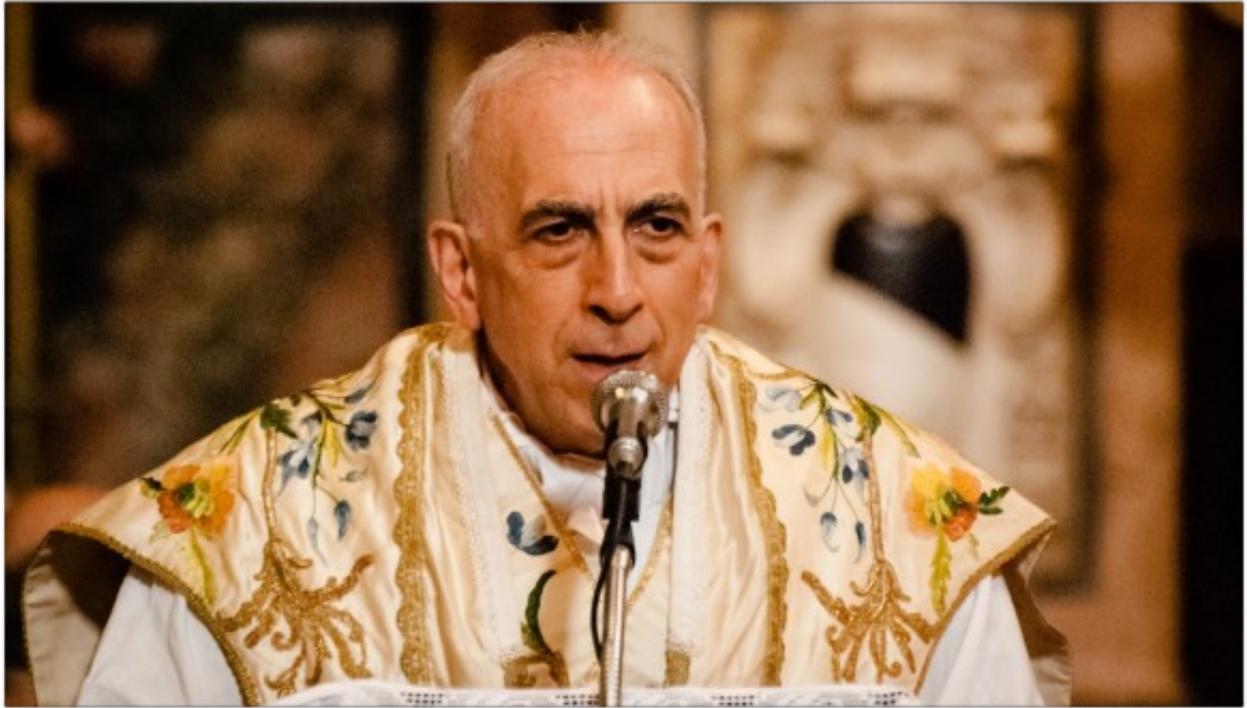


## **Monsignor Nicola Bux: "Unity is achieved in truth"**

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via

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The issue of sexual abuse in the Church has somewhat displaced the debate on *Amoris laetitia* and on all that followed about the adherence of the magisterium to the right doctrine. But, of course, the issues are connected.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to resume the thread of the discussion and we do it with a specialist, Monsignor Nicola Bux, theological consultant of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints,

after having been in that of the doctrine of the faith, the divine worship and the office of celebrations pontifical.

Author, among numerous other books, of the wise *Peter loves and unites. The pope's responsibility for the universal Church* (Edizioni Studio Domenicano), Monsignor Bux has just returned to Italy from Argentina, where, in Buenos Aires, he was invited to the XXI Encuentro de formacion catolica, on *La liturgia, fuente y expresion de the fe* .

**Q. Don Nicola, heresy and schism, words that seemed to have disappeared from the catholic vocabulary, are returning to the center of numerous analyzes and observations on the current situation of the Church. Do we want to do a little bit about the *status quaestionis* after *Amoris laetitia* and the following debate?**

A. It seems to me that after the publication, on September 24, 2017, of the *Correctio filialis de haeresibus propagatis* ( *Correction filial due to the propagation of heresies* ) , and the Declaration promulgated in Rome, by the conference of 7 April, where the cardinals Brandmüller intervened and Burke, the idea that the pope himself, through his magisterium, has run into heretical statements is now at the center of a vast debate, which is becoming more and more passionate every day.

Originally there is the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* , in which, according to the forty signatories of the *Correctio*(in the meantime, having gone up to two hundred and fifty, not counting the thousands of adhesions connected to the initiative), seven heretical propositions concerning marriage, moral life and the reception of the sacraments would be traceable.

It is hardly worth noting that the problems, at least as far as *Amoris laetitia* is concerned, have become considerably aggravated and complicated. As is well known, *the letter of Pope Bergoglio to the Argentine bishops of the Buenos Aires region and the criteria indicated by the latter for access to communion by the divorced and newly married*, have been published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* , all accompanied by a rewritten *ex audientia SS.mi* of the cardinal secretary of state, who, on the approval of the pope, considers these two previous documents as an expression of the "authentic magisterium" of the current pope and, therefore, as a magisterium to whom he lends devout respect for intellect and will.

At the same time, Cardinal Brandmüller, one of the four cardinals of the *dubia* (the others are Burke, Meisner and Caffarra, the last two who had died in the meantime) in an article re-launched the idea, which I had also expressed, of a profession of faith from the Pope.

**Q. In this regard, Don Nicola, also in the light of the statements of Cardinal Müller on the need for a public *disputatio* on *Amoris laetitia* and the words of the secretary of state of the Holy See, Cardinal Parolin, according to which "within the Church it is important to dialogue", is it realistic to imagine that an answer can come from the pope and that he can come to his profession of faith to dispel doubts and shadows?**

A. The authentic unity of the Church is made in truth. The Church was placed by the Founder - He who said: "I am the truth" - as "the pillar and foundation of truth" ( *1 Tim3*, 15). Without the truth there is no unity, and charity would be a fiction.

The idea that the Church is a federation of ecclesial communities, a bit like the Protestant communities, would make it difficult for the Pope to make a profession of Catholic faith. In fact, after the last two synods, a faith and a morality have come forth that we could define, at least, at two speeds: proof that both in some places it is not possible to give communion to divorced and remarried, [yet in] others [it is possible]. *Not a few bishops and parish priests, therefore, are in great embarrassment, because of an unstable and confused pastoral situation.* This being so, it seems realistic to think of a "table" within the Church, to understand what is Catholic and what is not: a doctrinal confrontation, on which only pastoral depends. Doctrinal development

always benefits from the debate. The example comes from Joseph Ratzinger, who was first prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then from the pope he received various dissenting theologians, confronting them.

**Q. And if the comparison will not be there?**

*A. I fear that the apostasy will deepen and the schism of fact will widen.* Precisely the rational and charitable confrontation within the Church would make the profession of faith of the pope necessary, with abjuration, evidently, of any errors and erroneous opinions declared up to that moment, to reaffirm the Catholic faith as a term of comparison, rule of faith of every Catholic.

Among other things, this situation has become even more urgent as a result of the latest changes introduced by the pope, such as that concerning the definition of "anti-evangelism" of the death penalty: definition, in a debatable way, changing an article of the Catechism of the Catholic Church according to a decidedly historicist vision, which poses a series of problems. Pure of conscience. Especially since the previous catechisms, I think of the Roman or Tridentine or the so-called Major of St. Pius X, teaching the legitimacy of capital punishment and its full conformity to Divine Revelation. The Tridentine catechism even defined the norm that allowed the state authority to impose the just

punishment, not excluding the capital, as "divine law" to an offender, guilty of serious crimes.

The question is very delicate. But sooner or later you will have to ask yourself, and not just for capital punishment, they taught the legitimacy of capital punishment and its full conformity to Divine Revelation. The Tridentine catechism even defined the norm that allowed the state authority to impose the just punishment, not excluding the capital, as "divine law" to an offender, guilty of serious crimes. And the problems, I said, are notable, because either we admit that the Church has taught the legitimacy of something anti-evangelical practically for two thousand years or we must admit that it was Pope Bergoglio to err - considering anti-evangelical what, at contrary, it is at least abstractly compliant with Revelation.

**Q. Many ask: if the pope feels free to change an article of the Catechism according to the changing needs of the people of God or the different sensibilities of the man of today, can he do it in other, even more important points?**

**A.** It is a truly disturbing question and, equally, a legitimate concern is that of keeping the *depositum fidei* unharmed from the contingent sensibilities of today's society or of tomorrow.

Returning to the initial question, a profession similar to the one that Paul VI did in 1968 would be necessary, in order to reaffirm what is Catholic, in the face of the errors and heresies that had spread immediately after the Second Vatican Council, especially due to of the publication of the Dutch Catechism.

In our case, however, it would be a matter of reaffirming certain truths about the sacraments, morals and social doctrine of the Church, and likewise rejecting the doubts or errors that may have spread, even involuntarily, on these issues.

**Q. Someone observed that the *Correctio* initiative , however clamorous, is not new, because already in the days of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and even before Paul VI, there were posters and petitions of theologians, clerics and laity , both individual and organized. It was the position of scholars who believed that the Second Vatican Council, through the anti-dogmatism or the uneven development of the dogma, had introduced a break with the previous Church, accused those pontiffs of centralism and non-openness to instances of modernity. Do you find that this is really an analogy with what is happening today?**

A. No, because that was a non-Catholic attack on Catholic teaching. In a special way, other theologians and laymen, who harbored

suspicious about the Council, expressed their opposition to any healthy innovation. In both cases it was a protest and not a correction. Now the first, placed in the key posts of the ecclesiastical establishment, are silent or lead an office defense, without ever entering into the merits of the heresies that are challenged, in particular, to the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* . It should be remembered that St. Pius X, in the encyclical *Pascendi* , warns that never clearly confess his heresy, it is the typical behavior of the modernists, because in this way they can hide themselves inside the Church.

**Q. But why do you think a profession of faith would be desirable? And if the Pope, as everything leaves us thinking, will not do it, what could happen?**

A. In the Decree of Gratian (pars I, paragraph 40, chapter VI) there is this canon: "No mortal will presume to speak of the pope's guilt, since, appointed to judge everyone, he must not be judged by anyone, unless you deviate from faith". The distancing and deviation from the faith is called *heresy* , a word that comes from the Greek "*airesis*" and means the choice and absolutization of a truth, minimizing or denying the others that are in the category of Catholic truths (remember in this regard that von Balthasar he wrote an essay entitled "*Truth is Symphonic*").

Obviously the deviation must be manifest and public. And in the case of manifest heresy, according to St. Robert Bellarmine, the Pope can be judged. I remember that Bellarmine was also prefect of the Holy Office, a figure whose function is to monitor the respect of the orthodoxy of faith by all, including the pope, who is also the first to have to perform this function of control. The pope is called by the Lord to spread the Catholic faith, but to do so he must prove capable of defending it.

The Orthodox - the Christians of the East separated from Rome - are so called precisely because they have emphasized the primacy of true faith as a condition of the true Church. Otherwise the Church ceases to be a pillar and foundation of truth. Consequently, those who do not defend the true faith fall from any ecclesiastical, patriarchal office,

**Q. Excuse me don Nicola, are you saying that in case of heresy, just as a heretical Christian ceases to be a member of the Church, does the pope cease to be pope and head of the ecclesial body, and he loses all jurisdiction?**

A. Yes, heresy affects the faith and the status of a member of the Church, which are the root and foundation of jurisdiction. This is the thought of the fathers of the Church, especially Cyprian, who dealt with Novatian, anti-pope during the pontificate of Pope Cornelius (cf. *Lib 4*,

ep 2 ). Every faithful, including the Pope, with heresy separates himself from the unity of the Church.

It is well known that the Pope is at the same time a member and part of the Church, because the hierarchy is within and not above the Church, as stated in *Lumen gentium* (No. 18). Faced with this eventuality, so serious for the faith, some cardinals, or even the Roman clergy or the Roman synod, could admonish the pope with fraternal correction, could "resist him in the face" as Paul did with Peter at Antioch; they could refute it and, if necessary, call it in order to force it to repent.

Should the pope be pertinent in error, we must distance ourselves from him, in accordance with what the Apostle says (see *Titus 3: 10-11* ). ***Furthermore, his heresy and his absence should be declared publicly, because he does not cause harm to others and everyone can protect themselves.*** At a time when heresy was well-known and made public, the Pope would lose *ipso facto* the pontificate. For theology and canon law, pertinent is the heretic who questions a truth of faith consciously and voluntarily, that is, with the full awareness that this truth is a dogma and with the full adherence of the will. I remember that one can have obstinacy or pertinacity in a sin of heresy committed even by weakness.

Moreover, if the pope did not want to maintain union and communion with the whole body of the Church, as when he tried to excommunicate the whole Church or to subvert the liturgical rites based on the apostolic tradition, he could be schismatic. If the pope does not behave like a pope and head of the Church, neither is the Church in him nor is he in the Church.

Disobeying the law of Christ, or ordering what is contrary to natural or divine law, what has been universally ordained by the councils or the Apostolic See, the pope separates himself from Christ, who is the chief head of the Church and in relation to which the ecclesial unity is constituted.

Pope Innocent III says that the pope must be obeyed in everything, until he turns against the universal order of the Church: in this case, unless there is a reasonable cause, it should not be followed, because, behaving thus, it is no longer subject to Christ and therefore separates from the body of the Church.

**Q. We admit, however, that we can get to such a point. What are the consequences for faith and for the Church?**

A. Whoever wants to be pope can not deny the Catholic truth; on the contrary, he must adhere to it in full if he wants to claim the magisterial authority. That is what Ratzinger wrote years ago, stressing

that the Pope can not "impose his own opinion", but must "recall precisely the fact that the Church can not do what she wants and that even he, indeed, does not have the faculty to do it ", because" in matters of faith and sacraments, as concerning the fundamental problems of morality", the Church can only "consent to the will of Christ ".

In the case of opposition between the text of a papal document and other testimonies of Tradition, it is permissible for a well-educated believer, who has carefully studied the matter, to suspend or deny its consent to the document itself. In the case of *Amoris laetitia* there are those who have shown that the document is cumbersome and contradictory in many points, and the quotations of St. Thomas are affixed to propositions that support things contrary to the thought of Angelico.

One understands, therefore, what Joseph Ratzinger wrote: " *On the contrary, it will be possible and necessary to criticize papal pronouncements, insofar as they lack coverage in Scripture and in the Creed, in the faith of the universal Church. Where there is neither the unanimity of the universal Church nor a clear testimony of the sources, a binding and binding decision is not possible; if it took place formally, the indispensable conditions would be lacking and the problem of legitimacy should therefore be raised* "(Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith, Reason, Truth and Love*, Lindau, 2009, p. 400).

In short, if the pope does not guard the doctrine, he can not demand discipline; if he then loses the Catholic faith, he would decay from the Apostolic See. "The power of Peter's keys does not extend to the point that the Supreme Pontiff can declare 'not sin' what is sin, or 'sin' that which is not sin. In fact, this would be to call evil good, and good for evil, something is, always has been and will be very far from the one who is the Head of the Church, the pillar and foundation of truth" (see Roberto Bellarmino, *De Romano Pontifice* , lib IV chapter VI, page 214, and also *Lumen gentium* , n.25). Consequently, the pope who, as a private person, identified himself with heresy, would no longer be the Supreme Pontiff or Vicar of Christ on earth.

**Q. You yourself, however, said that there are practical difficulties that are not unimportant ...**

A. For a pope, in fact, there is a kind of immunity from jurisdiction. So, although in theory it is said that the cardinals can ascertain her heresy, certainly in practice it would become difficult, because of the fundamental principle *Prima sedes a nemine iudicatur*, taken from the can. 1404 cic "No church, as a daughter, can judge the mother" that is, the Apostolic See. Even less might many sheep from the flock stand up and judge their pastor. If we look at how this principle has been applied in the history of the Church, and of the papacy in

particular, we note that even in the case of accusation of heresy, or even a true apostasy of the pope, everything ended with nothing.

I'll give a couple of examples.

The first that comes to mind is that of Pope Marcellin. According to ancient sources, these are especially the *Liber Pontificalis*. In the face of the great Diocletian persecution of the fourth century AD, he would have yielded and offered incense to the idols, that is, he would have apostatized, although this would not be entirely historically certain (for example, some authors and historians of the ancient Church, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Theodoretus of Cyrus, they deny this circumstance, affirming that this pope shone, however, during the Great persecution).

Following this, a synod would be called to Sinuessa, a town between Rome and Capua, near the current Mondragone, in 303 with the aim of ascertaining and declaring the apostasy of the pope. Now, it is true that the acts of this synod are considered apocryphal and dating back to the sixth century, but it is undoubted that from them emerges the clear refusal of the synodal to ascertain and condemn Marcellinus for his act of apostasy.

Rather, the synodals ask the pope himself to judge his gesture and self-commend the right punishment, recognizing the pope as a sort of

immunity from jurisdiction, precisely because of the principle I have said above, namely that the First See can not be judged by nobody. For the record, Marcellino, however, apparently repented of the gesture, testified his faith and died a martyr. For this reason he is revered as pope and martyr on April 26th.

The second case is that of Pope Leo III and his famous oath, represented by Raphael in a famous fresco of the Room of the Borgo fire in the famous rooms of the Apostolic Palace. Pope Leo III appears there in pontifical attire, who lends his oath to the Gospels, to Charlemagne and to a crowd of dignitaries, laity and clergymen, and to the people of God, on 23 December of the year 800, in the Basilica of Saint Peter. The pope was accused - although the ancient sources are not very precise in this regard - of perjury and adultery (no one knows who) by the nephews of his predecessor, Pope Adrian I.

Charlemagne came to Rome to put order among those who supported the pope and the opponents, the pope, freely, "without being judged and corrected by anyone, spontaneously and voluntarily", he purified himself before God of all faults, declaring and professing his innocence against the accusations. The Pope concluded: "I declare this spontaneously to eliminate any suspicion: not that this is prescribed by canons, not even so that I want to create a precedent and impose such a

use in the holy Church to my successors and my brothers in the episcopate".

In Raphael's painting appears a writing: *Dei non hominum est episcopos iudicare* , that is: *It is up to God, not to men to judge the bishops* . This is an allusion to the confirmation, given in 1516 by the Lateran Council V, of the bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII, which sanctioned the principle according to which the responsibility of the pontiff can be judged only by God.

**Q. In short, many practical difficulties ...**

A. A further difficulty is, then, in the identification of the exact contours of a heresy. Look, unlike the past, theology is no longer reliable, but has become a kind of arena in which everything converges - and its opposite. So, affirmed a truth, there will always be someone willing to defend the exact opposite. *As you can see, there are many practical, theological and juridical difficulties to the question of the judgment of the heretical pope.*

**Perhaps - and I say this from a practical point of view - it would be easier to examine and study more accurately the question concerning the juridical validity of Pope Benedict XVI's renunciation, ie whether it is full or partial ("halfway"), as someone has said) or doubtful, since the idea of a sort of collegiate papacy**

**seems to me decidedly against the Gospel dictate. Jesus did not say, in fact, *tibi dabo claves ...* "turning to Pietro and Andrea, but he only told Peter! That's why I say that perhaps a thorough study of renunciation could be more useful and profitable, as well as helping to overcome problems that today seem insurmountable to us.**

It was written: "There will also come a time of the most difficult trials for the Church. Cardinals will oppose cardinals and bishops to bishops. Satan will put himself in their midst. Also in Rome there will be great changes "(Saverio Gaeta, *Fatima, the whole truth*, 2017, p. 129). And this great change, with Pope Francis, we can see in a palpable way, given the clear intention to mark a line of discontinuity or break with the previous pontificates.

*This discontinuity - a revolution - generates heresies, schisms and controversies of various kinds. However, all of them can be traced back to sin. And this was already noted by Origen: "Where there is sin, there we find multiplicity, there schisms, there heresies, there the controversies. Where virtue reigns, there is unity, there communion, thanks to which all believers were one heart and one soul "( In Ezechielem homilia , 9.1, in Sources Chrétiennes 352, p. ).*

**Q. Even the liturgy was affected by all this, and she wrote it several times in her books ...**

A. Exactly. It is celebrated as if God were not present, a worldly animation.

But here we are comforted by the words that St. Athanasius of Alexandria addressed to the Christians who suffered under the Arians: "You remain outside the places of worship, but faith lives in you. Let's see: what is more important, the place or the faith? True faith, of course. Who has lost and who has won in this fight, who keeps the seat or who observes the faith?"

True, buildings are good, when apostolic faith is preached; they are holy, if everything takes place in a holy way ... You are the ones who are happy, you who remain within the Church for your faith, who hold it firmly in the foundations as they have come down to you from the apostolic tradition, and if any execrable jealousy tries to shake her on various occasions, she is not successful. They are those who have broken away from it in the current crisis.

No one will ever prevail against your faith, dear brothers, and we believe that God will make us return our churches one day. The more violent people try to occupy the places of worship, the more they separate from the Church.

They claim that they represent the Church, but in reality they are those who are in turn expelled from it and go astray "(*Coll. Selecta SS. Eccl. Patrum. Caillu and Guillou* , vol. 32, pp. 411-412).

Let us pray, however, that Divine Providence intervene in favor of the Church, so that it does not happen that we can find ourselves before the eventuality that I have described; as was hoped, less than a month after Benedict XVI's resignation, also the distinguished Jesuit canonist, Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda, at the end of an important article ( *La Civiltà Cattolica* , 2 March 2013).

**Q. In conclusion, can we say that heresy consists not only in spreading false doctrines, but also in silencing the truth about doctrine and morality?**

A. Yes of course. If someone would bother the term doctrine, use the term teaching, because both are the translation of the Greek *didacè* . Where the doctrine is lacking, there are moral problems, as we are seeing!

When the pope and the bishops do this, they use their office to destroy it. Saint Augustine says: they feed themselves, they seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ, they proclaim his word but to spread their ideas.

The name of Jesus Christ, said Cardinal Biffi, has become an excuse to talk about something else: migration, ecology and so on. Thus we are no longer unanimous in speaking (1 Cor 1: 10) and the Church is divided.

By the way, further modifications to the texts of the Roman missal in Italian are avoided, especially to the *Our Father* , because they would produce further divisions among the faithful.

**Curated by Aldo Maria Valli**

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