

Relatio – Circulus Germanicus

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As objectively conceived concepts we have again discussed at length mercy and truth, grace and justice and their theological relationship to one another. In God there are no diametrically opposed objects: since God is love, in God justice and mercy coincide. The mercy of God is the fundamental truth of revelation which does not stand in contradiction to the other truths of revelation. It reveals to us, rather, the most profound reason of what it says to us, why God has expressed himself in his Son and why Jesus Christ through his Word and his sacraments remains present in his Church for our salvation. The mercy of God discloses to us the ground and the aim of the whole work of salvation. The justice of God is his mercy, by which he has made us just.

We also pondered what consequences this interconnection has in our accompaniment of marriage and family. It rules out a one-sided deductive hermeneutic, which would subsume concrete situations until a common principle. In the thinking of Thomas Aquinas and also of the Council of Trent the use of first principles have to be applied gradually, with prudence and wisdom, to particular, often complex situations. For this reason it is not a matter of exceptions in which God's word would not be valid, but a question of a just and proper application of the word of Jesus – about his word on the indissolubility of marriage – in prudence and wisdom. Thomas Aquinas has clearly stated the necessity of the concrete nature of such an application, when he observed: "not only does the reflection of reason belong to prudence, but also the application to the act, which is the aim of practical reason." (Sth II-II-47,3)

A further aspect of our discussion was, in chapter 3 of the second part, the often spoken-of gradual approach of people to the sacrament of marriage, begun with a non-binding relationship of an unmarried couple living together and married only in a registry office, until finally they come to a valid sacramental marriage in church. The pastoral accompaniment of such people at these different stages is a huge pastoral task, but a joy also.

It also became clear to us, that in our many reflections and observations we were thinking in static terms and too little along biographical-historical lines. The Church's teaching on marriage has developed historically and in a greater depth. At first it concerned the humanising of marriage which grew in strength through the persuasive force of monogamy. In light of the Christian faith the personal dignity of the marriage partners received deeper recognition, and the divine image of human beings was recognised in the relationship of man and woman. In a further step the ecclesial nature of marriage underwent development and was understood as a domestic church. Finally, the Church became expressly conscious of the sacramental nature of marriage. This historical journey of growing appreciation manifests itself also today in the life-story of many people. They are first touched by the human dimension of marriage, within the ambience of the Church they allow themselves to be persuaded by the Christian view of marriage, and from there find their way to a sacramental celebration of marriage. Just as the historical development of Church teaching required time, so also must a Church pastoral approach allow people on their way to a sacramental marriage time to mature and not operate according to an "all or nothing" principle. In this regard, the "idea of a step by step process" (FC 9) is to be developed at the present time, which John Paul II had already established in Familiaris Consortio: "The pastoral endeavour of the Church does not limit itself to Christian families who are near to

us, but strives ever more intensely in so far as it widens the horizon according to the standard of the heart of Jesus to all families in their totality, and above all those who find themselves in difficult or irregular situations." (FC 65) The Church stands unavoidably in the area of tension between a necessary clarity in her teaching on marriage and family on the one hand, and on pastoral tasks on the other, to accompany and convince such people who in their way of life only partially agree with the basic tenets of the Church. For them, steps to be taken are essential on the way to the fullness of life within marriage and the family, as promised by the gospel of the family.

As well as this, personally directed pastoral is also necessary, which combines in equal measure the normative nature of the teaching and the human personality, keeps in view what his conscience is capable of accepting, and strengthens his responsibility. "For inscribed in their hearts by God, human beings have a law whose observance is their dignity and in accordance with which they are to be judged. Conscience is the most intimate centre and sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God whose voice echoes within them." (GS 16)

We ask that the final draft of the text reflect on two aspects:

Any impression is to be avoided which only uses Sacred Scripture as a quotation source for dogmatic, juridical or ethical persuasions. The law of the New Covenant is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers (CCC N.1965-1966). The written word must be integrated into the living word, which in the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of the faithful. This confers of Holy Scripture a wide-ranging spiritual power.

Lastly, we have had trouble with the concept of a natural marriage. In human history natural marriage is always culturally conditioned. A natural marriage concept can give the impression that there is a purely natural way of human life with cultural conditioning. We therefore propose the formulation: "Marriage rooted in creation".

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Translated Bishop Michael Campbell OSA.