

In the Light of Love

Interview with Father José Granados Garcia, author of the book *Eucharist and Divorce: Towards a Change of Doctrine?*

1. Q. - In this book, you talk in particular about the importance of understanding the term doctrine “in the Christian sense.” So, what is doctrine?

R. - The word “doctrine” does not have a good reputation. As is also the case of another word: “truth,” postmodern times do not appreciate it. It is as if speaking of “truth” means talking about coercion, of oppression within our concrete stories... Doctrine too seems to be a restricting net that does not open horizons of newness but rather closes them...

However, in Christianity, the word “doctrine” has a very different meaning. It is not a series of abstract statements. Nor is it an ideal, at the height—so it seems to us—it would be beautiful to live. The doctrine, in the Old and New Testaments, states a fact and tells a story. It is the account of God’s story with humans that becomes mankind’s story with God. The whole Credo is at the service of this truth: in Jesus, the final story that illuminates the beginning and the end, and fits into every personal history with its particular genius, created by love and call to a gift of love, has found its accomplishment.

This manifests another vision of the word truth: it is the truth of our history, incorporated in Jesus’ story, the truth that now becomes profoundly stimulating and has a great pastoral light. What spouses are not interested in knowing whether their love will last, if it is well built, if they can make the promise forever? What parent does not care about being able to transmit to his/her children a horizon on which to advance and that they can expand?

The philosophy of language talks about “performative” words, not only because they communicate intellectual content but because they are active and, therefore, have a real effect. The classic example is that of the promise. A promise contains not only theoretical truth, but a fact that even opens the future and meets my truth as a person. A promise is true only if it is “embodied” in a story of loyalty. Therefore, the Christian doctrine is “performative;” it is “embodied,” because it was born in Jesus’ story, which touches our concrete history as a promise of unsurpassed love. Consequently, doctrine is always linked to practice. Moreover, just keeping it as a nice ideal, after all, simply means denying it.

2 Q. - With the title of your book: *Eucharist and Divorce: Towards a Change of Doctrine?* you open a question about an issue currently discussed both inside and outside the Church... What led you to write this book? Why did you want to deal with the theme of the Eucharist and divorce?

R. - The idea of writing the book came, firstly, from a pastoral concern. Describing a richer idea of doctrine would help to recuperate doctrine as a light for family ministry. Today, more than ever, this ministry needs the light of doctrine: a story that allows engaged couples to prepare their love for the “forever” of marriage, and that encourages parents to tell their children why life is worth living.

This concern arose in the recent debate at the Synod, while listening to various interventions, because it seemed that this rich vision of the doctrine has been lost. I say this specifically with respect to the discussion about the possible admission of the divorced and remarried faithful to the Eucharist. Those who propose giving them communion say that this would not touch the doctrine. At the Synod, according to them, only pastoral issues are discussed and, therefore, Jesus's words concerning divorce cannot be altered.

My impression was that behind this argument there is a very poor Christian doctrine, as if it were an ideal, a crossbar that the Church raises up very high before people, but that should actually be adapted to their reality and weakness. I wrote the book to pursue this issue in the light of the great theological reflection of the Church. I think that an important conclusion of the book is that the Church's doctrine has always been born in the sacraments, and that it is inseparable from them; and, so, doctrine is always embodied. Precisely the Eucharist assumes an important role for knowing what doctrine is and why the Church has always professed Her faith not only in words but with living, concrete signs.

3 Q. - In view of the forthcoming Synod on the family, do you think that the Synod Fathers will be open to reformulating some of the considerations of the doctrine on this subject? Are we really facing a doctrinal change?

R. - The 2014 Synod ended with a question on the table that still has not been resolved and was brought up again in the recently distributed questionnaire. Therefore, it will surely be asked again in the next Synod. I think it is important to ask what is at stake. It is very different if, as some say, this concerns pastoral adaptation or if, as others say, it is a matter of doctrine.

This is exactly where the book comes in: in truth, will there not be a doctrinal change, if there is a change in the use of the Eucharist? What I wanted to show is that this debate concerns a matter of doctrine that touches the Church's fidelity to the words of Jesus. This is so because the Church does not reveal its doctrine as a theoretical statement, but in an incarnate and narrative way, in a sacramental way. Moreover, the Eucharist is the place of this profession of faith, because in it Jesus' story takes flesh in the life of the believer.

Moreover, the place where the doctrine is made flesh in people's lives, where it becomes a living expression of Jesus' word, is the sacrament of marriage. Indissolubility—the doctrine taught by Jesus—is not manifested merely as an idea, but as vital consistency between the life of the believer and the body of Jesus in the Eucharist. In the book, I argue that if giving communion to the divorced and remarried faithful were allowed, that would change not only doctrine but also the very source from which the doctrine comes.

4 Q. - As an expert on the matter, do you think that the divorced and remarried faithful could receive communion?

R. - I would make a distinction between two questions veiled within the one you have just asked me. This is the first and most direct question: can the divorced and remarried persons receive communion? The second is hidden behind it: does the Church have a word of hope for them that opens a road?

In the book, I have shown—so it seems to me—, that the answer to the first question you have asked is “no.” Now, precisely when “no” is said to this question, “yes” can be said to the second one.

Why is it necessary to say “no” to the first question? This “no” is, in reality, the other face of a “yes:” the consistency or the harmony between married life in the flesh and the Eucharistic life. When someone, in receiving communion, says “Amen,” he/she is not only saying: “This is the Body of Jesus,” but also: “My life in the body wants to conform to the life of Christ’s body. Now, this is precisely the way of living the sacrament of marriage, where the love of Jesus and his Church is brought into play. If someone does not want to live, in their concrete relations, in accordance with this body of Christ, according to the truth of marriage, he/she cannot say “Amen.” So, if the Church were to accept them at communion, She herself would no longer be a visible sign of Jesus’ love for humanity; His word would not be the Word incarnate and saving that it is. What would we say to young people who are preparing for marriage? What could be said to the couple who is experiencing difficulties in its marriage and is thinking of whether to let go or not? If it is said that marriage is indissoluble but then the faithful do not live this in the Eucharist, where the Church is born, would there not be, sacramentally, a lie?

Maintaining this harmony between the Eucharist and marriage allows saying “yes” to the second question. Yes, there is a path for the divorced faithful in this situation. If they were allowed to receive communion, the path would no longer exist; they would be left wondering about this contradiction between their life and Jesus’ words, and they would throw earth on their wedding promise. On the contrary, accepting this distance means taking the first step, so that Jesus’ word may become truth in their lives. If they receive these words of Jesus—which lead to their inability to approach communion—, if they accept to consider their situation in the light of these words, they are already advancing. The Church is called to welcome them with mercy and patience, to accompany them and invite them to prayer, mission and service. Of course, this does not eliminate the pain of the situation; yet, it does something greater: it shows how this suffering can become fruitful. There is no lack of concrete evidence of how this path leads to conversion and back to living in accordance to the truth of marriage, to the height of the gift that Jesus gives us in the Eucharist.

5 D. - I would like to ask you the same question that you posed to the reader: “How should we understand that the doctrine is fruitful enough to open horizons in the life of the Church and the family?”

R. - The Christian doctrine can only be understood in the light of love; the doctrine is the truth of love that allows describing life as a love story. Families need this story that doctrine, starting from the life of Jesus, announces: they need to learn to recall and to tell about God’s benefits, to weave their time by starting from the fidelity to a promise, and to look toward the future as a time of fertility. This is a word that parents can give to their children as a testimony of life, and that can also illuminate people’s path in society. It is a doctrine that, being embodied and communicating a story, is a fruitful light in the lives of people and of the Church.

The book tries to show that this fruitful doctrine springs from the consistency between the Eucharist and marriage. The Synod could start right here: confessing in faith, in the sacraments, in the Church's pastoral practice, the harmony between the Eucharist and marriage; because this is the great gift that God has given to the Church and to each family. From here a great light shines forth, a great journey begins that can give direction to all of family ministry. From here, new avenues can also be opened for those who, after losing the path of love, are wandering and disoriented.

Q. - You are also vice president of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family. So, you know the reality of the family and marriage. What are the threats they face?

R. - There certainly are many threats that afflict the family. This is logical, because the family is a fragile environment: the sphere of love, where life is accepted in its mystery and smallness, and, therefore, seems helpless. These threats are accentuated by modern individualism.

I would point out, on the one hand, the privatization of the family, its seclusion in the private sphere. Society does not consider the family, because it only takes into account individuals. Yet, the family consists precisely of relationships; it is defined on the basis of relationships that cannot be limited to individuals. If there is no social fabric to support the family, if it cannot be poured back into the social fabric and enrich it, then the family becomes an uprooted tree. This explains the need to develop a culture of the family, and also an ecclesiastical culture of the family (the parish is not composed of individuals but of families), that renders the good of the family and community.

This privatization of love has come to the extreme today of considering even the body as a personal project that the individual must define: these are the so-called gender ideologies. This is where the privatization of the family faces another threat: the pansexualism linked to the contemporary sexual revolution of the twentieth century. Separating sexuality and life, sexuality and love, has damaged the family, which lives in the intimate union between these dimensions of people.

This is combined with an emotivist vision of conjugal love, reduced to intense feeling towards the other person. Therefore, it is impossible to build a stable relationship on it, capable of supporting a whole life. Then, the fabric of time, the story that makes it possible for love to flourish and that is transmitted from one generation to the next are lost. The family is threatened by a vision of time divided into fragments, unable to tie one moment to another, incapable of promises, of forgiveness, of paternity and maternity for the future

However, the most important of the difficulties facing families is this other question: What hopes are presented to families? The Church's pastoral ministry does not begin with a fearful look towards dangers and difficulties. If this were our viewpoint, we could not be on the road of the Church as the Pope is asking us. The Church can go out, because it has great joy to communicate; and this joy spurs us on, and makes us march. The joy for families is in the gift they have received in the sacrament of marriage. It is in the Eucharist, that people conform themselves to that gift and are permitted to experience it. How is this gift ripened? How can families be helped to live up to this gift? If we start from the gift of God and His call, instead of with the difficulties, we can see that the gift is growing bigger, and that thanks to this gift the authentic family is not in crisis. On the contrary, as the source of the future, it is the force that helps us to overcome any crisis and to heal every wound.