

Article of Commentary on the *Responsum ad dubium*

The new statement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is a response to a question – in classical terms, to a *dubium* – occasioned, as is normally the case, by pastors and faithful who require clarification and guidance concerning a controversial issue. When questions are triggered by problematic assertions or practices in important areas of Christian life, an affirmative or negative response is provided, along with a statement of the reasoning that supports the response presented. The purpose of such interventions is to help the universal Church to respond better to the demands of the Gospel, to settle disputes, and to foster healthy communion among the holy people of God.

In the present case, a disputed question has arisen in the framework of the “sincere desire to welcome and accompany homosexual persons, to whom are proposed paths of growth in faith” (*Explanatory Note*), as indicated by the Holy Father Pope Francis at the conclusion of two Synodal Assemblies on the family: “so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives” (Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, n. 250). These words are an invitation to evaluate, with appropriate discernment, projects and pastoral proposals directed to this end. Among these are blessings given to the unions of persons of the same sex. It is therefore asked whether the Church has the power to impart her blessing: this is the formula contained in the *quaesitum*.

The answer - the *Responsum ad dubium* - is explained and motivated in the attached *Explanatory Note* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated February 22, 2021, to the publication of which Pope Francis himself has given his assent.

The *Note* is centered on the fundamental and decisive distinction between persons and the union. This is so that the negative judgment on the blessing of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons.

Persons first and foremost. In their regard, what is stated in n. 4 of the *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* written by the same Congregation, and recalled by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, must never be forgotten: “According to the teaching of the Church, men and women with homosexual tendencies ‘must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust

discrimination in their regard should be avoided' (2358)". This teaching is recalled and reaffirmed by the *Note*.

As for unions of persons of the same sex, the response to the *dubium* "declares illicit any form of blessing that tends to acknowledge their unions as such". The *Explanatory Note* bases the illicitness on three interconnected reasons.

The first reason arises from the truth and value of blessings. They belong to the genre of *sacramentals*, which are "liturgical actions of the Church" that require consonance of life with what they signify and generate. There are meanings and outcomes of grace that the *Note* explains in concise form. Consequently, a blessing on a human relationship requires that it be ordered to both receive and express the good that is pronounced and given by the blessing.

Thus we come to the second reason: the order that makes one fit to receive the gift is given by the "designs of God inscribed in creation, and fully revealed by Christ the Lord". These are designs to which "relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage" do not correspond, for they are "outside the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life." However, not only these unions – as if the problem were only such unions – but any union that involves sexual activity outside of marriage, which is illicit from the moral point of view, according to the perennial teaching of the ecclesial Magisterium.

This all implies a power that the Church does not possess, because she does not have the power over God's designs, which would otherwise be rejected and denied. The Church is not the arbiter of these designs and the truths they express, but their faithful interpreter and witness.

The third reason is to avert an error into which one would easily be led: that of assimilating the blessing of unions of persons of the same sex to that of matrimonial unions. Because of the connection between blessings of persons and the sacraments, the blessing of such unions could in a sense imply "a certain imitation or analogue of the nuptial blessing", imparted to a man and a woman united in the sacrament of Matrimony. This would be erroneous and misleading.

For the above reasons “the blessing of homosexual unions cannot be considered licit”. This statement in no way detracts from the human and Christian consideration in which the Church holds each person. So much so that the response to the *dubium* “does not preclude the blessings given to individual persons with homosexual inclinations who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching”.
