

Cardinal calls for fresh dialogue on divorced and remarried Catholics



In its approach to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, the Catholic Church needs to find a middle ground that does not destroy or abandon doctrine, but offers a "renewed" interpretation of church teaching in order to help those whose marriages have failed, Cardinal Walter Kasper said.

"I propose a path that goes beyond strictness and leniency," the German cardinal and theologian told Vatican Radio March 10.

An approach that avoids the two extremes "isn't against morality, it isn't against doctrine, but rather, (is meant) to support a realistic application of doctrine to the current situation of the great majority of people and to contribute to people's happiness," he said, speaking in Italian.

The cardinal was referring to a lengthy talk he had given to introduce a Feb. 20-21 discussion by the College of Cardinals on family life. The talk, titled "Gospel of the Family," was to be published in March in German and Italian by private publishing houses.

In the book's preface, published March 12 in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, Cardinal Kasper said the synod in union with Pope Francis would have to decide what steps to take to help families, but Catholic laity must be consulted. "We are all celibate while most of the faithful live the faith in the gospel of the family, in concrete and often difficult situations," he said.

With such public discussion about the church's response to Catholics who are divorced and civilly

remarried, the bishops and pope must say something, he said. "We obviously cannot respond to all the expectations, but if we repeat only the responses that have always been given, it would lead to great disappointment."

"As witnesses of hope, we cannot allow ourselves to be guided by a hermeneutic of fear," the cardinal wrote.

In an essay, also published in L'Osservatore Romano, Cardinal Kasper said church leaders must adopt "a renewed pastoral spirituality that leaves behind narrow-minded legalistic considerations and a non-Christian strictness which burdens people with unbearable weight, burdens we clerics don't want to carry and wouldn't know how to carry."

As proponents and defenders of the family, founded on the self-giving of one man and one woman who bring forth new life, the church cannot stand by in "resigned silence," he said. Marriage and the family are the last defense against a culture that banalizes and commercializes sexuality and reduces the human person and human relationships to what is economically useful.

Cardinal Kasper told Vatican Radio that the responses to a widely distributed Vatican questionnaire about Catholics' family life -- drawn up in preparation for October's Synod of Bishops on the family -- showed "there is a difficulty, an abyss" between church teaching and the actual situation of many people.

"The church has to bridge this abyss," he said, speaking in English; but that "does not mean pure appeasement policies, but the church must explain in a new way what family and matrimony are in order to help people and at the same time remain faithful to the Gospel."

Carol Glatz - Catholic News Service