



## Charity, Clarity, and Their Opposite

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
February 6, 2018

*To the people of the Church in Philadelphia:*

Nearly everyone trying to understand the current government turmoil in Washington is either (a) pre-committed to one or the other political party's version of events; or (b) thoroughly confused. Most of us fall more or less in the second group. And that means a great many citizens end up feeling powerless, then disgusted, then angry. If, as Scripture says, the truth makes us free, the lack of it makes us frustrated and locked in a state of uncertainty. To put it another way: Confusion is bad. It's bad for the individual soul, and it's bad for the health of a society. It inevitably breeds division and conflict.

Confusion can have different causes. Some of them are quite innocent. A person may hear or interpret information incorrectly. Or a person may express himself or herself unclearly. Or factors beyond anyone's control—for example, the prejudice or sloppiness of a news organization—may interfere with, or dramatically color, how a message is communicated and received. These things happen as a natural part of life. This is why leaders have a special duty to be clear, honest and prudent in what they do and say. They need to "speak the truth with love," in the words of St. Paul. To rashly, or deliberately, cause confusion about a significant matter is a serious failure for any person in authority. So it is in public life. And so it is in the life of the Church.

There is no love—no charity—without truth, just as there is no real mercy separated from a framework of justice informed and guided by truth. At the same time, truth used as a weapon to humiliate others, truth that lacks patience and love, is a particularly ugly form of violence.

So what's the point of these thoughts?

Over the past few weeks, a number of senior voices in the leadership of the Church in Germany have suggested (or strongly implied) support for the institution of a Catholic blessing rite for same-sex couples who are civilly married or seeking civil marriage. On the surface, the idea may sound generous and reasonable. But the imprudence of such public statements is—and should be—the cause of serious concern. It requires a response because what happens in one local reality of the global Church inevitably resonates elsewhere—including eventually here.

In the case at hand, any such “blessing rite” would cooperate in a morally forbidden act, no matter how sincere the persons seeking the blessing. Such a rite would undermine the Catholic witness on the nature of marriage and the family. It would confuse and mislead the faithful. And it would wound the unity of our Church, because it could not be ignored or met with silence.

Why would a seemingly merciful act pose such a problem? Blessing persons in their particular form of life effectively encourages them in that state—in this case, same-sex sexual unions. Throughout Christian history, a simple and wise fact applies: *lex orandi, lex credendi, i.e., how we worship shapes what and how we believe*. Establishing a new rite teaches and advances a new doctrine by its lived effect, i.e., *by practice*.

There are two principles we need to remember. First, we need to treat *all* people with the respect and pastoral concern they deserve as children of God with inherent dignity. This emphatically includes persons with same-sex attraction. Second, there is no truth, no real mercy, and no authentic compassion, in blessing a course of action that leads persons away from God. This *in no way* is a rejection of the persons seeking such a blessing, but rather a refusal to ignore what we know to be true about the nature of marriage, the family, and the dignity of human sexuality.

Again: All of us as human beings, whatever our strengths or weaknesses, have a right to be treated with the respect that our God-given dignity demands. We also have a right to hear the truth, whether it pleases us or not—even if it unhappily seems to complicate the unity of the Church herself. To borrow from Aquinas: The good of ecclesiastical unity, to which schism is opposed, is less than the good of Divine truth, to which unbelief is opposed (see STh II-II, q. 39, a.2).

Jesus said the truth will make us free. Nowhere did he suggest it will make us comfortable. We still need to hear the truth clearly—and share it, *clearly*, always with love. Creating confusion around important truths of our faith, no matter how positive the intention, only makes a difficult task more difficult.

*Your brother in Jesus Christ,*

*+Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
Archbishop of Philadelphia*