



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis

Consilium Internationale

FAMILY COMMISSION

Silvia Diana OFS.

Translation: Mary Stronach OFS



CONCLUSIONS OF THE SYNOD ON THE FAMILY OCTOBER 2015

II part Chapter III The Christian Teaching on the Family

Chapter III talks about **The Family in Christian Doctrine**. We continue integrating the richness of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) and sharing our local realities in order to strengthen our families and to accompany our brothers and sisters on the journey. Read the texts below and then discuss in your fraternity based on the questions.

Marriage in the Order of Creation and the Fullness of the Sacrament

[...] Quite appropriately, we can use a Christocentric hermeneutic to understand the natural properties of marriage, which make up the goods of the spouses (*bonum coniugum*), namely, union, openness to life, fidelity and indissolubility. In light of the New Testament, according to which all things were created through Christ and for him (cf. *Col* 1:16; *Jn* 1:1ff), the Second Vatican Council wanted to express appreciation for natural marriage and the positive elements in other religions (cf. *LG*, 16; *NA*, 2) and different cultures, despite their limitations and shortcomings (cf. *RM*, 55). Discernment of the presence of the “seeds of the Word” in other cultures (cf. *AG*, 11) can also be applied to the reality of marriage and the family. In addition to true natural marriage, positive elements are present in the forms of marriage in other religious traditions. We maintain that these forms — still based on the true and stable relationship of a man and a woman — are ordered to the Sacrament of Matrimony. While considering the human wisdom of the people, the Church recognizes that this family is also the basic cell which is necessary and fruitful in human coexistence.(47)

The Indissolubility and Fruitfulness of the Conjugal Union

The faithfulness of God to the covenant, which cannot be revoked, is the basis for the indissolubility of marriage. The all-inclusive, profound love between husband and wife is not only based on human capacity: God supports this covenant with the power of his Spirit. The choice that God made in our regard is reflected, in some way, in the choice of a spouse: just as God keeps his promise even when we fail, so love and conjugal fidelity maintain their value “in good times and in bad.” Marriage is a gift and a promise of God, who hears the prayers of those who ask for his help. The hardness of the human heart, its limitations and its weakness in the face of temptation is a great challenge in living a life in common. The witness of couples who faithfully live their marriage highlights the value of this indissoluble union and awakens the desire to constantly renew their commitment to fidelity. Indissolubility corresponds to the profound desire of mutual and enduring love which the Creator has placed in the human heart, a gift which he himself gives to each couple: “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (*Mt* 19:6; *Mk* 10:9). [...](48)

The Goods of the Family

Marriage is “a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (CIC, can. 1055 - §1). In mutual acceptance, those who are engaged promise each other a total gift of self, fidelity and openness to life. In faith and with the grace of Christ, they recognize the gifts which God offers them and commit themselves, in his name, in the presence of the Church. God consecrates the love of a husband and a wife and confirms the indissoluble character of their love, offering them the grace to live in faithfulness, mutual integration and openness to life. Let us thank God for marriage because, through the community of life and love, Christian spouses know happiness and experience that God loves them personally, with feelings of warmth and tenderness. [...] (49)

The fruitfulness of the couple, in a full sense, is spiritual. They are living signs of the Sacrament of Matrimony and a source of life for the Christian community and the world. The act of generation, showing the “inseparable connection” between the unitive and procreative aspects — as highlighted by Blessed Paul VI (cf. *HV*, 12) — must be understood in light of the parents’ responsibility and commitment to the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who are the most precious fruit of conjugal love. From the very first moment of conception the child is a person, who transcends those who have procreated them. “According to God’s plan, being a son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another, original and new, human being. And for parents each child is original, different, diverse” (Francis, *General Audience*, 11 February 2015). The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members — from toddlers to seniors — are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable. Family relations contribute decisively to the sound building of human society in fellowship, which cannot be reduced to simply the inhabitants of a territory or citizens of a State who live together. (50)

The Synod Fathers also wished to emphasize that “one of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today’s cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media”. “The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities”. At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a “most serious duty” and at the same time a “primary right” of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: “all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization” Still, “a rift has opened up between the family and society, between family and the school; the educational pact today has been broken and thus the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis”. (AL 84)

The Truth and Beauty of the Family

With heartfelt joy and profound consolation, the Church looks to families who faithfully follow the teachings of the Gospel. The Church thanks them for their witness and encourages them to continue. Because of these families, the beauty of an indissoluble, ever-faithful marriage is made credible. The first experience of ecclesial communion between persons grows and develops in the family, in which, through grace, the mystery of

Trinitarian love is reflected. "Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous — even repeated — forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life." (CCC, 1657). The Gospel of the Family nourishes those seeds still awaiting maturity and must also treat those trees which have withered and require attention (cf. Lk13:6-9). The Church as a sure teacher and caring mother acknowledges that, for those who are baptized, a sacramental marriage is the only marriage bond which exists and any rupture of that bond is against the will of God. At the same time, she is also aware of the fragility of many of her children who struggle along the path of faith. "Without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they [the lay faithful] need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur [...]" (51)

The Synod Fathers emphasized that Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through "their joy-filled witness as domestic churches". Consequently, "it is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that 'fills hearts and lives', because in Christ we have been 'set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness' (Evangelii Gaudium, 1). As in the parable of the sower the rest is God's work. [...]" (AL 200)

"This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems". Pastoral care for families "needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. This consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized of countries". The Synod Fathers also "highlighted the fact that evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors – such as the excessive importance given to market logic – that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields". (AL 201)

Questions for further the discussion:

- a) What can families do to celebrate and protect Christian marriage to make it faithful based on the teachings of the Gospel?
- b) How can we accompany our brothers and sisters on their journey of educating their children?
- c) How do we strengthen family relationships and build a more solid and fraternal human society?

Documents:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html

We finish our encounter praying together: **THE PRAYER OF THE HOLY FAMILY.**

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