Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 8, Special Issue No. 2 (2019): 31-59

Irregular Unions and Moral Growth in *Amoris Laetitia*

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FOLLOWING TWO SYNODS ON THE FAMILY, in 2016 Pope Francis issued his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.[1] Its reflections on the role of love in marriage, the education of children, challenges to the family, marriage preparation, and the tasks of accompaniment have won plentiful admirers, including many non-Catholics. Official papal documents on marriage, sexuality, and the family are rarely popular, but *Amoris Laetitia* defied public perceptions of Church teaching, and its stress on mercy reached many people who felt alienated. At the same time, the more innovative parts of the document gave rise to a very public and ill-tempered debate at all levels of the Church. Central to it is the question of whether civilly divorced and remarried Catholics in "irregular unions" may in some cases be readmitted to the Eucharist without having their situation regularized (no. 78). This struck many as a petty debate over an obscure taboo, but since the Church teaches that marriage is indissoluble, the presumption is that such couples are married to someone *else*, putting a further sexual relationship in conflict with well-known precepts. Moreover, the sheer level of disagreement suggests that this is also proxy debate for wider divisions in the Church over sexuality, marriage, and the family which run very deep.

The overall goal of *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8, is to integrate Catholics in irregular unions into the life of the Church. To use convenient scholastic terms, integration is "the end," the final cause, or the *telos*, of the chapter. *Amoris Laetitia* suggests two aspects to this. The first is outreach aiming at "mercy and reinstatement" (no. 296) in which people are welcomed, accompanied, and integrated. The second is a path of "gradualism" pointing to a "more perfect response" (no. 300) to the marriage ideal from which irregular unions derogate. *Amoris Laetitia* puts the matter delicately, but in light of the sixth commandment and indissolubility, this ultimately points to the commitment to abstain from sexual intimacy outside valid sacramental marriage. Very

[1] I am grateful to David Lantigua, Tim O'Malley, John Grabowski, and Tom Angier for helpful comments and suggestions they made to me when discussing this topic.

roughly, we might call the first aspect of the end the "proximate," and the second, the "ultimate" end of accompaniment and integration. By contrast, the Eucharist question is literally a footnote in a broader discussion about "the means" or resources of accompaniment. It remains a vitally important question, but that does not require us to put discussion of the end into cold storage.

This paper brackets the Eucharist controversy and focuses on the end of accompaniment and integration, in particular, on its neglected final or "ultimate" form. If we think of accompaniment as going along or in company with someone, the obvious question is: where we are going? Without a sense of direction, we will just be discussing the best route to nowhere in particular, which is precisely where many critics believe *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8, ends up. I dispute this view and show that Pope Francis makes a positive case for gradual but full conformity with the marriage "ideal" (no. 303), and then consider his innovative way of trying to encourage this choice.

To address this topic, I examine *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8, and connect it to passages concerning moral growth in *Amoris Laetitia,* ch. 4, and more broadly in the work of Pope Francis. Although I will make a number of comments and observations, this paper is primarily descriptive rather than evaluative. At relevant points, I will draw upon St. Thomas Aquinas, encouraged by the pope's claim that *Amoris Laetitia* is a "Thomistic" document.[2] I will also draw on the work of Servais Pinckaers, O.P., suggesting that his distinction between "moralities of obligation" and "moralities of happiness" helps to shed light on what the pope is doing in *Amoris Laetitia* and why his position has been misunderstood.

The first section discusses the pope's proposals in detail. Chapter 8 affirms that "any breach of the marriage bond" is contrary to God's will but adds that mitigating factors may impede voluntariness and diminish culpability. Rather than giving up on "the weakest of her children," the Church should accompany them through parish integration and pastoral outreach. At the same time, Pope Francis speaks of irregular unions themselves—even for those being accompanied—in unrelievedly gloomy terms: as "against the will of God" (no. 291), "weakness" (no. 296), the "midst of a storm," "troubled love," "having lost their way" (no. 291), "darkness" (no. 294), and so forth. This hardly implies that irregular unions are meant to persist indefinitely, and I suggest that the contrary view would cast doubt on the universal call to holiness, itself a defining legacy of Vatican II. Pope Francis makes that legacy a priority, and this animates his call for a "fuller response"

[2] See Carol Glatz, "'Amoris Laetitia' Is Built on Traditional Thomist Morality, Pope Says," *Catholic News Service,* September 28, 2017, www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2017/amoris-laetitia-is-built-on-traditional-thomist-morality-pope-says.cfm.

(no. 291) in which individuals "advance gradually" (no. 295) toward "the full reality of marriage… in conformity with the Gospel" (no. 295).

The second section addresses critics who say that the pope gives no reason for why anyone would choose to do this. They point to his shift from a "commandment" against adultery that one should obey to an "ideal" of marital fidelity toward which one should be "open" (no. 303). They urge that this ideal is an ersatz concept with no obligatory force and little power to attract. Moreover, since the commandments share the same source and authority, this could be taken to set a dangerous precedent, with invested parties treating as "merely an ideal" whichever Church teachings they find disobliging, from a just wage to care for the environment.

I suggest that the pope's commandment/ideal shift has a completely different purpose. The critics' mistake is captured in Servais Pinckaers's phrase "moralities of obligation": roughly, the view that law and obligation are the basic currency of moral life, making everything else an optional form of moral weight-lifting. Against this model, Pinckaers proposes a "morality of happiness," itself the majority view of the Greeks, Romans, and high medievals, which made the virtues and happiness central.[3] It has ample room for obligations, but no less important are what we might call "aspirational" parts of the moral repertoire, for instance, the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, *paraclesis* or apostolic exhortation, the role of narratives, examples, *mimesis*, spirituality, and so forth. I suggest that Pope Francis's model of growth and shift to a marriage "ideal" is best understood in this aspirational way, within a morality of happiness approach, whereas critics have misplaced him within a morality of obligation (of the "laxist" variety).

The final section examines how Pope Francis thinks we should encourage the commitment to growth. He suggests that many in "irregular situations" may "know full well the rule yet have great difficulty in understanding 'its inherent values'" (no. 301). Instead of sternly reiterating the norm to those who do not yet grasp its point, whose culpability is mitigated and whose agency is shaky, he proposes conveying the good or ideal behind the norm in attractive terms that foster appreciation and encourage a response.[4]

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[3] Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Sources of Christian Ethics*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995); Servais Pinckaers and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Morality: The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2003). There are of course exceptions and qualifications to this general rule. See Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press,1995), 120-131.

[4] This might appear to reverse the Thomistic model of growth, in which we observe the commandments *before* appreciating them. But I suggest that the pope has in mind anomalous cases that can be made to fit the Thomistic model.

Evoking Christ's own example, he calls for a "new language of parables" and suggests a major role for communicating the moral ideal indirectly: not through bare assertions or imperatives, but through "images," "examples" (no. 267), "attractive testimonies," "symbols, actions and stories," which may "win them over by their sheer beauty" (no. 288).[5] By these, someone may be "moved and drawn" to the ideal "in a personal way from within" (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 267). Reason and the will are not submerged in this process, but augmented by imaginative and affective means. Rather than being frivolous, I suggest that examination reveals the moral seriousness of this approach, which has important antecedents in Plato, Aristotle, and the Gospels themselves.

Particularly for those lacking formation, Pope Francis incentivizes moral growth through hortatory, narrative, dramatic, mimetic, and aesthetic means, and he suggests that our existing modes of teaching, catechesis, homilies, and persuasion should be deeply shaped by them. *Amoris Laetitia* itself tries to do this. More broadly, Christian marriage, chastity, sexual penitence, and holiness find potent representations in Scripture, the lives of the saints, the liturgy, sacred music, literature, and the visual arts. Such resources depict the norm or ideal "from the inside," drawing the skeptical or reluctant person into a fuller vision of the good it represents and fostering commitment to it. Though novel in how he thinks "the weak" should be encouraged toward the marriage ideal, Pope Francis does not see adherence to this ideal as an optional form of moral heroics, but as a necessity for their vocation to beatitude and holiness.

Culpability and Gradualism

The topic of irregular unions and moral growth comes to a focus in *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8. As the phrase suggests, "irregular union" refers to unions of a sexual or conjugal type which are "not according to the rule" (*regula*)—the rule in question being the sixth commandment against adultery as understood by the Church. *Amoris Laetitia* is not addressing what we would normally call "affairs" but remarriages, specifically cases where the parties are not canonically free to marry since at least one of them has a living spouse. As is well-known, the origins of this prohibition lie in the New Testament. In contrast to the Pharisees, who did allow some divorce and remarriage, Christ famously shocked his disciples by totally prohibiting this practice, which he equated with adultery (Matt 5:32).[6] On this basis, Pope John

[5] I address related points about moral formation in my *Hope and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 86-103.

[6] For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount we read: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matt 5:29-30). Divorce and remarriage

Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* taught that if a second civil marriage cannot be "regularized" through annulment and sacramental marriage, then the couple should either "satisfy the obligation to separate," or, if children's welfare is at stake, resolve "to live in complete continence… by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples" (no. 84). Pope Francis wished to revisit the issue, not just because of his focus on mercy—which Pope John Paul II also stressed—but due to his belief that secular inroads over the past decades have hollowed out the formation of Catholics on an unprecedented scale. His phrase for the Church, that it is a "field hospital," is well-known. Fewer note what it suggests: that we inhabit a battlefield strewn with casualties.[7]

Amoris Laetitia, chapter 8 opens by affirming that "any breach of the marriage bond is against the will of God" but insists that "the Church must accompany" (no. 255) those whose lives do not "correspond to [Catholic] teaching on marriage" (no. 292). They show signs of "a wounded and troubled love," and the Church's task as a "field hospital" (no. 291) is to tend to rather than to abandon them. While the pope affirms that it is important to avoid scandal and makes clear that irregular unions are "not the ideal," he insists that the accent mark fall on mercy. Such persons need to feel "not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow" (no. 299). They are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; they should therefore "realize that they belong to the Church as the body of Christ" (no. 299), and their gifts should be incorporated into various forms of ministry.

Para-marriages?

What remains unclear is how the persisting breach with indissolubility and the sixth commandment—which, after all, does not simply go away—is to be addressed within the context of accompaniment.

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figure explicitly in this verse, since in those verses which immediately follow, Christ equates them with adultery in the above sense. See John Nolland, "The Gospel Prohibition of Divorce: Tradition History and Meaning," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, no. 58 (1995): 19–35.

[7] Whatever one makes of the pope's unscripted comment that "the great majority of our sacramental marriages are null" (scaled down in a later redaction), such remarks make clear his view that a great many Catholics suffer severe agency malformation, making it far from a niche concern ("Most Marriages Today are Invalid, Pope Francis Suggests," *Catholic News Agency*, June 16, 2016, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/most-marriages-today-are-invalid-pope-francis-suggests-51752). Pope Francis's biographer, Austen Ivereigh, says the pope ascribes widespread malformation largely to the effects of "globalized postmodernity" and its consumeristic effects. See his "To Discern and Reform: The 'Francis Option' for Evangelizing a World in Flux," *Thinking Faith: The Online Journal of the Jesuits in Britain*, October 24, 2018, www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/discern-and-reform-%E2%80%98francis-option%E2%80%99-evangelizing-world-flux.

The question is not whether a delicate sense of discretion requires addressing an uncomfortable topic at the right time and in the right way. So much, one hopes, is obvious. The question is about *what*, exactly, is to be addressed when the proper time arrives. Is irregularity to be regarded essentially as a "past tense problem," spoken of in terms of gentle regret and mild reproof, perhaps, but with no serious need eventually to overcome it? Or does it remain a "present tense problem" in some yet to be defined way? (Below I explain why this is not a question of "discernment," whose importance lies elsewhere.)

The first approach would likely treat the tension between doctrine and practice in many cases as largely "technical." Presumably after a period of discernment, pastoral counsel, and heartfelt remorse for past mistakes, many irregular unions would be treated as second marriages in all but name: as what we might call "para-marriages."[8] Motivated by obvious compassion, such an approach would help to integrate countless couples back into the Church without requiring a painful disruption of new family arrangements.

Much could be said in support of this solution which so many people would understandably embrace with relief. At the same time, it avoids the real question posed by indissolubility. If marriage is indissoluble and it comes with an obligation to sexual fidelity, then the duty of fidelity to one's presumed-if-estranged spouse is present and operative even amid a second civil union. The moral tension does not just lie with a past divorce which may now be mercifully forgiven. As *Amoris Laetitia* notes (see, for instance, nos. 214 and 242), indissolubility means that any further sexual relationship outside of one's marriage is an ongoing breach of a duty of fidelity to someone else. The only way seriously to doubt this is either to suggest that marriage does not require sexual fidelity or that it is not indissoluble. Both, with their subtext of "evolving beyond Jesus," are firmly rejected by Pope Francis.

Mitigating Factors

At the same time, Pope Francis insists that those in irregular unions not be treated as morally abhorrent, and he denies that they are necessarily in mortal sin. He writes: "One thing must always be taken into account, lest anyone think that the demands of the Gospel are in any way being compromised. The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations" (no. 301). He cites with approval Pope John Paul II's critique of fundamental option theory (footnote 344), and adverts to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 301-302), which summarizes Church teaching on mitigating factors to the effect that mortal sin is only possible if grave

[8] I owe this term to Oliver O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 1 (1983): 156.

matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent are all present in an action (*Catechism,* nos. 1854-1864).

Although irregular unions involve "grave matter" if they involve sexual intimacy, the pope notes that full knowledge or deliberate consent may be lacking. A couple may not have known that their second civil marriage was "irregular" when they got married, perhaps due to ignorance of Church teaching. Such knowledge can readily be supplied, but the issue of deliberate consent is more complex. Voluntariness may be diminished, as the *Catechism* notes, by "duress, fear, habit" and "other psychological or social factors" (no. 1735; cited at *Amoris Laetitia,* no. 302).[9] Such factors are commonplace to some extent, but they modify culpability if they are severe enough to impede voluntariness. (This point is analogously recognized in criminal law in the limits placed around the so-called "insanity defense").[10]

Such considerations might excuse one for errors in the past, but could they permit the intention to indulge what is, strictly speaking, extramarital intimacy in the future? The latter view has raised considerable alarm, since the Church has always taught that a "purpose of amendment" is necessary for forgiveness (*Vademecum for Confessors*, no. 4), a fact which the possibility of future relapse does not preclude (*Vademecum*, no. 11). The same point is found in everyday conventions of apology and forgiveness. If I do not wish I had done otherwise than I did, and I do not intend to do otherwise in future, then I am not taking responsibility for my actions at all. (Claudius in *Hamlet* had the honesty to admit that this is what he was doing.) This suggests the need for forming the intention, at least, of avoiding grave acts, and therefore the effort to abstain from sexual intimacy in irregular unions going forward (see, for instance, *Amoris Laetitia,* footnote 364).

Accepting this general point, some argue that a legitimate purpose of amendment might take the form of a sincere desire to change, coupled with the impossibility of actually trying to do so.[11] There has been

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[9] This passage represents the Church's 20th century shift from the "age of reason" as a 100% on/off imputability switch to a more nuanced sense of the concept as moral "maturity," which can be lacking enough to diminish voluntariness. See John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 89-93.

[10] Pope Francis insisted very strongly on this qualification in making a related point elsewhere: "A lack of formation in the faith and error with respect to the unity, indissolubility, and sacramental dignity of marriage invalidate marital consent only if they influence the person's will (cf. CIC c. 1099). It is for this reason that errors regarding the sacramentality of marriage must be evaluated very attentively." See "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Officials of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota for the Inauguration of the Judicial Year," January 22, 2016, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/january/documents/papa-francesco_20160122_anno-giudiziario-rota-romana.html.

[11] In terms of action theory, this point is confused. The "purpose" in "purpose of amendment" implies the *intention* to amend, not just the wish that one might amend

a lively debate over what might make for these conditions, with representative scenarios put forth by philosopher Rocco Buttiglione, a confidant of Pope John Paul II, and Cardinal Coccopalmerio, president of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.[12] The first case is a *situation of duress*, such as when a woman has a spiritual awakening and wishes to live as "brother and sister" with her civil spouse, but he is so uncooperative as to hold her hostage in some way, perhaps by taking out his frustration through abusing the children or threatening to leave the family destitute.[13] This might constitute duress and extenuate culpability; but as an appalling situation of exploitation, abuse, and mental instability, it is less a long-term pastoral solution than a tragedy of victims in need of rescue.

The second case regards *malformation of agency*, such as when someone wishes on some level to follow the norm but judges that they cannot manage it or that their civil partner cannot.[14] It is further suggested that the children for whom they are staying together are harmed by the resulting domestic tensions, pushing their distress to the breaking point and diminishing voluntariness.[15] The *Catechism* passage appealed to here for support refers to "affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 302).[16] In the *Catechism*, this passage is used to extenuate culpability for adolescent masturbation while pointing out the need for moral growth so as to progressively overcome this behavior. In *Amoris Laetitia*, it likewise stresses the need to accompany people through

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without the intention of actually doing so. See *Vademecum*, no. 7; *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 31. The relevant question is whether one might be *excused* for lacking a purpose of amendment due to impeded voluntariness.

[12] See Edward Pentin, "Cardinal Coccopalmerio Explains His Positions on Catholics in Irregular Unions," *National Catholic Register*, March 1, 2017, www.ncregister.com/daily-news/cardinal-coccopalmerio-explains-his-positions-on-catholics-in-irregular-uni; and Rocco Buttiglione, "'The Correctio? The Method is Incorrect: They Do Not Discuss, They Condemn,'" *LaStampa*, April 10, 2017, www.lastampa.it/2017/10/04/vaticaninsider/the-correctio-the-method-is-incorrect-they-do-not-discuss-they-condemn-D7UTkUt9QdTbArDkCCZ4TN/pagina.html.

[13] Pentin, "Cardinal Coccopalmerio Explains His Positions."

[14] Buttiglione, "The Correctio?"

[15] This claim raises questions about grace and the commandments which it notably fails to answer, in particular, the Church's consistent teaching that "what God commands he makes possible by his grace" (*Catechism,* no. 2082). I return to this question below, when addressing Aquinas's model of moral growth.

[16] Although the scenario evokes sorrow and compassion, it is important to note that the situation as such does not exculpate (this would suggest that commandments cease to apply in difficult circumstances). Rather, what might exculpate is duress in response to the situation. Yet, that duress (not to be confused with stress or grief as such) is due to what the pope calls moral "weakness" or significant malformation, which is itself in need of healing.

initial "mercy and reinstatement" followed by a gradual process of moral growth beyond an "objective situation of sin" (no. 305).

"Stages of Growth"

The fact that Pope Francis describes irregular unions in terms of sickness and waywardness hardly suggests that they are meant to persist indefinitely. His rhetoric pushes in the opposite direction: of a spiritual illness which the church as "field hospital" (no. 291) slowly seeks to mend. Irregular unions are, he says, "against the will of God" (no. 291). The moral state of "the weak" within them is described as "darkness" (no. 294), "frailty" (no. 325), "imperfection" (no. 296), "weakness" (no. 308), the "midst of a storm," "troubled love" (no. 291), a "situation of sin" (no. 305), and so forth. The sheer number of such melancholy ascriptions is striking.

In keeping with this outlook, Pope Francis consistently says that while the Church must "treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgments" (no. 308), she "constantly holds up the call to perfection and asks for a fuller response to God" (no. 291) that accords with the Gospel "ideal." This is not very astonishing. If culpability is mitigated due to the misfortune that one's agency is impaired, presumably the long-term solution is to repair one's agency, rather than avoid moral growth so as to retain mitigated status. The pope adds that the Church has "the duty to accompany [the divorced and remarried] in helping them to understand their situation according to the Church" (no. 300), and that "every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience" (no. 303). Those in irregular unions, for their part, require "love for the Church and her teaching" and a "sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it" (no. 300). This ultimately requires that one's situation in life correspond to "the full reality" of Church teaching "in conformity with the Gospel" (no. 294). The final end charted for irregular unions in *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8 is identical to that of *Familiaris Consortio*.

Plainly, the pope does not see this growth occurring in the context of abrupt moral pushiness ("throwing stones at people's lives," no. 305), but rather via compassionate accompaniment ("advancing gradually," no. 295). Indeed, "mitigating factors" may impair agency such that "without detracting from the Gospel ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth" (no. 308). *Amoris Laetitia* refers to the path of "gradualism" as presented in Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*. This, he

says, is not a "gradualness of the law" but the process by which someone comes to "fully carry out the objective demands of the law" after successive "stages of growth" (no. 295).[17]

Many worry that talk of "gradualism" signals temporary permission to break the sixth commandment and therefore to perform what *Veritatis Splendor* called "intrinsically evil" acts (*Veritatis Splendor,* no. 56). This would jeopardize the category of exceptionless moral norms, without which Pope John Paul II powerfully argued that the nature of witness, the meaning of martyrdom, and the logic of the cross would themselves be "voided" (no. 84-94). Fortunately, this is not what *Amoris Laetitia* is doing. Mitigating factors may diminish responsibility, but this does not imply *permission* to break a norm, only provisional *exculpation* for failing to keep it.[18]

Assessing mitigating factors with anything like rough accuracy is very complicated. The disturbed or unstable easily become scrupulous. Equally familiar is the temptation to rationalize, to conflate the difficult with the impossible.[19] ("Humankind," as T.S. Eliot remarked, "cannot bear very much reality."[20]) This is partly why Pope Francis stresses the need for discernment with an experienced pastor (no. 300). Though discernment is important in terms of culpability and ways forward (no. 305), there is no suggestion in *Amoris Laetitia* of needing to discern *whether* one should undertake this path of reform. The pope teaches that gradualness of growth is not just for a select few but incumbent upon all: "For the law is itself a gift of God which points out the way, a gift for everyone without exception; it can be followed with the help of grace, even though each human being advances gradually" (no. 295). To suggest "discerning" otherwise would cast doubt on

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[17] For a very helpful recent discussion of gradualism, see Jason King, "Whose Gradualism? Which Relationships?" in *Horizons* 43, no. 1 (2016): 86-105.

[18] To illustrate the distinction with examples, we might say that all of the following are intrinsically wrong and prohibited by an exceptionless norm: (1) frightening fellow students during a final exam with loud shouts; (2) revealing to a genocidal regime the whereabouts of intended victims; (3) failing to pay a just wage as an employer, or subjecting workers to sub-human working conditions. But in case (1), suppose the student has a tic syndrome or other cognitive disability, liable to involuntary vocalizations; and in cases (2) and (3), suppose the agent is severely immature or under duress severe enough to diminish voluntariness. In such cases, the agent would be *excused* wholly or partly for derogating from the relevant norm, but this would not at all imply *permission* to violate that norm. Exculpation as distinct from permission implies that derogation from the norm remains wrong in itself, though impaired agency may exculpate a particular agent for such derogation to the extent, and for as long as, that incapacity obtains. See Aquinas on acts which are not *deliberatus* in ST I-II 88.6, and 88.2; as well as *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 17; *Catechism*, no. 2352; and Augustine's related discussion of suicide in *The City of God,* Book 1, Ch. 17.

[19] See, for instance, Aquinas' important discussion of "affected ignorance" (*ignorantia affectata*) in *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 8; ST I-II q. 11, a. 6.

[20] T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 2.

whether one were called to the "stages of growth" (no. 303) required by one's specific diagnosis of spiritual "weakness," making it an open question whether one should grow in holiness at all, or at least in the way one specifically needs to. But this hardly sounds like a successful piece of deliberation.[21]

The Universal Call to Holiness

Those who judge that they should avoid necessary moral growth raise one set of questions. A very different set of questions would arise if a given model of moral theology endorsed that judgment. This would signal backsliding from Vatican II through discarding one of its defining features, the "universal call to holiness."[22] That consideration raises the stakes of the question considerably.

Robert Imbelli has described the universal call to holiness as the "golden thread" binding together the documents of Vatican II.[23] As *Lumen Gentium* states:

> The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model (*magister et exemplar*) of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (no. 40).

The faithful, we read, "must hold on to and complete (*perficere*) in their lives this holiness." The document concludes: "Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (no. 40). Vatican II proposed that the call to holiness is universal in scope and extent—in that everyone, both clergy and laity, is called to full and perfect holiness. Noting the great difficulties and sacrifices this may involve, Pope Francis has repeatedly underscored these points, writing: "Let us listen once more to Jesus…. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word" (*Gaudete et Exsultate,* no. 66; see also for more forceful articulation, nos. 174-175). Whatever else such holiness means, it

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[21] The view that one might grow morally and spiritually in other areas of one's life while avoiding growth in this area is true so far as it goes, but it is largely irrelevant to the present point. It would be rather like ignoring a diagnosis which urged a blood transfusion or kidney transplant as essential to one's health by saying you would prefer to improve your health through dieting and exercise instead. See Pope Francis's related comments in *Gaudete et Exsultate,* nos. 174-175.

[22] For an excellent treatment, see Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, "The Universal Call to Holiness," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37-54.

[23] Robert Imbelli, presentation to the Theology and Religious Studies Faculty at The Catholic University of America, August 2018.

surely cannot mean that some might be "called" to an enduring condition of spiritual and moral disrepair, to what Pope Francis in describing irregular unions calls a state of "weakness" and "darkness."

Vatican II construed the call to holiness as universal not by defining holiness down, but by raising everyone up. A "two-tiered" Christian spirituality is therefore firmly ruled out. This is an important point in general, but it also has stakes in this particular controversy. It pushes against the view that full conformity to the marriage ideal might be for the extremely devout, perhaps, as those called to full holiness; but that the majority of "ordinary" believers cannot be expected to live out Gospel teaching, as though they were called to something less. Moreover, if certain pastors unwittingly implied this two-tiered model, the optics would be distinctly awful. It would recall the oldest forms of "clericalism" in which the laity were treated by the clergy as an inferior spiritual specimen, and even sorted by the clergy into a spiritual caste system of sorts.[24] Pope Francis has specifically ruled out this view, and anything like it would be ruinous, undoing a signature legacy of Vatican II by effectively negating the universal call to holiness.

AN "ASPIRATIONAL" APPROACH TO THE MORAL LIFE

My argument that *Amoris Laetitia*, like Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* before it, urges the need for growth beyond irregular status does not mean that the exhortation just recapitulates *Familiaris Consortio* while placing greater stress on mercy. One major difference concerns the way that Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II characterize the moral norm which irregular unions contravene. Pope John Paul II follows Scripture and tradition in speaking of a "commandment" against adultery which God calls those in irregular unions to "observe" (*Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 20, 34). By contrast, Pope Francis consistently avoids this language, and instead speaks of an "ideal" of marriage toward which couples should be "open" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 303).

Merely an Ideal?

Why the apparent shift from a biblical commandment in which God addresses one personally to an abstract ideal which beckons like a Platonic form? Seen against the background of Christian tradition, the shift is so striking that some critics see it as a rupture. Commandments, they argue, yield clear obligations; the same cannot be said of ideals. These may be optimal, but equally, they are optional. E. Christian Bruegger argues that by turning "the command of Christ" into "merely an ideal," pastors are being "called upon to propose the ideal;

[24] See Sara Butler, "Perfectae Caritatis," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, 208-215.

but we mustn't give the impression that the ideal is a concrete command of God for everyone." "An ideal is only an ideal," he remarks, and certainly phrases such as "ideally you should keep to the speed limit," "ideally I will arrive on time," or "in an ideal world" are usually deflationary: they identify a desired outcome while casting doubt on its likelihood.[25] Such deliberations typically correspond to what Aquinas called the *simplex voluntas*, which falls short of actual intention; or to what Anscombe called the "idle wish."[26]

The broader problem then regards consistency and precedent in the moral life. The question becomes: if *one* commandment may be viewed as an optional "ideal," what, in principle, is to prevent *other* commandments from being viewed the same way? Since the commandments derive from the same authority and share the same source, any partiality between them is arbitrary (James 2:10). The risk is that invested parties will treat as "merely an ideal" whichever commandments or Church teachings badly inconvenience them. Those who represent big business could say that a Church mandate of just wage and environmental responsibility are beautiful "ideals," but that they cannot be "rigidly imposed" when they would make a business model uncompetitive, threatening the livelihoods of many. Lawyers and judges may soon be found who likewise see the Church's teaching on the death penalty as "merely an ideal" that is not binding in "certain cases." The danger is a moral race to the bottom across the ideological spectrum in an already divided Church, blunting our Christian witness and giving the general air of hypocrisy.

The Ideal as Priority

It would be hasty and misguided to view Pope Francis's commandment/ideal shift in these deflationary terms. In the last section, I noted ways in which *Amoris Laetitia* resists being pulled in this direction. Chief among them is the pope's stress on the need for growth as well as the universal call to holiness (in some ways the latter serves as a firewall against his *bête noire* of clericalism).[27] The underlying assumption of the pope's critics is that his commandment/ideal shift is

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[25] See Bruegger's discussion in "Five Serious Problems with Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*," *Catholic World Report*, April 22, 2016, www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/04/22/five-serious-problems-with-chapter-8-of-amoris-laetitia/. See related claims in Fr. Regis Scanlon, "Amoris Laetitia: A Deceptive Joy," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, May 28, 2016, www.hprweb.com/2016/05/amoris-laetitia-a-deceptive-joy/.

[26] On Aquinas, see David Gallagher, "The Will and Its Acts," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 80-82. See also G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 67.

[27] See, for instance, *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the People of God*, no. 2, press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/publico/2018/08/20/180820a.html.

done precisely to *relax* the norm or to limit its scope. This assumption is manifestly false.

The official Latin text (which parallels the Italian here) of *Amoris Laetitia* employs the term *exemplar*, and the English version translates this as "ideal" (see nos. 303 and 308).[28] But *exemplar*, unlike English "ideal," is not a morally flaccid word. *Exemplar* indicates a model or plan that really is meant to be carried out and has serious action-guiding force. The point does not just hinge on matters of translation. The seriousness of "ideal" (*exemplar*) for Pope Francis is obvious when we consider how he actually uses the term. Far from limiting it to sexuality or other areas where he is supposedly lax, the pope frames many of his most urgent priorities as ideals. *Amoris Laetitia* itself speaks of "concern for migrants" and "the vulnerable" as an "ideal" (*exemplar, Amoris Laetitia,* no. 47), and presumably few would accuse Pope Francis of laxity on these subjects. He also describes Christ as the "ideal" (*exemplar*) for showing "the true meaning of mercy" (no. 64) as the Church should show it. Does any reader of Pope Francis think he frames mercy in terms of an "ideal" so as to weaken our commitment to it or somehow suggest that mercy is optional? Far from being deflationary, he uses "ideal" and related terms to frame major concerns of his pontificate.

Servais Pinckaers, O.P., and the "Morality of Happiness"

Critics of Pope Francis make a mistake captured by Servais Pinckaers's phrase "moralities of obligation." Pinckaers's idea of this is complex, and since he ascribes it to figures ranging from Ockham to Kant, it admits of wide variation. But all such moralities share the view that "law" in some form is the essential token of moral life and assume that a moral consideration must take the form of an obligation if it is to carry much deliberative weight.[29] Anything short of a commandment or obligation, it is thought, will merely have advisory force and look like an optional form of heroic virtue that most will simply ignore. This is more or less what critics think Pope Francis is up to in *Amoris Laetitia,* chapter 8.

If Pinckaers is right that "moralities of obligation" are the dominant ethical style of modern thought, it is no surprise that many uncritically read *Amoris Laetitia,* chapter 8 in this way.[30] Pinckaers ascribes the

[28]The Latin text was published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 108 (2016): 4. For further citations and discussion, see Robert Fastiggi and Dawn Eden Goldstein, "Does *Amoris Laetitia* 303 Really Undermine Catholic Moral Teaching?" *La Stampa*, September 26, 2017, www.lastampa.it/2017/09/26/vaticaninsider/doesamoris-laetitia-really-undermine-catholic-moral-teaching-yom5rmEIfGPzsMDlS7o6eP/pagina.html.

[29] Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 14-24, 240-253.

[30] For related arguments, see G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 36-50; and

prevalence of such moralities partly to a late medieval model of the will that he calls the "freedom of indifference," according to which the will is indifferent to the good, and happiness is extrinsic to morality.[31] Granted this assumption, commandments and obligations will look like the only serious way to wrestle misguided agency in the right direction and therefore will have to do all the ethical heavy lifting. From this perspective, a mere "ideal" is morally trifling.

Against this model, Pinckaers proposes the "morality of happiness" approach which he retrieves from the classical, patristic, and high medieval periods, particularly figures from Aristotle to Cicero and Augustine to Aquinas.[32] The shared assumption here is that the "starting point" for the moral life is happiness itself and that the virtues conduce to it, making happiness intrinsic to morality. Pinckaers says this accords with a "freedom for excellence" model which ascribes to humanity a natural inclination to the good and happy life that morality realizes and perfects.[33]

As Pinckaers notes, a strict separation of moral theology from spirituality is on this view a mistake, since it excludes salient aspects of ethical life in favor of obligations alone.[34] But no less important are what we might call "aspirational" categories of the moral life, such as the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, *paraclesis* or apostolic exhortation, the role of narratives, spirituality, beauty, *mimesis*, and so forth.[35] The term "aspirational" should not be taken as weak or vague, but as identifying a characteristic way that ethical tasks look when a structural inclination to the good and the desire for happiness are presupposed. And while commandments or precepts remain active and crucial in this model,[36] they need not do all the moral work.[37] Moral

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Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Routledge Classics, 2011), 193-218.

[31] Pinckaers and MacIntyre, *Morality*, 32-41, 67-75.

[32] Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 191-215. From the philosophical side, see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 27-65.

[33] Pinckaers and MacIntyre, *Morality*, 65-81.

[34] Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 206-208, 254-259.

[35] Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 30-31, 111, 121, 134-163, 165-167, 257, 319.

[36] Commandments, law, and obligations powerfully induce us to virtue and happiness (see, for instance, ST I-II q. 92, a. 1). What I call "aspirational" and "obligatory" moral aspects may supervene in practice, while differing in *ratio* (see below my discussion of the commandment "love thy neighbor" and the aspirational approach to the same in the Good Samaritan parable). I would emphasize this obligatory/aspirational connection more strongly than Pinckaers appears to, but that is a separate discussion. See Craig Steven Titus, "Servais Pinckaers and the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology," *Journal of Moral Theology* 1, no. 1 (2012): 59-67.

[37] Something may be urgently necessary to an agent without this strictly requiring that they be directed to it by means of a command or obligation, and this may be true even when agents in general *are* well-directed to that necessity by means of a command or obligation as well as by aspirational means. The difference is that a particular agent

goods which are not characterized as obligations may still be entirely *necessary*, and it would be ridiculous to toss these into one large dustbin marked "optional."[38]

My claim at this point is that Pope Francis is best read as representing what Pinckaers called a "morality of happiness."[39] Critics, by constrast, have misplaced him within a "morality of obligation"—*but without the obligation*—and this may help to explain their moral panic. Of course, the direct influence of Pinckaers on Pope Francis may be slight or even non-existent, but that is of little relevance; what matters is that the pope has fastened onto neglected themes which Pinckaers urged Christian ethics to take up.[40] I particularly want to stress the key role which Pinckaers assigned to concepts like *paraclesis*, exemplars, beauty, narratives, affect, and our attraction to the good, and suggest that Pope Francis's model of growth and the marriage "ideal" should be understood in this aspirational way.[41]

Motivating Moral Growth

This account obviously needs to be filled in. A good place to begin is Pope Francis's statement, concerning those in irregular unions, that

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may experience a degree of anxiety or duress that alters our approach: for instance, a paramedic or firefighter may want to direct people to something urgent or life-saving while realizing that the they are gripped by such weakness or fear that simply commanding them might make them freeze up. In that case, a very gentle, soothing, encouraging approach is perfectly compatible with the belief that it is vitally important for them to follow instructions. This is broadly Pope Francis' approach to irregular unions and moral growth with respect to "the weak."

[38] As R.G. Collingwood said, making a related point about category errors: "In ethics, a Greek word like *dei* cannot be legitimately translated by using the word 'ought,' if that word carries with it the notion of what is sometimes called 'moral obligation.' Was there any Greek word or phrase to express that notion?... How did they (the realists) know that the Greek and Kantian theories were about the same thing? Oh, because *dei*… is the Greek for 'ought.' It was like having a nightmare about a man who had got it into his head that *trieres* was the Greek for 'steamer.'" See R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Read Books Ltd., 2014), 63, and Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17, no. 2 (1956): 33–42.

[39] See, for example, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 265-267 and below.

[40] Besides what I have already noted, the pope in common with Pinckaers views happiness as central to ethics, places an unusual degree of stress on "joy" in the Christian life, and sees moral growth as enhancing rather than limiting freedom (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 267). And whereas "moralities of obligation" notoriously ignore or downplay the beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount, the pope shares with Pinckaers the uncommon belief that they are "the beating heart of the Gospel" (*Gaudate et Exsultate,* no. 81). On the Sermon generally, see the deeply important work of William C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[41] Throughout *Amoris Laetitia* the pope describes the marriage "ideal" (*exemplar*) in aspirational terms, as "God's plan in all its grandeur" (no. 307), a "gift" rather than an imposition (no. 295), a "fountain of objective inspiration" (*fons inspirationis*, 305), and so forth.

"More is involved here than mere ignorance of the norm. A subject may know full well the norm yet have great difficulty in understanding 'its inherent values'" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 301). As noted earlier, the pope has in mind those whose culpability is mitigated owing to a breakdown of agency and lack of full voluntariness, and this makes their situation precarious. He believes that in such circumstances, "imposing straightaway a set of rules" may "only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy" (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 49). As he says elsewhere, people need to "learn for themselves the importance of certain values, principles and norms" (no. 264) so that they:

> Arrive at the point where the good that the intellect grasps can take root in us as a profound affective inclination, as a thirst for the good that outweighs other attractions and helps us to realize that what we consider objectively good is also good "for us here and now" (no. 265).

But this leaves unexplained how agents might come to appreciate the "intrinsic values" of a norm or "objective ideal" they currently find alienating. Since a "fuller response" to that ideal may involve painful disruption, this raises the question of what could conceivably *motivate* that response.

Historically, identifying sources for such motivation has not been a mysterious venture. Even when people did not view the commandments with "profound affective inclination" (or anything like it), the Church taught that the commandments were nevertheless mandatory. In the New Testament and Christian tradition, believers are admonished to keep the commandments full stop, both because they safeguard essential goods, and out of awed reverence for divine authority set against a backdrop of eschatological judgment.[42]

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[42] The Gospels are laced with eschatological admonitions, many of which are forceful, and indeed, terrifying: from "fear not him who can destroy the body; rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28) to "if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matt 5:29). See Daniel Castelo, "The Fear of the Lord as Theological Method," in *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (2008): 146-160. Of course, admonitions may easily be abused to torment uneasy consciences, and from his almost daily warnings against rigidity, legalism, and "throwing stones," Pope Francis plainly believes that such abuse is widespread. Some might reply that his treatment of law and eschatological judgment takes a tendentious or caricatured view of commandment and the moral law themselves, and that Christians should do a better job of banishing the shade of Marcion. The pope's critiques, however, are not directed at the law itself, which he calls "a gift of God… for everyone without exception" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 295), and a "fountain of objective inspiration" (no. 305). Rather, they concern those who appropriate the law to personally condemn others.

This fits well with a Thomistic model of moral growth according to which "beginners" in the Christian life should trust in grace and try to keep the commandments from the outset rather than waiting until they feel so inclined.[43] To vary St. Anselm's phrase: I obey in order to understand. By increasingly doing the right thing, likely at first with gritted teeth and fevered brow, beginners may incrementally grind down the residue of past vice and grow in virtue. In the language of *Amoris Laetitia*, this would make the "intrinsic values" of the norm connatural with their own habits, and precisely this would allow them to "appreciate" the values of a norm which earlier they kept somewhat grudgingly.[44] By worrying about whether those who do not "appreciate" the norm should observe it nonetheless, it may seem that Pope Francis turns this model on its head, or even threatens the belief that God gives sufficient grace to keep the commandments. But the truth is more nuanced.[45]

The pope says those in irregular unions should be "open" (no. 303) to making a "fuller response" to the ideal, but then, there has to be some explanation for why anyone would want to respond to it. It is not enough to say that some may find the ideal action-guiding; there has to be some explanation of that fact itself. Otherwise any response to

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[43] As Charles Taylor notes, people can "be told what not to do… before they can understand just what is wrong. We can get a sufficient grasp of the commandment: 'thou shalt not kill'; or can obey the order 'don't talk like that to Grandad!', before we can grasp articulations about the sanctity of life, or what it means to respect age." Of course, understanding can, and should, duly follow. See Taylor, "A most peculiar institution," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 141. See footnotes 36 and 45 for a qualification of this general point.

[44] See the fine treatment by Michael S. Sherwin, "Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of Infused Cardinal Virtues," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 73, no. 1 (2009): 29–52.

[45] Pope Francis does not offer a rival model of moral growth to Aquinas's; he implicitly accepts it (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 267) while positing the case of persons who at present fall short of where that model begins. As noted earlier, those whom Pope Francis calls "the weak" are assumed to have mitigated culpability amid grave matter due to persistent moral, psychological, or other factors which compromise the possibility of "deliberate consent." The closest thing to this in Aquinas' taxonomy is not the category of "beginners," but the seriously immature (ST I-II q. 89, a. 6) who are not yet "capable of discretion" (*capax discretionis*). This incapacity "hinders the use of reason" (*prohibens usum rationis*) and, at least during this phase of incapacity, "excuses someone from mortal sin" (*excusat eum a peccato mortali*) for failing to properly observe the commandments. Aquinas is talking about children, but see Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 89-93, on how subsequent Church teaching applied this to the morally immature generally. This development tracks what Pope Francis means by "the weak," "affective immaturity," and so forth (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 302). Such terms may seem deeply patronizing, yet it is precisely the pope's diagnosis of spiritual malformation which accounts for his epistemic lenience in assessing mitigated culpability.

the ideal will be inexplicable. Partly due to assumptions about weakened agency, Pope Francis refuses to exhort "the weak" in irregular unions toward moral growth through appeals to sheer divine authority, fear of divine judgment, and the like.[46] Instead, he wants the Church to communicate the norm in aspirational rather than obligatory terms, stressing not the right but the good. The consequence is that the norm will only move the agent in terms which the pope accepts if the agent finds the norm *appealing* somehow. How might that be done, especially given the likely personal and familial costs of "regularizing" one's situation?

THE *VIA PULCHRITUDINIS*

Pope Francis lay outs his model of moral growth in *Amoris Laetitia,* chapter 4, and elsewhere in his corpus. Since *Amoris Laetitia,* chapter 8, does not emerge from mid-air, it is necessary to examine these sources, or we will have a truncated picture. Summarizing his overall model, the pope writes, "Moral education has to do with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, stimuli, rewards, examples, models, symbols, reflections, encouragement," and so forth.[47] He lays particular stress on the power of "examples," "images," "beauty," "testimonies," "symbols, actions and stories" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 288) by which someone may be "moved and drawn in a personal way from within" (no. 267).[48] This is, in fact, a very traditional Baroque Catholic and Jesuit approach to moral growth.[49]

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[46] See, for instance, *Amoris Laetitia,* no. 267, and *Gaudete et Exsultate,* no. 174. Questions with this choice remain, particularly given Scriptural and liturgical precedent, as well as historical Christian usage. Perhaps what can be said about Pope Francis's choice is that if there is a severe agency breakdown of the kind he has in mind (see above, and *Amoris Laetitia,* no. 302), presumably a very forceful approach would not motivate people at all, but startle them into a kind of agency paralysis or shell shock (see no. 49 on "dead stones… hurled at others"). However, when not addressing "the weak," the pope sternly warns against complacency. "Those," he writes, "who think they commit no grievous sins against God's law, can fall into a state of dull lethargy. Since they see nothing serious to reproach themselves with, they fail to realize that their spiritual life has gradually turned lukewarm. They end up weakened and corrupted" (*Gaudete et Exsultate,* no. 164; see also no. 159). I provide a good word for "the gift of fear," appropriately understood, in my *Hope and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 131-138.

[47] The text of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* reads: "Moralis institutio in libertate colenda insidet per proposita, rationes, definitos actus, incitamenta, praemia, exempla, exemplaria, signa, cogitationes, cohortationes." *Amoris Laetitia,* no. 267 reads like a very succinct summary of what Pinckaers meant by "freedom for excellence" and "morality of happiness."

[48] Compare to *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 157, which adds "images," "sentiments," and so forth.

[49] See the perceptive study of Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 221-247. For centuries,

"Far from dealing with abstract truths or cold syllogisms" (*Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 142), he writes, which "appeal only to the mind" (no. 157), such means "help people better to appreciate and accept the message…. An attractive image makes the message seem familiar, close to home" (no. 157). This tracks his point about needing to appreciate the "inherent values" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 301) of a norm and suggests a way to foster this. He believes we must sidestep presumed "issues with authority and rules" that alienate people, and instead provide them "with attractive testimonies" and such that may "*win them over by their sheer beauty*" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 288, italics mine).

These remarks are not brisk, hand-wavy gestures but central to his whole approach. As past writers spoke of a *via negativa* or *via positiva* as basic paths to God, Pope Francis speaks of a *via pulchritudinis* ("way of beauty," *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 167). Having the power to break through religious indifference and dazed consumerism, he proposes the *via pulchritudinis* as the Church's trump card for evangelization and formation in what he calls a "culture of the ephemeral" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 38). This approach, as he sees it, does not stop at passive contemplation but should "encourage the practice of good" (*Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 142), so that it becomes action-guiding and morally salient.

Is this at all plausible? It is far from clear that being captivated by beautiful or moving imagery tends to motivate some corresponding action. Lovers of *Hamlet*, for instance, show no observable tendency to feign madness, traffic with ghosts, or develop an avenging streak. Appreciation of the play is perfectly compatible with doing nothing about the experience. At the same time, Pinckaers has rightly stressed that aesthetic judgments are far more closely related to moral values than generally thought (an insight which, he says, moralities of obligation have helped to occlude).[50] Many of our deepest priorities are fueled by evaluative judgments in which moral and aesthetic aspects

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through forms of narrative, recitation, and theater, she notes that "Jesuit education aimed not simply at presenting the student with moral imperatives but at fostering in students an active emulation of moral ideals" (132). This might involve a certain "messiness" at first, but rather than extenuating vice, the goal was to encourage virtue through a "gradual process" of "engaging the affections" and "actively luring" (163) someone toward divine goodness. As with the admonitions of Scripture and the Thomistic model of growth, the end is to adhere to what the Gospel requires, but the means tend toward "a glide and not a leap" (135). The resemblance to Pope Francis's way of addressing irregular unions is striking.

[50] He makes the point very forcefully in *Sources of Christian Ethics*, esp. 30-31, 111-112. It had famously been made before by Plato, Aristotle, and the Greeks generally. See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 53-58, 67. The view is also pervasive in medieval authors, including Aquinas. See, for instance, Adam Johnson, "A Fuller Account: The Role of 'Fittingness' in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 3 (2010): 302–18.

are entangled, and this is what the pope has in mind. "A successful image," he writes, may not only "make people savor the message," but "awaken a desire and move the will towards the Gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 157), making it an occasion of grace that invites real change. Before looking at particular ways this relates to irregular unions, the pope's underlying assumption about the power of moral imagination requires a closer look to see how far his account can take us.

Moral Imagination

It is a commonplace that attitudes and values are powerfully shaped by the kind of stories, music, novels, poetry, art, dancing, television, advertisements, films, and online images which people consume. (The seductiveness of marketers, predation of pornographers, and protectiveness of parents, equally witness to this fact.) Following Plato, Aristotle notes that music, dancing, theater, and the arts "inspire enthusiasm" and that "when men hear imitations… their feelings move in sympathy" with what is represented. Generally, these representations involve states of "character" which engage our sympathy and invite our approval, making it important to our moral formation to "move with" or sympathize with the right things.[51]

Aquinas fully approves of Aristotle's account and borrows from it the point that "it is natural to man to be pleased with representations" (*repraesentatio enim naturaliter homini delectabilis est*), and that the less advanced someone is, the more they need to "attain intellectual truths through sensible objects," such as stories, examples, and so forth (ST I q. 9).The existence of the poet, in fact, is morally important, since "his task is to lead us to something virtuous by some excellent representation."[52] Aquinas adds the crucial claim that a *repraesentatio* has the power to change our minds by getting past our habitual filters. We may "incline to one side" of a contested perspective "because of some (imaginative) representation."[53] Echoing Aristotle's point about "moving in sympathy," Aquinas says that imagination may move the passions, and ultimately, the will itself (ST I-II q. 9, a. 1-2).

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[51] Aristotle, *Politics* 8.1340a-b. For a discussion, see Roger Scruton, *Music as an Art* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 58-69.

[52] "Et ad hoc ordinatur poetica; nam poetae est inducere ad aliquod virtuosum per aliquam decentem repraesentationem" (*Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, Bk 1, Lecture 1). Dante is so taken with this point that the patients of his *Purgatorio* are rehabilitated primarily by *rehearsing* various stories and exempla of the virtues in tones of praise and aspiration. (They vary this treatment by reciting examples of the opposed vices in tones of disdain and contrition.) See Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor, 2004), xviii–xx.

[53] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, Bk 1, Lecture 1. A famous Biblical example is when the prophet Nathan, through his parable of the ewe lamb, indirectly got David to see and acknowledge the guilt of his adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12:1-9).

The point is not just the fairly obvious one that imaginative and aesthetic consumption impacts habituation, so that media, culture, and the arts have tremendous ethical force. It is rather that imagination through the passions may *get around* the existing bias of habits and attitudes so that we temporarily feel differently about a subject from how we are accustomed. Imagination may arouse feelings of joy, sadness, anger, hope, or love, creating a temporary *dispositio* which may differ in quality from the agent's existing habits, and making something "seem good to a man" which "does not seem good" to him ordinarily (ST I-II q. 9, a. 2). This *dispositio* affects our perspective in a way that may incline the will itself in a new direction. This suggests a way that moral imagination might allow one to glimpse the "intrinsic values" of a norm in the absence of connaturality.

The result is not just emotional contagion or a psychological gimmick. Our reasoning is not put to sleep, and the will may resist these motions.[54] Aquinas has, in fact, a complex account of how theoretical and practical reasoning engage imagination and affect.[55] For my purposes, what matters is his view that "the beautiful is the same as the good" (*pulchrum est idem bono*): specifically, the beautiful is the good perceived *as* pleasing (ST I-II q. 27, a. 1). According to Aquinas, the moral good (*honestas*) may be perceived, not just as moral good, but also as "spiritual beauty" (*pulchritudo spiritualis*, ST II-II q. 145, a. 2): precisely what the good poet or artist, he says, should help us to do.[56] If perceived in this way, the good/beautiful will appear to us as "an object of desire" and this may arouse a "wondrous love" (*mirabiles amores*) for goods toward which we had previously been unresponsive (ST II-II q. 145, a. 2). This is to "appreciate the inherent values" of a norm, or the good which the norm safeguards, and it may foster thoughts of commitment to what it represents, encouraging what Pope Francis calls a "fuller response" to the ideal.

We need only consider, for instance, the vast difference in power between being *told* that a merciful God forgives the contrite, and being *shown* the idea with supreme artistry and moral imagination in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Or the difference between being commanded to "love your neighbor" and seeing the same point dramatically articulated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The latter episode is particularly helpful since Christ addresses someone who "knows full well" the commandment but lacks insight into its "intrinsic values."

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[54] However, the will's relation to the passions is not one of control but persuasion. The passions themselves are reasons-responsive, and so the will exercises a "monarchic" rather than "despotic" sovereignty over them. Yet the passions may inform the will and, so to speak, "answer back" to it (ST I q. 81, a. 3; I-II q. 9, a. 2, ad. 3; see also ST I-II q. 59, a. 2, ad. 3).

[55] See Edgar de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969), 145-156.

[56] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, Bk 1, Lecture 1.

It is not just that the image or story tricks our sympathies by presenting an oppressive commandment through a haze of false loveliness, as though it were a *melle gladium* ("honeyed sword"), to borrow St. Jerome's phrase.[57] Rather, the story explores the good which the commandment mandates but whose full appeal it fails to capture,[58] throwing the admirable qualities of that good into bold relief in dramatically compelling ways, aiding self-knowledge by considering familiar obstacles and rationalizations, showing that what looked implausible can in fact be pulled off, and extending moral knowledge by probing aspects of the moral good we may not have considered, and yet may now find inspiring. If one is "open" to the ideal, to use the pope's phrase, one may gradually or suddenly come to a dramatic recognition—what Aristotle calls *anagnorisis*—of seeing a truth that was right there all the time, but somehow hidden or disguised.[59] As in T.S. Eliot's line, "The end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time."[60] At its height (in a parable of Jesus, or the life of a great saint like Francis of Assisi, for instance), such representations invite us to enter into imaginative sympathy with states of mind connatural to the great moral exemplars, temporarily lifting our moral outlook beyond its habitual level, and allowing us to consider what it would be like to identify with such values and commitments in our lives rather evade them.[61]

The Marriage Ideal as Aspirational

Pope Francis adopts this approach to foster moral insights in all areas of Christian life, using sources from the poetry of Jorge Luis Borges to films such as *Babette's Feast*. These sources are eclectic, but it is clear that, for Pope Francis, Scripture and the lives of the saints occupy pride of place (see *Gaudete et Exsultate,* nos. 3-35, *Evangelii Gaudium,* nos. 149-153*). Amoris Laetitia* itself reflects on the marriage "ideal" in terms of the pope's *via pulchritudinis*. Throughout the document, and particularly in chapters 3 and 4, he probes the full meaning and beauty of Christian marriage, meditating on the unbreakable union between Christ and the Church, his bride, and holding it up to the readers gaze as the transcendent source of indissolubility. The

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[57] St. Jerome, *Epistola CV*, Ad Augustinum, www.patrologia-lib.ru/patrolog/hieronym/epist/epist04.htm.

[58] In other words, it fails to capture considered purely as an order or imperative. The richer sense of commandment as an expression of divine wisdom is not the sense of it that Pope Francis sees as ambivalent (see *Amoris Laetitia,* no. 305, and *Gaudete et Exsultate,* nos. 142, 161).

[59] Aristotle, *Poetics* 11.1452a20-35. See also Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction, And Displacement," *Daedalus* 90, no. 3 (1961): 587-605.

[60] Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 59.

[61] For related points, see Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 140-145.

cumulative effect is to present indissolubility not as an alienating norm (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 134) but as the necessary safeguard which alone makes unconditional love possible, thereby freeing us for precisely what we were created (no. 123; see also 86). The stakes could hardly be higher, but he tries to show and not just tell these points, inviting readers to enter mentally and emotionally into this moral space through a wealth of examples, symbols, imagery, and stories. In effect, he is wooing readers into a deeper perception of the marriage "ideal" (*exemplar*) toward which they must grow—almost as with a meditation in St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, where one is guided into a scriptural "scene" so as to apply it personally to one's life.[62] Such approaches are of great value to all Christians. More to the present point, they may help "the weak" to see the "inherent values" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 301) of the marital norm, making a "fuller response" to it thinkable.

The historical resources of Catholic Christianity for fostering such recognitions are vast. The intermingled value of Christian marriage, chastity, sexual penitence, and holiness all find powerful representations in Scripture, the lives of the saints, the liturgy, visual arts, sacred music, literature, and so forth. A few examples would include Psalm 51, Ephesians 5, Matthew 19, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, the lives of saints Lucy, Agnes, and Cecilia, the marriage liturgy, Fra Angelico's *Virgin Mary Annunciate*, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*, Allegri's *Miserere*, Wagner's *Parsifal*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Milton's *Comus*, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, and so forth. There is here an embarrassment of riches which makes almost any particular example seem random, and the internet has made access to versions of these widespread. To the extent such aspirational resources are available to us but disregarded, we have buried a major talent in the napkin,[63] one which the Church has historically used as a central resource, and which Pope Francis directs us to retrieve.[64]

At the same time, this overall approach cannot be limited to self-consciously elevated or artistic sources, important as these are. There must be more everyday means of getting the marriage ideal across in aspirational form, and the pope suggests doing so through spiritual reading, education, catechesis, homilies, personal encouragement, and

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[62] I am grateful to Tim O'Malley for first suggesting this point to me.

[63] See the rewarding classic by the British art historian Kenneth Clark, *Civilization* (Harper and Row, 1970), 61-88.

[64] See, for instance, Hannah Brockhaus, "Pope Francis: Sacred Music Points to the Beauty of Paradise, *Catholic News Agency*, November 24, 2018, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-sacred-music-points-to-the-beauty-of-paradise-21149.

so forth.[65] In effect, he proposes not new means, but a new way of going about existing means, so that catechesis, homilies, and the like are not just drily prosaic, but given hortatory, mimetic, and aesthetic power.[66] What this should look like is to an important extent a question for pastors, catechists, and others more directly involved in ministry.

The Ideal in the Context of Beatitude

At the same time, it is important to see the norm with its values as a constituent within the good and happy life as a whole, centered around God and of supreme value. A generally shared insight of "moralities of happiness" is that while moral goods and virtuous acts are desirable for their own sake (*kalon, honestas*), they are further and ultimately desirable for the sake of happiness or beatitude.[67] It is therefore important to see the marriage ideal or norm in this overall context. The figure of Augustine is a helpful test case for illustrating this relationship, for several reasons. First, his own life as a saint is a lived exegesis, or canonical commentary, on what the call to holiness means. Second, he is the particular saint whom the pope relies upon to articulate his *via pulchritudinis*, so that he is already worked into the pope's approach. Lastly, he is Christianity's great paradigm for a "fuller response" that goes beyond irregular sexual unions of one kind or another.

As is well-known, many factors over years of searching brought Augustine to the brink of conversion. But even when his intellectual doubts were resolved, "the chain of the desire of the flesh" held him back (*Conf.* 8.6.13).[68] He long knew of the sixth commandment but lacked the motivation to embrace continence. Unlike "the weak" of *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter 8 in so many other ways, he was like them in feeling unable to act otherwise. Augustine was prayerfully "accompanied" by his mother St. Monica and others but, plainly, was not led to repent by being told to obey the sixth commandment in ever more

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[65] In addition to the above citations, see *Evangelii Gaudium,* nos. 132-167, which presents these everyday means as foundational concerns of his pontificate.

[66] A very promising approach is to use Scripture, narratives, and the vast repertoire of the arts themselves within education, catechesis, homilies, and so forth. Bishop Robert Barron stands out for this approach, and tellingly cites Kenneth Clark as his "model and inspiration" for it: https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/kenneth-clark-and-the-danger-of-heroic-materialism/386/.

[67] See, for example, Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 123-124; J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," in *Essays on Aristotle's "Ethics,"* ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 163-177.

[68] All translations from F.J. Sheed, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Indianapolis: Hackett: 1992). My narration substantially follows Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 61-71.

pushy tones.[69] What leads him over the threshold, finally, is precisely what Pope Francis proposes: "examples," "stories," "testimonies," and "beauty," as occasions of grace.

At a certain point he hears the story of Victorinus, an important figure in Roman society who went from being a secret believer to boldly proclaiming Christ. Augustine was "on fire to imitate him" (*Conf.* 8.5.10, 134), yet still holds back. Still more impactful was the conversion story related by Ponticianus of an imperial official who, chancing across St. Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*, "began to read it, marveled at it, was inflamed by it" (*Conf.* 8.6.15, 137). He imagines what it would be to live like St. Anthony, "imitating that beauty," and in doing so falls in love with the ideal of holiness which the father of monks embodies. "If I should choose to become a friend of God," he reflects, "I can become one now" (*Conf.* 8.6.15, 138).

In the famous garden scene, Augustine reproaches himself, wonders if he can become free, prays "let it be now, Lord, let it be now," and then perceives the "austere beauty of Continence" personified as a celestial lady, disciplined, joyous, and serene. She "stretches forth loving hands to receive and embrace" him, pointing to the multitude of saints who having followed her, inviting Augustine to join their company: "Cast yourself upon Him and be not afraid… Cast yourself without fear, He will receive and heal you" (*Conf.* 8.11.27, 145). There follows the well-known *tolle lege, tolle lege* scene where Augustine imitates Anthony by hearing Scripture as a form of personal address, and, trusting to grace, fully commits himself to God and his commandments, giving rise to his own dramatic recognition: "Late have I loved You, O beauty ever-ancient, ever-new!" (*Conf.* 10.27.38).

It is not simply that Augustine imitated various saints and exemplars. As Jennifer Herdt notes, the conversion stories with their panoply of moving images served as "sources of inspiration, as occasions for God to reveal God's supremely attractive beauty." They are not just templates for imitation, but forms of encouragement to a new life, and "the site of the creation of desire for God."[70]

While Augustine's hang-ups with the sixth commandment figure crucially in the story, it would be absurd to think that he embraced the new life just because someone managed "to make chastity look beautiful" to him. A serene and liberating aspect do show chastity to be positive in itself for Augustine. Despite expected struggles, chastity appears not just a drab negation but as something of moral and even

[69] He would doubtless grant that he *should* have obeyed the commandment all along, but he lacked the commitment to the overall good and holy life which would have led him to do so.

[70] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 67, 69.

sacred value.[71] In Pope Francis's terms, he has come to "appreciate the intrinsic values" of the norm, and this does not involve the self-deceived thought that the norm will be easy to follow. At the same time, chastity becomes action-guiding for Augustine not just because it looks beautiful, freeing, and pure in itself; rather, he sees these qualities as *internal* to the overall good and holy life toward which divine love and beauty draw him.[72] The intrinsic values of the norm are situated in their larger context of a new life devoted to God, a life seen not as renouncing happiness, but as the key to finding it.

In that context, though the cost of sacrifice may still be high, the need for it is at least intelligible.[73] In a fine synecdoche of what Pinckaers meant by "morality of happiness," the pope articulates this very point, saying that:

> Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. This entails a readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything. For happiness is a paradox. We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not of this world: "This is our logic," says Saint Bonaventure, pointing to the cross. Once we enter into this dynamic, we will not let our consciences be numbed and we will open ourselves generously to discernment. When, in God's presence, we examine our life's journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life, we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult. We need, though, to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives. God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us. He does not want to enter our lives to cripple or diminish them, but to bring them to fulfilment (*Gaudete et Exsultate,* nos. 174-175).

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[71] In sharp contrast to theological kitsch of the Christopher West variety, this important point is also illustrated with considerable genius in Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* and the inimitable faces of Fra Angelico's female saints, to take just two examples.

[72] Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 66-71.The example of Julia Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited* is also intriguing, because she is a recognizably modern person struggling with grace, who resolves with great pain to depart an "irregular union," giving up "this one thing I want so much" in the refusal to "set up a rival good to God's" (308). Because she is deeply in love, this could seem like the pointless sacrifice of her own happiness. But the success of the novel is to help the incredulous slowly see what she is gaining in a life of service to God, captured in the symbol of spiritual depth and peace with which the novel closes: "a small red flame – a beaten-copper lamp… relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle… burning anew." See Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), 310-315.

[73] Aquinas quotes Augustine (ST I-II q. 107, a. 4) to the effect that just as difficult tasks are less burdensome if done out of love for the beloved, so too the difficulty of keeping the commandments is lightened somewhat when done out of committed love for God.

As the phrases "once we accept the mysterious logic" and "once we enter this dynamic" suggest, we will only really see these points through internalizing and appreciating the "allure and savor" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 307) of the Gospel with its "demanding ideal" (no. 38), connecting the idea of sacrifice *with* the pursuit of happiness. While we may arrive at such knowledge by more abstract and formal means, this is easier for many to grasp initially in the form of "stories, examples, beauty," and so forth.[74]

CONCLUSION

Pope Francis worries that those in "irregular situations" may "know full well the norm, but not appreciate its inherent values" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 301) and to that extent be alienated from the Church. He particularly has in mind "the weak" whose culpability is mitigated owing to a breakdown of agency and lack of full voluntariness.[75] Their situation is thus precarious: their links to the Church may be fragile, their moral and spiritual formation badly mauled. Moral pushiness, the pope says, may just come across to them as "throwing stones at [their] lives" (no. 305), possibly driving them from the Church, or plunging them into despair. He therefore insists upon a path of "mercy and reinstatement" (no. 296) by which they will be welcomed, accompanied, and integrated into the life of the Church. But the fact that he frames irregular unions as "darkness," "troubled love," "the midst of a storm" and so forth, proclaims the need for a deeper remedy, and this is borne out by his frequent appeal to the need for a "gradualism" which leads to eventual "conformity with the Gospel" (no. 294). In light of the sixth commandment and Christ's teaching on indissolubility, he urges couples to seriously be "open" to new stages of growth (no. 303), and this ultimately points to a "regularized" situation. I have suggested that he regards this as an important necessity rather than just optional heroics.

But this raises the question of what might encourage someone to accept a hard saying they find vague, offensive, or even threatening. To get the message across, the pope says the Church should avoid cold didacticism, sheer commands, or implied threats, instead making a positive appeal through hortatory, narrative, mimetic, and aesthetic means (which Pinckaers also stressed the need for ethics to recover).

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[74] Aquinas himself makes a related point (about the "simple" or *rudes*) in ST I q. 9.

[75] This qualification needs to be stressed, given the repeated warnings in the pope's corpus about complacency and lack of vigilance. Concerning those whose agency is not compromised, and who simply wish to disregard Church teaching on marriage and indissolubility, he writes: "Such a person needs to listen once more to the Gospel message and its call to conversion" (*Amoris Laetitia,* no. 297). Yet he believes that a great many Catholics do suffer malformation severe enough to have their agency compromised, though this is an estimate of fact, not a statement of principle.

He lays particular emphasis on the power of examples, stories, symbols, images, and beauty to help "the weak… be moved and drawn in a personal way from within" (no. 267). As Christ did in the parables, the pope tries to reach the will through the back door, as it were; treading lightly around the suspicious intellect and appealing initially through imagination and the passions so that we are more apt to consider truths we may have a motive to deny.

Amoris Laetitia itself practices this approach, seeking to captivate or woo readers into the ideal through meditations on sexuality and indissolubility. More generally, Catholic Christianity possesses vast resources, from Scripture and the lives of the saints to the fine arts, for illustrating the "intrinsic values" of marriage, sexual penitence, chastity, and holiness. Such resources do not simply replace the usual means for encouraging moral growth, such as catechesis, homilies, pastoral counsel, and so forth. Part of Pope Francis's point is that *these practices* themselves need to take on a more aspirational approach, and so at the beginning of his pontificate he called upon pastors and the Church to develop "a new language of parables" (*Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 167)

While *Amoris Laetitia,* chapter 8, raises many questions whose answer is not always obvious, its overall shift in approach, from obligation to aspiration, from commandment to ideal, is not done to deflate the norm, but to provide what the pope thinks a better way to help "the weak" get to where the norm would have taken them in any case. Pope Francis does this in ways that barely register in what Pinckaers calls moralities of obligation but which are central to a morality of happiness and what I have called its "aspirational" sources. That approach seeks to evoke the good which the norm requires but whose full appeal it fails to capture, so that the law may be appreciated as a "fountain of inspiration" (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 305) calling forth a "fuller response" to the path of holiness which is also, and crucially, the path of happiness. M