What was, and was not, included from Pope John Paul II’s 1981 Familiaris consortio, following the last Synod on the Family in 1980.

Compiled by James Bretzke, SJ, Professor of Moral Theology, Boston College School of Theology & Ministry

2015 Synod Paragraph #85: **178 placet 80 non placet** (plus 7 abstentions) (2/3rds passed by one extra vote)

A small section of Pope John Paul II’s *Familiaris consortio* was included in this Synod Final Report #85, but *not* the whole of the key FC Paragraph #84 as many conservatives explicitly requested in the *circuli minores* Reports of (see for example the report of one of the English-language groups submitted by Archbishop Charles Chaput). The section quoted can be read in a number of ways, and it is illuminating perhaps to see what was *not* included from this text.

What was quoted, verbatim, is the following:

Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing, and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid.

However, what was *omitted* made the following points:

**The moral nature of divorce, especially with a view to a subsequent marriage** “is an evil that, like the others, is affecting more and more Catholics as well, the problem must be faced with resolution and without delay.”

**The Church must be resolute in holding firm to its current practice,** as it “cannot abandon to their own devices those who have been previously bound by sacramental marriage and who have attempted a second marriage.”

**Only non-sacramental participation in the Church’s life is encouraged:** divorced and remarried couples “should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace.”

However, the *exclusion of the divorced and re-married from the Eucharist is clearly stated and rigorously upheld:* “However, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist.”
Pastoral sensitivity further demands their exclusion from the Eucharist: “Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage.”

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is only open under the limited condition of readiness to abandon the objectively sinful life of adultery: Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage.

The only pastoral “solution” which would allow such individuals the opportunity to return to Communion would be the traditional “live as brother & sister in complete continence”: This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples."

No pastor could seem to countenance in any liturgical way a “blessing” of a couple in an irregular union: Similarly, the respect due to the sacrament of Matrimony, to the couples themselves and their families, and also to the community of the faithful, forbids any pastor, for whatever reason or pretext even of a pastoral nature, to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. Such ceremonies would give the impression of the celebration of a new sacramentally valid marriage, and would thus lead people into error concerning the indissolubility of a validly contracted marriage.

The Church’s position here is that of genuine pastoral love and concern since it upholds the necessary fidelity to Christ: By acting in this way, the Church professes her own fidelity to Christ and to His truth. At the same time she shows motherly concern for these children of hers, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate partner.

Those in irregular second marriages have “rejected God’s commands” but they are still open to the possibility of conversion and subsequent salvation: With firm confidence she believes that those who have rejected the Lord's command and are still living in this state will be able to obtain from God the grace of conversion and salvation, provided that they have persevered in prayer, penance and charity.