

**PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR ADMITTING SOME
DIVORCED AND REMARRIED COUPLES TO EUCHARISTIC
COMMUNION**

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Abstract

One of the pastoral ministries of Jesus Christ entrusted to the church consists in feeding the lambs, feeding the sheep and looking after the sheep. Jesus entrusted this ministry to the church through the apostles received by Peter prince of the apostle (John 21:15-17). This task of feeding the lambs and looking after the sheep has been carried out in many and various ways throughout the history of the church. Principally however, the church has carried out this ministry in three basic ways of “teaching the word, administering the sacraments and leading the ecclesial community; ministry of the word, ministry of the sacraments and the leadership ministry which corresponds to Christ’s three roles of prophet, priest and king respectively. It must however be noted that in exercising this aspect of her pastoral ministry it is not all the lambs and the sheep of Jesus Christ in the church that are tended and benefit from the three basic ways of carrying out this ministry. Some of the Lord’s lambs and sheep are starved from some of these nourishments especially the sacramental nourishments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Among the category of those starved from sacramental nourishments of reconciliation and the Eucharist are the civilly divorced and remarried members of the lay faithful. This paper examines the pastoral grounds on which some civilly divorced and remarried Catholics could be readmitted to these Sacramental nourishments of the church.

Keywords: Pastoral, Theological, Divorced, Remarried Couples, Eucharistic, Communion.

1. Introduction

The problem of administering the sacraments of reconciliation and Holy Communion to the divorced and remarried couples in the Church is as ancient as the apostolic church. Many arguments for and against it were put forward in the

course of the history of the church. For instance, one could argue from the *Didache* that the divorced and re-married couples could have been admitted in the Eucharist since baptism and sacramental reconciliation were the only requirements for Eucharistic communion. We read in the *Didache* on baptismal requirement for the reception of the Eucharist thus: "Let no one eat or drink of the Eucharist with you except those who have been baptised in the name of the Lord; for it was in reference to this that the Lord said 'do not give that which is holy to dogs'"¹ While on the need for sacramental reconciliation especially among warring parties the *Didache* admonishes "On the Lord's day gather together, break bread and give thanks after confessing your transgression so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled".² Reconciliation after a quarrel with a neighbor could have been applied to divorced and remarried spouses. It is from this perspective of the possibility of reconciliation that Kasper, cited by McBrien opined that "the church can admit divorced and remarried persons to the sacraments when they are sorry for any guilt they may have incurred in the breakdown of the first marriage, when everything humanly possible has been done to save the first marriage, and when the second marriage has become a morally binding union that cannot be dissolved without causing fresh injustice."³

2 The *Lineamenta* (Outline)

Of recent, however, the issue of admitting to the sacraments divorced and remarried members of the church once again came to the lime light more forcefully. It was triggered by the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. The theme of the reception of Holy Communion and Sacramental Reconciliation by the civilly divorced and remarried members of the church featured in articles 51-53 of the *Lineamenta*. The document itself is the fruit of the work of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2014 on The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation. Among these pastoral challenges, the Synod Fathers during this event recognised and treated the issue of the church's pastoral responsibility to the divorced and remarried members of the faithful.⁴ It is on this note that the Fathers deliberated on the possibility of readmitting and giving the divorced and remarried access to the Sacraments of penance and the Eucharist.

On this subject matter, two positions were held by the Synod fathers. The first position insisted on maintaining the present discipline of refusing to give divorced and remarried members of the church the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist because of the relationship between the reception of the Eucharist and communion with the Church, as well as the teaching of the church on the indissolubility of marriage, which were both shattered by the act of divorce. The second position held by the other Synod Fathers on the other hand wanted an individualised approach to the problem which could permit access in certain situations, and with certain well defined conditions primarily in irreversible situations and those involving moral obligations towards children who would have to endure unjust suffering.⁵ However, in the midst of these views both those in favour and against, the Fathers encouraged and “requested that further theological study in the matter with a view to making clear the distinctive features of the two forms and their connection with the theology of marriage”⁶ be carried out.

3 The Stand of the Church

The official teaching and practice of the Church over the centuries on the subject matter is the outright refusal to admit to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist couples who have been divorced and civilly remarried. This is because divorce and remarriage are considered doctrinally evil since they basically, constitute a sin of adultery which in the Decalogue constitutes an offence against the will of God⁷ for marriage, which of its very nature too is ordered towards permanency.

Above all, the sacramental nature of the marriages of baptised members of the Catholic faith makes such marriages indissoluble to say nothing of remarriage. Peschke has articulated the sacramental nature of Christian marriages thus: “According to Ephesians 5:21-33 the marriage between baptised Christians is entered after the model of the union of Christ with his church. With the same faithful love with which Christ loves the church, husbands must love their wives. And with the same unbreakable bond of devotion and love with which the church is linked to Christ, wives must be linked to their husbands. ‘This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church’ (Eph 5:32). The sacramental nature of the Christian marriage explains why it can never and for no reason whatsoever be dissolved, suppose it is a valid marriage. While marriages of partners who are not baptised can at times be dissolved for the

greater good of the faith” (cf. 1 Cor 7:12-16).⁸ To dissolve such sacramental marriages is tantamount to rupturing and breaking the unity that exists between Christ and his Church.

Based on the above and other reasons, the Church teaches and legislates that a marriage that is sacramental and consummated is indissoluble, to say nothing of remarriage⁹ while the Catechism of the Catholic Church expressly spelt out the sinful nature of divorce and remarriage. After repeating the exact teaching of the Lord on the subject matter, the Catechism went further to say:

Divorce is a grave offence against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is a sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery.¹⁰

The divorced and remarried could be said also to be living in a situation of public and permanent sin. Pope John Paul II maintaining the magisterial teaching of the church calls it an evil. As such, the divorced and remarried are cut off from communion with the church expressed concretely by denial of the church’s sacramental nourishments of the Eucharist and reconciliation which are meant for those in full communion with the church. Pope John Paul II articulates the time long teaching of the church thus:

However, the church reaffirms her practice which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the church which is signified and effected in the Eucharist....

Reconciliation in the sacrament of penance, which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage....¹¹

The divorced and the remarried are cut off from sacramental nourishment on grounds of their situation of living publicly and permanently in sin. Their state and condition of life likewise objectively contradict the union of love between Christ and the church, signified and effected in the Eucharist. They like wise belong to the members of Christ's faithful that the Code of Canon law says are under the penalty of excommunication or interdict. According to Canon 915, "Those upon whom the penalty of excommunication or interdict has been imposed or declared, and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin, are not to be admitted to Holy Communion". The divorced and remarried members of Christ's faithful are both under the penalty of excommunication and are obstinately living in sin. As such, they are not worthy of Eucharistic reception unless they repent and take up a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage

4. The Subject Matter

The question this paper addresses is: Could the church admit to the Eucharist divorced and remarried couples who have no intention what ever of leaving a union that is considered illicit in the eyes of the church? The answer is: Yes, they could be admitted. While upholding the church's position and teaching on the indissolubility of a sacramental and consummated marriage as well as rejecting totally as sinful and evil civil divorce of such marriages and subsequently a remarriage, and without prejudice to any of the provisions of canon law regarding marriage, the divorced and civilly remarried couples could be admitted to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist on the grounds of the nature of the pastoral ministry entrusted to the Church and the demands of Divine Mercy and Providence made manifest and offered to all in Christ.

5. Pastoral theological grounds for admitting to the Eucharist divorced and remarried couples

There are a number of pastoral theological grounds on which the admission of divorced and remarried spouses could be admitted into the Eucharistic Communion. Among such grounds are the following points.

I The Nature of the Pastoral Ministry of the Church

The theological basis of the church's pastoral ministry consists in the shepherding and nourishing tasks entrusted to the church through Peter and the

apostles by Jesus. One of the graphic scriptural texts of the giving of this ministry reads thus:

When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him 'feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'look after my sheep.' Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt that he asked him the third time 'do you love me?' and said 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep' (John 21: 15-17).

The term shepherd came from the Latin *pastor*. The Greek equivalent of the Latin *pastor* is *poimen* (ποιμήν). Etymologically, this Greek term *poimen* in its verbal form means the action of feeding with tender care accorded the sheep.¹² The one who accords the sheep this tender care of feeding is the pastor or shepherd. A shepherd has two vital functions to perform when caring for the sheep. First as shepherd he leads the flock to green fields to eat and to restful waters to drink. Unable to find verdant pastures and cool streams by their own effort the shepherd had to guide and lead the sheep each day to green pastures where they could be fed and not to be starved (Ps 23). Added to this first function, the shepherd tends and looks after the weak and sick sheep. The second task of the shepherd is that of giving protection to the sheep against the attack of predators. The shepherd does this with the help of the staff he carries with him serving both as a walking stick and as a weapon with which he could use against the wolf, and to bring back the stray to the fold. A good shepherd therefore, is someone who leads his flock to fertile pastures and life giving water, all the while defending them against malevolent predators with the wood of his staff.

The church in carrying out her pastoral ministry as shepherd is therefore duty bound to perform the two tasks of the shepherd to the sheep and lambs of the Lord. The church in her ministry is duty bound to feed the lambs and the sheep of the Lord with the nourishments of the Word of God and the sacraments entrusted to her; as well as to protect the sheep and the lambs against the sinful ways of the devil, the predator with her sacraments of healing. Hiltner as reported by Lapsley sums up the pastoral ministry of the church to include caring, helping, healing and sustaining the people entrusted to the shepherd.¹³ Great care must however be shown by the shepherd not to neglect any of the

flock especially the sick, the weak and the feeble, who are most in need of the church's pastoral caring, helping, healing and sustenance.

The shepherds of old were reprimanded by the prophets for neglecting to nourish the sheep especially the weak and the wounded. The prophet Ezekiel addressed the human shepherds of Israel in this regard:

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows, 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy and say to them, Shepherds, the Lord Yahweh says this: Disaster is in store for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Are not shepherds meant to feed the flock? ..., but you failed to feed the flock. You have failed to make the weak sheep strong, or to care for the sick ones, or bandage the injured ones. You have failed to bring back the strays or look for the lost' (Ezek 34:1-4).

If Jesus' shepherding ministry entrusted to the church through Peter and the other apostles consists in nourishing the lambs and the sheep of the Lord (John 21) then the divorced and the remarried members of the flock and sheep of the Lord could also be nourished with the sacraments. In other words, the civilly divorced and remarried spouses are still sheep and lambs of the Lord who through Baptism are incorporated into the fold of Christ. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church through baptism we are freed from sin and are reborn as children of God and members of Christ, incorporated also into the church and are made sharers in the mission of the church.¹⁴ As such they are constituted among the lambs and sheep of the Lord to be nourished and looked after (John 21: 15-17) especially with the sacramental nourishments of the Church.

II. *The Nourishing and Cleansing Nature of the Eucharist*

The second pastoral ground on which the admission of the civilly divorced and remarried members of Christ's faithful is considered is from the nourishing nature of the Eucharist. One of the principal effects of the Eucharist is that of nourishment. If the discourse of Jesus in John's gospel on the bread of life has any thing to do with the Eucharist, then indeed one of the effects of the Eucharist is its nourishing impact on the lives of the recipients. The Lord Jesus teaches this

at Capernaum when he declared that He is the bread of life and whoever comes to Him and believes in Him will never go hungry nor thirst (John 6: 36). This nourishment likewise prevents the recipients from death for “Your fathers eat manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven so that a person may eat it and not die” (John 6: 49-50). The same nourishing aspect of the Eucharist is further buttressed that it does not only support life here on earth but also nourishes to eternal life. “In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood you have no life in you. Any one who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day” (John 6: 53-54). As if to clear any iota of doubt about the nourishing nature of the Eucharist and the union and bond it creates with the recipient, the Lord insists: “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person” (John 6: 55-56).

The Church in her Eucharistic doctrine has also repeated the bonding and nourishing effects of the Eucharist as taught by the Lord. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that intimate union with the Lord Jesus is the principal fruit of receiving Holy Communion; while on the nourishing aspect it states: “What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh ‘given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received at baptism”.¹⁵

The Catechism of the Catholic Church further acknowledges that the Eucharist separates the recipients from past sins on the one hand, while on the other, it preserves the recipients from sinning.

Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is “given up for us,” and the blood we drink “shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins... As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; ... By the same charity that it enkindles in us, the Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin.¹⁶

III. *The Theology of Baptismal Regeneration*

By virtue of the sacrament of baptism the baptised members of Christ's faithful are given a new spiritual rebirth without which the Lord Jesus says one cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). As such they are constituted new creatures. Due to the reality of this spiritual birth it cannot be repeated. Hence the church in the past has rejected the idea of rebaptising reconverted heretics, who were truly baptised, as well as rebaptising persons baptised in heresy depending on the nature of the heresy. Pope Stephen I in a letter to Cyprian bishop of Carthage reiterated this fact by refuting the practice whereby converted heretics were rebaptised.¹⁷ Thus the practice in Rome, Alexandria and Palestine was to lay hands on such heretics, rather than rebaptising them, when receiving them as a mark of reconciliation. The same teaching was upheld by the Council of Trent, and its Catechism teaches that baptism being a spiritual regeneration seals the recipient with a character that can never be effaced from the soul, and as such can never at any time be repeated.¹⁸ The Second Vatican Council in even more clearer terms forcefully repeated this teaching as echoed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. While admitting the possibility that the new birth generated by the waters of baptism could be wounded by acts of sin, the new life however is never destroyed nor annihilated.

Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptised is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (Character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.¹⁹

"Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte 'a new creature,' an adopted child of God, who has become a partaker of the divine nature".²⁰ The baptised becomes a new spiritual creature. This fact is being attested to in the baptismal theology and celebrated in the baptismal rite of anointing with Chrism and investiture with the white cloth. Like any other living creature in the natural order, this new creature needs the sacramental nourishments of the Eucharist and penance²¹ so as to bring growth and wholeness to this new spiritual creature.

It is from this perspective that the civilly divorced and remarried members of the faithful owing to the fact that they are baptised, and have the new life of grace and an indelible mark conferred by the sacrament of baptism which though may be wounded by the act and sin of divorce but never erased nor annihilated,²² stand in great need of the church's spiritual nourishments of penance and the Eucharist.²³

IV. *The Theology of Divine Providence*

God is merciful and providential to all his creatures. In His divine providence, God the Father and creator of all that exists never cease to sustain and nourish his creatures. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that God's creation was not a complete and perfect piece it was created in a state of journeying to perfection. As such, God provides for his creation with all the needed dispositions which guide creation towards perfection. ²⁴ Despite the unfaithfulness of his creatures, God supports and sustains them with his presence and nourishes them with both their material and spiritual needs. In other words, our faith teaches us that despite the failure on the part of creation, God never ceases to provide for his creatures. The sacred scriptures as well as the doctrinal teaching of the church attested to God's providence for his creatures in diverse ways.

Scriptural Basis of Divine Mercy and Providence:

The Old Testament contains a lot of testimony regarding God's merciful and providential attitude to all his creatures. To Adam and Eve our first parents who in a sense were also the first to carry out the act and sin very similar to that of divorce and remarriage by rejecting their marital bonding with God and opting for a new marital bonding with Satan and his wishes; God never ceased to sustain and nourish them. In fact on the realisation that they were naked, his divine mercy and providence moved him to cover their nakedness.

God also had a similar experience with the children of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt. At the foot of Mount Sinai God entered into a seeming marital covenant with the children of Israel which was sealed with the blood of the sacrifice (Exodus 20). Though the children of Israel consented to the terms of this 'seeming marital covenant', not too long after that, and underneath the very foot

of the mountain of the covenant, the children of Israel failed, divorced God and entered into a new seeming marital alliance with the very images which God forbade. Despite this, God continued to sustain and nourish them out of his mercy and providence. In fact in the presence of Moses, God declared his loving providence and mercy thus: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations...” (Exodus 34:6-7). It was after this that God indeed nourished them for forty years in the desert with Manna which in a sense one could say was proto Eucharist. The remainder of the history of Israel is characterised by repeated acts of unfaithfulness to God and bonding themselves to foreign gods (2Kings 17:5-23). The book of the prophet Hosea is actually a graphic description of Israel’s seeming marital unfaithfulness to God on the one hand and God’s faithfulness to Israel on the other. Despite these repeated acts of unfaithfulness by Israel, God was always faithful to Israel showing Israel his love and providence by nourishing her with both spiritual and material nourishments.

In the New Testament, the gospels are full of scenarios where divine mercy and providence is extended by Jesus to all and especially to those who needed them most. If Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman is anything to go by, it is a concrete scenario depicting God’s willingness in Jesus to dispense his mercy and providence to a divorced and a serially remarried woman since she was married to five and the one with whom she lives is not her husband (John 4:9). “If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you ‘give me something to drink’ you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water” (John 4: 10). The living water, I suppose, Jesus was willing to give this divorced and serially remarried Samaritan woman is non other than the Eucharistic water and blood of mercy that flowed from the side of the crucified Lord which leads to eternal life.

There are many other gospel scenes where God the great provider of mankind through Jesus his only begotten Son provided nourishment for all categories of human beings. The miraculous feeding of the five thousand could no doubt involve many divorced and probably remarried spouses (Matt 14:21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). In fact, Jesus teaches about God’s mercy and providence to all his creatures without discrimination when he compared the worth of the birds of the air and flowers growing in the fields with human beings (Matt 6:25-34). If God provides nourishment to these sparrows of little worth, how much more then of the divorced and the remarried Christian faithful?

Would God's love, mercy and providence not admit them to Eucharistic Communion?

V. *Pastoral Needs of Sinners*

Admittedly, the divorced and remarried persons are living in a situation of public and permanent sin. They are sinners to the core. This makes their case for Divine providence and mercy in Sacramental and other spiritual nourishments a dire one. They stand in need of these nourishments more than any other. This too is in total keeping with the teaching of the Lord thus:

Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice! And indeed I came to call not the upright but sinners' (Matt 9:10-13).

Who knows whether among the categories of sinners mentioned were divorced and remarried couples? Again who knows whether the meal in which they participated was indeed Eucharistic or its typology? In any case, Jesus sums it all: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick". Therefore, the divorce and remarried, who are sick, could stand much more in need of these sacramental nourishments as avenues for God's mercy and providence.

VI. *Pas/Terra Theological Approach*

Another scenario that portrays the mercy and providence of God is from the point of view of Pas/Terra theology (Pastoral Theology in dialogue with land cultivation theology complementarily enhancing pastoral ministry). A lot of pastoral lessons could be learned on the mercy and providence of God to all his creatures including the divorced and remarried members of the church.

The parable of the darnel in the vineyard teaches that despite the badness of the darnel it was not to be uprooted until harvest time. Uprooting it would have been to deny it of nourishment; and leaving it with the good seed to benefit from the soil nutrients was not because there after the darnel would convert to be the good seed. The only reason it was left was for the good of the good seed for in case as you uproot the darnel you may as well uproot to good seed. Of course, the nourishment would be good for the darnel even though it will never get converted to be good seed. This is a great indicator of what divine mercy and providence could be to categories of sinners living in an environment of sin like the divorced and civilly remarried couples. To allow them these nourishments is purely the gratuitous act of Divine mercy and providence. Probably for all these years that the church has withdrawn Eucharistic communion from the divorced and the remarried, it is likely that they have been denied divine providence and mercy which God wills to nourish all his creatures with irrespective of being either darnel or the good seed. I think the admonition of the owner of the vineyard to the labourers is a pastoral lesson and response that the church, "as labourer in the vineyard of the Lord," could employ to the problem of admitting divorced and remarried members of Christ's faithful to Eucharistic Communion. When the labourers reported the matter to the owner of the vineyard and suggested uprooting the darnel, the owner of the vineyard declined and admonished the labourers thus: "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull out the wheat with it let them both grow till the harvest" (Matt 13:24-30). Let the darnel both grow till harvest time so as not to uproot the good seed with the darnel.

6. Summary and Recommendations

Summary

From the foregoing, it is clear that there are numerous pastoral theological grounds on which the admission of the divorced and remarried members of the faithful to Eucharistic communion could be reconsidered. The nourishing nature of the Eucharist itself coupled with the pastoral ministry of nourishing the flock of the Lord entrusted to the church which finds concrete expression in the sacraments of the church could not have excluded the divorced and remarried members of the faithful. Likewise the nourishing needs of every living creature, both physical and spiritual, call for the admission of the divorced and the remarried since the life of grace received through baptismal regeneration which though could be wounded by the act and sin of divorce is never erased nor annihilated.²⁵ As such, this life of grace stands in great need of the church's Spiritual nourishments of penance and the Eucharist.²⁶

Great lessons could likewise be drawn from the parables and actions of Jesus towards sinners in general and possibly the divorced and the remarried in particular that could pave ways for admitting to the Eucharist these spouses. Among these gospel parables stand the parables of the darnel and the good seed, the unproductive fig tree etc. Likewise the merciful attitude and actions of Jesus towards sinners such as His attitude of eating with sinners and His willingness to offer even the civilly divorced and serially remarried Samaritan woman waters of eternal life could be grounds of theological significance for admitting divorced and remarried members of the church to these sacramental nourishments.

It must however be admitted that due to the need to forestall abuses of the sacredness of Eucharistic meal (1Cor. 11) as well as the need to avoid scandals and leading the faithful into error and confusion regarding the church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage²⁷ certain measures of discipline and liturgical decorum are necessarily needed. As such, even though from the foregoing divorced and remarried couples could be admitted into the Eucharist caution must be the watch word. I therefore put forward the following programme of pastoral care for the divorced and remarried couples to undergo

after which, if the church deems it appropriate, they could be administered the sacraments.

Recommendations/Pastoral Action Plan

i. A Programme of Pastoral Care for the Divorced and Remarried Spouses

The experience of losing one's spouse through acts of divorce and remarriage could be a very painful one for the couples involved in particular and in some other cases the children as well. The pains would usually include the feeling of being rejected, betrayed, guilty and being a failure. This in turn could lead to being angry. Angry with one's spouse, angry with one self and even angry with God are all part of the painful experiences. Some times it is the reality of this painful experience that leads one into remarriage after the break up of the first marriage. The difficulties created by remarriages after divorce are so numerous; because one goes into a remarriage with all the painful experiences one had as a result of the break up of the first marriage.²⁸ As such, remarriages or second marriages do not last either. From the sociological point of view and in terms of statistical evidence, remarriages are less successful than first marriages. The rates of divorce from second marriages are higher than those from first marriages.²⁹ As such, rather than rushing to administer the sacraments to divorced and remarried couples, concerted pastoral care should be carried out with a view to handling with some level of maturity the hurts and pains of the couples to guarantee some stability in the new relationship, if the possibility of reconciliation with the first spouse is ruled out. When this level of stability is established, and having dealt with the reality of angry hurts from the previous relationship, the reality of the present relationship, family issues, children upbringing, societal stigma, legal issues, need to avoid the possibility of a repeat of divorce through marriage stability strategy, deepening of faith and prayer, forgiveness, love etc, then the church could consider the possibility of restoring such couples to Eucharistic communion taking into consideration the length of time they have lived together and their ages.

ii. Intensify a Programme of Catechesis for the Faithful on Sin and its Consequences

Secondly, in order to ensure and uphold faithfulness to the church's tradition of not causing scandal and leading the faithful to error and confusion regarding the teaching of the church concerning the nature of marriage and its indissolubility while not blocking the possibility of readmitting the civilly divorced and remarried members of the faithful, agents of pastoral ministry in general and pastors of souls in particular must intensify the catechesis of the faithful on sin in general³⁰ and the sins associated with marital fidelity and the reception of the Eucharist in an unworthy manner in particular.

Contemporary man has lost the sense of sin and its consequences. Hence, contemporary men and women have lost the sense of shame about sin and as such avoid calling sinful actions by their proper names and given them new shady names that beautify the sinful actions. Apart from individuals involved in renaming sinful actions, the attitude has been institutionalised even by some international organisations. For example, during the Rwandan crisis of 1994, the powers that be prohibited the use of the term 'genocide' to describe the massacres. Rather than calling it genocide, the then Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali speaks of it as civil war which is milder than genocide.³¹ A man or woman who commits the sin of adultery or fornication with someone else than their spouse speaks of visiting their male or female friends. The sin of abortion is described as overhauling of an engine. This is the degree to which the sense of sin and shame as well as the consequences associated with them are lost. It could be the reason also that accounts for the rampant cases of divorce and remarriage.

This situation therefore calls for the urgent need for a renewed concerted effort to the course of catechesis on sin which the catechism of the Catholic Church says "creates the proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgement of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root."³²

When agents of pastoral ministry in general and pastors of souls in particular intensify catechesis on sin in general and the sins associated with marital fidelity as well as those associated with the unworthy reception of the Eucharist in particular, then the consciences of the faithful are better formed and stand in a better position to decide whether to go for the reception of the Eucharist or not. This catechesis should aim at putting before the faithful life and prosperity on the one hand and death and disaster on the other (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). In so

doing, the catechesis will be setting before Christ's faithful the two ways of the *Didache* one of life the other one of death.³³

In most of our parishes shortly before the reception of Holy Communion during the Eucharistic celebrations announcements are made warning all as to the reception of the Eucharist thus: "It is now time for Holy Communion and Holy communion is for Catholics who are in the state of grace". This type of catechesis is okay but not good enough to build the consciences of the faithful on the consequences of the unworthy reception of the Eucharist. Since the Eucharist and its reception are the highest point of the liturgical celebration, the entire homily should serve as a platform for this catechesis and the immediate preparation for this moment. Let the homily with the help of the scriptural texts stress the ways of worthy reception as well as unworthy ways of reception. In this way, awareness could be raised, consciences formed and individual members of the faithful and the civilly divorced and remarried members inclusive stand the better chance to judge themselves whether they are worthy for the reception or not. This too is in accord with St. Paul's methodology on the worthy reception of the Eucharist. After a lengthy catechesis on what the Eucharist signifies as was given to him by the Lord, he concludes the catechesis thus: "Everyone is to examine himself and only then eat of the bread or drink from the cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognising the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation' (1 Corinthians 11:28-29).

In this way too, the church could remain faithful to her doctrinal obligations and teaching ministry on the one hand and on the other has refrained from being judgemental as to who is worthy for the reception of the Eucharist and left it to the informed consciences of the faithful. The bottom line here is to intensify catechesis with a view to forming the consciences of the people of God about sin and the consequences associated with sinful actions and leave the decision of meeting Jesus in the Eucharist to the individual.

Notes

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³Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism Completely Revised and Updated* (San Francisco: HarperCollins 1994) 860

⁴XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World LINEAMENTA* (St. Pauls, 2015) 51

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⁷John Paul II, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church Revised edition* (Ibadan: Society of ST. Paul 2013) no. 2072.

⁸Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II Volume II: Special Moral Theology* (Warwickshire: C.Goodliffe Neale 1985) 455

⁹John Paul II. *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins, 1983) (cf. canons 1056 and 1141),

¹⁰CCC 2384

¹¹John Paul II. *Familiaris Comsortio* in Flannery, A., ed. *Vatican II More Post Conciliar Documents*. (New York: Collegeville, 1975) no. 84

¹²Hiltner, S. *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1958) 15

¹³William B. Oglesby, Jr (Editor). *The Shape of Pastoral Theology Essays in Honor of Seward Hiltner* (New York: Abingdon 1969) 31-48

¹⁴CCC 1213, 1272

¹⁵CCC 1391, 1392

¹⁶CCC 1393-1395

¹⁷J. Neuner and J. Dupuis eds, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Church Revised Edition* (Glasgow: Collins 1983) 386

¹⁸Pius V. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (Illinois: TAN, 1982) 190

¹⁹CCC 1272

²⁰CCC 1265

²¹CCC 1392

²²CCC 1272

²³CCC 1392

²⁴CCC 302-303

²⁵CCC 1227

²⁶CCC1392

²⁷John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 84

²⁸Garry R. Collins Christian, *Counselling A Comprehensive Guide Revised Edition* (Collins 1998) 450

²⁹Anthony Giddens, *Sociology 6th Edition* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2009) 361

³⁰CCC 1697

³¹John Sobrino “Faith, Justice and Injustice” in Frans Wijsen, Peter Henriot & Rodrogo Mejia (Eds) *The Pastoral Circle Revisited A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2006) 11

³²CCC1865