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Pope Francis: Indissoluble Marriage & No Divorce

JUNE 1, 2021 BY DAVE ARMSTRONG 9 COMMENTS



+ Analysis of Ed Feser's "Doctrinally Problematic" Criticisms



Ed Feser, an orthodox Catholic and Thomist, is an associate professor of philosophy at Pasadena City College (see his **books** and **articles**). He runs a **popular blog**, and has been described by *National Review* as "one of the best contemporary writers on philosophy." Sir Anthony Kenny, writing for the *Times Literary Supplement* stated that Feser "has the rare and enviable gift of making philosophical argument compulsively readable." His words below will be in [blue](#).

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Here are Feser's criticisms (from his blog) of Pope Francis with regard to the issue of divorce, including the charge that he has not spoken forcefully enough (a la Pope Honorius) in defense of these dogmatic Church teachings:

Pope Francis has made many statements that at least *seem* to contradict traditional Catholic teaching on **divorce and remarriage**, . . .

[W]hether or not Honorius and John XXII were guilty of strict heresy, they were undeniably guilty of making statements that fell under one or more of the lesser theological censures cited above. Similarly, even if Pope Francis's problematic statements can be given readings that avoid strict heresy, it doesn't follow that they can avoid falling under one or more of the lesser theological censures. . . .

Had the pope simply reaffirmed traditional teaching in response to these straightforward and respectfully presented questions from several of his cardinals [in the **dubia**], the main doctrinal controversy that has roiled his pontificate would have been swiftly resolved.

For another thing, what a person *fails* to say, and how he *acts*, can "send a message" no

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less than what he does explicitly say. . . .

Similarly, when the pope not only makes theologically ambiguous statements about divorce and remarriage, conscience, etc. but refuses to clarify those statements, and promotes and praises people with a reputation for departing from traditional teaching in these areas while criticizing and sidelining people with a reputation for upholding traditional teaching, it is hardly surprising if many people worry – whether correctly or not – that he does not agree with traditional teaching but doesn't want to say so directly. (“**Some comments on the open letter**”, 5-6-19)

Pope Francis is accused of trading in ambiguities in the interests of “accompanying and integrating” Catholics who do not accept the Church’s teaching on divorce and remarriage. And the problem, the critics hold, is that *Amoris*’s way of accommodating these dissenters makes of that teaching a dead letter, or even implicitly contradicts it. (“**Denial flows into the Tiber**”, 12-18-16)

[A] permissive attitude toward divorce and remarriage is the *very last thing* one could justify in the name of *Christ’s* understanding of mercy.

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Does Pope Francis endorse such a reversal of traditional teaching? The open letter accuses him of this and other errors. Of course, some of the pope’s statements on doctrinal matters are ambiguous, and in interpreting what a person means, it is only fair to look at the larger context rather than consider an ambiguous statement in isolation. (“**Popes, heresy, and papal heresy**”, 5-25-19)

[O]n several issues – marriage and divorce, . . . Pope Francis has repeatedly made statements that appear to contradict traditional Catholic teaching, and has persistently refused to respond to respectful requests for clarification made by members of the hierarchy and prominent theologians. Moreover, he has done so not only in offhand comments during interviews and the like, but in official magisterial documents, such as *Amoris Laetitia*, and now the *Catechism*. (“**Pope Francis and capital punishment**”, 8-3-18; see similar statement made in a *First Things* article from the same date)

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Large numbers of Catholics hold heterodox views on matters of divorce and marriage . . . They are quite happy with *Amoris*, the change to the catechism, and all the other doctrinally problematic statements the pope has made over the last five years. Meanwhile, many orthodox Catholics, well-meaning but naïve, have been willing to put up and shut up as long as they can cobble together some far-fetched interpretation of the problematic statements that seems to preserve continuity with past teaching. (“**Hubris meets nemesis? (Updated)**”, 8-28-18)

Even in the Church, recent years have seen the *ad hominem* routinely deployed against even the most respectful and scholarly critics of Pope Francis’s doctrinally problematic statements concerning divorce and remarriage, . . . (“**The *ad hominem* fallacy is a sin**”, 7-3-18)

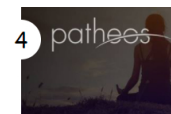
Ambiguity? In *Amoris* maybe, but, historically speaking, none whatsoever in Catholic teaching on divorce and remarriage. (“**More on Amoris**”, 1-16-17)

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Now I shall proceed to document many of Pope Francis’ affirmations of the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and the indissolubility of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It’s notable that in not a single instance of Feser calling out the pope on his blog for his supposed departure from the traditional norms, could he be bothered to take a few minutes out of his busy schedule and enlist Google Search to *find the statements that I have found* without too much effort.

He claims that the pope is ambiguous and not clear enough, blah blah blah (all standard talking points these days among his innumerable critics), yet in fact the pope *has* made it very clear, as I will show. Despite that, for some strange reason (assuming there *is* reason involved) his critics rarely look up these things and present them, so as to be *fair* to the head of the Catholic Church and the successor of St. Peter. It’s inevitably a one-way presentation, much as media portrayals of political debates only show one side (the liberal / Democrat positions).

In the last citation above, Feser complains about *ad hominem* against “critics” of the Holy Father. By the same token, I complain about *ad hominem* against the *pope*, too. If in fact Pope Francis upholds Church teaching on marriage and divorce (as I contend and, I think, demonstrate below), then to state otherwise would be in effect (and



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knowingly or not) an attack on *him*, since he doesn't *hold* these views falsely *attributed* to him.

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Let's take a survey, then, of what sure seem to *me* to be **clear, unambiguous affirmations** of the Church's traditional moral teaching on marriage, from Pope Francis (my bolding throughout):

The holiness and **indissolubility of Christian matrimony**, often disintegrating under tremendous pressure from the secular world, must be deepened by clear doctrine and supported by the witness of committed married couples.

Christian matrimony is a lifelong covenant of love between one man and one woman; it entails real sacrifices in order to turn away from illusory notions of sexual freedom and in order to foster conjugal fidelity. (4-25-14; cited in **"Pope emphasizes 'indissolubility of Christian matrimony'"**, Catholic News Agency, same date)

And this always – we have said it here, in the Hall – without ever putting into question the **fundamental truths of the Sacrament of marriage**: the **indissolubility**, the unity, the faithfulness, the fruitfulness, that openness to life (cf. Cann. 1055, 1056; and *Gaudium et spes*, 48). (10-18-14, **Address for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**)

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No intervention called into question the fundamental truths of the Sacrament of Marriage, namely: **indissolubility**, unity, fidelity and openness to life (cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48; Code of Canon Law, 1055-1056). This was not touched. (12-10-14, **General Audience**)

Through the centuries, the Church, having attained a clearer awareness of the words of Christ, came to and set forth a deeper understanding of the doctrine of the **indissolubility of the sacred bond of marriage**, developed a system of nullities of matrimonial consent, and put together a judicial process more fitting to the matter so that ecclesiastical discipline might conform more and more to the truth of the faith she was professing. . . .

This Committee, under the guidance of the Dean of the Roman Rota, drew up a plan for reform with due regard for the need to protect the principle of the **indissolubility of the marital bond**. . . .

Nevertheless, we are not unaware of the extent to which the principle of the **indissolubility of marriage** might be endangered by the briefer process; for this very reason we desire that the bishop himself be established as the judge in this process, who, due to his duty as pastor, has the greatest care for catholic unity with Peter in faith and discipline. (8-15-15, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* ***Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus***)

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Marriage is indissoluble when it is a sacrament. And **this the Church cannot change. It's doctrine. It's an indissoluble sacrament**. . . . With the reform of the marriage annulment procedure, I closed the door to the administrative path, which was the path through which divorce could have made its way in. Those who think this is equivalent with "Catholic divorce" are mistaken because this last document has closed the door to divorce by which it could have entered. It would have been easier with the administrative path. . . . **"Catholic divorce" does not exist**. Nullity is granted if the union never existed. But if it did, it is **indissoluble**. (9-27-15, cited in **"Pope Francis Reaffirms that Catholic Marriage is Indissoluble"**, John Burger, *Aleteia*, 9-30-15; see another version at the **Holy See website**)

To a rhetorical question – probably asked as a trap to make him unpopular with the crowd, which practiced divorce as an established and inviolable fact – Jesus responds in a straightforward and unexpected way. He brings everything back to the beginning, to the beginning of creation, to teach us that God blesses human love, that it is he who joins the hearts of two people who love one another, he who joins them in unity and **indissolubility**. This shows us that the goal of conjugal life is not simply to live together for life, but to love one another for life! In this way Jesus re-establishes the order which was present from the beginning.

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To carry out her mission in fidelity to her Master as a voice crying out in the desert, in defending faithful love and encouraging the many families which live married life as an experience which reveals of God's love; in defending the sacredness of life, of every life; in defending the unity and **indissolubility of the conjugal bond** as a sign of God's grace and of the human person's ability to love seriously. (10-4-15, **Homily at the Mass for the opening of the Synod on the Family**)

[The synod] was about urging everyone to appreciate the importance of the institution of the family and of marriage between a man and a woman, based on unity and **indissolubility**, and valuing it as the fundamental basis of society and human life, [10-24-15, Closing message to the Synod on the Family; "**Pope Francis: Synod was about affirming family, indissoluble marriage**", Catholic News Agency, 10-24-15)

The lack of formation in faith and also an error regarding the unity, **indissolubility** and sacramental dignity of marriage may vitiate matrimonial consent only if they determine the will. It is precisely for this reason that errors regarding the sacramental nature of marriage must be evaluated very carefully. . .

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The family, founded on **indissoluble marriage**, unitive and procreative, belongs to the 'dream' of God and of his Church for the salvation of humanity, . . .

[The] essential elements [or marriage are] offspring, the good of spouses, unity, **indissolubility**, sacramentality. (1-22-16, cited in "**Francis affirms indissolubility of marriage, objectivity of annulment conditions**", *The Catholic World Report* / *Catholic News Agency*, 1-23-16)

Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 3-19-16:

No one can think that the weakening of the family as that natural society founded on marriage will prove beneficial to society as a whole. . . . There is a failure to realize that only the **exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman** has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life. (52)

In various countries, legislation facilitates a growing variety of alternatives to marriage, with the result that marriage, with its characteristics of exclusivity, **indissolubility** and openness to life, comes to appear as an old-fashioned and outdated option. (53)

The Synod Fathers noted that Jesus, "in speaking of God's original plan for man and woman, reaffirmed the **indissoluble union** between them, even stating that 'it was for your hardness of heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so' (Mt 19:8). The **indissolubility of marriage** – 'what God has joined together, let no man put asunder' (Mt 19:6) – should not be viewed as a 'yoke' imposed on humanity, but as a 'gift' granted to those who are joined in marriage... (62)

It is particularly helpful to understand in a Christocentric key... the good of the spouses (*bonum coniugum*)", which includes unity, openness to life, fidelity, **indissolubility** and, within Christian marriage, mutual support on the path towards complete friendship with the Lord. (77)

For they bear witness, in a credible way, to the beauty of marriage as **indissoluble** and perpetually faithful. (86)

Marriage joins to all this an **indissoluble exclusivity** expressed in the stable commitment to share and shape together the whole of life. (123)

In the words of Saint Robert Bellarmine, "the fact that one man unites with one woman in an **indissoluble bond**, and that they remain **inseparable** despite every kind of difficulty, even when there is no longer hope for children, can only be the sign of a great mystery". (124)

Marital love is not defended primarily by presenting **indissolubility** as a duty, or by repeating doctrine, but by helping it to grow ever stronger under the impulse of grace. (134)

It is a deeper love, a **lifelong** decision of the heart. (163)

[W]e know that "marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children. Even in cases where, despite the intense desire of the spouses

children. Even in cases where, despite the intense desire of the spouses, there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life, and preserves its value and **indissolubility**". (178)

Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon **marriage as a lifelong calling** . . . (211)

Another great challenge of marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once for all.

Their union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a **lifelong project**. (218)

The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the **indissolubility** of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity". (243)

Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. (246)

*

[W]e are also experiencing a culture of the provisional. I heard a bishop say, several months ago, that a young man, who had finished his university studies, a fine young man, introduced himself to the bishop and told him: "I want to become a priest, but for 10 years". It is **the culture of the provisional**. This happens everywhere, even in priestly life, in religious life. The provisional. This is why a part of our sacramental marriages are null, because **they [the spouses] say: "Yes, for a lifetime", but they do not know what they are saying**, because they have another culture. They say it, and they mean well, but they do not have the awareness. A woman in Buenos Aires once scolded me: "You priests are clever, because to become priests you study for eight years, and then, if things do not go well and the priest finds a young woman that he likes.... in the end you give him permission to get married and have a family. And we lay people, who have to make an **indissoluble lifelong sacrament**, they make us have four conferences, and **this for a lifetime!**". To me, one of the problems is this: the preparation for marriage. . . .

The marriage crisis is because people don't know the sacrament, the beauty of the sacrament: they do not know what **indissoluble** means, **they do not know that it is for a lifetime**. (6-16-16, **Address**)

But when we receive **a sacrament which is indissoluble for our whole life**, it is the **mystery of Christ and of the Church and it lasts a lifetime**, they prepare us with three or four conferences?". It's true: the preparation for marriage. It is better not to get married, not to receive the sacrament if you are not certain of the fact that there is a sacramental mystery there, it is truly the embrace of Christ with the Church; if you are not well prepared. (6-18-16, **Address**)

Marriage is the most beautiful thing that God has created. The Bible tells us that God created man and woman, created them in his own image (cfr Gen 1:27). That is to say, **the man and woman who become one flesh, are the image of God**. . . . do you know who pays the divorce fees? Two people pay. Who pays? . . . Both? More! God pays, because **when "one flesh" is divided, the image of God is soiled. And the children pay**. You do not know, dear brothers and sisters, you do not know how much children suffer, the little ones, when they witness the arguments and the separation of parents! Everything should be done to save a marriage. (10-1-16, **Address**)

When we speak of marriage as a union between man and a woman, as God established it, as an image of God, it is a man and a woman. The image of God is not the male: it is both man and woman. Together. They become one flesh when they are united in marriage. This is the truth. It is true that, in this culture, conflicts and any number of problems are not well handled, and there are also philosophies like "Today I'll enter this [marriage], and when I get tired of it, I'll enter another, then a third, then a fourth..." This is the "world war" against marriage you were talking about. We need to be careful not to let these ideas take hold in us. But first of all, **marriage is the image of God, man and woman in one flesh. When this is destroyed, the image of God is "marred" or distorted**. (10-2-16, **In-Flight News Conference**)

Today fleeting relationships are preferred to the stability of a definitive life project. But a house built on the sand of frail and fickle relationships cannot stand. What is needed instead is a rock on which to build solid foundations. And this rock is precisely that faithful and **indissoluble communion of love** that joins man and woman, a communion that has an austere and simple beauty, a **sacred and inviolable character** and a natural role in the social order. (1-8-18, **Address**)

Jesus' love for children, his filial relationship with the heavenly Father, his **defence of the marriage bond, which he declares sacred and indissoluble**, fully reveals the family's place in God's plan: being the cradle of life and the first place of welcome and refuge, it plays an essential role in



me and the first place of welcome and of love, it plays an essential role in mankind's vocation and is like a window which opens wide onto the very mystery of God, who is Love in the unity and in the trinity of the Persons. (6-16-18, [Address](#))

Of all the kinds of human fruitfulness, marriage is unique. It is about a love that gives rise to new life. It involves mutual responsibility for the transmission of God's gift of life, and it provides a stable environment in which that new life can grow and flourish. Marriage in the Church, that is, the sacrament of matrimony, shares in a special way in the mystery of God's eternal love. When a Christian man and woman enter the bond of marriage, God's grace enables them freely to promise one another **an exclusive and enduring love**. Their union thus becomes a sacramental sign – this is important – **the sacrament of marriage becomes a sacramental sign of the new and eternal covenant between the Lord and his bride, the Church**. Jesus is ever present in their midst. He sustains them throughout life in their mutual gift of self, in fidelity and in **indissoluble unity** (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48). Jesus' love is, for couples, a rock and refuge in times of trial, but more importantly, a source of constant growth in pure and **enduring love**. Gamble big, for **your entire life!** Take a risk! Because marriage is also a risk, but it is a risk worth taking. **For your whole life, because that is how love is.** (8-25-18, [Address in Dublin](#))

The love of Christ that renews all things is what makes possible marriage and a conjugal love marked by fidelity, **indissolubility**, unity and openness to life. (8-25-18, [Address at Croke Park Stadium, Dublin](#))

Quite often, the very root of problems that come to light after the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony is to be found not only in a latent and unsuspected immaturity that suddenly explodes, but especially in the weakness of Christian faith and the absence of accompaniment from the Church, in the solitude in which young spouses are generally left after the wedding. Only when they are faced with everyday life together, which calls spouses to grow on a journey of giving and sacrifice, do some realize that they had not fully understood what they were about to begin. And they find themselves unprepared, especially when faced with the magnitude and meaning of Christian marriage with regard to the practical implications linked to the **indissolubility of the bond**, to being open to pass on the gift of life, and to fidelity.

That is why I reaffirm the need for a permanent catechumenate for the Sacrament of Matrimony, which concerns its preparation, celebration and the initial times that follow. ([Address, 9-27-18](#))

And here, Jesus again takes up the Book of Genesis: "from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'" (vv. 6-8). And he concludes: **"What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder"** (v. 9). In the Creator's original plan, it is not that a man marries a woman and, if things do not go well, he **repudiates** her. **No**. (10-7-18, [Angelus](#))

I would ask Ed Feser and the many others who "argue" as he does in this regard, "what part of 'indissolubility of marriage' is so *difficult* for you to *understand*?" What is so unclear or "*ambiguous*" about the above? And why was it so *hard* for all these critics to *find* all of this? Or if they *could* find it (using computer skills any smart seven-year-old today possesses), why were they *unwilling* to do so, or unwilling to *include* this ultra-relevant information in their attack-pieces?

See the the two follow-up papers:

[Ed Feser, Pope Francis, Divorce, "Ambiguity", & Implosion](#) (6-3-21)

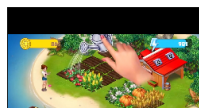
[Did I Say Ed Feser Called Pope Francis a Heretic? \(+ Further Exchanges Back-and-Forth with Ed Feser\)](#) (6-4-21)

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Summary: I document Pope Francis' affirmations of Catholic teaching regarding divorce & the indissolubility of marriage, over against Ed Feser's critical ("doctrinally problematic") claims.

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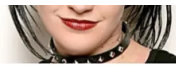
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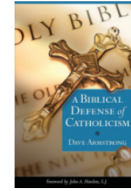
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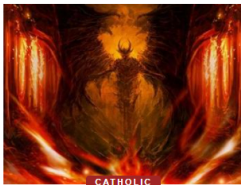
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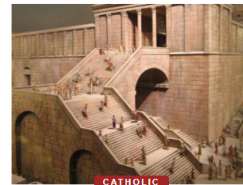
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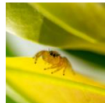
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Paul Hoffer · 4 days ago · edited

I, too, have questioned Pope Francis' "ambiguous" statements on marriage. However, upon closer reading and reading the statements in context, they became much less ambiguous. There is a distinct difference between speaking theologically-what should be or must be-and pastorally-what is in fact a particular person's situation. People sin. Sin creates messy, deformed, and broken situations in people's lives and relationships. Pope Francis has attempted to reach out to those people who are trapped in such situations and relationships and say to them, "There is a way out. You do not have to leave the Church. There is a path to forgiveness and acceptance again." God loves us despite our sinfulness. WE should love each other despite our sinfulness. Pope Francis, in Jesuit fashion, starts where one is at rather than where one needs to be.

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Caritas · 6 days ago · edited

"Meanwhile, many orthodox Catholics, well-meaning but naïve, have been willing to put up and shut up as long as they can cobble together some far-fetched interpretation of the problematic statements that seem to preserve continuity with past teaching"

This is a very typical fallacy from those who want to discredit any complex theology, or refuse to put intellectual effort into avoiding rash judgement (see catechism 2478). Very disappointing coming from I presume an analytical philosopher. You can't just give the answer that seems obvious to you just because it sounds simpler to your ears. Also, to say it's naïve to interpret it the orthodox way is practically saying that it IS heterodox in itself, so I can't see how he can play the cautious card here. It reminds me of what Leo the XIIIth said in Est Sane Molestum: "Not only must those be held to fail in their duty who openly and brazenly repudiate the authority of their leaders, but those, too, who give evidence of a hostile and contrary disposition by their clever tergiversations and their oblique and devious dealings." The thing is, if the thousands of daily declarations about faith from all popes were accessible, of

course we would find ambiguous sentences here and there. The only reason why they're better known is because the pope's enemies keep highlighting them, and push the narrative that he's deviating from faith. This has been done with Saint John Paul the IInd, Benedict XVI, even with Saint Paul VI (see the "League for Catholic Counter-Reformation" slanders). The internet has made it easier but it doesn't prove the Pope should systematically give an explanation, rather it just proves that people should read all his words on such matters (easily accessible with the vatican's search engine) before jumping on conclusions.

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Edward Feser · 6 days ago
Dave,

You have seriously misrepresented my position, from your title and opening remarks onward. First of all, I have never said that Pope Francis "favors" divorce or "desires... to change the Catholic teaching" on the matter. I have not attributed any such views or motives to him. What I have said is that some of his statements on the matter are ambiguous, potentially misleading, seemingly in conflict with tradition, etc. That is a very different claim from the one you attribute to me, and it is a claim that can be evaluated independently of questions about the pope's intentions or motives.

Second, you give your readers the false impression that I have developed some notable critique of my own of the pope's statements on this matter, and then go on to criticize this critique as superficial. But in fact I have not myself written much about the problems with *Amoris*, and when I have commented on them at all I have mostly referred approvingly to the criticisms that others (such as Brugger, Grisez and Finnis, Fr. Weinandy, et al.) have developed. So, if you were interested in a serious defense of the pope, you would answer the detailed criticisms that those people have made, rather than just answering my brief references to those criticisms. (What I have had a lot to say about myself, of course, are the pope's statements on a different topic, viz. capital punishment. But again, on *Amoris* I have mostly merely approvingly cited the arguments of others. So it is odd that you should write up a long post on what I have said about it.)

Another problem with your post is that it is simply beside the point to cite other statements the pope has made that are more traditional-sounding than the problematic ones, especially when they are far less well known than the problematic ones and when the pope has refused to answer questions about the problematic ones, or to explain exactly how they can be reconciled with the more traditional ones – even though doing so would be extremely easy for him to do and would instantly silence his critics. E.g. if he had just come out and answered the dubia, we would not be having this conversation.

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3 ^ | v - Share



Dave Armstrong [\[Meta\]](#) · Edward Feser · 6 days ago · edited
Hello Dr. Feser,

Thanks for taking the time to respond. Let me take this opportunity to say that I appreciate a lot (indeed, most) of what you write. I was particularly impressed by your brilliant analysis of the insufficient reasons for Rod Dreher's defection from Catholicism. When Catholics disagree it's always important to remember that we mostly agree with each other.

You have seriously misrepresented my position, from your title and opening remarks onward.

I don't think so, but we will clarify these matters in dialogue. I hope we can go more than one round, so that we can actually *accomplish* something constructive. My title was punchy and rhetorical (as indicated by the question mark). I'd be glad to modify anything that is inaccurate. And I hope you will do the same: especially because you are criticizing the head of the Catholic Church, whereas I am merely criticizing a philosopher and amateur theologian.

First of all, I have never said that Pope Francis "favors" divorce or "desires... to change the Catholic teaching" on the matter. I have not attributed any such views or motives to him. What I have said is that some of his statements on the matter are ambiguous, potentially misleading, seemingly in conflict with tradition, etc. That is a very different claim from the one you attribute to me, and it is a claim that can be evaluated independently of questions about the pope's intentions or motives.

Like many critics of the pope, you want to have it both ways: to make these criticisms, but stop a millimeter short of actually *asserting* that he

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Edward Feser · Dave Armstrong · 5 days ago
Dave,

I have zero interest engaging with someone who pretends to be a mind-reader and insists on telling me (and at prodigious length!) what I am "really" thinking, when I've already told you otherwise. So, kindly cut it out with that nonsense or we're done here. If you want to have a discussion with some fantasy version of me rather than with the real me, I'll leave you to it and get on with something more useful.

I formulated my remarks the way I did for a reason, and it isn't the reason you suppose it to be. A statement can be ambiguous, misleading, seemingly heterodox, or otherwise problematic regardless of the intentions of the person who makes it. Nor can I read Pope Francis's mind any more than you can read mine. Furthermore, there are explanations for the pope's problematic remarks other than those that would involve attributing heretical intent to him, such as muddleheadedness. And then there is the fact that the word "heretic" has canonical and theological implications that entail strict conditions for applying it to a person that I do not believe are met in this case, and it is extremely reckless for people to apply it in the absence of those conditions.

For these reasons, I deliberately avoid getting into questions about the pope's intentions. It's not because I am somehow trying to hide my true opinions while sending out dog whistles, or whatever silly thing it is you are obsessed with accusing me of. It's because it would be irresponsible to do so, and also entirely unnecessary. Again, a statement can be problematic and worthy of criticism regardless of the intentions of the person who makes it. Hence I have focused on the pope's statements themselves.

If I were to treat your remarks the way you treat mine, I would accuse you of the sleazy rhetorical tactic of engaging in the "poisoning the

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Dave Armstrong [\[Meta\]](#) · Edward Feser · 5 days ago

Closing Observations: I did not misrepresent Dr. Feser *at all*. I copiously documented what he has stated about Pope Francis (that I thought objectionable) and then critiqued it.

My Socratic hard questions were asked in the spirit of "please *seriously consider* the implications of the things you are stating, that perhaps you are unaware of. They *seem* to me (and by all means *correct* me if I'm wrong) to lead inexorably to certain conclusions."

I can see how Dr. Feser may not have perceived that this was my approach and opinion; that I had not made it *clear* enough (always a possibility in any discussion). If so, now I *have*. This is the beauty of dialogue. It allows opportunities to clarify, explain, defend, learn, be challenged and "stretched" and to increase understanding on both sides. But it takes two. *Only one party* wanted to dialogue in this short-lived exchange.

How Dr. Feser reasons with regard to Pope Francis (and also, secondarily to myself) is how I approached (and continue to approach) *him*. Let me rephrase his own statements above to illustrate how this analogy works (and it is a very close analogy indeed):

A statement can be ambiguous, misleading, or otherwise problematic regardless of the intentions of the person who makes it. Nor can I read Ed Feser's mind any more than he can read mine. Furthermore, there are explanations for Ed Feser's problematic remarks other than those that would involve attributing dishonest or malicious intent to him, such as muddleheadedness.

[see more](#)

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seblhrm_MetaChristianity · Dave Armstrong · 4 days ago · edited

| They seem to me (and by all means *correct* me if I'm wrong) to lead inexorably to....

Fair enough but then Ed did give the correction, several in fact, and quite clear at that, so the next step would be to just re-set there and move on.

PS: A great website you have here overall BTW ~

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Dave Armstrong [\[Meta\]](#) · seblhrm_MetaChristianity · 4 days ago · edited

He still has plenty to answer for, and he is utterly refusing to do so. I say that the reasonable explanation for that is that he can't; he was caught in self-contradiction and it's embarrassing to him that a non-academic pointed this out, hence the current ridicule and mockery.

Glad you like my website. Thanks.

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Dave Armstrong [\[Meta\]](#) · Edward Feser · 5 days ago · edited

Nice projection there. I made no personal remarks, but you have certainly attacked the pope, and now myself. It's a shame that a good discussion was not to be had, but that's how it usually goes when it has to do with Pope Francis.

I complimented you at the start, and I meant it ("Let me take this opportunity to say that I appreciate a lot (indeed, most) of what you write. I was particularly impressed by your brilliant analysis of the insufficient reasons for Rod Dreher's defection from Catholicism."). Not the slightest compliment, however, came from you in my direction.

As always, I'm more than happy to let readers read my arguments and yours, and now your hostile potshots, and make up their own minds. You could have followed and responded to my reasoning, if you didn't take everything personally, and this could have been a very good dialogue. But you chose to end it and attack. It's equal parts sad and silly.

But I wish you the best and all God's blessings. You may be angry at me because I vigorously disagreed with your positions (not you as a person), but it doesn't follow that you don't do a lot of great writing and defenses of the faith. You certainly do and I am glad for it. And I will end on that positive note.

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