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The Sin of Turning Away from Reality: An Interview with Father Krzysztof Charamsa

DAVID PATERNOTTE*, MARY ANNE CASE AND SARAH BRACKE

The Polish ecclesiastic Krzysztof Olaf Charamsa is a former member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the former second secretary of the International Theological Commission. Until 2015, he was a professor at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum and Pontifical Gregorian University. He has published widely on theological issues, including in-depth discussions of the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Pope Benedict XVI.

In 2015, Mgr Charamsa made global headlines after he came out, together with his partner Eduard Planas, on the eve of the second Synod on the Family. He lost his job and was almost immediately suspended from priesthood. Since then, he has been an outspoken critic of Catholic conservatism on issues related to women's and LGBTIQ rights, and has advocated for the need of the Church to amend its teachings. He recently published his recollections of his life at the Vatican (La Prima Pietra. Milan: Rizzoli, 2016) and keeps a website (www.kcharamsa.com) to share his activities.

This interview was prepared by all authors and carried out by Mary Anne Case and David Paternotte in February 2016 in Barcelona. A much longer transcript of the actual conversation was subsequently edited by the authors and the interviewee. The interview includes an appendix with references to the main documents and institutional bodies mentioned in the text.

Keywords

Gender ideology; Vatican; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; complementarity; Ratzinger; Charamsa.

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Gender Trouble at the Vatican

D. Paternotte: As you know, we have been working on the emergence of 'gender ideology' and we are interested in understanding how this more recent debate on gender developed within the Catholic Church in general, and at the level of the Vatican in particular. How do you account for the ways in which gender became such an issue for the Vatican?

K. Charamsa: The reaction to gender really began after the UN conferences, after Cairo and Beijing. The Vatican responded to those conferences with panic and disorder. When you hear something that makes you panic, you easily move from the possibility to discuss to merely defending your own position. This move marks the Vatican's relationship to gender studies, or what they call 'gender ideology'. The Vatican, as an institution formed by people, concrete people and concrete offices, is currently in a situation of panic.

The Catholic Church, so it seems, needs an enemy. Communism was a very good enemy. And now the Church is unable to form its own identity. It has a great problem in defining its Catholic identity in the modern world, and needs to answer questions such as: Who are we in this world? What do we do after the sexual revolution, after feminist thought? Such questions continue to be articulated against 'others'. In the past, it was Protestantism, evangelical Reform, and then Communism. The Church must find something – I cannot say somebody: 'somebody' in this case is depersonalized, it is deformed into 'something' – upon which an enemy image is projected, which then helps me to clarify my identity. This 'something', nowadays, is gays and sexual minorities. Sexual minorities are reduced to the 'other', not 'one of us', and then to 'something'. In this stereotypical vision, sexual minorities such as gays, lesbians, transgender people, intersex people are reduced to the masculine category of 'gays', only gays. The Church fails to see real people, communities or movements. It identifies something without real knowledge of it; without awareness of the human and sexual identity and life of these people, who must remain invisible. They are viewed as an object upon which hate and fear can be projected, and which can be destroyed. 'Gender' emerges as the slogan-name of a theoretical elaboration against which the Church can build its identity.

In this situation, you cannot reflect about reality, about this thing you refuse. Therefore, the reaction to gender studies is to reject. This is the knee-jerk reaction of the Church, as it has done before in its history. When Darwin wrote his book, the reaction of the Catholic Church and of Christianity as a whole was to reject it. The only strategy was prohibition – not objective study, reflection, or dialogue – of human thought, which the Church perceives as not coherent with the doctrines of the faith. The same thing is now happening with gender studies. But of course gender studies cannot be reduced to one book, as it represents a wide spectrum of thinking, of experiences, and social movements. A way of thinking that is connected to life, concrete life, to people who gain awareness of their own dignity and identity, and begin to see the possibility to

be themselves. From a Christian point of view, one might say that this is a very Christian movement, a truly evangelical movement. This is the Gospel: 'work in progress' to understand our nature and our call to be and love! Because the understanding of the Gospel is made by people, concrete people who seek to understand themselves in the light of God's revelation, but not without reason. But the Church made another choice in the face of the great discovery of sexual orientation and gender identity and their cultural and social connotations. This choice is not inspired by intellectual patience and knowledge, but by political strategies. It can be captured in this image: when Vatican delegates returned from Cairo, from Beijing, they said: 'Okay, the war begins!' The Vatican responded: 'Oh! Thank God, we have a new war!' No patience, no study, no dialogue – no attempt to understand a new human conscience and its requests for human rights and non-discrimination. Only a very emotional ideological fight! We know nothing about this constructed enemy; we have no time to read anything. So it is easy to present this enemy to ourselves as something impersonal, a thing, in a somewhat materialistic approach to reality. So the Church, who speaks about spirit, is far more materialistic in this regard than the world outside, than philosophy. This is the situation we have known in the Church for the past 20 years.

M.A. Case: Hasn't it been longer than this? Ratzinger, in 1983, had already put it all together in what is known as the Ratzinger Report. He didn't have the word 'gender', but he had everything else. He had gay people and trans people and feminism, and new reproductive technologies and new family formations.

K. Charamsa: Do you really think he is an expert in this? Do you think he has read something serious about this?

M.A. Case: I don't know. I don't know where he gets this idea so early.

K. Charamsa: From Joseph Nicolosi, a doctor of reparative therapy, from Gerard van den Aardweg, a Dutch psychiatrist about homosexuality, from Mgr Tony Anatrella, a French priest who cures gay people (and some of these say that he invited them to have sex during corrective therapy), and from Johann Christoph Arnold and others.

M.A. Case: So, did Pastor Arnold propose *Humanum*?

K. Charamsa: [laughs] No! Who proposed that spectacle, that is another question. I'm talking about the origins of Ratzinger's thinking. The level at the Vatican is poor, and closed, and fundamentalist. There is very little intellectual force to dialogue, to reflect. It's more like a panic game, where one doesn't really know what to do and one attacks in every occasion. There is, I want to insist, no serious reflection about gender studies, feminism, or social movements of sexual minorities in the Vatican. There is no theological, philosophical or sociological reflection in the Church, and this is dramatic. So when you ask me who and what and when, I answer nobody, nowhere!

You know, in the Catholic Church we claim that the term 'homophobia' was invented by the press. Never mind forty or fifty years of study about homophobia. The problem is, the Church begins by presenting the enemy as somebody with whom you cannot discuss. Later on it wakes up and finds there was no problem, as it finds now with Darwin's theory. But the Church fails to account for what it has done for several hundred years in the meantime. We have the

same situation now with gender studies. It might even be worse because we have concrete people, who can't wait for three hundred years. In brief, the reaction now is panic, disorder, and ideological propaganda, and nothing more. Like in a Bolshevik state. When you don't study, when you don't reflect, when you don't discuss, you must present everything in apocalyptic terms.

D. Paternotte: Like a conspiracy.

K. Charamsa: Yes. We are in this apocalyptic vision, an emotional reaction. Perhaps this is also a problem connected to the absence of great intellectual minds at the highest levels of the Church, who would be able to describe reality more objectively.

D. Paternotte: Yet while some of the arguments in the Lexicon are entirely disconnected or invented, others actually make sense. Some people must have read something. I have therefore a very basic question about the production of knowledge: does the Church ask for reports from people who are consultants, like the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, when they need this kind of information? How do they find information when they need it?

K. Charamsa: Look, I can confirm that, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), which is the office of the Vatican responsible for doctrinal positions, nobody has read anything. The consultants are theologians – and not the best theologians – who absolutely are not experts of gender studies. They rely on a few propagandistic and apocalyptic slogans, like the argument that closes every discussion: 'They want everybody to change their sex and teach this to children in school.' Much confusion and ignorance, a persistent usage of 'they': we don't know who they are, but this is the concept of a 'public enemy', which must be instilled in the Catholic mentality. This is the background of the propagandistic pronouncements of Francis against gender in his General Audience on the family.¹ I was in the team of the Congregation who edited the text of this audience. I did everything to attenuate the text, but it was impossible to contradict this ignorant sentence in a meeting with two other figures who are ignorant about gender. The same thing happened at the Synod. There is no serious reflection about gender studies, only irrational negation.

Then there's the Lexicon, this is a 'magisterial' work of ignorance by cardinal Trujillo. He was not a great scholar, but had a true obsession with sexual issues and a hatred of gays. In the Lexicon, our Catholic pseudo-scientific answer to gender studies, you do find people who have read something, but in a very partial way. This partial and subjective presentation of gender studies is implanted within Church mentality and propaganda. In this sense, we have many theologians who fight against Dr. Money and construct this whole conspiracy. For instance, we have one in Poland.

¹ See *General Audience*, 15 April 2015: 'Modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths in order to enrich the understanding of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much skepticism. For example, I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.'

D. Paternotte: Do you mean Oko?

K. Charamsa: Yes, Oko is a local demagogue in the service of the Polish Episcopal Conference: with the silent permission of the Conference he continues to spread, in an offensive and inhuman way, what bishops think and what they want the people hear. And Polish media promote this propagandist, without realizing that they become voices of apocalyptic Catholic propaganda. This propaganda now dominates a big part of Polish homophobic, racist, and anti-Semitic mentality, which represents a big unevangelical 'victory' of the Catholic Church in Poland. But seriously, it is difficult to study these matters within the Church, at the level of the Congregation. Serious study is effectively forbidden by ecclesial authorities, as it is viewed as collaboration with the enemy. So when the CDF investigates Catholic professors or bishops, for the *nihil obstat*, the Congregation finds theologians who use the words gender, homosexuality or AIDS, to be suspicious. There are, of course, places within the Church where you can study these topics. I am thinking of the Institutes for the Study of Marriage and Family, founded by John Paul II. They now have national centers all over the globe connected with the Institute of Rome directed by Mgr Melina.² Their work is more propagandistic than serious interdisciplinary research. They can use all these terms, like homosexuality or gender, because they produce only unilateral condemnations.

The tactic, the strategy, is therefore often silence. We cannot speak about this. Homosexuality cannot exist, and when it exists, it must be invisible. The Lexicon is part of this ignorance. I'm surprised that university centers do not condemn or denounce this publication, especially as it comes from an important institution. The Vatican is afraid of something it wants to stop. And I think many people in the Church know they cannot stop it. But they hope they might delay it, so that they get enough time, twenty or thirty years, to reflect. Then they can say, 'Oh yes, it was the historical context, now we understand better.' This is Catholic mentality. This is our mental school. Now we are able to better understand Luther and the evangelical Churches. But nobody asks: 'What have we been doing all this time?'

My dream, when I began to read gender studies and I found it to be strong thinking, was that we could begin to objectively and critically study this rich body of thought, which cannot be reduced to *one* idea and *one* ideology.

Global Dynamics and Alliances

D. Paternotte: This makes me think about two additional issues. One is the meeting of the Pope with the Orthodox Church in Havana last February, with their defense of heterosexual marriage. The other is the positioning of the African churches during the Synod, when they presented gender as an imposition of the North on the South. How do you read such dynamics?

K. Charamsa: I read these in the same perspective: disorder and singular reactions, without a global vision. The Synod does not only face the problem of the

² In August 2016 the Pope appointed a new president, Mgr Sequeri. This new appointment, however, does not change anything to the Institute's homophobic character.

African position, but of course the African bishops were used by the Curia, by the CDF, during the Synod. Cardinal Walter Kasper said in the first Synod: 'With the African bishops we cannot speak, and they cannot teach us, about homosexuality. Sorry, but this not possible.' They lack scientific knowledge about sexual orientation and are incompetent to discuss this issue. That was a clear and courageous statement by Kasper in an interview. It was not against the dignity of these persons, but a judgment of the intellectual and experiential reflections on homosexuality of their churches. So Kasper said: 'No. You must listen now, and not speak.' Because this is where we must form our conscience. And then came the second Synod, and Cardinal Robert Sarah. He also represents the view of the CDF and openly compares gays today to the Nazis of yesterday or calls transgender people the devil. There's no mystery in this regard; there's a great ideological friendship between Müller and Sarah. But the Congregation kept this in the background. So, the Africans, I think, were manoeuvred by the Curia. This is something diabolical, as they are presented as the 'healthy Church'. It was horrible to me when Francis went to Uganda, where the Catholic Church supports inhuman civil laws against gays, and did not say a word about homosexuality. This is symptomatic of a mentality that relies on fear, panic, and lack of study; on the willingness to push some people back into invisibility. But even without the prejudices and stereotypical positions of the African bishops at the Synod, the Curia is enough LGBTIQ-phobic to destroy a free and rational discussion in the Church about these human issues.

The problem is that sexual minorities in the Church should begin a Stonewall Revolution, which will force the Church authorities to *think* and leave a paranoiac fear of LGBTIQ-persons behind. Do you know where the letters and reports that Catholic gay organizations sent to the Vatican before the Synod ended up? In the rubbish bin. The cancelation of issues of gay dignity happened not during the Synod, but before it. For this reason I came out before the Synod. The press release said that the Synod wanted to reflect on divorced and also gay people. Thanks to the CDF this project of free and evangelical discussion about human dignity was denigrated and cancelled even before the Synod opened.

We must consider the Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, the Havana Declaration, in the same vein. Regarding family issues, this is a really political statement (not ecclesial in the evangelical sense), a very absolutist and arrogant statement. It is written with kind words in an atmosphere of reconciliation, but in reality this is a political fight against humanity. You know, this was the meeting of two enemies, great enemies, holding a staged meeting for the world, with cameras. We *hate* the media in the Catholic Church, but we *need* the media, we need visibility, at least for these weird political strategies, like the 'reconciliation' of two enemies. When you have two enemies, you must find a third enemy to create an alliance. And the third enemy is sexual minorities, their right to love and be loved, their human right to marry and live in the family, and so on.

M.A. Case: This is one of the things that fascinates me about the war on gender, that the Catholic Church has formed alliances with all kinds of religious traditions: Islam, the Mormon Church, the Southern Baptists, the Bruderhof, the Eastern Orthodox, with whom, as you say, they are at war. But they agree on this.

K. Charamsa: They do this without studying the position of others. They prioritize political strategy – immediate and ideological – above study and coherence

with the truth. We know that the Orthodox Church has little capacity nowadays to reflect about modernity. We know that the Moscow Patriarchy represents the political line of the Kremlin; this Church speaks in the name of the Russian state. And the Catholic Church uses whomever it can, in this materialistic manner we discussed before. Everyone who might reinforce your struggle is considered to be good, and you can make an alliance with the devil. These two men in Cuba should have spoken about the contemporary problems that Christians face. But they didn't, and instead they spoke about others (or about who they consider 'others'). Last but not least, if Kyrill and Francis would like to speak about the family, they are competent only to speak about the *Catholic* or *Orthodox* family, not the *human* family and arrogantly impose their *inhuman* and *unscientific* vision to humanity at large. This is the arrogance of their politics, not the humility of the Gospel of Jesus.

For me, the true arrogance lies in their writings about the family. The statement is a very sad moment in Francis' pontificate. It reflects something of an ideological war of two important politicians who fail to understand that the mission of the Church is spirituality, prudence, and patience. This is my disappointment with Francis' strategy, because he began his pontificate with some principles. 'We must understand reality,' he wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*. But now he is doing the exact opposite. Now he returns to the 'undiscussed values' strategy of Benedict XVI. There are two possibilities. Either he has changed compared to the initial enthusiasm for his pontificate, which was very different from his service in Buenos Aires, or everything was merely a strategy. After the pontificate of Benedict the Church was very tired, very morose, and in dire need of change. Francis brought change, but it was only cosmetic. I want to believe that this man has no bad intentions. But he is only human. And he might have discovered that it is impossible to collaborate with anyone in the Vatican.

The Place of Scholarship

D. Paternotte: Are you suggesting that, because the Vatican is so entangled with politics, there is no time for anything else, like study?

K. Charamsa: Exactly, no time and no will to comprehend reality. Because we must, at every moment, reconfirm our political strategy. And you know, Pope Francis is an old, homophobic man. Homophobic in a quotidian sense, as something which, in Catholic or Christian families, is transmitted through the mother, the grandmother. He for sure has inherited this mentality, but my hope at the beginning of his pontificate was that he would be able, as a man of state, in a new position, to open his mind. He was a great fan of Cardinal Carlo M. Martini, the Archbishop of Milan, who has reflected on sexual minorities positively. But when you begin a new job, you must have collaborators. The pope cannot study gender studies, he cannot read much... he needs institutions who do that for him. So when collaborators come to this pope and say, 'Gays are Nazis', day after day, it is easy to think that perhaps it is true, just like his grandmother used to say bad things about these gays. Francis might have returned to reality, as he announced at the beginning of his pontificate, but not the reality of humanity. Instead, he turned to the reality of his Church, that is, of the Vatican,

of the institution, of the *system*. But when my church is a 'system', it begins to run counter to Christianity. Because Christianity is not a system. Christianity must be an encounter with people; it must be thinking. The Church has become a patriarchal and masculinist system of domination and that creates confusion. For a believer it is often impossible to distinguish between the political system and one's faith. Moreover, in the Catholic Church we must obey the magisterium. You might want to say: 'But there are churches everywhere; Catholicism is not only the Vatican.' Of course! But every movement of Catholics who think, who understand, who are open to discussion and reflection is targeted by the paranoiac and apocalyptic politics of the Vatican.

When the Pope speaks, you might think there must be great scholarship behind it. Like when Ratzinger wrote his last document as prefect of the CDF – this document about the collaboration between Man and Woman in the Church and in the World with its ridiculous analysis of feminist studies. People tend to think such a text relies on serious scholarship. Then you check the consultants of the CDF in the *Annuarium Pontificium* and you seriously wonder whether they have the required expertise to write this text. The first draft might have been written by one woman – a philosopher – but it was commented upon by thirty men, thirty theologians, who have no idea about gender studies or have only a stereotypical or prejudiced conception of it. For me, this last document by Ratzinger is a presentation of the Biblical position, without any serious confrontation or response to gender studies or feminist thinking. And, paradoxically, nobody in the Church reads this text. Or when we do read it, we do not read it critically, but only to quote it, and sustain the illusion that the Congregation has dealt with gender studies in a well-researched manner.

M.A. Case: So Ratzinger didn't write the 2004 letter to the Bishops personally?

K. Charamsa: No, he did not. He discussed and confirmed the definitive version; he signed the document.

M.A. Case: So who did write it?

K. Charamsa: As I said, the first draft was done by a female scholar, but this is not such an important fact, because the first draft is then revised by collaborators of the Congregation and usually the final text is very different from the first draft. But your question introduces another interesting element, for sociological reasons. There are many women in the Church doing fantastic work, but those women whom the Vatican has admitted as collaborators are often integralist and incapable of discussion. Their scholarship justifies the submission of women. It's incredible. They are submissive and unable to think independently.

So the Church relies on a ritualistic repetition of theory, a theory that serves propagandistic ideology. If you have doubts, you just hide them because when you work in the Vatican, when you work in Catholic universities, you depend on the CDF, on its *nihil obstat*. The Congregation consists of ten men who work on doctrinal topics. The *nihil obstat* depends on them.

You know, the Vatican sometimes says, 'We are not centralist because we have no men, no resources.' But fear is enough to submit people in the Church and often the problem is that great questions are entrusted to fundamentalists, as in the case of the CDF. I'll give you an example. Do you remember CDF's

statement against Roger Haight?³ After the statement the entire world discovered a very important Catholic thinker, and *Gott sei Dank!* You might wonder why the Vatican is fighting against him, as there are many others who say the same thing, or even more strongly. But the Church chooses one case to frighten or intimidate others. It is important to understand that the Congregation fights without objective criteria, only with fear. And with fear we can dominate people; it is a force that hinders thinking. My hope was Francis, who is not so intellectual, but very political. He's not a professional scholar, but he knows where he must go to read something important. He has intuition, but he has no leverage, no collaborators, to do something.

I think that, as a political man without collaborators, he has calculated what he can do and what is impossible. This was obvious in one of his interviews before the Synod, when the journalist asked him, 'So, divorced people and homosexuals, what do you want to do with them in the Synod?' He spoke about divorce. Journalist insisted and asked about homosexuals. [laughs] He returned to divorce. At that moment he struck me as a man who understands he cannot do anything. This is the victory of the masculinist system of the Vatican, which consequently converts faith into propagandistic ideology that is unable to reasonably verify our ideas in the light of reality.

M.A. Case: So there's a woman who works with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith? Who worked with Ratzinger in 2000?

K. Charamsa: No. Documents are not only prepared by officials of the Congregation but also by external experts. Then they are discussed by the consultors of the Congregation, who are managed by officials of the Congregation. The consultors consist of thirty professors from Roman universities, which means no one from the rest of world. And in Rome there is no possibility to develop independent thinking because of the Vatican. When you work in Rome, you must be very careful and it is better when you repeat the actual doctrine without real thinking. There was one woman in the staff of the CDF, but generally there is a great fear of women. In the Church, the final word on the every question is the voice of men.

So, when the Congregation works on a draft of a document about gender or medical issues, the actual work is done by people without expertise: philosophers, lawyers, canon lawyers, theologians, but not the best thinkers and no experts of medical, sexual, psychological, or social problems.

The International Theology Commission suffers from the same problem. At the time of Vatican II, the Catholic Church had theologians with open minds, like Balthasar, De Lubac or Congar. Today, because of continuing forms of inquisition and the 'burning' of thinking and creativity in the Church (this is the heritage of John Paul II and Ratzinger), we face a lack of thinkers. This also explains why the Vatican responds so anxiously to contemporary developments. When Hegel developed his thought no one in the Catholic world was capable of answering him. We are in a similar moment of crisis. Of course, we have somebody like Kasper for ecclesiology, but he is not an expert in gender studies. Without a real interdisciplinary discussion, he also represents heteronormativity, and is unable to reflect on the system and systematic thinking of the Church in this field.

³ Notification on the book *'Jesus Symbol of God'* by Father Roger Haight S.J.

When you encounter gender studies, you must think, 'Oh, *mamma mia*, there is something important here.' And you must begin to confront your position, especially your heteronormative position without fear. Yet they refuse to see this, and prefer to reduce gender studies – no, 'gender ideology' – to an effect of contemporary incertitude, a 'modern and pagan mode', and design it as our 'apocalyptic enemy'. It does not make sense. Let's return to the example of the unfortunate catechesis of April 2015, repeated during the Synod without a real theological criterion (the important thing is repeat and repeat). When one of the Roman professors prepares a catechesis about the family for Francis, he merely knows that it is good to introduce a slogan about gender, but has no idea what he's talking about. He simply repeats an idea already constructed in Church language. When this draft comes to the Congregation for correction, we are happy: 'Yes!! Gender!' It's important just to *say* the *name* of the enemy, not explain why it's an enemy. The important part is the stigmatization and marginalization.

Nobody really knows where this 'gender ideology' comes from. This is our ecclesial construction: the Church has constructed gender ideology. In the case of Francis' catechesis we can observe how the Vatican works. The Congregation approves the draft without consulting gender experts, and the Pope reads it. He did not delete the sentence: 'For example, I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.' This claim is not verified by serious reflection – What is gender theory? Who wants the removal of difference? etc. etc. And reducing gender studies to what the pope calls, in very apodictic and bad judgment, 'an expression of frustration and resignation' is simply not serious in intellectual terms. This is the stigmatization of an important contemporary reflection. So these kinds of statements and phrases function like propaganda, which seeks to destroy or negate – not exactly intellectually but psychologically, in Catholic mentality – one part of respectful thinking. This kind of communication seeks to incite negative emotions against something that is not defined. Everything that our people must know about gender studies is in this sentence. This is the stigmatization of LGBTIQ issues.

Theology of the Body and Sex Complementarity

M.A. Case: Except that when you say that there are no great systematic thinkers, there's a sense in which, as I see it, the heteronormativity of the Church is in fact an invention of Wojtyła and Ratzinger. They are the systematic thinkers who have given us, with the theology of the body, with complementarity, with Ratzinger's metaphysics of marriage, something that is, fairly systematic and serious, theologically, no?

K. Charamsa: Is there a theological foundation to heteronormativity?

M.A. Case: I mean it's new. I guess my sense is that what Ratzinger and Wojtyła are writing is new.

K. Charamsa: The insistence on complementarity in a very negative way, as a slogan against gays, is indeed new. Of course, it relies on the traditional interpretation of the two first chapters of Genesis. Facing the discovery of sexual orientation, the Church is called to reflect on its interpretation of the Bible in a new light. But panic pushed it in a different direction: it reinforced the complementarity argument and therefore closed the possibility of Catholic reasonable confrontation of our faith heritage, including its cultural and historical constructions and biblical expressions, with actual knowledge. In the past, the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo about the Solar System requested a reinterpretation of parts of the biblical view on the world and mankind. The Church today faces the same call with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity.

M.A. Case: Yes. Also theology of the body is new.

K. Charamsa: Theology of the body is new in the sense that this part of our humanity was misunderstood and forgotten, creating the Catholic complex of the body. I think it is possible to reconstruct a Catholic theology of body that takes the complexity of LGBTIQ issues into account. For theology this would be an enrichment that reforms our traditional, heteronormative, vision of marriage, which, in the light of Christian sources, must be open also for same sex couples. God has created us for love and this is an essential message for our faith, revealed in Genesis. In the confrontation with gender studies, we must correct many aspects of traditional doctrine about marriage. The intellectual scandal in the Church is that we are exasperating the complementary argument whereas we should reflect on the reinterpretation of Genesis. This (biological) use of complementarity, as a term and concept is, for me, a clear ideological construction *against* the other. It is a very dangerous ideological invention, which comes with the prohibition to be discussed and verified.

The Church uses the theology of body in the same vein. While it would be necessary to confront it with modern knowledge about human identity, we transform all this reflection into an immutable argument that does not permit reflection about modern advancements in knowledge and human rights, sexual human rights. We transform our historical and circumstantial anthropological reflection in the eternal truth of faith. We have closed our eyes for a very complex and mysterious identity, which is a human person, when we shield ecclesial reflection from the development of modern knowledge. This is a reduction of the human body to something immutable and prefixed. We have canceled the dynamic of knowledge and human reason and impose our partial historical visions as universal and eternal. This has been our error many times in the past, and we continue it today.

This is also my experience of pope Francis. His response to homosexuality in his latest book is a perfect example of confusion. I think the man might have had good intentions before, but now there is great confusion. He continues to speak about 'homosexual tendency'. 'Tendency' is our word; we cannot use 'orientation' because that would confront us with *all* subjects of sexual orientation. The Church speaks about 'tendency', something like a psychological or sexual attraction, nothing more – not something natural and healthy, normal and regular. The term 'sexual orientation' was used only twice and by error. John Paul II used it at the beginning of his pontificate, in one of his first speeches in the United States, but it was an error [laughs]. The problem is that the Church is not

honest in its doctrine: it doesn't use the scientific term yet it doesn't explain why it eliminates it. The answer is: because it wants to maintain the false ancient vision of homosexuality, because only this erroneous vision can justify the actual doctrine of homosexuality. If homosexuality is a pathology, homosexual acts can be considered sins, yet if it is a healthy sexual orientation, the entire Catholic vision of homosexuality must change.

The Church fails to face sexual orientation with an open mental attitude, and offers panic and paranoia instead. The document against admitting gays in the priesthood is a case in point.⁴ It is based on a false vision of gay people, and it is a document of segregation of a part of humanity. This is the law of the Church and Francis does not want to change it. He maintains a big incoherence between what he says and what he permits.

In his book, Francis continues this confusion and says: 'I am glad that we are talking about "homosexual people" because before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity. And people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love.' This sounds like: 'Oh, sexual tendencies are not important and we can hide them.' But sexual orientation is part of the wholeness and dignity of a human person and in practice, for heterosexual people, it really is the foundation of their life in every dimension: family, social, religious, etc. Yet for homosexual people, the Church insists, 'sexual tendencies' are not the most important thing (which sounds ridiculous coming from those who have silenced the existence of homosexuality in the past centuries). This reductive distinction is a big falsification. This ecclesial dialectic is false and incoherent with human knowledge about human sexuality. What kind of anthropology holds that 'before: individual person – then: homosexual'? What does that mean? We know today that it is impossible to understand a human being without sexual orientation and gender identity. And this is also against human rights!

We have all these problems in the Church, because the ecclesial authorities are not able to reflect on and to live our human sexual orientation at a personal and communitarian level.

With false language and false pre-concepts we destroy reality; we hide it. John Paul II 'discovered' the term 'body' and introduced it within Catholic mentality, which was a good thing: we began to speak about something that used to be a taboo, but is essential for understanding the human person. At the same time this theology encloses the concept of the body in a static and biologist perspective: psychological or relational aspects of the 'language of the body' are seen as expressions of a reductive biologist conception of the body. Humanity now also knows that sexual orientation – or as the Church falsely puts it: 'sexual tendency' – is equally essential for understanding human nature. Facing this modern discovery, with our false ecclesial terminology we seek to hide this reality, to eliminate it, to *dominate* it. Our language is a prison, and a very hypocritical one, which falsifies reality and forces Catholics to obey this irrational imposition.

⁴ *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders.* The document was presented and prepared by the earlier mentioned Mgr Tony Anatrella.

I have seen some initial positive openness in the theology of body, which can help to reduce our Catholic complex of body, also in the field of language. Yet I remain critical about this theology, because this kind of 'fixing' of the body, this static signification, doesn't help us understand the human being, man or women.

As for the complementarity argument as it is currently used, I don't find anything positive in it. It is the ideological fixing of a false thesis. It was, of course, already present in John Paul II, but the kind of complementarity promoted by *Humanum*, by the Congregation, is something more: it is an ideological usage of a historical argument that is not seriously verified and that is imposed as universal. Also when this argument is presented as psychological, in reality the complementarity of two – man and woman – is something essentially biological, something very physical and materialistic. And very schizophrenic for Catholic thinking, when you think about the fact that Latin priests, in their celibacy, cannot realize this physical and biological complementarity. And it's an absolutist imposition of a very dangerous argument; no dialogue or reflection about it is possible. So for me, this ideology is a clear instrument of the ideological war the Vatican is waging. And at the same time, when you propose ideology, you must name your enemy with it. So you project your problem on another: 'gender ideology'.

And ideology is the real Catholic problem, because in the central agency of the Vatican we have no one who is capable to think, to open minds and propose a constructive intellectual analysis of the situation. One might of course also say that there *are* many people who think, but they cannot express and develop their thought. Take Cardinal Ravasi for instance. This man is capable of dialogue, but he is a man of the system. So, in the end, he has no possibility of reflecting on heteronormativity. Or Schönborn, or Bonny in Belgium, Marx in Germany... the Vatican sees these people as freaky within the Church.

Everything is banalized, and this is the great weapon of this ideological fight. This is the weapon of homophobia. Ridiculize, present as inferior, and then destroy. Physically or psychologically – it doesn't matter. We prefer to destroy psychologically, but we don't disagree with other forms of destruction. So the Islamic State has its reasons to eliminate those persons who are dangerous to society, African states have their reasons to impose the death penalty for gay people. The Vatican agrees with this! For the Catholic Church, states and nations have the *right* to eliminate persons who are dangerous. Sexual minorities *are* seen as dangerous. One journalist in Amsterdam said to me: 'Do you know that Cardinal Amato told me that two men who love each other are in society like two terrorists with a bomb?' This cardinal was my boss in the Congregation. I don't know his experience of homosexuality and I don't want to know it. But this is the perception: when you design and create your enemy and stigmatize him as so dangerous, you have every right to eliminate him. And this is our homophobia. But homophobia is nothing when you think about lesbophobia or transphobia or intersexphobia. This is another issue perhaps for the next century! Until now, in the Church, we don't know who are trans or intersex persons. For now, in the collective imaginary the Church treats sexual minorities as exclusively gay, and nothing more. Lesbians don't exist, sometimes we remember that there are transgender people, but we cannot define who they are...

M.A. Case: But Ratzinger was worried about trans people in 1983.

K. Charamsa: I'm not sure what the true perception of reality was in Ratzinger's mind, nor how many personal problems are connected with this perception. Let me say, when you read Anatrella, Anderweg or Nicolosi, you begin to perceive reality this way. Let's give another example. We have spoken about Mark Regnerus. No one at the Congregation has read him. We don't read, but we know. He's against homosexuals, so he is with us. Everybody who's against him is against us, against the Church, against God, against humanity, against the family, against our future.

When one reads the documents of the Congregation on sexuality, one wonders how this intelligent man Ratzinger can sign such weak texts. The first homophobic text, the great text of Ratzinger's,⁵ and then two horrible texts against gay dignity and rights, love and sentiments.⁶ All these documents are anchored in the text of *Persona Humana* of 1975,⁷ and the *Catechism* (1992), of course, which then changed its vision on homosexuality in 1997.⁸ It was scandalous, because in the original version the *Catechism* suggested that homosexuals do not choose their situation. The Congregation cancelled this in its revisions! But how does the Congregation know if homosexuals choose to be homosexuals or not? This is not the competence of the Congregation nor the Church, but rather a scientific issue. But this knowledge disturbs the Church because it is a call to reflect seriously on our moral position: if being gay is not a choice, but a natural orientation, then the reality is different and the moral ecclesial judgment should consider this newness.

Humanum was precisely the effect of this mentality and not a great intellectual project of the Church. No! There were two friends, one official in the Congregation and one American professor, who wanted to do something against gays and who organized people loaded with money to realize their project. This initiative was a very occasional, circumstantial project. There was no patient collegial reflection about the significance and sense of this kind of project.

M.A. Case: Yes. I am at a loss to understand what *Humanum* is trying to do. Who is its target audience? What is it trying to accomplish?

K. Charamsa: *Humanum's* entire strategy is about propaganda. And the propaganda worked very well in the context of the Synod, against Pope Francis. It was a project intended to contradict and silence the pope's intention to discuss.

⁵ *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, which recommends 'compassion' for homosexuals, 'suffering persons', and foresees the 'just discrimination' of homosexuals.

⁶ *Some considerations concerning the response to legislative proposals on the non-discrimination of homosexual persons* and *Considerations regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons*, which stipulates that homosexuality 'do[es] not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity', while homosexual relationships would not be 'human', or lack 'the human and ordered form of sexuality'.

⁷ *Persona Humana*. The declaration speaks of homosexual persons 'incapable of enduring a solitary life', of their 'inability to fit into society' and of their 'anomaly', and offers a skewed panorama of 'reasons of homosexuality'. This document is quoted by the *Catechism*.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 2357–2359.

M.A. Case: So *that* was the target audience. The Synod.

K. Charamsa: Yes. We can say it.

M.A. Case: OK. So not the world?

K. Charamsa: The ecclesial great dream is of course always the world, but I think that this dream was scaled down, also when other Vatican Dicasteries did not want to collaborate in this 'world congress' and 'demonstration of disgust of all religions against gays'. In practice the CDF was alone with American money: with dollars you can 'create' reality. So the initial hope was to present, in American style, this great condemnation of gay people by all religions. But the effect was not so big; it was not a great victory.

The method they use is that of a dictator who wants to destroy the opposition without listening to the opposition. Instead of studying reality, the congress offered propaganda. Together with some other initiatives, it 'killed' a Synodal understanding and discussion of reality. This is the reason why I say that the second Synod of 2015 was closed before it began.

From the Question of Homosexuality to the Woman Question

M.A. Case: I actually find it not at all surprising that Ratzinger would sign CDF documents, because for Ratzinger it's all theory, right? It's all what I keep calling math problems with humans. He's not interested in the person, the actual human person, the gay person or the straight person. It's all about the ideal relationship of Yahweh and the people of Israel, the Christ and the Church, the man and the wife, the priest and the people... if you're doing it at that level of abstraction, of course you're not interested in psychology, you're not interested in sociology. You're just interested in moving around abstract chess pieces.

K. Charamsa: Yes, you are right. The problem of many religious thinkers is abstraction and that becomes a wall of protection against the world and its life. For me, Ratzinger is ingenious in this abstraction, but his great problem was a lack of collaborators. You can discuss with him on an intellectual plane, but of course you need information, you need confrontation. Ratzinger did not have this kind of information nor confrontation. All consultants and officials in the Congregation were fascinated by him, like students fascinated by their professor. He was the 'Word of God', and every word that came out of his mouth was like a revelation. And these men were also incapable of understanding Ratzinger. They just took what he was saying as the doctrine of the Church, which cannot be changed. Nobody *wants* to verify or to discuss his conclusions. Because we are in an ideological war. I think that with rigorous and objective information about, and experience of, homosexuality Ratzinger could be able to reflect about the homophobia of his thought system. But exactly this study is forbidden in the CDF. He's very platonic in this defense against reality.

Now the documents of the CDF, which is recognized as the compulsory magisterium of the Church, serve as propaganda and nothing more. When

you analyze the texts, one is even worse than the other. The last one – the Considerations about unions – is horrible, it is a text that advocates human segregation and justifies discrimination. These documents are an expression of apartheid.

M.A. Case: No, worse than that. Of extermination.

K. Charamsa: Yes. This is psychological extermination, reducing gays to non-existence in the social space, to silence in language, to criminals in the law, etc. I think we must help the Church to move away from this emotional reaction, from this impossibility of reflection, from this broken reflection, emotionally broken. This was also the basis for my decision to come out. I understood that I must break or attack the emotions of my community. I know that you confront the texts of the Church very seriously, which is a normal attitude of university professors, of intellectuals. But it is my impression that, at this moment, this amounts to seeking dialogue with an irrational dictator. We must compel the Church to begin dialogue and the first condition is to accept that gays exist not as object, but as subjects with dignity and without shame. In order to force the Church to consider us as human persons I think coming out is essential. It was my call and that of every gay priest. We are not criminals to exterminate. The criminal is the system that offends and eliminates us.

In my experience there is a tendency in the Church to harden those concepts which we should verify in the modern context. This is case for natural law. In the first Synod an Italian Bishop and theologian, Bruno Forte, said: 'Perhaps today we cannot continue to speak about natural law in its Thomistic rigid form. Perhaps we must think more about the order of creation, which expresses something that we wanted to capture, with Thomas Aquinas, under the term of natural law.' I agree with this perspective, because helps me to re-interpret the philosophical concept of natural law in confrontation with actual knowledge and to return to the Bible. But of course, the order of creation obligates only believers, no one else. Natural law is used as our rational Catholic argument against the world. And today there are more objections than certitudes about natural law in its rigid version. But the Church doesn't hear voices calling for reflection and biblical renewal. Rather, it renders concepts harsher, which serves to maintain the ecclesial power of patriarchal domination.

Another example, very striking, is the International Theological Commission, where I was the second secretary. It was a very interesting experience. The International Theological Commission was a very important project after the second Vatican Council. This college of theologians, connected to the doctrinal Dicastery, that is, CDF, was founded by Paul VI as a new progressive power, a hope for theology and Catholic thinking. In the beginning there were many interesting people, such as Balthasar, Rahner, and many others. Rahner noted that this commission must discuss new problems and not repeat the ancient solutions. He said, 'I cannot pass my time in a commission where there is no discussion. I don't need to go to Rome for ice cream. I can eat ice cream in Germany as well.' So he left, even though I think that at that time it was not so bad. I cannot image what Rahner would say today. This commission became a ridiculous caricature with people who prepare textbooks. This is how they understand their mission, textbooks! Textbooks are the work of a professor after two or three years; it's not necessary to form an international theological commission for this. We can

see two problems: first of all, the level of reflection is very low. The second thought is worse: the idea of a central commission preparing something like textbooks is exactly the sin of uniformity, of imposition of a central Roman ideology upon all churches. The Church actually refuses the dynamic of thinking, the peaceful intellectual confrontation with reality, and promotes ideological positions.

And do you know what they are working on these days? [dramatic pause] Religious freedom.

D. Paternotte: That's not surprising.

K. Charamsa: The real goal of this reflection is how to use religious freedom or freedom of religion against gay marriage and against the non-discrimination of gay people in the society.

D. Paternotte: Well, that was the answer of the Catholic Church in the US, to the Supreme Court decision.

K. Charamsa: Yes, perhaps also in France. And this apocalyptic topic is connected with the defense of poor Christians in Syria. With the concept of religious freedom they defend Christians, and exterminate gays. I'm sure that we must defend Christians when they are persecuted. But my gay friends are martyrs too, in another way. And I'm not speaking about lesbians, about trans, who suffer much more. They are martyrs of Christian ideology defended by the Church.

M.A. Case: For me it goes beyond homophobia. It's gynophobia, or ignorance. I mean, it's in the fact that there were no women and no incorporation of women. Not because I think women have a special perspective, but precisely because I think they don't.

K. Charamsa: I also think that underneath this mentality there is the problem of women. It brings us back to the theology of the body. Wojtyła's idea of the 'genius of women' is something false and dangerous. This is a false construction. Woman becomes a 'thing' (not a subject who can describe herself) we (men) declare to be great, to be wonderful, with her special and particular genius. She becomes a special 'thing' that we can adore. Which is another way to neutralize this 'thing': the 'thing' has no possibility to open her mouth. Yet we are convinced that she's adored by our masculine (ecclesial) recognition of her genius. This is our depersonalized object: we don't treat women in a personal way, as the subject of an equal relationship. This is our 'fetish'. And Mary, mother of God, is also something like our 'fetish': we say that she is the most important person, but we eliminate a real feminine presence practically in every field of the Church. And every woman must be happy with this. Every woman must be happy that we adore Holy Mary and, with John Paul II, also her 'genius', when in reality this is a neutralization of her rights, her dignity, her equal participation in the human community, etc. This is something Macchiavellian, something so false.

M.A. Case: When you say Macchiavellian, it suggests a level of self-consciousness and purposefulness rather than blindness.

K. Charamsa: In part. This is Macchiavellian, but a great part of the clergy does not have full consciousness of it. Many men in the Vatican are convinced that they are saving humanity. This is a force of falsification: you convince yourself

that a false image is right. The effect is Macchiavellian, but how many people in the Vatican are conscious of that? That I cannot say.

For me, all the propaganda and non-intellectual constructions, which support the heteronormativity of the Church, are an expression of hatred towards the persecuted object. So, the rejection of women and gays (who are deemed women) is not an intellectual problem, it's a problem of government. This is a problem of power, of masculine, patriarchal power, which is contradicted now by women, by sexual minorities, by people who were stigmatized and discriminated in the past in society at large and now continue to be discriminated by their Church of love.

The official 'genius' of woman and the official 'respect' for gays is in fact the biggest expression of disappointment, of inferiority, of hate. So you continuously hear: 'Look. Gays are pathological people who *cannot*, are not able, to love another person. We are not against them. But they are naturally disordered and cannot have a sexual relation... And we are not against the marriage of gay men. They can get married. To women.' The mentality of the Church does not have the consciousness that these sentences are inhuman: this is not respect; this is humiliation. These sentences do not only ignore reality, they are also against human dignity.

M.A. Case: The Catholic Church has an easier time saying gays shouldn't have sexual relations than almost all of the other churches because the Catholic Church values celibacy. So when it says to gay people, 'You can have a life that is a life without love, without a partner', they are recommending to gay people what they recommend to their elite, right? Which is why complementarity is for me such a bizarre thing. If you believe in complementarity, then what are you doing with an all-male celibate priesthood? How are the priests living a life, and how is the *Church* living, if they're only half...

K. Charamsa: Yes, this is the thing.

M.A. Case: If there's no *parité* in the Church, the way there is in the French Assembly.

K. Charamsa: This is a great contradiction. Gays are stigmatized as sick, abnormal, with an internal disorder with respect to heteronormativity. But at the same time the Church prepares a closet for them: celibate priesthood. In the past this was a practical solution for a homosexual man who cannot marry a woman and thus remains unrealized in society. So he could become a priest and gain a socially important position. Today the Church continues to obligate Catholics to maintain compassion for these pathological individuals. This compassion, however, is against the dignity of a homosexual person. It is a sentiment of superior healthy heterosexual humanity over pathological individuals: this is the same compassion one has for a person with mental disorders. In one of its documents, the Congregation uses a comparison between gay and mental disorder. If gays obey this condemnation and remain silent their entire life, they can be priests and pursue an ecclesial career. The perfect closet!

M.A. Case: We also recommend celibacy to the ordinary heterosexual priest.

K. Charamsa: Yes. This is difficult to explain because nowadays the Church says all priests are heterosexual priests. Officially gays don't exist and now – according to the law of 2005 – gays cannot be priests, also when they want to be

celibate. The contradiction with complementarity is enormous. But in theory and in canon law celibacy is now only for heterosexual men. Celibacy is a promise to not marry a woman! And canon law contemplates a delict against celibacy only with women. Celibacy is the big problem, and another topic which I think we cannot fully address here. Celibacy is a discipline from the tenth century for which the Church is now seeking a theological foundation, which is impossible to find.

We live exactly as you said, in this abstraction. We create something that does not exist. And we must do it rabidly, ferociously, because this world presents objections. Very practical objections. Psychology tells me that imposed celibacy is not good. *Imposed*. One person can exercise his option to be celibate, but in the Catholic Church – in the Latin Church – celibacy is obligatory, without the possibility of choice! I cannot be a priest in the Latin Church, as I don't accept celibacy as a necessary part of priesthood. But the discipline of celibacy is not a theologically necessary part of priesthood. It would be possible for me to explain celibacy intellectually if Jesus, as founder of the Church, wanted that, but did he want this? I see no theological foundation for celibacy. It's the same thing with women's priesthood. The reasons are cultural, historical, but not theological.

M.A. Case: And worse, the argumentation is self-defeating. I still have the buttons: 'Ordain women or stop baptizing them.' So when *Inter Insigniores* says that women can't be priests because they can't be the image of Christ, well, the whole premise of salvation is that Christ is the image of *us*. And if women can't be ordained, then they're not saved.

K. Charamsa: This argument against women is also a panicked construction of the CDF and Paul VI against Anglicans. If you read this argument today, you think: 'Excuse me, but this argument, theologically, is not so strong. In the entire *Inter Insigniores* there's not one strong, Biblical, traditional argument.' There are many social, historical, and cultural arguments, but this is not essential. So the Congregation closed the discussion without arguments. In 1994 Pope John Paul II signed the document, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, against female ordination, deciding that priesthood is only for men. He wrote a statement by a masculine Church, which does not reflect, does not analyze reality, and cuts off the possibility to discuss. Yet this is only fighting against time. If this Church wants to continue, not as a sect but as a resonant Church community, it has to move forward.

M.A. Case: I think marriage equality might happen first, but women priests last.

K. Charamsa: Interesting. I am sure that the photo of my coming out is the announcement of the future clergy. Perhaps without clergymen – that's not important, it was only to be explicit in the photo: a priest with his partner, woman or man, a person whom one loves, is not contradictory with the love of Christ. But the Church is blocking everything. It doesn't open a perspective for reflection on the future.

M.A. Case: Well, as you say, it's all been reactive. So, you know, starting with *Humanae Vitae* and the Declaration on Homosexual Persons, and *Inter Insigniores*, they are all reactions. They are seeing that the world is moving elsewhere and saying no.

You know, in the end we, feminists and gay rights activists, may succeed in destroying humanity. We may destroy humanity.

K. Charamsa: [laughs] Yes, okay, but you know, normal people laugh about this. When you hear this, what can you say? Laugh! What can they say?

M.A. Case: Well, they could say, 'You're right.' You know, Ratzinger is right. We are destroying an old vision of humanity. Just as Christ destroyed an old vision of humanity.

K. Charamsa: Exactly. Yes, in this sense, this is a revolution, this is destroying. Destroying discrimination. But this is constructing, also. While the position of the Church is destroying without constructing. And this is falsification. In this moment the Church wants to conserve its position and maintain hate among Catholic masses against feminists and gays. That is a fight against time!

M.A. Case: So this is the thing about the genius of women. How many years have they been saying, 'We have to have a theology of the woman', and is there one? No! I mean, it's been twenty, thirty, forty years they've been saying, 'Well, we have to have one.'

K. Charamsa: This is more of a media strategy.

M.A. Case: This brings us back to the idea that it's Macchiavellian. You think that it's strategic, rather than self-delusional. I always thought that they were fooling themselves, more than they were fooling anyone else.

K. Charamsa: But the problem is the responsibility, the conscience – the real conscience of a person. I think that many of these ecclesial men are not conscious of this, but they serve this power which is not-God, which is diabolical – if you want to use our preferred name in the Catholic Church, the preferred name is the devil. This is sad. But it is so. I think that many, many of these people are not conscious of this confusion.

The worst sin is to be afraid of reality and this is the social sin of this time in my Church.

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Institutional Bodies

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in this text also Congregation or CDF: one of nine congregations of the Roman Curia. It is the oldest (first founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III, as the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition) and most active congregation, responsible for Catholic doctrine.

Curia, or Roman Curia: the administrative apparatus of the Holy See and the bodies through which the Roman Pontiff governs the Catholic Church.

International Theology Commission: established in 1969, by Paul VI, with the aim of studying doctrinal problems of major importance. The Commission is attached to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Synod of Bishops: a council of selected bishops, from around the world, that functions as an advisory body to the Pope (and technically speaking not part of the Curia). The Synod mentioned in this text refers to the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, also known as the Synod on the Family, with the theme 'The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World', that took place from 4 to 25 October 2015. This Synod was prepared by an extraordinary Synod on the Family, which took place in October 2014.