

# LIGHT OF TRUTH



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**Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia the post-synodal apostolic exhortation which is written with inputs from the two Synods in 2014 and 2015 both were seen with lot of controversial stand points on the question family and marriage. Now the Papal document has come, how do you think the Pope is telling the world on the debates that took place in the Church on marriage divorce, remarriage and contraception?**

Although the Relatio Synodi (2014) and the Relatio Finalis (2015) did not give an indication of any drastic changes, especially on the much debated issues like contraception, communion to the divorced and remarried couples and homosexual unions, speculations over these issues continued, with the hope that the Apostolic Exhortation would make some further changes. Hence, those who were expecting radical changes are perhaps a bit disappointed. Those who



## IN THE PROCESS OF GROWING TO THE IDEAL

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be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment." The Pope also makes clear that, "Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church..." (no. 299). The principle to be followed here is that of integration: "The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it" (no. 299). The

Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried... (no. 84).

All these do not mean that a clear and definite teaching is given regarding the admission of the divorced and remarried into communion. Rather, there is lack of clarity, or it seems that a clear-cut direction is not given. That is why even bishops have interpreted these statements differently: while some German bishops say that Amoris Laetitia allows communion to the divorced and remarried, some other bishops have the opinion that there is no change in the teaching.

While it is said that homosexual unions cannot be considered analogous to God's plan for marriage and family

(no. 251), it is made clear that every person is to be respected regardless of one's sexual orientation (no. 250). Thus the teaching remains the same, though the need of mercy and pastoral care to those with same orientation and to their families is underlined.

Regarding contraception, we cannot find any radical change teaching. The importance of procreation is repeatedly underscored. Regarding the means of controlling birth, Humanae Vitae is referred to: "Moreover, 'the use of methods based on the

Pope is not speaking as a judge, but as someone who 'has the smell of the sheep.' Instead of applying hard and fast rules to all the families and situations, the attempt is to meet the families where they are and to invite them to experience the all-embracing mercy of God and the joy that God offers to every family and every person. Above all, the Pope respects the consciences of people, and urges "to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations" (no. 37).

**I noticed a word repeated 43 times in the English translation of the letter which is "process;" the Pope tells us "time is greater than space." Do you think the Pope is following a new methodology of pastoral practices and theological thinking namely a paradigm change from**

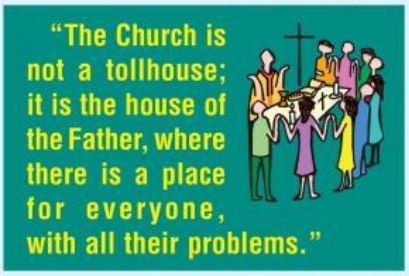


**"Eucharist 'is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."**

wanted no change in the traditional position of the Church, but only its reaffirmation also are a bit disappointed, since a clear condemnation or rejection is not seen.

Those who wanted changes are partially satisfied, saying that Amoris Laetitia gives room for the communion of the divorced and the remarried, especially based on paragraph no. 301: "...Hence it is [!] can no longer simply be said that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace..." Paragraph no. 298 speaks about the 'variety of situations' "which should not

Pope makes it clear that instead of blindly applying some rigid rules, "What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases," (no. 300). This discernment has to be made in the conversation with the priest, in the internal forum... (no. 300). Footnote no. 351 is noteworthy in this regard: "In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments... I would also point out that the Eucharist 'is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.'" Moreover, there is a departure from the teaching of Familiaris Consortio: "...the



**"The Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems."**

laws of nature and the incidence of fertility' (Humanae Vitae, 11) are to be promoted..." (no. 222). However, it may be noticed that instead of categorical statements, what is recommended is that such methods 'are to be promoted.'

However, in appreciating the contribution of Amoris Laetitia, we should not restrict ourselves to such controversial issues. First of all, it presents a comprehensive idea of the Christian family, beginning from the biblical vision. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis on the concrete realities and complexities in the life of the families. Throughout the document, it is clear that the

**being to becoming of man? What are the implications?**

Yes, the word "process" appears a number of times. In some places it refers to the synodal process, in other places it refers to marriage and family, in certain places it refers to "irregular" situations, and yet in other places it refers to pastoral practices. Although these may have different implications depending on the context, it has an important impact. It reaffirms the overall approach of entering into dialogue with the concrete situations; instead of applying rigid rules equally

**"Pope Francis basically believes in the goodness of the human person."**

## IN THE PROCESS OF GROWING TO THE DEAL

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to all situations, it shows the importance of respecting the process through which each person and each family has to discern God's design; it indicates how the Church, in its pastoral practice, has to respect every person and family in the process of discernment, without making unnecessary and unhealthy judgements. While the ideal is presented, the Pope makes it clear that ideals may not be achieved all of a sudden. Instead, everyone is in the 'process' of achieving this ideal, whether it is attained or not. This sincerity has to be acknowledged and recognised. Importance is to be given to process than results.

"Time is greater than space" (no. 3) is given as a guiding principle for the whole document. Although some experts feel that this usage is a bit elusive, or some better expression might be used, it could be understood a bit more clearly in light of *Evangelii Gaudium* paragraphs 222 and 223: "It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time... Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces" (EV, no. 223). Thus, "process" and the principle, "time is greater than space" go together.

Is it a new methodology? Yes and No, depending on how we evaluate it in light of the historical development of Church's moral teaching and practice. In many other places in the document, the Pope refers to the "law of gradualness," which practically is the same principle. Seen in this way, the Pope is reaffirming the tradition of the Church. On the one hand, the moral tradition speaks about the moral norms; on the other hand, it recognises the fragility of the human person. For example, from 16th century, we find the debate over probabilism, probabiliorism, equi-probabilism, etc. [The limited space does not allow me to explain each of these terms here]. In the 20th century, especially following *Humanae Vitae*, we find proposals like "Situation of Tension" (by Peter Chirico), 'Conflict Situation' solutions (proposed by Charles Robert), 'compromise' situation (proposed by Conrad van Ouwwerker) and later defended and elaborated by Charles Curran, 'the law of graduality' and so on. They are attempts to understand with compassion the fragility of humans, without denouncing them. This does not mean that there is nothing new in the methodology of Pope Francis. There is a clear and greater emphasis

on human fragility, on the need for mercy. Not that law is to be discarded, but rather it is a recognition of the limitedness of human being. Human being is in the process of becoming, of growing into the ideal. It may take time, or he/she may not reach the ideal fully, but the 'becoming' itself is important. However, the Pope makes a clear distinction: "Along these lines, Saint John Paul II proposed the so-called 'law of gradualness' in the knowledge that the human being knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth." This is not a 'gradualness of law' but rather a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law" (no. 295). In spite of this, we need to remember that many theologians think about the 'gradualness of law,' that is, a change in the law, when necessary. Many have pointed out how law has changed in the tradition of the Church, though a distinction is to be made between what can be changed and what cannot be changed.

Perhaps, something new in the methodology of Pope Francis, especially in *Amoris Laetitia* may be the change in the style of magisterial teaching itself: At least since Vatican I, especially with the definition of Infallibility and Primacy, magisterial or Catholic teaching meant that everything is defined, or everything is stated in clear-cut terms. Especially in this document, the Pope does not follow that style. Instead, the style is dialogical, invitational. The Pope makes it clear that, "not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it" (no. 3). This may be startling to many. In *Amoris Laetitia* everything is not in black and white. There are many 'gray' areas, leaving sufficient room for the bishops, pastors and individual Christians. This can be said to be something new in the magisterial teaching style.

**The Pope repeatedly tells us not to impose and judge "straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned" (no.49). A pastor is called upon to make moral judgments, what is wrong with judging, how do we escape judgmental approach?**

The Pope repeatedly makes it clear that the pastor/priest is not called to be a judge. Instead, the priest is called to facilitate persons to discern the will of God. Not only paragraph no. 49, but a number of other passages repeat this. In my opinion, one of the most challenging sentences in *Amoris Laetitia* is: "We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (no. 37). The pastor is not supposed to judge, but to help the persons to form their consciences. Discernment and decision is not the duty of the pastor, but of the person. Only God knows the conscience of the person; Only God has the right to judge. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to consider the faithful as infants, and keep them infantile. That is, instead of guiding them to become mature persons and mature Christians, to dictate what they should and should not do, or to impose decisions on them. This tendency is rejected by the Pope. In Chapter 8 the Pope repeatedly speaks about the need of avoiding judgements. For example, "Consequently, there is a need "to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations" and "to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition" (no. 296). Rather than judging, the pastor is called to accompany, facilitating the person/s to discern and integrate into the community. The pastor is not the custodian of the grace of God, but only a channel. What the Pope says in paragraph 310 is very powerful: "It is true that at times "we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems." All this calls for a new self-awareness of the pastor as well as his role. Becoming aware of one's own limitation and fragility may help the pastor to become more compassionate and merciful to others. Meditating upon how Jesus dealt with the sinners and helped them to come to a new life through the experience of forgiveness and love is also important in avoiding a judgemental approach. Priesthood is not a right or a merit, but a gift gratuitously given by God, to be a channel of His love and mercy, and thus to bring others to a fuller awareness and experience of the love and mercy of God.

**We are taught to think and judge in binaries of good – evil, God–devil, light – darkness, man–woman, etc. How do we overcome this way of thinking and judging? Is the Pope asking for it? How important is the space between**

**the binaries which we easily jump?**

Surely, overcoming these binaries is important. I have already explained how the Pope speaks about "process," and how he emphasises that "time is greater than space." No one is evil in itself. Everyone is created in the image and likeness of God; everyone is a child of God. At the same time, the influence of sin is there in every human being. So, good and evil can be seen in varying degrees in every person. However, we believe that everyone is sincerely striving to be good and to be better. This process of becoming good and better has to be acknowledged and appreciated, instead of judging persons. The Pope asks us again and again to recognise this basic good in every person, although there may be complexities or 'irregular situations.'

**An individual man or woman is not simply an edition of the general name MAN, but a person with a specific identity which no other human being has, how does moral theology take this into its consideration?**

*Amoris Laetitia* has a lot to say to moral theology. The Pope makes it clear that each person is unique and different; similarly the situation in which each person lives is unique. The person with his/her strengths and weaknesses, achievements and failures, capabilities and limitations has to be the subject of moral theology, not a platonic concept of man. The repeated invitation to take into account the concrete reality and complexity of the situation is a way of showing that the identity and uniqueness of the person has to be respected. Pope Francis says that although concern must be shown for the integrity of the Church's moral teaching, "special care should always be shown to emphasize and encourage the highest and most central values of the Gospel, particularly the primacy of charity as a response to the completely gratuitous offer of God's love" (no. 311). Similarly, the Pope emphasises the need of avoiding a "cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues" (no. 312).

This also implies, as mentioned above, respect for the consciences of persons. The Pope points out one of the failures of moral theology or theology in general: "We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life" (no. 37). Instead, moral

theology should be able to understand the uniqueness of persons and encourage them to be open to God's grace in his/her own unique way.

**Human beings can be perceived both as sinner on his way to sainthood or a person created in the image of God who will pass the test of time through his way. Both pessimistic and optimistic, Augustinian and John Chrysostom perhaps show the two ways, which way of Pope Francis and why is it important?**

Although God created everything as good, due to the misuse of freedom by the human being, sin entered the world. Human being, though created in the image of God, and redeemed by Jesus Christ, is a mixture of good and evil. We find in the tradition approaches which emphasise one of these dimensions, depending on which it may be called basically optimistic or pessimistic. I would prefer not to compare between Augustine and Chrysostom, because I think that often our evaluation of Augustine is too pessimistic and unjust. In his context, in the midst of conflicting philosophies, some of which even condemned the body as created by the devil or evil god, Augustine defended the basic goodness of human body and person. In fact, he took a middle path, which was later judged as pessimistic. Any way, Pope Francis basically believes in the goodness of the human person, his/her sincere attempts to do good and to respond to the call of God. He/she may fail, but what is needed is not judgement or condemnation, but accompaniment with mercy and compassion. Only this will help the person to overcome the failures and march towards God with hope. Being judgemental only distances people. Especially today, people living in complex situations cannot be helped by judgements. Many are already depressed and disappointed. So, only if we are able to instil hope in them — hope in their goodness and ability, hope in the mercy and love of God — they will be able to respond to God's grace. ■

### Novena To Saint Jude

Most holy Apostle, St. Jude, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, the Church honors and invokes you universally, as the patron of difficult cases, of things almost despaired of. Pray for me, I am so helpless and alone.

Intercede with God for me that He bring visible and speedy help where help is almost despaired of. Come to my assistance in this great need that I may receive the consolation and help of heaven in all my necessities, tribulations, and sufferings, particularly - (make your request here) - and that I may praise God with you and all the saints forever. I promise, O Blessed St. Jude, to be ever mindful of this great favor granted me by God and to always honor you as my special and powerful patron, and to gratefully encourage devotion to you. Amen

- Lilly Pasala