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Preface

PREFACE



Amoris Laetitia is truly a gift to the Church and those who work to promote marriage and family life. The Office of Priest Vocations and Formation of the Archdiocese of Washington presents these reflections on the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, promulgated by Pope Francis, March 19, 2016.

This exhortation is of great importance for the understanding and teaching of the Church's vision for marriage and family life and its pastoral application in our contemporary society and culture. It was issued after years of prayer, consultation and dialogue with bishops and leaders in the Church. Every seminarian, in particular, should study the document in detail since he is in preparation to be of service to families in his future ministry.

Much of the content of these reflections is taken from the works of His Eminence Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, who was greatly involved in both synods that produced material from which our Holy Father extensively draws in this exhortation.

Cardinal Wuerl's engagement with synods goes back over 25 years under

Pope, now Saint, John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. In 1990, Cardinal Wuerl began this longstanding involvement with this new post-conciliar, ecclesial gathering resulting in a long series of expressions of the Papal Magisterium in apostolic exhortations. The first of these synods, in which Cardinal Wuerl was involved, was the 1990 Synod on Priestly Formation that produced the material used by Saint John Paul II in his 1992 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis. There followed in succession the 1997 Synod of the Church in America, out of which came Saint John Paul II's 1999 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Ecclesia in *America*. Additional synods in which His Eminence participated include the Synod on the Eucharist in 2005 and its post-synodal apostolic exhortation by Pope Benedict XVI, Sacramentum *Caritatis.* This was followed by the 2008 Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, out of which came the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Verbum Domini by Pope Benedict XVI. Next came the 2012 synod with the theme, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" at which Cardinal Wuerl served as the General Relator (General Coordinator). Pope Benedict XVI presided over this synod but the apostolic exhortation that followed on it was the first exhortation by Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium.

At the public consistory of February 2014, Pope Francis called for the Church to engage in a reflection on family and marriage that would encompass two synods, one in 2014 on the challenges marriage faces today and another in 2015 on the Church's teaching on marriage and the family.



In both of the synods, the first in October 2014 and the second in October 2015, Cardinal Wuerl participated as a member and was appointed to the writing committee charged with the task in both synods of producing a consensus summary of the long and prayerful deliberations. The last of these two (the relatio finalis) presents a list of statements, reflecting the consensus of the discussions which was endorsed in its totality by more than two-thirds of all of the Synodal Fathers with most of the paragraphs receiving over 90% approbation. Out of this deliberative process in which our Holy Father called upon the Synodal Fathers to speak with clarity, listen with humility and be open to the Holy Spirit came the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia.

These reflections cover the historical development of synods and synodality and their relevance, and provide an overview of Amoris Laetitia and its pastoral implications. There are also numerous references for further study in the appendix.

Amoris Laetitia is truly a gift to the Church and those who work to promote marriage and family life. It comes at a crucial period of time due to the challenges in the cultural landscape and the need to continue to serve families as they seek to encounter Christ in their lives.

> -Msgr. Robert Panke Rector, Saint John Paul II Seminary

This exhortation is of great importance for the understanding and teaching of the church's vision for marriage and family life and its pastoral application in our contemporary society and culture.



Chapter One The Historical Development of Synods and Synodality

The ecclesiastical structure that we call the Synod of Bishops has its own identifiable origin and specific purpose. The Pope calls such a meeting, and national conferences of bishops around the world elect those bishops who will attend from their respective countries. A number of additional bishops, experts and observers are also appointed by the Pope.

The idea of having a synod grew out of the experience of Pope Paul VI and the bishops at the time of the Second Vatican Council. Then over 2,500 bishops from all over the world, from October 1962 to December 1965, came regularly to Rome to reflect on how well the Church was carrying out her mission to be the continuing presence of Christ and his Gospel in the world. As the Council drew to a conclusion in 1965, there was the hope that some mechanism might be found to keep alive the collaborative experience of the Council. Thus was born, at the directive of the Pope, what we now call the Synod of Bishops.

Pope Paul VI's Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo, re-established the Synod of Bishops as an ecclesial institution and gave it what was, in effect, its constitution. The document notes that the aims of the Synod are: "to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world; to see to it that accurate and direct information is supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that should be carrying on in today's world; to facilitate agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church.

Its special and immediate purposes are: to provide mutually useful information; to discuss the specific business for which the Synod is called into session on any given occasion" (AS, II).

With the establishment of the structure in 1965 of the Synod of Bishops, Pope, Pope, now Blessed, Paul VI created an

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ecclesial institution to permit an aspect of the collegiality experienced during the Second Vatican Council to continue in a new and limited format. Hence, we now speak of synodality as an expression of episcopal collaboration that does not rise to the level of an ecumenical council.

Collegiality refers to the Successor of Peter governing the Church in collaboration with, and with the participation of, the bishops of the local Churches, respecting their joint responsibility for the Universal Church. Synodality is one particular expression of that rightful participation of the local churches in governance, through consultation.

Three kinds of synods exist: "ordinary" assemblies that consider matters of importance to the Universal Church, "extra-ordinary" assemblies that focus on topics requiring timely decisions, and "special" assemblies that focus on particular geographical areas. There have been 27 such synods in all since they were re-established by Paul VI in 1965.

Pope Francis, elected as the 266th Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ, and Head of the Church Universal, now stands on all of the foundation work of his predecessors and begins to pick up, once again, the threads of the energizing focus of the Second Vatican Council.

What Pope Francis is renewing is what the Second Vatican Council began and this includes emphasis on the pastoral mission of the Church, one that is less focused on the exercise of power and more directed to the evangelizing discipleship reflected in personal witness. Here the words of Blessed Paul VI ring true, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."



The mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father's infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst. -Amoris Laetitia, 59

Chapter Two An Overview of the Document and its Content

"The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church." With these words, Pope Francis begins his post-synodal apostolic exhortation entitled *Amoris Laetitia* (On Love in the Family), which was signed on March 19, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, patron of our spiritual family, the Church.

In the opening chapters, Pope Francis discusses God's creation and plan for marriage and family as revealed in scripture, and how it contrasts with the experiences of the family in the human condition and the challenges that families, and those who wish to form families, face in the world today. Particularly challenging to Catholic teaching is an individualism that is so concerned with one's desires, as well as the throwaway culture that sweeps away marriage and family whenever they prove inconvenient or tiresome. Against this is needed a greater effort to help couples and families to respond better to the grace God offers them and

to form their consciences as they make their own pilgrim journey through life. The recognition of the heavily secular cultural context in which members of the Church live today is not new to this document or these synods. Pope Benedict XVI, both in his 2008 visit to the Church in the United States and particularly during his visit to the Archdiocese of Washington when he addressed the bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and later in the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization, highlighted the challenges of secularism, individualism, materialism and the relativism that pervades our culture.

With all of this as background, Pope Francis now reminds us of the vocation of the human family which is revealed in the infinite love of the Lord who became incarnate in a human family, and who gave himself for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst. Quoting extensively from Scripture and Church teaching, Pope Francis





affirms that the communal life of husband and wife and children can be steeped in and strengthened by sacramental grace. Even for those in a marriage that does not reflect entirely the Church's teaching, continues the Pope, Christ inspires the Church to turn to them with love and affection to assist them in overcoming the trials they face.

At the center of the Gospel of marriage and family is love, says the Holy Father. Offering counsel to couples, family members and all of us while reflecting on Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, he explains that authentic love is patient and merciful, love is at the service of others and is marked by generosity and humility, it is neither rude nor resentful, and it rejoices with others in hope and fruitfulness. Love surmounts even the worst barriers and always brings new life. Furthermore, he emphasizes, dialogue, quality time, valuing the other person and keeping an open mind are essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Sadly, as has been said, this is not always the experience of people. In the second half of his exhortation, Pope Francis provides some pastoral perspectives, saying that the Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to these people and families and help them through discernment, dialogue and prayerful support and understanding to overcome obstacles.

Without claiming to present an entire pastoral plan, the Holy Father calls for a family apostolate that offers more Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage. -Amoris Laetitia, 203







Every family, despite its weakness, can become a light in the darkness of the world. 'Nazareth teaches us the meaning of family life, its loving communion, its simple and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character. -Paul VI, Address in Nazareth, 5 January 1964 adequate catechesis and formation, not only of engaged and married couples and their children, but also priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated religious, catechists, teachers, social workers, medical professionals and other pastoral workers.

Formation for marriage and family life needs to begin at an early stage, Pope Francis urges. A more intensive long-term and short-term marriage preparation, as well as continuing to accompany newly-married couples, will provide the tools needed to face trials together and thereby prevent in the first place problems that might lead to a break-up of the marriage and family. Education of children in schools, parishes and within the family with respect to caring for one another, moral virtues, socialization, fostering good habits - all these are necessary. If there is a breakdown that leads to separation or even divorce, that loving accompaniment by the Church needs to continue, said the Holy Father. "It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church," he added, and pastoral care to their children needs to be a primary concern (243-45). Likewise, the Church accompanies with love those who are co-habiting or who experience a same-sex attraction to help them to carry out God's will in their lives.

The rule to follow in all cases, the Pope makes clear, is the love and mercy of the Lord. "It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an 'unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous' mercy," he says. "No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves. Naturally, if someone flaunts an objective sin as if it were part of the Christian ideal, or wants to impose something other than what the Church teaches, he or she can in no way presume to teach or preach to others; this is a case of something which separates from the community (cf. Mt 18:17). Such a person needs to listen once more to the Gospel message and its call to conversion. Yet even for that person there can be some way of taking part in the life of community, whether in social service, prayer meetings or another way that his or her own initiative, together with the discernment of the parish priest, may suggest" (297).

Marriage and family, as we know from personal experiences, endure all the pains and sufferings, the trials and tribulations of the human condition. Yet, we know that with and through the Risen Christ, all things are made new. Marriage and family are revitalized and are made into the marriage and family that God wants for us.

This apostolic exhortation, which follows on the Synod of Bishops that met in October of 2014 and another in 2015 to discuss the challenges to marriage and family today, reflects the consensus of those



meetings and many voices.

Throughout the Synod process - which was supplemented by the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, an array of books and articles, and vigorous discussion amongst many people who were following the Synod - there was universal recognition by all of the critical importance of marriage and family to humanity. More specifically, it was widely understood that a special task of the Synod, and thus the Church, was to help pastorally those who find themselves in unique or challenging situations and to patiently and lovingly accompany them with special concern, helping them to live as fully as possible the life-giving experience of Christ and his Church.

It became abundantly clear at the very beginning of the first of the two synods on the family that more was needed then a simple repeating of the doctrine of the Church and her canon law concerning marriage. While some very few asserted that this was all that was required of the synod, the vast majority of partecipants recognized the need to speak to the new, contemporary challenges that marriage and family face and to encourage a renewed, pastoral effort to help the faithful, including those who have drifted away from the practice of the faith, to appropriate the Church's beautiful teaching as best they can at any particular moment in their life's journey.

Pope Francis has used these discussions to inform this exhortation, and his own pastoral teaching to aid in reflection, dialogue and pastoral practice. Over the course of 325 paragraphs in nine chapters, the Holy Father points the way to how the Church might take steps to support married couples and families in their lives, and to mercifully bring hope and healing to those who find themselves in broken and wounded situations, with a sensitivity toward the diversity of particular relationships and cultures.

No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel!



Chapter Three

The Consensus Among the Bishops Expressed by Amoris Laetitia



Amoris Laetitia is itself the fruit of very intensive listening on the part of Pope Francis. The two synods on family were preceded by consultation of local churches throughout the world on the lived situation of families, their challenges, and their experience. The extraordinary synod of 2014 reflected on the challenges to marriage and family and, thus, prepared the agenda for the 2015 ordinary assembly. One of the many aspects of the apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, that is particularly noteworthy is that it expresses the Holy Father's engagement with the bishops who attended both the 2014 and the 2015 Synods on marriage and all of the material that was a part of those two gatherings that spoke about marriage, the challenges to marriage and of course the beauty and blessings of marriage.

Following the mind and words of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis has placed great emphasis on his unity with the bishops as they carry out their teaching and governance role in the Church. The Council reminds us that bishops, always with and never without Peter, share a responsibility for the life of the Church. Pope Francis has called upon all of us, but especially bishops, to recognize that it is not just one voice that guides the whole Church but the action of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and minds of the faithful but particularly in the work, ministry and charism of the bishops.

The Holy Father has highlighted, once again, the role of bishops in collaboration with him in the overall responsibilities for leadership, teaching and pastoral ministry of the Church. In February 2014, the Holy Father, at a consistory of the cardinals, asked us to begin to reflect on the challenges to marriage today. He then called for a Synod that in 2014 addressed the difficulties that marriage faces and reminded us of the heavily secular culture we live in, of the materialism

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that is a part of the mentality of many people, the individualism that dominates our culture, particularly in the Western world and in the United States, and the relativism that is at the heart of so much of the moral judgment that is made today. Here the Pope noted that it is precisely in this context that our people live and that our teaching must help them move beyond.

One of the facts of our contemporary life and culture is the tsunami of secularism that has, in recent years, overwhelmed the way in which so many, especially the young, understand reality. Too often the great pillars of a shared view of life - family, marriage, objective right and wrong, the common good – have been "washed away." We are left with a world view, accepted by many that sees no value in our vision and message – if they have even ever heard it. The 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization spoke of the universal recognition and concern of this sad phenomenon.

In the 2015 Synod, the focus was on the substance of the Church's teaching on marriage and family and its relevance today. The Synod affirmed that there is a difference between the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, a doctrine of the Church, and the personal, conscientious judgment concerning one's relationship to the Sacraments. The two realities are greatly related but they are not the same thing. We must be careful not to mix together as if there were no distinctions among: God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ; the Church's articulated doctrine; Church law which attempts to apply the teaching, and the evaluation of the specific concrete

situation of each believer. The context of both Church law and the pastoral assessment is the loving, pastoral assistance of the pastors of the Church.

To be avoided are both a laxism that to readily dismisses moral obligation, and a ridged legalism that too quickly denies the role of human conscience in making moral judgements. In the Synod discussions we heard some few who asserted that all we have to do is announce and repeat the precepts of the Church regarding marriage. We also heard the call for a more expansive pastoral outreach to accompany those who are in situations that do not completely reflect the fullness of Church teaching on marriage, or so many other Gospel mandates.

It is precisely in the light of the overwhelming influence of the secular culture and the significant absence of proper religious formation that many judgments of reason are made by which the person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. While the judgement may, from the truly informed and enlightened understanding, be erroneous, nonetheless, a human being must always obey the certain judgement of his conscience (cf. CCC 1800).

Here we find a significant aspect of both Amoris Laetitia and the received teaching of the Church. Not every moral judgement is made in the full rich light of complete understanding of the faith and its requirements. That judgement still has value and our pastoral task is to accompany the person in a journey we are both making together to draw closer to a fuller embrace of Christ and his Gospel. **Pope Francis has** called upon all of us, but especially bishops, to recognize that it is not just one voice that auides the whole Church but the action of the Holv Spirit working in the hearts and minds of the faithful but particularly in the work, ministry and charism of the bishops.





What this current post-synodal apostolic exhortation is highlighting is both what the Synod in 2014 said about the challenges to married people and the cultures in which they live, and then what the second Synod in 2015 also said about the beauty and the blessing of marriage and our need to foster and share that wonderful teaching.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, our Holy Father has relied on a number of theological sources including: Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Common Doctor of the Church; the Magisterium of the Church, and in particular the teaching of Saint John Paul II. Then in the efforts to hear how that teaching is lived and applied today, Pope Francis looks to the consensus that came out of the two Synods and is found in the relatio synodi of 2014 and the relatio finalis of 2015.

The context of both Church law and the pastoral assessment is the loving, pastoral assistance of the pastors of the Church. What this process and it conclusions say is that the Pope together with bishops from around the world have for two years discussed, prayed, listened, reflected and discussed again and again how to present the Church's teaching on marriage in a way that it is inviting and compelling and at the same time faithful to the truth and able to engage people who live in a marriage that does not reflect perfectly and entirely the Church's teaching.

Some few object to what they say is a disengagement of Church teaching and law from pastoral practice. Yet, what *Amoris Laetitia* addresses is precisely how to help those who honestly struggle to see the coherence of Church teaching with their own state of life and circumstances that are seen as beyond their power to alter. The Synods spoke of engaging and accompanying while avoiding unnecessary condemnation.

Pope Francis gives an example for all of us that if we are involved in the work, ministry and particularly in the pastoral life of the Church, we have to be aware of the teaching, of the need to internalize that teaching and at the same time of the individual circumstances in which that teaching is lived.

At the end of all of the discussions and all of the reflections carried out over two full years, there emerges now this apostolic exhortation that I would call a "consensus exhortation."

It is important to note, notwithstanding some of the news articles and blogs, that every paragraph of the final relatio of the Synod was approved by a twothirds majority of the bishops and that nearly every paragraph received close to 95% support. What this apostolic exhortation is confirming for us is the validity and the value of the Second Vatican Council's call for collegial reflection, that is, the bishops coming together and working together, always with and never without Peter.

This apostolic exhortation which is so faithful to the voice of the bishops highlights in an extraordinary manner the importance of the consensus that the bishops arrived at and that he as Peter, head of the Church, and in communion with his brothers, now affirms and confirms.



Catholic moral teaching prior to the Second Vatican Council had in many ways become encumbered by an overarching focus on human acts, law, and sin. Scholars of the history of the discipline point out that these preoccupations were the result of the interconnection between it and the sacrament of penance, the historical association of moral teaching with the discipline of Canon Law, and the voluntarism that impacted western thought after the 14th and 15th centuries. The manuals which emerged after the Council of Trent and were used in the newly established seminaries often presented the moral life as a dialectical struggle between freedom and law whereby human acts were evaluated by relevant moral law unless some space for freedom could be won by an appeal to conscience or a casuistic analysis of similar moral cases.

In their directives for the renewal of the Church's moral teaching, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council called for: "livelier contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation," a presentation which was to be "more thoroughly nourished by biblical teaching," and one which would be able to "show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world." These hallmarks of renewal were echoed and amplified elsewhere in the Council's teaching on the human person as fully revealed in Christ (cf. Gaudium et spes, no. 22), scripture as the animating principle of Catholic theology (cf. Dei verbum, no. 24), and the universal call to holiness (cf. Lumen gentium, no. 40) which has contributed to the flourishing of virtue ethics in recent Catholic moral theology.

Like his predecessors, Pope Francis follows the "sure compass" provided by the Council's teaching for the renewal of the Church. All of these hallmarks of post-conciliar renewal are carried forward in Amoris laetita: the focus on the human person revealed in Christ, the primacy of love, the deep engagement with scripture, and the turn to virtue and grace rather than law and obligation as the primary categories for Catholic moral teaching. Pope Francis's exhortation draws richly on the teaching of scripture in unpacking the role of family and of love within salvation history and the Church, culminating in the document's beautiful and profound mediation on St. Paul's great hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 (see nos. .90-119). The document invites us to take as a point of departure "the merciful gaze of Jesus" (no. 60). This sets the Church's teaching on the family in the key of mercy and love: "Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defense of a dry and lifeless doctrine" (no. 59). The path of conversion walked by Christians is therefore understood as a process—unfolding according to the working of grace and "the law of gradualness" (cf. AL, no. 295) within the field hospital of the Church (cf. AL, no. 291).

The Church's moral teaching on marriage and the family is thus put at the service of Her pastoral practice and care of souls in order to enable Her members to "bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world" as the Council directed. It is one and the same Holy Spirit who works within the individual human heart drawing it to Christ who also brings renewal to the "family of families" (AL, no. 87) which is His Body.

-John S. Grabowski The Catholic University of America

Chapter Four The Magisterial Continuity of Amoris Laetitia



While we can refer to Amoris Laetitia as a consensus document, we might also name it the continuity exhortation. In Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis does more than just present the teaching of the Church on marriage. He also calls for pastoral reflection and action. In it we see the continuity of the teaching that we find in the conciliar era beginning with Saint John XXIII following through with Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis. If Amoris Laetitia is properly placed in the context of the constant teaching of the Church, we will see an affirmation of both the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage and also the Church's universal practice of applying that unchanging teaching to individual lived experience and concrete situations.

In urging concrete steps to support married couples and families, and bring hope and healing to those in difficult situations, Pope Francis follows in the longstanding tradition of the Church Magisterium. The continuity is made clear by the astounding amount of citations from previous pontificates and the tradition of the Church in general. For example, there are 56 citations from the teachings of Saint John Paul II, 22 citations to the Second Vatican Council, 22 citations to Saint Thomas Aquinas, 19 citations to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 11 citations to the magisterium of Benedict XVI, 10 citations to Blessed Paul VI, and more. While we can refer to Amoris Laetitia as a consensus document, we might also name it the continuity exhortation.

From the days of the Council until today, the Church has been greatly blessed by a series of pontiffs, successors to Saint Peter, who have so well served the Church with their teachings. However, we have at times seen people being confused and misled about those teachings, beginning with the Council itself, due to an erroneous hermeneutic, that is, interpretation and application, of the teaching.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who began explicitly to point out the failings and unacceptability of what has been called "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," which he contrasted with the true hermeneutic of reform and renewal in the continuity of the Church. Precisely in order to understand what it is that Jesus is revealing to us, we turn to his Church and the continuous apostolic tradition in the Body of Christ to clarify, reaffirm and assure us.

CHAPTER FOUR



In opening the Council, Saint John XXIII said he wanted the ancient faith to be exactly preserved in its entirety and yet proclaimed in a way in which it could be heard and embraced in our age and circumstances. Blessed Paul VI also had the goal to maintain the unity of the Church, particularly in the face of the tensions and challenges of the post-conciliar times and opposition to some Magisterial teaching.

In the nearly 27 year pontificate of Saint John Paul II, the third longest pontificate in the history of the papacy, we see a refocusing of the energy and vision of the Church, an explanation and application of the conciliar teaching. Pope Benedict XVI, a gifted theologian who was at the side of Pope John Paul II for most of his pontificate, and was an advisor at the Council, reminded all of us that there is an extraordinary theological richness to what we proclaim in the Creed.

Now Pope Francis picks up the threads of the energizing focus of the Council while standing on the foundational work of his predecessors. In keeping with the longstanding orthodox teaching of the Church, it falls to the pope and the bishops, always with and never without Peter, to articulate the teaching of the faith. CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter Five

The Pastoral Implications of Amoris Laetitia

In responding pastorally to those whose lives more deeply reflect the brokenness of the human condition rather than the beauty and blessing of the Church's received teaching, Pope Francis affirms that our task is



not to scold, but to sustain them in faith and hope. We need to begin patiently and lovingly to accompany them with special concern, helping them to live as fully as possible the life-giving experience of Christ and his Church. In this spiritual journey, each person can be at a different place. We are called to recognize this fact as we try to go out, encounter and accompany others.

"...the Church is commissioned to proclaim the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the mind and heart of every person. The Bride of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who goes out to everyone without exception". Bull Misericordiae Vultus (11 April 2015) 12: AAS 107

In chapter eight, the Holy Father follows the teaching of Saints John Paul II and Thomas Aquinas to remind us of the distinction between objective moral norms and their application in uniquely concrete circumstances. Thus he says that pastoral practice needs to take into account individual conscience, which not only can recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to revealed Gospel teaching, but can also be that voice of the Spirit which prompts the person to make the most generous response to God he or she can considering the complexity of one's human limitation (Amoris Laetitia, 303).

The pastoral responsibility to help individuals apply objective moral norms to their concrete personal circumstances cannot, by definition, rely on a textbook of predetermined responses. However, three principles can help guide pastors in their priestly work with individual souls.

Fidelity to the received tradition

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation is an exercise of the Papal Magisterium just as all of the previous post-synodal apostolic exhortations have been, just as papal encyclical letters are. In keeping with the longstanding orthodox teaching of the Church, it falls to the pope and the bishops, always with and never without Peter, to articulate the teaching of the faith. The pope is the rock – the touchstone of our faith. What makes Amoris Laetitia so significant is that it also followed on the expressed consensus of cardinals and bishops from around the world gathered together in two synods in what has been described as the most transparent and open exercise of synodality since that ecclesiastical structure was founded by Blessed Paul VI in 1965.

The apostolic exhortation, then, is to be read within the context of the received tradition. There is clearly no new doctrine introduced on the nature of marriage, the indissolubility of marriage, the determinant role of human conscience in moral capability, or the applicability of current canon law. There is an objective moral order. It is written in our hearts as the natural law and proclaimed in revelation.

CHAPTER FIVE

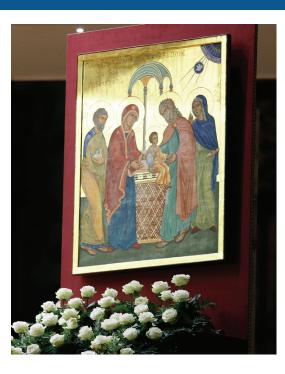
REFLECTIONS ON AMORIS LAETITIA

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that the Decalogue, the Commandments, are a privileged expression of the natural law (CCC, 2070). Saint Thomas Aquinas speaks of natural law in his Treatise on the Law (Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 94). He also describes the role of charity or love in human actions and in the moral order, especially in the Summa Theologiae, II-II.

Thus, for instance, the exhortation does not create some sort of internal forum process in which a marriage can be annulled or in which the objective moral order can be changed. The teachings of the Church on marriage and family, conscience and moral decision-making, remain unchanged. The role of the priest in listening and offering affirmation or challenge to persons as they work through their own understanding of their situation, is not the same as absolving from the law or annulling a marriage.

Respect for individual conscience

Instead, the exhortation places greater emphasis on the role of the individual conscience in appropriating those moral norms into the person's actual circumstances. Given the inroads that secularism and relativism have made among the faithful, the Holy Father has indicated that we have a greater responsibility than in past ages to make allowances for those influences that diminish the impact of objective norms, and accompany individuals towards a greater awareness of those norms as well as a greater willingness and capacity to integrate them more fully in their lives. Here Amoris *Laetitia* confirms the longstanding teaching of the Church and encourages



pastors to see through the lens of Christ's mercy and compassion rather than through an opaque legalism.

This profound respect for the conscience of the individual does not apply, it should be noted, to judgments he or she makes regarding the teaching of the Church, but of the state of his or her soul. Pastors of souls, in teaching and proclaiming the faith, in guiding and counseling, do not replace the judgment of conscience of individual believers; that is a judgment that they alone make before God. It should also be clear that the judgment of conscience of individual believers does not replace or change the objective teachings of the Church. This brings us to the pastoral art of accompaniment.

Accompaniment

In pastoral ministry we must consider the role of the priest as he works with an individual to help that person understand more fully how the law and teaching apply in his or her own life The teachings of the Church on marriage and family, and conscience and moral decisionmaking, remain unchanged.



HAPTER FIVE



We have a lot of pastoral accompaniment ahead of us if we are to be good shepherds, gathering the lost members of the flock – who may not even know that they are lost. situation. We also must consider the conscientious judgment before God of the person in light of where that person might be and any mitigating factors (*Amoris Laetitia*, 305).

Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know full well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances (Amoris Laetitia, 301). Nevertheless, a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God's mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church (Amoris Laetitia, 305). This conviction that people can always grow closer to the Lord, no matter where they are, is the underlying moral principle that should inform both that personal discernment and the priest's ministry.

Knowledge of the teaching is one thing, appropriating that knowledge in a way that it forms one's life and value judgements is another. The priest can and should impart the teaching and

help form conscience. But the actual judgement of conscience and therefore the culpability before God for a specific action belongs to the individual. Moral theology, just as does civil law, recognizes degrees of responsibility or culpability before the law, depending on the circumstances of the person and the action. We recognize that different persons may be appropriating the same teaching in different ways because of their particular situation. This does not mean that the law or teaching has been changed. But it does mean that we have a lot of pastoral accompaniment ahead of us if we are to be good shepherds, gathering the lost members of the flock – who may not even know that they are lost.

Pastoral dialogue, accompaniment and integration involve the development of conscience and also the expression of a level of support or confirmation for the judgment the individual is making about the state of his soul or her soul. That judgment is the act of the individual and is the basis for their accountability before God. The role of the priest, as Pope Francis reminds us in complete fidelity with the Church's perennial teaching, is to help form conscience: not take its place (*Amoris Laetitia*, 300).

Conclusion

moris Laetitia is not a list of answers to each individual human issue. The apostolic exhortation calls for a compassionate pastoral approach to many people – married, single, and divorced – who are struggling to face issues in life, the teaching of the Church, and their own desire to reconcile all of this. The exhortation is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy.

In continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis calls us to the work of the New Evangelization. A hallmark in this papacy is the emphasis that the Church "go out" into the world, to not stay wrapped up within herself, but to go out to give to people the beauty of the Gospel, the amazement of the encounter with Jesus.

Pope Francis approaches his teaching ministry first and foremost as a pastor of souls. This can be a challenge and an incentive for all of us who seek to do the same thing. There is always the temptation simply to annunciate doctrinal points as if this is the same as engaging in pastoral ministry with a person who is discerning how they can appropriate this teaching. The pastoral ministry of accompanying the discerner benefits over the years from pastoral experience. We hear that voice of experience in this document where, in many places, one recognizes the voice of a pastor speaking directly to members of his flock, sharing his own experience and wisdom formed from many years of service to God's people.

In the action of going, encountering, sharing and accompanying, we also recognize that in the journey, we – ourselves – are also drawing closer to the Lord. In all of our evangelizing, teaching, catechizing, counseling, admonishing, and instructing, we also remember both God's liberating truth and saving mercy. None of us can claim yet to be perfect as is our heavenly Father. But we can grow closer to the Lord who will by his grace heal us so that we can have the life he wants for us.

As we carry out our pastoral responsibilities, we thank God first of all for the call and then for the guidance we receive from his Holy Church and particularly from our Holy Father, Pope Francis.



Appendix



- Cardinal Schonborn's Intervention at the Presentation of Amoris Laetitia
- Cardinal Wuerl's Video Series and Talks on Amoris Laetitia
- Interview with Cardinal Christoph Schönborn on Amoris Laetitia
- Cardinal Wuerl's Talk at the Canon Law Society of America Convention (October 10, 2016)
- Cardinal Wuerl's Talk to the Priests of the Archdiocese of Washington at the 2016 Clergy Convocation (May 10, 2016)
- Cardinal Wuerl's Talk at the University of Notre Dame (October 18, 2016)
- Cardinal Wuerl's Talk at The Catholic University of America (April 27, 2016)
- Cardinal Schonborn's Talk at Consistory

These resources and a video series on Amoris Laetitia can be found at adw.org/amorislaetitia.

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