

*Note: The following document is a paraphrase of the text of the 'Relatio'. it is not meant to replace the 'Relatio' but could be used as a door opening through which to study the full text. The headings and paragraph numbers mirror those in the original document.*

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## **Preface**

This document, the *Relatio Synodi*, is being made public so that all can reflect on it and make submissions in preparation for the next stage of the Synod in October 2015. Pope Francis says that we have “one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront” (Pope Francis)

Therefore the bishops are asked to set a reflection process in motion.

## **Introduction**

As the Synod gathers in prayer of thankfulness for families in which love and warmth are experienced it also remembers families where there is little joy and sometimes loneliness or resignation because of shattered dreams.

1. Despite the many signs of crisis in the family institution in parts of the world, the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant. This is why the church sees a need to proclaim the 'Gospel of the Family' as part of the good News revealed by Jesus and taught by the church down through the years.

2. The reflection around the family will continue between the 2 Synods and will then be pursued at greater depth at the 2<sup>nd</sup> part in Oct 2015. The Synod is collegial, ie, bishops and Pope working together.

The following reflections are in 3 parts:

Part 1: listening

Part 2: looking

Part 3: Confronting the situation

## **PART 1:**

### **LISTENING: the context and challenges of the family**

#### **The Socio-Cultural Context**

4. We look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows. We do this in a spirit of faithfulness to Christ's teaching.

Cultural changes around the world influence all aspects of life, including family life. There are positive aspects to this, eg, a greater recognition of the rights of women and children, at least in some parts of the world. Negative influences can come from individualism, or from lack of faith.

5. Contemporary culture can bring about loneliness and lack of faith; this can often lead to powerlessness in the face of unemployment and poverty, which at times is a real nightmare, bringing financial difficulties and discouraging the young from marrying. It can lead to not wanting children or to seeing the presence of older persons as a burden. It can lead to violent unrest.

6. In some countries and contexts there are particular challenges, eg, where polygamy is still being practised or where the custom is of 'marriage in stages', arranged marriages, cohabitation. Mixed marriages can lead to various problems although can also lead to growth in tolerance and understanding. Civil legislation can compromise marriages and the family, especially when the reference to God is missing.

7. In some countries a great number of children are born outside marriage; many grow up with just one of their parents or in a blended or reconstituted family. Divorces are increasing; children can be a source of contention in family break-ups. Fathers are often absent. In many places today women are discriminated against; women can be victims of violence in families, children can be sexually exploited; the phenomenon of 'street-children' is on the rise. Migration is another sign of the times which has huge implications for family life.

#### **The Importance of Affectivity in Life**

8. People in many parts of the world are feeling a need to live in harmony with their own feelings and emotions and to have good relationships with other people. They want to build relationships of self-giving and mutual sharing. Individualism and living only for oneself goes against this. The challenge for the church is to help couples to grow in dialogue and trust as they come to know more deeply the merciful love of God.

9. The question of emotional (affective) stability is a pressing one. The growth of pornography and the commercialization of the body is worrying; people may be forced into

prostitution. Misuse of social media can affect this. Many people tend to remain in the early stages of affective and sexual life. If people fail to grow to emotional maturity this can have a damaging effect on their relationships and on family life. The decline in world population can have serious consequences for the future.

## **Pastoral Challenges**

10. The Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope. People need to be accepted as they are in the world of today. We need to know how to support people in their searching and in their hunger for God, also including those who have experienced failure. The Christian message always contains both the mercy and the truth that meet in Christ.

## **Part 11**

### **Looking at Christ: the Gospel of the Family**

#### **Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation**

11. In order to respond to contemporary challenges, we look to Jesus.

12. The order of creation can be understood as from the beginning of creation to redemption in Christ. The newness of the Christian Sacrament of Marriage is in this context. It is part of God's saving action, beginning with a person's baptism and advancing progressively to conversion to a love that saves us from sin and gives us fullness of life.

13. Jesus himself, referring to the original plan of the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between a man and a woman. This is to understand the indissolubility of marriage, not as a 'yoke' imposed on persons, but as a gift the husband and wife united in marriage.

In his lifetime Jesus announced the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation; at the same time he manifested the true meaning of mercy, eg, in his meeting with the Samaritan woman.

### **14. The Family in God's Saving Plan**

Three stages in God's plan for marriage and the family:

- Adam and Eve as the first couple, blessed by God and also blessed so that they 'might be fruitful and multiply'.

- The historical form of marriage, for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce.
- With Christ's coming, the period begun by Moses ended.

15. Jesus restored marriage and the family to their original form. Through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion.

## **The Family in the Church's Documents**

16. The Church's teaching on marriage and the family has been constant down through the centuries. At Vatican Council 2, a special chapter was written about the family (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47- 52). It defined marriage as a community of life and love, placing love at the centre. The true love of husband and wife implies a mutual gift of self and a harmony of sexual and emotional aspects. Such a union is grounded in Christ. Through his Spirit, Christ gives the spouses the capacity to live that love, permeating every part of their lives with faith, hope and charity. Living this way, the couple help to build up the Body of Christ and are a domestic church.

17. Since Vatican 2, church teaching has continued to refine its teaching on the family. *Humanae Vitae* emphasised the intimate connection between conjugal love and the generation of life.

Pope JP2 developed teaching on the vocation of man and woman to love and proposed basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the family in society.

18. Church teaching continued with Pope Benedict.

*Deus Caritas Est* says that the truth of the love of man and woman is only understood in the light of the love of Christ crucified. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, he emphasises the importance of love as the principle of life in society.

19. Pope Francis' encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, in connecting marriage and family, writes of the 'vocation of love' - a love 'based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness.'

## **The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together**

20. Mutual self-giving in marriage is grounded in the grace of baptism. The married couple recognise these elements in their commitment:

- a promise of total self-giving/mutual complementarity
- faithfulness
- openness to new life

21. Valid elements exist in some forms of family outside of Christian marriage but the church maintains that these are always oriented towards Christian marriage.

## **The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Broken and Fragile Families**

22. The Church looks to families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel as they witness to the beauty of a marriage which is indissoluble and faithful. In a family a person learns the joy of work, love, forgiveness, prayer and the offering of one's life.

The Holy Family of Nazareth is the model.

23. The Church only recognises sacramental marriage. At the same time she is conscious of those who are struggling. She sees the need to accompany people with mercy and patience as they grow through difficult times. The church believes that God's saving work is always at work in each person.

24. Re people who have contracted civil marriages, who are divorced, remarried or cohabiting, the church considers a pastoral approach which helps them understand how the grace of God works in their lives and helping them to reach the fullness of God's plan for their lives.

25. The Church is concerned that many young people are afraid of the commitment in relation to marriage and many that so many marriages do not last. Mercy, encouragement and wisdom are needed in some situations.

26. Re civil marriages between a man and a woman, traditional marriages and cohabitation; Where unions such as these are stable, loving and responsible they can offer occasions for guidance with an eye toward the eventual celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage.

27. The church can be like a beacon in a lighthouse for those who are in the midst of a storm. Merciful love transforms and elevates while at the same time it speaks the truth in love.

## **Part 3**

### **Confronting the Situation: Pastoral perspectives**

#### **Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family today in Various Contexts**

28. The Church must proclaim the Gospel of the Family with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher and in faithfulness to Christ.

29. All have a share in the ministry of the Church. Catholic families are called in a particular way to active pastoral activity on behalf of the family.

30. In light of the parable of the Sower, our task is to cooperate in the sowing; the rest is the work of God's grace. In preaching about the family the Church is a sign of contradiction.

31. The Church needs to connect with people's real problems; the crisis in marriage and the family can be seen in the context of a wider crisis of faith.

32. The language we use must be meaningful. the gospel proclaimed to families must appeal to the values that people are seeking; it must not be merely a set of rules.

33. The Word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family. It is Good news, a criterion of judgement and a light on the journey for married couples.

34. Various religious experiences provide richness and cultural diversity. The good in them should be appreciated and limitations and deficiencies evaluated.

35. Christian marriage preparation is part of a journey of faith within the context of the wider Church family.

36. Renewal in the Church's pastoral practice is urgent. this affects training of priests, pastoral workers and a greater involvement of families.

37. Factors in economic and political that militate against family life and values need to be denounced.

### **Guiding Engaged Couples in their Preparation for Marriage**

38. The entire Christian community needs to be involved more extensively in marriage preparation; the witness of families themselves is primary. Marriage preparation should be connected with all the sacraments. Specific pre-marriage preparation programmes are needed in which couples experience themselves as part of the Church community as well as focussing thoroughly on family life.

### **Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial years of Marriage**

39. A vital and sensitive period. Pastoral accompaniment needs to continue. Experienced couples are of great importance in fostering evangelization through the family. the parish the ideal place for this.

### **Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or living Together**

40. Dialogue and discernment are needed, along with sensitivity to positive aspects of established relationships. While clearly presenting the Christian message, the Church also needs to indicate the constructive elements in these situations.

41. Many people around the world live in unions that have not been religiously or civilly recognised, eg, traditional (arranged) marriages, lifestyle choice, lack of finance.

42. All these situations require a constructive response.

### **Caring for Wounded Families (Persons who are Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried and Single-Parent families)**

43. Married couples with problems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. With proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner.

44. The necessity for courageous pastoral choices was particularly evident at the Synod. Solutions need to be considered in a variety of ways.

45. The 'art of accompaniment' teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.

46. Special discernment essential for pastorally guiding persons who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect, recognition of injustice or maltreatment. Pastoral activity is geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, eg, in special 'listening centres'. Consequences for children need to be addressed.

47. Need to make nullity procedure more accessible and less time-consuming, and if possible, free.

48. The streamlining of procedures will require increased responsibility of the bishop of the diocese. Need trained counsellors to assist.

49. Divorced persons who have not remarried ought to be encouraged to find sustenance in the Eucharist and be accompanied by local community and pastors esp re children or when in financial difficulty.

50. Likewise, those who are divorced and remarried require great respect as well as encouragement to participate in the life of the community.

51. Re divorced and remarried persons and access to Sacraments: the subject needs further exploration, bearing in mind the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances.

52. Some Synod fathers considered that further theological study on this matter is needed.

53. Mixed marriages discussed. Differences in practices of the Orthodox churches create some serious problems re ecumenism. Also, the dialogue with other churches is important.

## **Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies**

54. Homosexual unions in no way similar to God's plan for marriage and family. Nevertheless, people with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity.

55. Exerting pressure in this regard on pastors of the Church is totally unacceptable. It is equally unacceptable to link international aid with the introduction of laws that establish 'marriage' between persons of the same sex.

## **The Transmission of Life & the Challenge of a Declining Birthrate**

56. Openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love.

57. Pastoral work in this area needs to start with listening to people and acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life. This is the basis of teaching regarding the natural methods for responsible procreation.

The adoption of children, orphans and the abandoned and accepting them as one's own is a specific form of family apostolate.

58. There is an ongoing need for accompaniment of married couples, both as regards personal development and maturity in an ever-deepening relationship.

## **Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization**

59. One of the fundamental challenges facing the family today is undoubtedly that of raising children. There is need to consider how to develop families as places of growth in daily life, and places where virtues are lived out and transmitted. Parents, then, are able freely to choose the type of education for their children.

60. The role of the Church in supporting families is a valuable one, starting by being welcoming communities. These communities offer support in complex situations and everyday life in the work of raising children and young people.

Families should seek the intercession of Mary. Pastoral work and devotion to Mary are an appropriate starting point for proclaiming the Gospel of the Family.

## **Conclusion**

61. These reflections are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view. They will be developed and clarified through reflection processes in the local churches. These are not decisions taken nor are they easy subjects. The Holy Spirit will guide us in finding the road to truth and mercy for all.