. If this assumption is correct, the claim is undoubtedly true, since heresies cannot be magisterial teaching. It is unusual and indeed virtually unheard of for a magisterial document to present heresy as the teaching of the Catholic Church. But it is not impossible for this to happen with a document that does not contain infallible teachings, such as *Amoris laetitia*; the meaning of 'not infallible' is 'capable of being false'. This is the meaning that is suggested by Cardinal Burke's remark that "when the Pope seems to say things that are contrary to the teaching of the Church, then it's not reasonable, neither is it an expression of faith, to cling to those kind of statements as if they were the exercise of the papal magisterium."

A correction of the errors of *Amoris laetitia* would thus be a correction of statements that occur in a magisterial document and that are presented as magisterial teachings by that document, but that are not in fact exercises of the papal magisterium.

Cardinal Burke has spoken not just of correction of a document, *Amoris laetitia*, but of correction of a person, Pope Francis. Correction of the Pope himself is necessary given his failure to reply to the dubia, and is not called for simply because he signed the document and promulgated it as his own. Very few people will actually read the document in its entirety, and not many will read even its seemingly heterodox passages. Most of the harm that is being caused by *Amoris laetitia* results from

the use that is being made of these passages to promote the heresies and abuses mentioned in the dubia, the support given by Pope Francis to the promotion of these heresies, and the public assent that Pope Francis has given to some of these heretical interpretations of the document. This support has been documented by this author in the piece cited above (at <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2016/12/article-considerations-on-dubia-of-four.html>), and by John-Henry Westen at Lifesite News (<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/2016-the-year-pope-francis-finally-showed-his-hand>).

On the character of the assertions of heresy in *Amoris laetitia*, Cardinal Burke has stated:

“With regard to the question of heresy, one has to be very attentive to material heresy and to formal heresy. In other words, material heresy : are there actual statements in the text which are materially heretical ? Are they contradictory to the Catholic Faith ? Formal heresy : did the person –namely the person of the pope who wrote the document– intend to proclaim heretical teachings? And the last thing, I don't believe myself at all. And I think with regard to the first question, the language and so forth is confusing and it's difficult to say that these confusing statements are materially heretical.”

This statement could be read as erroneously suggesting that a statement in itself – that is to say, the claim that is made by a verbal utterance or written message that makes an assertion – can be materially heretical, although Cardinal Burke no doubt knows that this is not the case. The distinction between formal and material heresy has no application to what is being said by an assertion. The claim being made by a verbal or written utterance either contradicts a divinely revealed truth or it does not. The distinction between formal and material heresy applies to the person who makes a claim that contradicts divinely revealed truth. If the person who makes such a statement realises that it contradicts a teaching that the Catholic Church has taught as being divinely revealed and as requiring the assent of divine faith, then it is formally heretical ; that is to say, it constitutes a mortal sin against the theological virtue of faith that deprives the sinner of that virtue. If the person does not realise this then [his] assertion is not a mortal sin against the virtue of faith, but only an error. Given the fundamental character of the truths at issue, and the clear statement of them by John Paul II in well-publicised magisterial documents issued while Pope Francis was a priest or a bishop, it is very hard to see how Pope Francis could manage to be ignorant of the fact that they have been taught by the Catholic Church as divinely revealed. Such ignorance would involve a mental feebleness and lack of knowledge of ecclesiastical controversies that does not fit with what is known about the Pope. In the light of the fact that Pope Francis has openly endorsed heretical understandings of *Amoris laetitia* in his letter to the bishops of the Buenos Aires region of Sept. 5th 2016, it is more likely than not that he is in fact a formal heretic.

Cardinal Burke has asserted that what the Pope wrote in his letter to the bishops of Buenos Aires “simply means that this is his personal understanding of the matter. But that letter hardly could be considered an exercise of the papal magisterium “ (interview with Michael Matt of *The Remnant*, published Dec. 25th 2016). This is undoubtedly true for the reason mentioned in 3) above ; a magisterial teaching cannot contradict the teaching of Jesus Christ. And certainly the letter is not in a form that would require Catholics to give religious submission of mind and will to its contents, even if it did not contradict the faith. Were the letter to have been compatible with the faith, however, it

would not have been a private opinion devoid of any papal authority ; it was sent by Pope Francis in his capacity as Pope to advise the Buenos Aires bishops that one of their official documents gave the sole correct interpretation of *Amoris laetitia*. Its authenticity was then confirmed by *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official journal of the Holy See. Had the bishops' interpretation in turn been compatible with the faith, the bishops in question would have been correct to have understood the letter as a papal instruction that they should follow. It has been so understood by Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Germany and Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, who have cited it to justify formal episcopal decisions to admit divorced and remarried Catholics to communion. The letter is certainly not private in the way that an inner act of disbelief in the faith is private. It is a publicly accessible document that can serve as evidence in law.

In coming to the conclusion that Pope Francis is probably a heretic on the basis of his utterances up to the present, it is essential to draw a distinction between heresy as a personal sin and heresy as a public crime that is subject to legal sanctions. This distinction has been described by the author of this article in the piece cited above (<http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2016/12/article-considerations-on-dubia-of-four.html>). It is required by the fact that some forms of the personal sin of heresy, such as an inner refusal to believe a doctrine of the Catholic faith, are not publicly observable, and hence cannot be addressed by a juridical process. In order for a manifestation of the personal sin of heresy to be a crime punishable by law, it must satisfy two conditions ; it must be verifiable by measures that satisfy the demands on evidence for a juridical process, and it must be repeated in the face of correction by ecclesiastical authority. The latter condition of pertinacity is required in order to distinguish between heresy – a willed rejection of the Catholic faith – and mere error about what the faith actually teaches. The former condition is a general requirement for all crimes that are subject to a legal sanction.

This is important for a formal correction of Pope Francis, because his refusal to answer the dubia could on its own be questioned as a grounds for such a correction. It might be said that this refusal was due to pique or a poorly-judged desire to avoid further controversy, rather than to adherence to the heresies in question. The refusal together with the letter to the bishops, however, suffice[s] as grounds for saying that Pope Francis is publicly contradicting the Catholic faith, and that a formal act of correction is necessary.

Although this public contradiction of a truth of the faith requires a formal correction, it is not a heretical act in the legal sense. Pope Francis would only be canonically guilty of heresy if he adhered pertinaciously to a heretical claim, and such pertinacity can only occur in response to at least one formal correction ; it does not exist before such a correction has taken place. Two such corrections are generally held to be required, following *Titus* 3 : 10, “A man that is a heretic (αἰρετικὸν), after the first and second admonition, avoid.” Unless and until these corrections take place and are rejected by the Pope, he remains innocent of the canonical crime of heresy, and retains his papal office.

The question of how anyone, even a cardinal, can correct the Pope is an important one. It is a basic principle of the divinely established constitution of the Church that the Pope judges all other Catholics on earth and is judged by none of them. But this constitution does not establish the Pope as an autocrat with tyrannical authority, who is answerable to no-one. The Pope's authority is a legal one, and as with all legal authority it involves duties to his subjects as well as rights over them. The duty to confess the Catholic faith is a fundamental duty of the papal office. His subjects may thus formally

request and even require him to carry out this duty. The right to make such a formal request belongs to any Catholic, but the cardinals, whose office is to advise the Pope, have a strict duty as well as a right to make this request. The cardinals who have failed to do this are guilty of a grave dereliction of duty. This failure is a catastrophe that threatens to lead to the disintegration of most of the Church.

## II. True and false obedience

This catastrophic situation has been compared with reason to the Arian crisis, where a majority of bishops at one point conformed to a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ (<http://www.dici.org/en/documents/the-amoris-laetitia-controversy-in-the-light-of-the-arian-crisis/>). There is however a difference between the present situation and the heyday of Arianism in the fourth century. The Arian heresy was expressed in terms that were designed to make it difficult to see what was at stake. Arians described the Father and the Son as 'like in substance', 'homoiousion', while Catholics hold that they are 'one in substance', 'homoousion'. This led the whole dispute to be caricatured as a quarrel over a diphthong. The dispute over *Amoris laetitia*, on the other hand, involves no metaphysical subtleties. It concerns whether or not to accept the plain teaching of Scriptural texts that anyone of good will who thinks about them can understand. How is it that the cardinals and the bishops of the Catholic Church can almost all fail to publicly uphold this teaching, as their office requires them to do ?

No doubt simple unbelief plays a large role in this failure. But a substantial part of the hierarchy were appointed by John Paul II, and adhered to his positions. These positions included a clear reiteration of the Catholic teaching on divorce, remarriage and the Eucharist that is being denied by Pope Francis. Almost none of these bishops have supported the four cardinals. What explains this failure ?

The explanation lies in a false conception of religious authority, which considers it to be above the law rather than subject to law, and that sees the surrender of intellect and will to the religious superior as virtuous and indeed obligatory. This conception has deep roots in the history of the Church, and a grasp of its nature and origin is essential for an understanding of the failure of bishops and cardinals to openly resist Pope Francis's attacks on the faith. A discussion of this conception has already been attempted by the present author, but the importance of this issue seems to justify a reiteration of the essential elements of that discussion.

The proximate source and best expression of this conception is to be found in the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola, particularly in the Constitutions of the Society and in his letter on obedience written to the Jesuits of Portugal in 1553. Its key elements are the following.

[1] The claim that the commands of the superior have the force of divine commands, and should be treated as divine commands – provided, of course, that obeying them would not be manifestly sinful ; this qualification should always be understood as applying to the Jesuit conception of obedience. St. Ignatius asserted : ‘The superior is to be obeyed not because he is prudent, or good, or qualified by any other gift of God, but because he holds the place and the authority of God, as Eternal Truth has said : He who hears you, hears me ; and he who rejects you, rejects me [*Luke* 10:16].’<sup>5</sup> ‘In all the things into which obedience can with charity be extended, we should be ready to receive its command just as if it were coming from Christ our Saviour, since we are practi[s]ing

the obedience to one in His place and because of love and reverence for Him.' (Constitutions, part VI, ch. 1).<sup>6</sup> This position seems to have received general acceptance in part because of acceptance of the fallacious inference from the premise that God commands us to obey the orders of our superiors, to the conclusion that the orders of our superiors are commandments of God.

[2] The claim that the mere execution of the order of a superior is the lowest degree of obedience, and does not merit the name of obedience or constitute an exercise of the virtue of obedience.

[3] The claim that in order to merit the name of virtue, an exercise of obedience should attain the second level of obedience, which consists in not only doing what the superior orders, but conforming one's will to that of the superior, so that one not only wills to obey an order, but wills that that particular order should have been given – simply because the superior willed it.

[4] The claim that the third and highest degree of obedience consists in conforming not only one's will but one's intellect to the order of the superior, so that one not only wills that an order should have been given, but actually believes that the order was the right order to give – simply because the superior (it is supposed) believes this himself. 'But he who aims at making an entire and perfect oblation of himself, in addition to his will, must offer his understanding, which is a further and the highest degree of obedience. He must not only will, but he must think the same as the superior, submitting his own judgment to that of the superior, so far as a devout will can bend the understanding.' (St. Ignatius, Letter on Obedience.)

5 The claim that in the highest and thus most meritorious degree of obedience, the follower has no more will of his own in obeying than an inanimate object. 'Everyone of those who live under obedience ought to allow himself to be carried and directed by Divine Providence through the agency of the superior as if he were a lifeless body which allows itself to be carried to any place and to be treated in any manner desired, or as if he were an old man's staff which serves in any place and in any manner whatsoever in which the holder wishes to use it.' (Jesuit Constitutions, part VI ch. 1).

[6] The claim that the sacrifice of will and intellect involved in this form of obedience is the highest form of sacrifice possible, because it offers to God the highest human faculties, viz. the intellect and the will.

Now because this disposition of will in man is of so great worth, so also is the offering of it, when by obedience it is offered to his Creator and Lord. ... there are, however, many instances where the evidence of the known truth is not coercive and it can, with the help of the will, favour one side or the other. When this happens every truly obedient man should conform his thought to the thought of the superior.

And this is certain, since obedience is a holocaust in which the whole man without the slightest reserve is offered in the fire of charity to his Creator and Lord through the hands of His ministers. And since it is a complete surrender of himself by which a man dispossesses himself to be possessed and governed by Divine Providence through his superiors, it cannot be held that obedience consists merely in the execution, by carrying the command into effect and in the will's

acquiescence, but also in the judgment, which must approve the superior's command, insofar, as has been said, as it can, through the energy of the will bring itself to this. (St. Ignatius, Letter on Obedience.)

An obvious objection to the Jesuit conception of obedience was soon raised. It was remarked that acceptance of blind obedience would mean that heretical priests and bishops could easily lead their people into rejection of the faith. St. Robert Bellarmine's response to this objection was that it was not a real possibility, because the preaching of heresy by bishops or priests would promptly be suppressed by the higher authority of the Holy See. This response of course required the pope himself to be incapable of heresy. The theory that the pope was not only infallible in his formal definitions of faith, but personally immune from heresy in virtue of his office, was accordingly first proposed in the Counter-Reformation, and argued for by Bellarmine. The theory was incompatible with the facts and the previous tradition of the Church – one pope, Honorius, had actually been condemned as a heretic by an ecumenical council – but it was required by the Jesuit conception of obedience, and soon came to be widely accepted.

It could reasonably be said that St. Ignatius, a soldier, was not thinking in a philosophical and systematic way in his teaching on obedience. His acknowledged sanctity and the way in which he himself exercised authority are not compatible with a genuine belief in tyrannical authority on his part. Hence, one should not take his description of obedience too literally. However, later expositions of his view by Jesuits who were not saints interpreted his words in a literal sense that commended a tyrannical understanding of authority.

We find this, for instance, in Alphonsus Rodriguez S.J.'s *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*. This work, the most widely read manual of ascetic theology of the Counter-Reformation, was published in Spanish in 1609, and went through many editions in many translations – over sixty in French, twenty in Italian, at least ten in German, several in English. It was required reading for Jesuit novices up to the Second Vatican Council. In his proposed examination of conscience, Fr. Rodriguez (who is not to be confused with St. Alphonsus Rodriguez) requires the penitent—

I. To obey in will and heart, having one and the same wish and will as the Superior.

II. To obey also with the understanding and judgment, adopting the same view and sentiment as the Superior, not giving place to any judgments or reasonings to the contrary.

III. To take the voice of the Superior ... as the voice of God, and obey the Superior, whoever he may be, as Christ our Lord, and the same for subordinate officials.

IV. To follow blind obedience, that is obedience without enquiry or examination, or any seeking of reasons for the why and wherefore, it being reason enough for me that it is obedience and the command of the Superior.<sup>15</sup>

Rodriguez praises obedience – as he understands it – in illuminating terms.

One of the greatest comforts and consolations that we have in Religion is this, that we are safe in doing what obedience commands. The Superior it is that may be wrong in commanding this or

that, but you are certain that you are not wrong in doing what is commanded, for the only account that God will ask of you is if you have done what they commanded you, and with that your account will be sufficiently discharged before God. It is not for you to render account whether the thing commanded was a good thing, or whether something else would not have been better; that does not belong to you, but to the account of the Superior. When you act under obedience, God takes it off your books, and puts it on the books of the Superior. ... so the Religious, living under obedience, composes himself to sleep – that is to say, he has no trouble or care about what he is to do, but goes his way to heaven and perfection. Superiors see to that, they are the captains and masters of the ship. ... this is the blessing which God has given to the Religious who lives under obedience, that all his burden is thrown on the shoulders of his Superior, and he lives at ease and without care whether this be better or that. This is one of the things that greatly move virtuous folk to live under obedience and enter Religion, – to be rid of the endless perplexities and anxieties that they have there in the world, and be sure of serving and pleasing God. ... If I were there in the world and desired to serve God, I should be troubled and in doubt whether I eat too little or too much, sleep too much or too little, do too little or too much penance ... but here in Religion all these doubts are cleared away, for I eat what they give me, I sleep at the time appointed, I do the penance they assign me.

Rodriguez adds that 'not only in spiritual matters, but also in temporal, this is a life very restful and void of care. Like a passenger in a well-victualled ship, a Religious has no need to attend to his own necessities.' One could not give a plainer exposition of a servile notion of obedience and its appeal to subordinates. Rodriguez's position draws the logical conclusion from a literal understanding of St. Ignatius's writings on obedience. If a subordinate entirely abandons the activity of his own mind and will when presented with the order of a superior, it is indeed the case that he surrenders all moral responsibility for the execution of the order, and the responsibility is transferred entirely to the superior who gives the order. That is because moral responsibility requires the functioning of one's intellect and will ; if this functioning is legitimately abolished in the case of a superior's order, responsibility for the execution of the order is abolished as well. The fact that the abandonment of this functioning is presented as legitimate and indeed as obligatory is the key to this logical implication. If the functioning of one's mind and will is abandoned illegitimately, one does not lose all moral responsibility for the acts that one performs as a result of their abandonment. But if this abandonment is legitimate, as Rodriguez claims it is, moral responsibility is indeed necessarily suspended. Such abdication is indeed 'restful and void of care' ; it enables avoidance of adult cares and responsibilities. This avoidance and its accompanying infantilisation appeals to many people, which is why this conception of authority was able to garner wide support among subjects as well as superiors. The ruinous effects of attracting to the clerical state people who seek avoidance of adult responsibility – and the material security of passengers in a well-victualled ship! – explain much of the parlous state of the Church today, and indicate that this state did not begin with the Second Vatican Council.

In drawing this conclusion, Rodriguez goes farther than St. Ignatius. The absence of this conclusion in the writings of St. Ignatius is what makes it possible to give a pious interpretation to his views on obedience, and to assert that his writings need not be read as an endorsement of a tyrannical understanding of authority and a servile understanding of obedience. With Rodriguez such an interpretation is ruled out, and these understandings of authority and obedience take undoubted possession.

Like other writers, Rodriguez makes the usual exception for obedience to commands that are manifestly contrary to the divine law. It has however been noted that the Jesuit doctrine of probabilism tends to nullify this exception. According to this doctrine, there is no sin in doing any action that a reputable authority maintains to be permissible ; and one's religious superior is naturally taken to be a reputable authority. There is also a psychological fact that makes this exception nugatory. Internalising and practi[s]ing the Jesuit notion of obedience is difficult, and requires time, motivation, and effort. When it has been done successfully, it has a lasting effect. Once one has destroyed one's capacity to criticise the actions of one's superiors, one cannot revive this capacity and its exercise at will. Following the directive to refuse obedience to one's superiors when their commands are manifestly sinful then becomes psychologically difficult or even impossible – except perhaps in the most extreme cases, such as commands to murder someone, which are not the sort of sinful commands that religious superiors often have an interest in giving in any case.

There is an explicit appeal to the wisdom and goodness of superiors in this doctrine of obedience. This appeal however ignores the characteristic effects of the exercise of tyrannical authority, which are no less deep – perhaps deeper – than those of the practice of servile obedience. Such authority has an intoxicating effect, producing overweening pride and megalomania. Superiors in the grip of these vices become both prone to giving unjust orders, and incapable of conceiving of themselves as sinful or mistaken.

Some expositions of the Ignatian conception of obedience described obedience to an order than (sic) one suspects but is not certain to be illicit as an especially high and praiseworthy form of obedience. This statement about the exceptional merit of obeying orders that are morally dubious is made in St. Ignatius's letter 150. The letter was in fact written for him by Fr. Polanco, his secretary and close collaborator who was responsible for composing much of the Constitutions ; but since it went out under St. Ignatius's signature, it benefited from his authority.

This conception is presented by its adherents as following the tradition of the Church on obedience. Its innovation can however be seen by contrasting it with the position of St. Gregory the Great. In his *Moralia*, St. Gregory states that the merit of obedience lies in sacrificing one's proud self-will. St. Thomas makes a similar point by describing the merit of obedience as consisting in sacrificing one's proper will, i.e. one's will as functioning independently of God. St. Ignatius however makes it clear that it is not self-will, but the entire human faculty of will itself, that is to be sacrificed ; one's self-will could not be described as 'of great worth'. This is a sacrifice in the sense of an abandonment and a destruction, since it involves handing over one's will to the will of another human being. St. Thomas considers the proper object of obedience to be the precept of the superior (*Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae q. 104 a. 2 co., a. 2 ad 3). He praises obedience that seeks to forestall the expressed will of the superior, but such obedience in his understanding does not bear on what the superior wants or thinks in general, but only on what the superior intends to command ; it is an anticipation of a command, based on a correct understanding of what the command is going to be. St. Ignatius's lowest degree of obedience, which he does not consider to be virtuous, is thus what St. Thomas considers to be the only form of obedience. St. Thomas holds (sic) that St. Ignatius's alleged higher forms of obedience do not fall under the virtue of obedience at all:

“For Seneca says (*De Beneficiis* iii) : 'It is wrong to suppose that slavery falls upon the whole man:

for the better part of him is excepted.' His body is subjected and assigned to his master but his soul is his own. Consequently in matters touching the internal movement of the will man is not bound to obey his fellow-man, but God alone." (*Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae q. 104 a. 5 co.)

St. Thomas's point here is that the limitation of the duty of obedience that is admitted by a pagan philosopher to belong to slaves *a fortiori* applies to the limitation of the duty of obedience in general. Nor does St. Thomas think of obedience as a virtuous form of personal asceticism. He does not hold that obeying a command we dislike is better as such than obeying a command we are happy to fulfil. Indeed, since a rightly directed will seeks the common good, a good person will be glad to carry out any suitable command, since such commands and obedience to them both exist for the sake of the common good. Obedience does not for St. Thomas occupy the central moral role that it does for Counter-Reformation theologians. He does not consider that all good acts are motivated by obedience to God, because he considers that there are virtues the exercise of which is prior to obedience – such as faith, upon which religious obedience depends (cf, 2a2ae q. 104 a. 7 ad 3). Obedience is simply an act of the virtue of justice, which is motivated by love of God in the case of divine commands and love of neighbour in the case of commands of a human superior. These loves are both more fundamental and broader than obedience. Since obedience is founded on justice rather than *vice versa*, obedience to a human being is primarily to the law and only derivatively to the person of the superior. But obedience to law requires understanding of the law ; hence abdication of personal thought and understanding precludes true obedience, rather than forming part of it.

The servile conception of obedience remained the standard one into the twentieth century. Adolphe Tanqueray, in his widely read and translated (and in many ways excellent) work *Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique*, could write that perfect souls who have reached the highest degree of obedience submit their judgment to that of their superior, without even examining the reasons for which he commands them. We can see a manifestation of this prevalence in the *Treatise on Obedience* of the Sulpician Louis Tronson, which gave St. Ignatius's teaching and writings as then understood as the summit of Catholic teaching on obedience. The Sulpician adoption of the Jesuit conception was particularly important because of their central role in the training of priests in seminaries from the seventeenth century onwards. The seven years of seminary training universally required in the Counter-Reformation Church meant that the tyrannical understanding of authority and servile understanding of obedience conveyed by this training was deeply ingrained in those who went through it. The Sulpician manuals were abandoned after the Second Vatican Council, but the conception of obedience that they inculcated was preserved, as anyone who has worked or studied in a seminary can vouch for. It has become more influential in some respects, because it is no longer counterbalanced by the strong formation in Catholic philosophy and theology that was formerly given in seminaries.

The corrupting effect of this conception of obedience is exacerbated by the fact that in a clerical system run according to this conception, the leaders all start off as followers themselves. In this capacity, they learn the skills of the slave for survival and advancement ; flattery, duplicity, bullying and humiliation of those beneath them, and concealment. Their promotion from subordinate to superior does not depend primarily on their competence at the tasks they are supposed to perform, but on their capacity to ingratiate themselves with their superiors. Here again, the decline of the Church since the Second Vatican Council has exacerbated the damage caused by this understanding of obedience. When clerics

were in charge of large and important enterprises – schools, hospitals, universities, parishes with thousands of faithful and extensive organisations – competence could not be dispensed with. This need provided a check on the harm done by a tyrannical understanding of authority, because the commands given by authority had to be effective, and the people giving them had to know what they were doing. Now that these important enterprises have withered away in much of the world, tyranny and servility have been given much greater scope in the clerical world.

This account of a theory of authority corresponds with startling accuracy to the situation in the Church today. It fully explains the failure of believing bishops and priests to oppose Pope Francis. The account is however more enlightening than encouraging. It shows that the crisis over *Amoris laetitia* and Pope Francis's support for heresy is not simply the result of a rogue pope having disastrously been elected. The failure of the hierarchy to oppose the Pope's disastrous actions is the result of a deeply-rooted systemic problem in the Church. It is not just this failure, but also the heterodox programme of Pope Francis and his allies, that is rooted in this problem. This programme does not intend to allow any divorced and remarried Catholics whatsoever to receive communion. Instead, it decrees that reception of communion is to be subject to the decision of the priest who gives it – a decision that is to be guided by considerations that are general enough to make the will of the priest in practice the determining factor. This replaces the divine law concerning marriage and the Eucharist with the authority of the priest, and enshrines the superiority of this lawless and therefore tyrannical authority over the authority of God Himself.

The task of resisting and overcoming this heretical programme thus cannot be restricted to the reestablishment of the specific doctrines mentioned in the dubia ; it must attempt to restore a proper understanding of law and authority itself. This task amounts to carrying out a general reform of the Church. The means for implementing such a reform are not immediately apparent to say the least, but a recognition of the need for reform is at least a start.

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