

A Back Door to a Neo-Mosaic Practice in the Final Report of the Synod

by Bishop Athanasius Schneider

Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana

The XIV General Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops (October 4 – 25, 2015), which was dedicated to the theme of “*The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*,” issued a *Final Report* with some pastoral proposals submitted to the discernment of the Pope. The document itself is only of an advisory nature and does not possess a formal magisterial value.

Yet during the Synod, there appeared those real new disciples of Moses and the new Pharisees, who in the numbers 84-86 of the *Final Report* opened a back door or looming time bombs for the admittance of divorced and remarried to Holy Communion. At the same time those bishops who intrepidly defended “the Church’s own fidelity to Christ and to His truth” (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84) were in some media reports unjustly labeled as Pharisees.

The new disciples of Moses and the new Pharisees during the last two Assemblies of the Synod (2014 and 2015) masked their practical denial of the indissolubility of marriage and of a suspension of the Sixth Commandment on a case-by-case basis under the guise of the concept of mercy, using expressions such as: “way of discernment,” “accompaniment,” “orientations of

the bishop,” “dialogue with the priest,” “forum internum,” “a more fuller integration into the life of the Church,” a possible suppression of imputability regarding the cohabitation in irregular unions (cf. *Final Report*, nn. 84-86).

This text section in the *Final Report* contains indeed a trace of a Neo-Mosaic practice of divorce, even though the redactors skillfully, and in a cunning manner, avoided any direct change of the doctrine of the Church. Therefore,

During the Synod, there appeared those real new disciples of Moses and the new Pharisees, who in the numbers 84-86 of the Final Report opened a back door or looming time bombs for the admittance of divorced and remarried to Holy Communion.

all parties, both the promoters of the so-called “Kasper agenda” and their opponents, are apparently satisfied stating: “All is OK. The Synod did not change the doctrine.” Yet, such a perception is quite naive, because it ignores the back door and the pending time bombs in the above-mentioned text section which becomes manifest by a careful examination of the text by its internal interpretive criteria.

Even when speaking of a “way of discernment” there is talk of “repentance” (*Final Report*, n. 85) there remains nevertheless a great deal of ambiguity. In fact, according to

the reiterated affirmations of Cardinal Kasper and like-minded churchmen, such a repentance concerns the past sins against the spouse of the first valid marriage and the repentance of the divorced indeed may not refer to the acts of their marital cohabitation with the new civilly married partner.

The assurance of the text in the numbers 85 and 86 of the *Final Report* that such a discernment has to be made according to the teaching of the Church and in a correct judgment remains nevertheless ambiguous. Indeed, Cardinal Kasper and like-minded clerics emphatically and repeatedly assured that the admittance of the divorced and civilly remarried to Holy Communion will not touch the dogma of the indissolubility and of the sacramentality of marriage, and that a judgment of the conscience in that case has to be considered as being correct even when the divorced and remarried continue to cohabit in a marital manner, and that they should not be required to live in complete continence as brother and sister.

In quoting the famous number 84 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II in number 85 of the *Final Report*, the redactors censored the text, cutting out the following decisive formulation: “The way to the Eucharist can only be granted to those who take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.”

This practice of the Church is based on Divine Revelation of the Word of God: Written and transmitted through Tradition. This practice of the Church is an expression of the uninterrupted Tradition since the Apostles and, thus, remains unchangeable for all times. Already Saint Augustine affirmed: “Who dismisses his adulterous wife and marries another woman, whereas his first wife still lives, remains perpetually in the state of adultery. Such a man does not any efficacious penance while he refuses to abandon the new wife. If he is a catechumen, he cannot be admitted to baptism, because his will remains rooted in the evil. If he is a (baptized) penitent, he cannot receive the (ecclesiastical) reconciliation as long as he does not break with his bad attitude” (*De adulterinis coniugiis*, 2, 16). In fact, the above intentional censorship of the teaching of *Familiaris Consortio* in n. 85 of the *Final Report*, represents for any sane hermeneutics the very interpretive key for the understanding of the text section on divorced and

remarried (numbers 84-86).

In our days exists a permanent and omnipresent ideological pressure on behalf of the mass media, which are compliant with the unique thought imposed by the anti-Christian world powers, with the aim to abolish the truth of the indissolubility of marriage – trivializing the sacred character of this Divine institution by spreading an anti-culture of divorce and concubinage. Already fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council stated that the modern times are infected with the plague of divorce (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 47). The same Council warns that Christian marriage as Christ’s sacrament should “never be profaned by adultery or divorce” (*Gaudium et spes*, 49).

The profanation of the “great sacrament” (Eph. 5, 32)

of marriage by adultery and divorce has assumed massive proportions at an alarming rate not only in civil society but also among Catholics. When Catholics by means of divorce and adultery theoretically and as well as practically repudiate the will of God expressed in the Sixth Commandment, they put themselves in a spiritually serious danger of losing their eternal salvation.

The most merciful act on behalf of the Shepherds of the Church would be to draw attention to this danger by means of a clear – and at the same time loving – admonition about the necessarily full acceptance of the Sixth Commandment of God. They have to call things by their right name exhorting: “divorce is divorce,” “adultery is adultery,” and “who commits consciously and freely grave sins against the Commandments of God – and in this case against the Sixth Commandment – and dies unrepentant will receive eternal condemnation being excluded forever from the kingdom of God.”

Such an admonition and exhortation is the very work of the Holy Spirit as Christ taught: “He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16: 8). Explaining the work of the Holy Spirit in “convincing sin,” Pope John Paul II said: “Every sin wherever and whenever committed has a



The most merciful act on behalf of the Shepherds of the Church would be to draw attention to this danger by means of a clear – and at the same time loving – admonition about the necessarily full acceptance of the Sixth Commandment of God. They have to call things by their right name exhorting: “divorce is divorce,” “adultery is adultery.”

reference to the Cross of Christ – and therefore indirectly also to the sin of those who <have not believed in him,> and who condemned Jesus Christ to death on the Cross” (Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 29). Those who conduct a married life with a partner who is not their legitimate spouse, as it is the case with divorced and civilly remarried, reject the will of God. To convince such persons concerning this sin is a work moved by the Holy Spirit and commanded by Jesus Christ and thus an eminently pastoral and merciful work.

The *Final Report* of the Synod unfortunately omits to convince the divorced and remarried concerning their concrete sin. On the contrary, under the pretext of mercy and a false pastorality, those Synod Fathers who supported the formulations in the numbers 84-86 of the Report tried to cover up the spiritually dangerous state of the divorced and remarried.

De facto, they say to them that their sin of adultery is not a sin, and is definitely not adultery or at least is not a grave sin and that there is no spiritual danger in their state of life. Such a behavior of these Shepherds is directly contrary to the work of the Holy Spirit and is therefore anti-pastoral and a work of the false prophets to whom one could apply the following words of the Holy Scripture: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Is. 5:20), and: “Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading” (Lam. 2: 14). To such bishops the Apostle Paul without any doubt would say today these words: “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13).

The text of the *Final Report* of the Synod not only omits to convince unambiguously divorced and civilly remarried persons concerning the adulterous and thus gravely sinful character of their lifestyle. It justifies indirectly such a lifestyle by means of assigning this question ultimately to the area of the individual conscience and by means of an improper applying of the moral principle of imputability to the case of cohabitation of the divorced and remarried. In fact, the applying of the principle of imputability to a stable, permanent, and public life in adultery is improper and deceptive.

The diminution of the subjective responsibility is given

only in the case when the partners have the firm intention to live in complete continence and make sincere efforts therein. As long as the partners intentionally persist to continue a sinful life, there can be no suspension of imputability. The *Final Report* gives the impression to intimate that a public lifestyle in adultery – as it is the case of civilly remarried – is not violating the indissoluble sacramental bond of a marriage or that it does not represent a mortal or grave sin and that this issue is furthermore a matter of private conscience. Hereby one can state a closer drift towards the Protestant principle of subjective judgment on matters of faith and discipline and intellectual closeness to the erroneous theory of “fundamental option,” a theory already condemned by the Magisterium (cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 65-70).

The Shepherds of the Church should not in the slightest manner promote a culture of divorce amongst the faithful. Even the smallest hint of yielding to the practice or to the culture of divorce should be avoided. The Church as a whole should give a convincing and strong

witness to the indissolubility of the marriage. Pope John Paul II said that divorce “is an evil that, like the others, is affecting more and more Catholics as well, the problem must be faced with resolution and without delay” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

The Church has to help the divorced and remarried with love and patience to recognize their own sinfulness and to help them to convert with one’s whole heart to God and to the obedience to His holy will, which is expressed in the Sixth Commandment. As long as they continue giving a public anti-witness to the

indissolubility of marriage and contributing to a culture of divorce, the divorced and remarried cannot exercise those liturgical, catechetical, and institutional ministries in the Church, which demand by their own nature a public life in accordance with the Commandments of God.

It is obvious that public violators for instance of the Fifth and Seventh Commandments, such as owners of an abortion clinic or collaborators of a corruption network, not only cannot receive Holy Communion but, evidently, cannot be admitted to public liturgical and catechetical services. In an analogous manner, public violators of the Sixth Commandment, such as divorced and remarried, cannot be admitted to the office of lectors, godparents, or catechists. Of course, one must distinguish the gravity of the evil caused by the lifestyle of public promoters of abortion and corruption from the adulterous life of di-

When Catholics by means of divorce and adultery theoretically and as well as practically repudiate the will of God expressed in the Sixth Commandment, they put themselves in a spiritually serious danger of losing their eternal salvation.

vorced people. One cannot put them on the same footing. The advocacy for the admission of divorced and remarried to the task of godparents and catechists aims ultimately not the true spiritual good of the children, but turns out to be an instrumentalization of a specific ideological agenda. This is a dishonesty and a mockery of the institution of godparents or catechists who by means of a public promise took on the task of educators of the faith.

In the case of godparents or catechists who are divorced and remarried, their life continuously contradicts their words, and so they have to face the admonition of the Holy Spirit through the mouth of the Apostle Saint James: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas. 1: 22). Unfortunately, the *Final Report* in n. 84 pleads for an admittance of the divorced and remarried to liturgical, pastoral, and educational offices. Such a proposal represents an indirect support to the culture of divorce and a practical denial of an objectively sinful lifestyle. Pope John Paul II on the contrary indicated only the following possibilities of participating in the life of the Church, which for their part aim a true conversion: “They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

There should remain a salutary area of exclusion (non-admittance to the Sacraments and to the public liturgical and catechetical offices) in order to remind the divorced of their real serious and dangerous spiritual state and, at the same time, to promote in their souls the attitude of humility, obedience, and of longing for the authentic conversion. Humility means courage for truth, and only those who humbly subject themselves to God will receive His graces.

The faithful, who have not yet the readiness and the

will to stop with the adulterous life, should be spiritually helped. Their spiritual state is similar to a kind of “catechumenate” regarding the sacrament of Penance. They can receive the sacrament of Penance, which was called in the Tradition of the Church “the second baptism” or “the second penance,” only if they sincerely break with the habit of the adulterous cohabitation and avoid public scandal in an analogous manner as do the catechumens, the candidates to Baptism. The *Final Report* omits to call the divorced and remarried to the humble recognition of



Divorce by William Holbrook Beard

As long as they continue giving a public anti-witness to the indissolubility of marriage and contributing to a culture of divorce, the divorced and remarried cannot exercise those liturgical, catechetical, and institutional ministries in the Church, which demand by their own nature a public life in accordance with the Commandments of God.

their objective sinful state, because it omits to encourage them to accept with the spirit of faith the non-admittance to the Sacraments and to the public liturgical and catechetical offices. Without such a realistic and humble recognition of their own real spiritual state, there is no effective progress towards the authentic Christian conversion, which in the case of the divorced and remarried consists in a life of complete continence, ceasing to sin against the sanctity of the sacrament of marriage and to disobey publicly the Sixth Commandment of God.

The Shepherds of the Church and especially the public texts of the Magisterium have to speak in an utmost clear manner, since this is the essential characteristic of the task of the official teaching. Christ demanded from all His disciples to speak in an extremely clear manner: “Let what you say be ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Mt. 5: 37). This is valid all the more when

the Shepherds of the Church preach or when the Magisterium speaks in a document.

In the text section of the numbers 84-86 the *Final Report* represents, unfortunately, a serious departure from this Divine command. Indeed in the mentioned passages the text does not plead directly in favor for the legitimacy of the admittance of the divorce and remarried to Holy Communion, the text even avoids the expression “Holy Communion” or “Sacraments.” Instead, the text by means

of obfuscating tactics, uses ambiguous expressions like “a more full participation in the life of the Church” and “discernment and integration.”

By such obfuscating tactics the *Final Report* in fact put time bombs and a back door for the admittance of the divorced and remarried to Holy Communion, causing by this a profanation of the two great sacraments of Marriage and Eucharist and contributing at least indirectly to the culture of divorce – to the spreading of the “plague of divorce” (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 47).

When reading carefully the ambiguous text of the section “Discernment and integration” in the *Final Report*, one has the impression of a highly skillful, elaborated ambiguity. One is reminded of the following words of Saint Irenaeus in his *Adversus haereses*: “He who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men make of them. For, though he will acknowledge the gems, he will certainly not receive the fox instead of the likeness of the king. But since what may prove a finishing-stroke to this exhibition is wanting, so that any one, on following out their farce to the end, may then at once append an argument which shall overthrow it, we have judged it well to point out, first of all, in what respects the very fathers

of this fable differ among themselves, as if they were inspired by different spirits of error. For this very fact forms a proof from the outset that the truth proclaimed by the Church is immovable, and that the theories of these men are but a tissue of falsehoods” (I, 9, 4-5).

The *Final Report* seems to leave the solution of the question of the admittance of the divorced and remarried to Holy Communion to local Church authorities: “accom-

paniment of the priests” and “orientations of the bishop.” Such a matter is however connected essentially with the deposit of faith i.e. with the revealed word of God. The non-admittance of divorced who are living in a public state of adultery belongs to the unchangeable truth of

the law of the Catholic faith and consequently also of the law of Catholic liturgical practice.

The *Final Report* seems to inaugurate a doctrinal and disciplinary cacophony in the Catholic Church which contradicts the very essence of being Catholic. One has to be reminded of the words of Saint Irenaeus about the authentic shape of the Catholic Church in all times and in all places: “The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes the points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world (Italy). But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and

the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth. Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition.



Saint Irenaeus from a stained glass window

The non-admittance of divorced who are living in a public state of adultery belongs to the unchangeable truth of the law of the Catholic faith and consequently also of the law of Catholic liturgical practice.

For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little diminish it” (*Adversus haereses*, I, 10, 2).

The *Final Report* in the section on the divorced and remarried carefully avoids confessing the unchangeable principle of the entire Catholic tradition, that those who live in an invalid marital union can be admitted to Holy Communion only under the condition that their promise to live in complete continence and avoid public scandal. John Paul II and Benedict XVI confirmed strongly this Catholic principle. The deliberate avoidance of mentioning and reaffirming this principle in the text of the *Final Report* can be compared with the systematic avoidance of the expression “homousios” on behalf of the opponents of the dogma of the Council of Nicea in the fourth century – the formal Arians and the so-called Semi-Arians – who invented continuously other expressions in order not to confess directly the consubstantiality of the Son of God with God the Father.

Such a declination from an open Catholic confession on behalf of the majority of the episcopate in the fourth century caused a feverish ecclesiastical activity with continuous synodal meetings and a proliferation of new doctrinal formula with the common denominator of avoiding terminological clarity, i.e. the expression “homousios.” Likewise, in our days the two last Synods on the Family avoided naming and confessing clearly the principle of the entire Catholic tradition, that those who live in an invalid marital union can be admitted to Holy Communion only under the condition of their promise to live in complete continence and avoid public scandal.

This fact is proven also by the immediate unequivocal reaction of the secular media and by the reaction of the main advocates of the new un-Catholic practice to admit divorced and remarried to Holy Communion while maintaining a life of public adultery. Cardinal Kasper, Cardinal Nichols, and Archbishop Forte, for instance, publicly affirmed that, according to the *Final Report*, one can assume that a door in some way has been opened to Communion for the divorced and remarried. There exists as well a considerable number of bishops, priests, and laity who rejoice because of the so-called “opened door” they found in the *Final Report*. Instead of guiding the

faithful with a clear and an utmost unambiguous teaching, the *Final Report* caused a situation of obscurity, confusion, subjectivity (the judgment of the conscience of the divorced and forum internum) and an un-Catholic doctrinal and disciplinary particularism in a matter which is essentially connected to the deposit of faith transmitted by the Apostles.

Those who in our days strongly defend the sanctity of the sacraments of Marriage and Eucharist are labeled as Pharisees. Yet, since the logical principle of non-contradiction is valid and common sense still functions, the contrary is true.

The real result of the Synod in the perception of the faithful and of secular public opinion was that there has been practically only one focus on the question of the admittance of the divorced to Holy Communion. One can affirm that the Synod in a certain sense turned out to be in the eyes of public opinion a Synod of adultery, not the Synod of family.

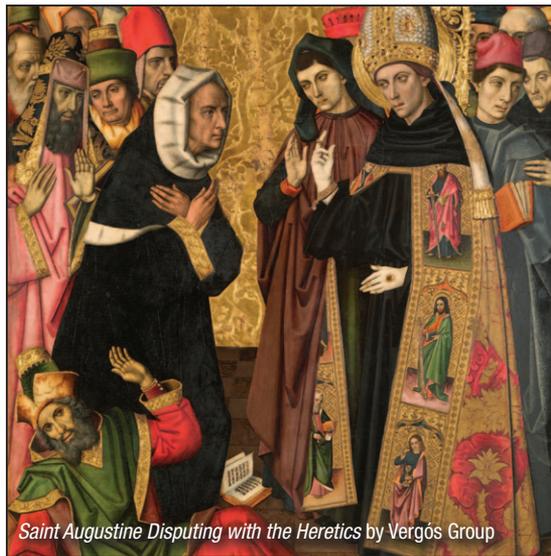
The obfuscators of the Divine truth in the *Final Report* are more like Pharisees. For in order to reconcile a life in adultery with the reception of Holy Communion, they skillfully invented new letters, a new law of “discernment and integration,” introducing new human traditions against the crystalline commandment of God. To the advocates of the so-called “Kasper agenda” are addressed these words of the Incarnated Truth: “You made void the word of God by introducing your own tradition” (Mk. 7: 13). Those who during 2,000 years spoke relentlessly and with an utmost clarity about the immutability of the Divine truth, often at the cost of their own life, would be labeled in our days as Pharisees as well: Saint John the Baptist, Saint Paul, Saint Irenaeus, Saint Athanasius, Saint Basil, Saint Thomas More, Saint John Fisher, Saint Pius X, just to mention the most glowing examples.

The real result of the Synod in the perception of the faithful and of secular public opinion was that there has been practically only one focus on the question of the admittance of the divorced to Holy Communion. One can affirm that the Synod in a certain sense turned out to be in the eyes of public opinion a Synod of adultery, not the Synod of family. Indeed, all the beautiful affirmations of the *Final Report* on marriage and family are eclipsed by the ambiguous affirmations in the text section on the divorced and remarried, a topic which was already confirmed and decided by the Magisterium of the last Roman Pontiffs in faithful conformity with the bi-millennial teaching and practice of the Church. It is therefore a real shame that Catholic bishops, the successors of the Apostles, used synodal assemblies in order to make an attempt on the constant and unchangeable practice of

the Church regarding the indissolubility of the marriage, i.e. the non-admittance of the divorced who live in an adulterous union to the Sacraments.

In his letter to Pope Damasus, Saint Basil drew a realistic picture of the doctrinal confusion caused by those churchmen who sought an empty compromise and an adaptation to the spirit of the world in his time: “Traditions are set at nought; the devices of innovators are in vogue in the Churches; now men are rather contrivers of cunning systems than theologians; the wisdom of this world wins the highest prizes and has rejected the glory of the cross. The elders lament when they compare the present with the past. The younger are yet more to be compassionated, for they do not know of what they have been deprived” (Ep. 90, 2).

In a letter to Pope Damasus and to the Occidental Bishops, Saint Basil describes as follows the confused situation inside the Church: “The laws of the Church are in confusion. The ambition of men, who have no fear of God, rushes into high posts, and exalted office is now publicly known as the prize of impiety. The result is that the worse a man blasphemes, the fitter the people think him to be a bishop. Clerical dignity is a thing of the past. There is no precise knowledge of canons. There is complete immunity in sinning; for when men have been placed in office by the favour of men, they are obliged to return the favour by continually showing indulgence to offenders. Just judgment is a thing of the past; and everyone walks according to his heart’s desire. Men in authority are afraid to speak, for those who have reached power by human interest are the slaves of those to whom they owe their advancement. And now the very vindication of orthodoxy is looked upon in some quarters as an opportunity for mutual attack; and men conceal their private ill-will and pretend that their hostility is all for the sake of the truth. All the while unbelievers laugh; men of weak faith are shaken; faith is uncertain; souls are drenched in ignorance because adulterators of the word imitate the truth. The better ones of the laity shun the churches as schools of impiety and lift their hands



Each period of confusion during the history of the Church is at the same time a possibility to receive many graces of strength and courage and a chance to demonstrate one’s love for Christ the Incarnated Truth.

in the deserts with sighs and tears to their Lord in heaven. The faith of the Fathers we have received; that faith we know is stamped with the marks of the Apostles; to that faith we assent, as well as to all that in the past was canonically and lawfully promulgated” (Ep. 92, 2).

Each period of confusion during the history of the Church is at the same time a possibility to receive many graces of strength and courage and a chance to demonstrate one’s love for Christ the Incarnated Truth. To Him each baptized and each priest and bishop promised inviolable fidelity, everyone according to his own state: through the baptismal vows, through the priestly promises, through the solemn promise in the episcopal ordination. Indeed, every candidate to the episcopacy promised: “I will keep pure and integral the deposit of faith according to the tradition which was always and everywhere preserved

in the Church.” The ambiguity found in the section on divorced and remarried of the *Final Report* contradicts the abovementioned solemn episcopal vow. Notwithstanding this, everyone in the Church – from the simple faithful to the holders of the Magisterium – should say:

“Non possumus!” I will not accept an obfuscated speech nor a skilfully masked back door to a profanation of the Sacrament of Marriage and Eucharist. Likewise, I will not accept a mockery of the Sixth Commandment of God. I prefer to be ridiculed and persecuted rather than to accept ambiguous texts and insincere methods. I prefer the crystalline “image of Christ the Truth, rather than the image of the fox ornamented with gemstones” (Saint Irenaeus), for “I know whom I have believed,” “Scio, Cui credidi!” (2 Tim. 1: 12). ☩

*Bishop Athanasios Schnieder O.R.C. is a Roman Catholic bishop who is the auxiliary bishop of Astana, Kazakhstan, and titular bishop of Celerina. He is a member of the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross of Coimbra. This lecture was originally published on the website of *Rorate Caeli* on November 2, 2015 and is reprinted with their permission.*

