



## Spørgeskemaet og den kommende familiesynode

Som bekendt var fristen for at besvare det af Vatikanet udsendte spørgeskema uanstændig kort her i landet. Det kunne derfor heller ikke komme som nogen overraskelse, at kun ganske få fandt tid eller orkede at besvare det - i alt ti personer og et kommunitet. De fleste besvarede tilmed kun 3-4 af de stillede spørgsmål.

Bispekontoret har nu sammenskrevet besvarelsene og sammen med biskoppens egne kommentarer er de sendt videre - formentlig til Stockholm, hvor biskop Arborelius, der er formand for den nordiske bispekonference, sammenskriver svarene fra hvert af de nordiske lande, inden det hele sendes til Synodeseekretariatet i Rom.

Biskoppen har ikke ønsket at offentliggøre de indkomne svar, endsige at orientere os om sine egne synspunkter. Debat blandt de troende er vist ikke et begreb, han kender til eller ønsker at fremme.

Nedenfor bringer vi derfor en artikel af **Sandro Magister** om de tyske biskoppers svar. English translation by **Matthew Sherry**, Ballwin, Missouri, U.S.A.

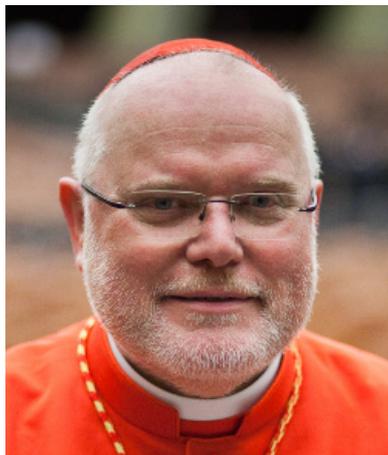
### **Synod. The German Bishops Are Putting the Cart Before the Horse**

*The responses of the episcopal conference to the presynodal questionnaire describe what is already being done in Germany: communion for the divorced and remarried, tolerance for second marriages, approval of homosexual unions*

ROME, May 6, 2015

To judge by the latest product of the German episcopal conference, the synod on the family scheduled for October 4-25 could turn out to be a wasted effort.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of Munich and president of the episcopal conference, had made this clear last February 25 with a remark that made its way around the world:



“We are not a subsidiary of Rome. Every episcopal conference is responsible for pastoral care in its own cultural context, and must preach the Gospel in its own original way. We cannot wait for a synod to tell us how we must shape the pastoral care of marriage and the family.”

But now it is Germany’s episcopal conference itself that has set this same concept down in black and white, in its official response - after consulting the “people of God” - to the preparatory questionnaire sent out from Rome in view of the next session of the synod.

When it comes to the question on “how to promote the determination of pastoral guidelines on the level of particular Churches,” the German bishops in fact write:

*"Referring to social and cultural differences, some of the responses favour regional agreements on pastoral guidelines at local church level. The basis could also be formed by diocesan discussion processes on the topic of marriage and the family the outcome of which would be discussed with other local churches. This would be conditional on all concerned being willing to engage in a dialogue."*

The formulation is a bit contorted, but the facts speak for themselves. In almost all the dioceses of Germany, sacramental absolution and Eucharistic communion are given to the divorced and remarried, as already made clear by a previous document from the German episcopal conference, approved on June 24, 2014 and proudly exhibited in Rome at last October’s session of the synod on the family:

[> Theologically responsible, pastorally appropriate ways of assisting remarried divorcees](#)



This document can be read in its entirety on the website of Germany's episcopal conference, not only in the original German but in Italian, English, French, and Spanish, proof of the intentions of this episcopate to teach a lesson to the whole world.

And the same multilingual treatment has been adopted for the responses to the presynodal questionnaire, made public in recent days:

[> The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. Response by the German Bishops' Conference](#)

Below is reproduced the section of the document with the responses to the most controversial points of the questionnaire: the divorced and remarried, mixed marriages, homosexuals.

Not only do the German bishops approve of giving absolution and communion to the divorced and remarried, but they also express the hope that civil second marriages be blessed in church, that Eucharistic communion also be given to non-Catholic spouses, that the goodness of homosexual relationships and same-sex unions be recognized.

They write that they do not intend in the least to bring into question the doctrine of the universal Church relative to marriage and family. But they do not explain how to reconcile this doctrine "cum Petro et sub Petro" with the pastoral practices that they have implemented in Germany.

In the judgment of Cardinal Gerhard Müller, in fact, such a reconciliation is impossible.

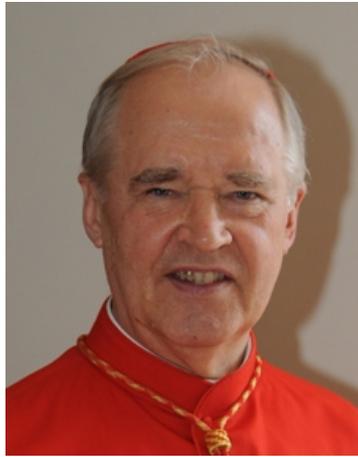




On the contrary, “the idea that the episcopal conferences are a magisterium apart from the Magisterium, without the pope and without communion with all the bishops, is a profoundly anti-Catholic idea that does not respect the catholicity of the Church”:

[> Bishops conferences are not the Magisterium, Vatican doctrine chief reminds Cardinal Marx](#)

Müller is German, but in Germany they see him more as “Roman” than as one of them, in that he is prefect of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith. Another cardinal seen as more Roman than German is Paul Cordes, president emeritus of Cor Unum.



He too has criticized his countrymen bishops, who presume to teach a lesson to the world even though they are at the head of a Church in disrepair, where many priests neither pray nor go to confession, two thirds of the faithful do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and only 16 percent of Catholics have faith in a God who is a person and not a vague entity:

## **FROM THE RESPONSES OF THE GERMAN BISHOPS TO THE PRESYNODAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **DIVORCED AND REMARRIED**

[Question no. 37: “How can the procedures for the recognition of cases of nullity be made more accessible and streamlined, and if possible free of charge?”]

[Question no. 38: “Sacramental pastoral practice with regard to the divorced and remarried is in need of further development, including the evaluation of the Orthodox practice and taking into account ‘the distinction between the objective state of sin and attenuating circumstances.’ What are the perspectives in which to act? What are the possible steps? What are the suggestions for obviating undue or unnecessary forms of impediments?”]



The question on pastoral care for civilly divorced and remarried Catholics was answered by everyone, and in most cases also in a very detailed manner. It is a concern for many faithful, far beyond the group of those whose marriages have failed. There can be no doubt that this remains a pivotal issue for the credibility of the Church. There is a very high expectation among the faithful that the Synod of Bishops will open up new paths for pastoral care in this respect. It comes to note here that the statements of the People of God by no means follow an undifferentiated call for mercy, but contain arguments which are theologically nuanced.

The breakdown of a marriage is a painful process accompanied by feelings of guilt. The faithful expect the Church to guide people whose marriages have broken down with assistance and understanding and not to push them out to the margins of the community. Rather, they should be encouraged to play an active role in the parish (cf. "Familiaris consortio", No. 84). From this perspective, there is also an ongoing discussion on the question of possibly admitting Catholics who are civilly divorced and who have remarried to confession and sacramental communion. The sacraments are above all understood as a means of salvation through which Christ comes to the aid of the weak and those who have sinned. Exclusion from the sacraments, above all when it is permanent as with remarried divorcees, contradicts the conviction of faith held by the vast majority of Catholics that God forgives all sin, opens up the chance for conversion and makes it possible to have a new beginning in life.

With regard to receiving the sacraments, the majority of the faithful do not expect pastoral exceptions carried out in secret, but wish to see structural solutions. This is not a matter of undistinguishing admission to the sacraments, but of admission that is bound by criteria. Only a small number among the faithful reject admission of remarried divorcees to communion as a matter of principle because they fear that this might weaken the Church's witness to the indissolubility of marriage. The vast majority of the faithful do not share this fear.

The Resolution of the Permanent Council of the German Bishops' Conference of 24 June 2014 on "Theological - responsible, pastorally-appropriate ways of assisting remarried divorcees" has therefore had a highly - positive echo among the People of God. We proposed in our resolution to admit civilly - divorced and remarried faithful to the sacrament of penance and to communion if life together in the canonically-valid marriage has definitively failed, the obligations from this marriage have been clarified, remorse was expressed as to the guilt for the breakdown of the marital union, and the honest will existed to live the second civil marriage out of faith and to bring up the children in the faith.



It is furthermore proposed to rethink the failure of a marriage in terms of ecclesial law, teaching and past oral care, and to develop liturgical forms in which the pain of separation and complaining of hurt or humiliation, as well as the hope of a new beginning, are articulated before God. There is a need to clarify the relationship between faith and the Sacrament of Marriage in terms of the theology of the sacrament

Several dioceses and associations consider it to make sense to give greater consideration to the practice of the Orthodox Churches. This would not entail simply adopting their practices, but also opening up analogous paths in the Catholic Church. There is however still some theological clarification to be carried out here. In this context, it is also proposed to consider blessing a second (civil) marriage, which should however be quite distinct from a church marriage in liturgical terms.

Streamlining the nullity procedure, in particular when it comes to accelerating the procedures and reducing the costs (particularly for the expert reports), is certainly welcome. Some experts propose dispensing with generally submitting cases to a second instance since it generally confirms the first-instance judgment and having the first-instance judgment handed down by of a body of judges instead of by a judge sitting alone. There is also a need to consider whether the legal presumptions in marital law should not be re-examined.

Streamlining the procedures however does not solve the problem as a whole. The number of those who engage in such proceedings is very small in comparison to the large number of those concerned. This number is unlikely to increase much even were the procedure to be simplified. What is more, simplifying the nullity procedure is not to be misunderstood as a renunciation of the indissolubility of marriage. It is hence important not to overemphasise such measures.

### **MIXED MARRIAGES**

[Question no. 39: “Do the current norms permit giving valid responses to the challenges posed by mixed and interconfessional marriages? Do other elements need to be taken into account?”]

In more than 40 % of church marriages where one partner is Catholic, the other partner belongs to one of the other Christian denominations, as a rule to the Protestant denomination. What is more, the number of marriages between a Catholic partner and one with no denominational affiliation is increasing. Hence, considerable attention is attached to the question on pastoral guidance.



The faithful expect the conjugal and family life of partners who belong to different denominations to be supported by the Church (within the meaning of can. 1128 CIC ) and that the non-Catholic partner is invited to take part in parish life. The way in which a family shapes its faith life is however to be left to the two partners.

Considerable scope is attached in the responses to the question of the possible admission of the non-Catholic partner, particularly of a Protestant partner, to sacramental communion. The exclusion from communion of the partner who belongs to a different denomination is regarded as an obstacle particularly for the Christian upbringing of the children and of the faith life of the family. In theological terms, it is pointed out that the Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris consortio" (1981) clearly expresses an appreciation of inter-denominational marriages (No. 78), whilst at the same time stressing the significance of the Eucharist as "the very source of Christian marriage" (No. 57). In the interest of strengthening sacramental marriage, and when it comes to the Christian upbringing of the children, the question thus needs to be asked as to how the non-Catholic spouse is to take part in the life of the parish and under what circumstances he/she can in fact be admitted to communion. Do inter-denominational marriages which are bound by the dual sacramental tie of baptism and marriage not constitute a grave spiritual need permitting the admission of the non-Catholic partner in an individual case (cf. can. 844 § 4 CIC; Encyclical Letter "Ut unum sint" of 1995, No. 46; Encyclical Letter "Ecclesia de eucharistia" of 2003, No. 45 and 46)?

## **HOMOSEXUALS**

[Question no. 40: "How does the Christian community turn its pastoral attention to families that have members with homosexual tendencies? While avoiding all unjust discrimination, how can persons in such situations be cared for in the light of the Gospel? How can the demands of God's will for their situation be proposed to them?"]

Homosexual living arrangements have a legal status in Germany that is distinct from that of marriage ("civil partnerships"). Their recognition is based on a broad consensus within society which, as was shown amongst other things by the responses to the first questionnaire in preparation of the Extraordinary Synod, is also shared by a majority of Catholics.



As a matter of principle, the faithful expect everyone to be accepted both in the Church and in society, regardless of their sexual orientation, and that an atmosphere of appreciation towards all be promoted in the parishes. Almost all responses concur with the view that is put forward in the human sciences (medicine, psychology), namely that sexual orientation is a disposition that is not selected by the individual and that it is unchangeable. It is therefore confusing for the questionnaire to speak of "homosexual tendencies", and this is considered to be discriminatory.

Only a small number of respondents fundamentally reject homosexual relationships as constituting a grave sin. The vast majority expects the Church to carry out a differentiated moral theological evaluation which takes account of pastoral experience and of the findings of the humanities. Most Catholics accept homosexual relationships if the partners practice values such as love, faithfulness, responsibility for one another and reliability, but they do not thereby place homosexual partnerships on the same footing as marriage. It is a matter of appreciating whilst at the same time stressing differentness. Some of the statements also favour a blessing for such partnerships which is distinct from marriage.

Pastoral care that accepts homosexuals requires a further development of the Church's sexual morals which incorporates recent findings from the humanities, as well as from anthropological, exegetic and moral theology.

(from: [www.chiesa.espressonline.it](http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it) )