Q & A Regarding Synod Final Report

What is this report? It is a summary of meetings had over the past few years as collated and emphasized by the authors.

Does it carry magisterial weight? No. It is a summary of cherry-picked testimonies and data that tell a story crafted by the authors and does not represent the experience of many in the Church, nor does it accurately reflect the perennial magisterial teaching on the matter.

Is this report a *Vatican* document? While it is a report issued by people who work at the Vatican, it is a consultative document. You could think of it like kids offering their opinion regarding how a family should spend its money. Their father will thank them and tell them that their opinions will be taken under advisement, but in the end, he makes the decision that is best for the family and in this case the pope will do so for the Church. So, it is a document of the Vatican, but it has no doctrinal weight, just like a memo about a meeting agenda.

In the 1960's Pope Paul VI called for a commission to investigate whether contraception was morally acceptable for married Catholics. The commission said yes and gave their final report to the pope. Paul VI then wrote one of the great encyclicals on human sexuality and human dignity, *Humane Vitae* which explicitly condemned the use of all forms of contraception by married Catholics. (They only considered the question regarding use inside marriage, because sexual acts outside marriage are already sinful.) The commission's report gave him the exact information he needed, though they came to a different conclusion.

What has the pope said about these things? Since being raised to the office of pope Leo XIV has spoken on the Church's teaching about sexual morality and homosexuality and in each case he has said: homosexual acts are a sin, God's intended plan for human sexual pleasure necessarily includes a man and a woman in the context of marriage, a person's dignity must always be respected, all human persons are called to chastity, and the Church's teaching on sexual morality cannot change.

What role does personal experience play in shaping doctrine? At the level of a single individual's experience, none. Even a group of individuals' experience would not have a significant impact on doctrine. Doctrine develops over time but flows forth from Sacred Scripture, the consistent apostolic interpretation of those scriptures, and consistent teaching by the Apostolic successors from the beginning up to our present age on a subject. If my experience contradicts that consistent teaching then my experience is what needs to be examined, not the Church's teaching. The tension between my experience and the unchanging truth is where pastoral accompaniment comes in. That is where a priest stands between me and God's will and helps me to mature through the suffering created by that tension to grow closer to God.

Could the Church's teaching on same-sex sexual acts as sinful change? No. As noted previously, the development of doctrine requires that any new development of a magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church must conform to the teaching that have come before. The Authority of the Church over matters of faith and morals is one of deeper understanding and defense, not one of research and novelty.

Is the virtue of chastity only for homosexuals and single people? No, the virtue of chastity is for all persons and is necessary for fulfilling and life-giving relationships. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2337-2359), but it is not about "not" doing things, it is about being fully possessed of the self so I can love others with my whole being. There is a misconception propagated in the report that creates one chastity for those who are opposite-sex attracted and another for those who are same-sex attracted. This would mean that God wills that certain moral principles are relative, which is not consistent with what has been revealed to us in Sacred Scripture.

Are the testimonies problematic? Yes. The testimonies are both taken from males who actively pursue same-sex sexual relationships according to their own testimony and who both are in civil unions with a same-sex partner. Furthermore, they state that they regularly attend the sacraments without repentance for their sinful actions. This does not reflect the reality of those who are living according to the Church's clear teaching regarding same-sex sexual acts and have been obedient to God's proposed plan for human sexuality.

How are we to understand Testimony 2? We regret that that individual had a negative experience of Courage, however, he has a misperception of what Courage does. We are only concerned about a person's holiness, if someone is holy then whatever temptation might come up will be responded to properly.

Does the report accurately present the testimony of Testimony 2? No, it does not. The person of Testimony 2 notes that he sought conversion therapy on his own and then was recommended Courage by his counselor. The report presents this as Courage "pushing for reparative therapy," which is false and inaccurate. Courage does not "push" or "recommend" "conversion" or "reparative therapies."

Is the report problematic? Yes. It increases Courage's profile within the Catholic Church in a slanderous and negative light and will affect our ability to minister. Our Board and Episcopal Board are taking steps to address this concern and the fact that an official document of the Church, albeit with minimal importance and no doctrinal standing, mentions Courage slanderously. We will let you know as this develops.

What are we doing? The Courage board and Episcopal board are in the process of reaching out and using their authority to have the report altered and Courage's name retracted. We will note their success on the website or in the newsletter. Since we will be working contrary to the cultural narrative, it will likely not have big headlines or fireworks.

Let us pray to our beloved Lord – who was falsely accused- to strengthen us and to foil the enemies of His Church. And that St. Francis de Sales, who was known for his commitment to truth when handling lies may strengthen us. So that we may speak the truth in Charity to all God's beloved children.