

# **Pastoral Challenges of Family**

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## **Introduction**

A family is constituted of a husband and a wife and their child(ren). Family implies a precedence by marriage. Hence, our reflection here is on both marriage between the baptized persons and the family.

The present Pope Francis has taken the ministry to the families as a serious concern of the Church today. The families are facing lot of problems and challenges about which the Church cannot be unconcerned. A good pastoral guidance is an urgent need of the time. In order to inculcate into the minds of the pastors of the Church these problems and challenges and help them to carry out their ministry in all seriousness, the Pope planned a two level Synod on families: An extra-ordinary Synod of bishops on "*Pastoral Challenges of Family in the Context of Evangelization*" and an ordinary Synod on "*Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*". The first one was held between October 5 to 19, 2014 and the second is scheduled to take place between 4-25, October 2015.

## **1. The Teaching of the Church on Marriage and Family**

We have to distinguish three fundamental phases in the divine plan for the family: The first is the *family of origins*,

when God, the Creator instituted the primordial marriage between Adam and Eve, as a solid foundation for the family. "God created man in the image of himself... male and female he created him" (Gen 1:27). Jesus, referring to this primordial plan for the human couple, reaffirmed the indissoluble union between man and woman when he said: "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh." (Mt 19:4-5).

This historic *family* was *wounded by sin* (Gen 3) and became the historical form of marriage among the people of God for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce (cf. Deut 24:1ff). This was the principal practice in the time of Jesus. With Christ's coming and his reconciling fallen world through his redemption, the period begun by Moses ended.

Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and the family to their original form (Mk 10:1-2). Marriage and the family have been *redeemed by Christ* (Eph 5:21-32) and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which every true love flows. The spousal covenant, originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation received its full meaning in Christ and his Church.<sup>1</sup>

The marriage between a man and a woman is a contract – a contract through which both man and woman bind themselves to each other. This contract in a Christian marriage is sublimated to the level of a *covenant* and the covenant between baptized persons has always enjoyed the

dignity of *a sacrament*. "The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws: it is rooted in the contract of partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent. It is an institution confirmed by the divine law and receiving its stability, even in the eyes of society, from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other; for the good of the partners, of the children and of society this sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone. For God himself is the author of marriage and has endowed it with various benefits and with various ends in view".<sup>2</sup> The fundamental elements and essential qualities of marriage are *unity, fidelity and fruitfulness*.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says that God himself is the author of marriage. "The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. So, it is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics."<sup>3</sup>

Marriage by nature is oriented to the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. "The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

Consequently a valid contract between the baptized is by that very fact a sacrament.”<sup>4</sup> The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World says, “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.”<sup>5</sup>

Openness to life is an essential part, an intrinsic requirement of conjugal love, because this love is directed towards communion and communion begets life. This is very important in the context of some young couples deliberately choose not to have children. Welcoming children implies accepting the other and others with whom one leans to discover and build the human family.

## **2. Difficulties and Challenges which the Families face Today**

Such a sublime institution of marriage and family faces today with many difficulties and challenges.

### **2.1. Cohabitation**

There is an increasing trend of living together without any religious or civil marriage. Avoiding marriage is seen as not only a sign of individualism, but also a symptom of crisis of a society already burdened by formalisms, obligations and bureaucracy. Avoiding marriage is seen as sign of a poor character and weakness in the individual in facing increasingly *complicated* structures. The natural consequence of this attitude is *co-habitation* without any guarantee of stability. Very often couples choose to cohabit not with a possibility of future marriage, but without any intention to marry at all.

The reason for not undergoing the legal or religious path may be variegated. Just to mention a few: The first one may be an exasperated individualism that distorts family bonds and ends up considering each component of the family as an isolated unit. Another reason in the context of increasing materialistic and secularist attitude is a ever-growing religious indifferentism which does not permit a man or a woman to undergo religious rites and get recognized in the community in which he or she lives; a third reason could be the poor economic condition of the couples who are unable to cope with the extravagance that a marriage celebration involves. In earlier days people in the rural areas, after undergoing a religious ceremony in the Church or temples had a simple ceremony and banquet in front of their houses under temporarily erected *pandal* made with *kajan* leaves. Whereas today marriage banquets are held in big marriage hall with flexes and cut-outs fixed along the road for a quite some distance. The number of those who participate in the marriage banquets is growing bigger and bigger. Often it is a status problem for the families conducting marriage for their children. X and Y had a grand marriage celebration; So, if Z does not have a similar or even more grandeur celebrations, he/she will be in low esteem before others. This forces people to borrow money for marriage celebrations. Such and similar reasons might force the young couples to go for mutual agreement of co-habiting without any recognized ceremony or tie *mangalia* around the neck of the bride in front of any shrine like Vailanganni or Poondy.

## **2.2. Broken Families**

Among the great number of pastoral challenges the broken families is a keenly felt one. Divorce in the developed countries and even in the developing countries has become almost a normal practice. Even for the smallest reason and some misunderstandings, young couples quarrel and separate themselves either by a legal means of divorce or by simply getting out without bothering for any institutional means.

One of the difficulties that the families face is the "loneliness arising from the absence of God in a person's life and the fragility of relationships. There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end in crushing families. The increasing instances of poverty and unemployment in the workplace, are at times is a real nightmare or in overwhelming financial difficulties, which discourage the young from marrying.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.3. The Divorced and Civilly Re-married Persons**

Another pastoral challenge is the divorced and civilly re-married persons who seek for living normal life in the Church as any other Christian. In other words, they seek the pastoral care from their pastors.<sup>7</sup> In some countries this problem is not present, due to the fact that civil marriages do not exist. In other countries, the percentage of divorced tends to decrease because of the unwillingness to contract a new marriage even civil one – after the failure of the first marriage.<sup>8</sup>

#### **2.4. The Problem of Homosexuality**

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. The number of people with homosexual orientation is increasing day by day. Some countries have legalized homosexual unions which definitely between the baptized persons cannot be equated with the marriage between a man and a woman. Such situation is an important educative challenge. There is a moral problem in homosexual unions when such partners adopt children, it brings another challenge of paying attention to the children who live with the couples of the same sex.

#### **2.5. Abortions**

Abortion is another pastoral problem. People have recourse to abortion for various reasons. It may be because of poverty which does not permit them to have many children. The Report after the Discussion of the extraordinary Synod says, "Economic factors have enough weight to contribute to the sharp drop in the birth rate which weakens the social fabric, compromising the relationship between generations and rendering the view of the future less certain. Being open to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love."<sup>9</sup> Another reason why they abort may be the health condition of the mother. Sometimes doctors advise the mother not to have the child in order to avoid side-effects both for the mother and the child. So the mother consents to abort the child.

The above mentioned problems and challenges are not exhaustive. The Report before the discussion of the extra-

ordinary Synod gives a list of problems of family. “The widespread difficulty in creating a serene atmosphere of communication in some families is due to multiple factors: business and economic worries, differing views on the upbringing of children from various models of parenting, a reduction in time for dialogue and relaxation. In addition, there are disruptive factors like separation and divorce, with the consequences of a blended family, and, conversely single parenting, where a relationship with the other parent is confused or limited, if not totally absent. Finally, this lack of communication can result from a widespread selfish mentality that closes in upon itself, with the disturbing consequence of the practice of abortion. The same selfishness can lead to the false idea of parents that children are objects or their property that can be produced by them as they desire. Especially where poverty is widespread, women and children in particular suffer from violence and abuse. However, in even the most developed countries disruptive facts are present due to various forms of dependence, such as alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, sexual addiction and other forms of social networking. Due to external pressures, the increasing job insecurity is a nightmare for many families; migration often creates large imbalances in the family, such as those experienced by people who move from their own country – oftentimes because of war and poverty – or by those receiving them in their own country.”<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Directive Principles for Pastoral Response**

Pope Francis in the in *Evangelii gaudium* says, “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities [...]. In the case of the family, the weakening

of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society."<sup>11</sup> Hence, a true pastoral urgency calls for providing the opportunity for these persons to take care of their wounds, to heal and resume their journey of life, together with the entire ecclesial community. The problems and challenges of the family are the *signs of times*. These signs call for proper interpretation of the doctrine of faith according to the demand of the time. While they should be read in the light of the Gospel, parrot like repeating the doctrine would not solve the problems. Though the teaching does not change but it can be made more profound and it can be different. There is a certain growth in the understanding of the Gospel and the doctrine, a development. Cardinal Newman had spoken on the development of doctrine. This is also not a change but a development on the same line. The present Pope wants this and the world needs it. The Church does not invent her doctrine but is its interpreter and custodian. So it is necessary to accept people in their concrete being, to know how to support their search, to encourage the wish for God.

A thorough renewal of the Church's pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Family and replacing its current emphasis on individuals is the need of the time. For this reason, the Synod fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.1. The Attitude of Jesus towards the Sinners**

Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with patience and mercy, proclaiming the demands of the Kingdom of God. The attitude of Jesus towards humanity

would be a help for us to effectively do pastoral ministries in the midst of these problems and challenges. Jesus came into this world that 'the people may have life and have it in all its fullness' (cf. Jn 10:10b). The people whom he came to save were sinners whose relation with God was broken. He came first to heal the wounds and then given them a healthy life. His love for the sinful mankind often manifested itself in the form of mercy and forgiveness. That is why he said to the woman caught red-hand in adultery, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir" she said. "Neither do I condemn you", said Jesus. "Go away, and from this moment sin no more" (Jn 8:3-4). Jesus also permitted the sinful woman Mary to anoint his feet, wipe them with her hair etc (cf. Jn 12:1-8).

Levi held a great reception for Jesus in his house after he was called by Jesus to follow him. There were tax collectors and others with Jesus dining. Seeing this, the Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples and said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Then Jesus said to them "It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:29-32; cf. Mt 9:9-13). So, Jesus' attitude towards the sinners was not one of condemning but of forgiving and showing mercy towards them.

### **3.2. Mercy towards the Sinners**

The present Pope has said that the Church is not "a country club for the Perfect", but "hospital for the sick." This is in agreement of what Jesus had said that came to call not the upright, but the sinners to repentance. Hence, in continuation of Jesus' attitude the pastors of the Church

are called to minister to the sinners, the strayed sheep of the Church as in the parable of the lost sheep our Lord says "In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner" (Cf. Lk 15, Parables of Mercy). It is pertinent here to note what the Report after the Discussion of the extraordinary Synod has said, "The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4;15), in fidelity to the merciful *kenosis* of Christ. The truth is incarnated in human fragility not to condemn it, but to cure it."<sup>13</sup>

Pope Francis often speaks that the Church should be carrier of the mercy of God to the people, especially to the sinners. In the report prior to Discussion of the extraordinary Synod Cardinal Erod has this to say, "The issue of mercy has emerged more prominently as an important perspective in proclaiming the Gospel... The mercy of God, already presented extensively in the Old Testament (cf. Ex 34:6; 2 Sam 24:14; Ps 41:4 etc), is supremely revealed, especially in the actions and preaching of Jesus. In the parables of merciful father (cf. Lk 15:11-32), as well as in the entire New Testament, mercy is a core teaching: God is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4). According to St Thomas Aquinas, mercy is the most important attribute of God (cf. *Summa Theol.* II/II 9.30, ar.4; *Evangelii gaudium*, 37); mercy expresses the absolute sovereignty of God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8,16)... The most decisive manifestation of divine mercy towards humanity is the Incarnation of Christ and the work of Salvation.... Indeed, God never tires of forgiving the sinner who repents and he does not tire of giving him this possibility again and again. This mercy, is not a justification of sin,

but rather the sinner's justification, to the extent that he converts and aims to sin no more" <sup>14</sup>

The meaning of mercy for the Church today was emphasized by Pope St John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council. He said that the Church must have recourse to the medicine of mercy rather than to oppose error with the weapons of rigidity. Pope St John Paul II again reverted to this spirit in his second encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (1980) and designated the second Sunday of Easter as "Divine Mercy Sunday". Pope Benedict XVI presented the subject in the encyclical *Deus Caritas est* (2005). At beginning of his Pontificate Pope Francis said: "God never tires of forgiving, ever! [...] We sometimes tire in asking for forgiveness."<sup>15</sup> In *Evangelii gaudium* he says that the Church is a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."<sup>16</sup> Mercy, the central theme of God's revelation, is highly important as a hermeneutic for the Church's actions.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, she does not do away with truth nor relativize it, but seeks to interpret it correctly in the hierarchy of truths.<sup>18</sup> Nor does she do away with the demands of justice.

Mention must be made here that some Synodal Fathers thought that using mercy of God as a hermeneutical tool to respond to divorced or remarried couples, does not take away the commitments which arise from the demands of the marriage bond. The strong sentiments of these fathers was that the bishops need to stand firm to Church's teaching on indissolubility of marriage while still being very compassionate with those who cannot live up to it.

As a post-Synod reflection, a round-table discussion was organized on the topic "*The Hope of the Family: The Synod and Beyond*"; this was held on October 21, 2014 at European University of Rome (UER). The round-table discussion was introduced by Antonio Gaspari, Editor-in-chief of Zenit News Agency. The panel was consisted of Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Mueller, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Bishop Luigi Negri, President of John Paul II International Foundation for the *Magisterium* of the Church, Monsignor Levio Melina, President of John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and Family and Costanza Mirano, journalist and writer. Cardinal Mueller's book, "*The Hope of the Family*" was taken as the frame-work of the conference. Msgr Melina speaking on the book thanked Cardinal for his book and for the courage he demonstrated in it. Recalling what Blessed Paul VI said, he affirmed: the Church does not invent her doctrine but is its interpreter and custodian. To one who solicits a review of the cornerstones of the faith to render it adaptable to our times, the Church can only answer: *Non possumus*, (we cannot). Further continuing he said that the Cardinal argues for the inalienable bond between truth and practice. Doctrine would become abstract and practice arbitrary if the Church did 'end of the season discounts'. Mercy cannot be an instrument to resolve contingent difficulties. Parents are concerned with education, even if at times they are constrained to say things that seem, at times disagreeable to the children.<sup>19</sup> So also the Church is expected to do.

#### **4. Practical Suggestions**

While maintaining the unity and the indissolubility of marriage, every pastor has to find a way out in concrete

situation of challenges coming from marriage and families for doing an effective ministry to the families.

#### **4.1. Education of Young Couples**

The proper task of the pastoral care is to take up the educational challenge, in its various stages, of educating young couples in love, in preparation for marriage, after marriage and especially in more difficult situations, so that the family might be a real school of humanity, a school of social and ecclesial relations and a school of holiness.

The family is a *school of humanity*, because it is the school of love in the life and development of a person. "The family is, in a sense, a school for human enrichment. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, the married couple must practice an affectionate sharing of thought and common deliberation as well as eager cooperation as parents in the children upbringing."<sup>20</sup> It is the school of humanity because of the relationship which marriage requires and establishes between spouses and between parents and children.<sup>21</sup>

The family is also a school of *social relations*, because it helps a person develop his social skills and builds society.<sup>22</sup> In a similar manner, the family is the womb of the Church's life, which teaches us to live in communion with the Church and to be active participants in it.<sup>23</sup>

Finally the family is also the *school of holiness*, in which the path towards sanctification of married couples and children is undertaken and sustained.<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, the Church proclaims the value and beauty of the family. The institution of marriage and the family is undoubtedly a reality, given its important social and ecclesial relevance.

The early years of marriage are a vital and delicate period during which couples grow in the awareness of the challenges and meaning of matrimony. Thus there is a need for a pastoral accompaniment that goes beyond the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. Of great importance in this pastoral is the presence of experienced couples. The parish is the ideal place for expert couples to place themselves at the disposal of younger ones. Couples need to be encouraged towards a fundamental welcome of the great gift of children. The importance of family spirituality and prayer needs to be underlined, encouraging couples to meet regularly to promote the growth of the spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life.<sup>25</sup>

It is gratifying to note that in all the dioceses of Tamil Nadu there is marriage preparation. Some dioceses do not write the banns if the couples do not produce the marriage preparation certificate. However, in light of emerging new signs of times, the syllabus for the marriage preparation need to be revised and re-organized, so as to respond the new type of challenges in marriage and family life. We should not be satisfied merely by the producing of marriage preparation certificates, because sometimes this is not a guarantee for correct knowledge of problems and challenges that the partners would face. Care should be taken to test their knowledge before issuing certificates. Correct knowledge of love and sexuality is essential. This can be guaranteed by the witness of elderly partners and this would give credibility to the ideals. Undoubtedly, younger generations will be inspired by a married couple's testimony of a strong and enduring love and faithfulness.

#### **4.2. Dealing with Illegally Married Partners**

In Indian society arranged marriage was so far the normal practice. But gradually its relevance becomes questionable, especially in the context of Indian society becoming more and more an open society due to the influence of the West. Young people prefer to choose their life partners after getting to know each other either in the workplace or in the colleges. This is what is known as love-marriages. The parents should not blindly oppose such marriages; instead they should involve themselves in helping their children to take a right decision by scrutinizing the desirability of the proposal. Quite often this is not forthcoming and so the young people get out of their homes and get themselves married either civilly or by exchange rings in front the some shrines like Vailanganni or Poondy etc.<sup>26</sup> Of course, in such cases the young couples could have approached their pastor for help which very often they do not do. There are also quite number of cases where the young couple do not undergo any ceremony, but simply begin to live as husband and wife.

What to do with such cases of marriages? In good olden days the latter union was known as concubinage; whereas now it is being called co-habitation. The former cases are called illegal unions. In all these cases the young partners will approach the parish priest only when they have a child for baptism.

Speaking of these cases the Report prior to the Discussion of the extra-ordinary Synod says, that the cohabitation and Civil marriage require discernment on a case to case basis. In this sense, a new dimension of pastoral care of the family today reveals itself through considering

the reality of civil marriages and, despite the differences, even cohabitation. Consequently, when these relationships are obviously stable in a publicly recognized legal bond, they are characterized by deep affection, display a parental responsibility towards their offspring and ability to withstand trials and they can be seen as a seed to be nurtured on the path towards celebrating sacramental marriage. Very often, however, couples choose to cohabit not in light of the possibility of a future marriage, but without any intention to marry at all.<sup>27</sup>

In some dioceses there is a policy of not legalizing such marriages at once. They are asked to wait until their child reaches the age of discretion, i.e., child is baptized on the occasion of receiving First Communion. This may not be a good pastoral. The new signs of times call for quicker resolution of the problem. Hence, without any difficulty they can be rectified and legalized.

But there will be problem when one of the partners is non-Catholic or non-Christian. In such cases attempts can be made to persuade the non-Catholic or non-Christian partner to accept the faith of the other partner. If he or she is willing to embrace Catholic faith of the husband or wife, that is well and good. Otherwise, the provision of marriage of mixed religion and disparity of cult should be applied and after getting the dispensation the marriage has to be rectified.

### **4.3. Dealing with the Divorced and Remarried**

Among the great number of pastoral challenges keenly felt today is that of divorced and civilly remarried persons. Divorced and civilly remarried persons belong to the Church. They need and have the right to receive care from their

pastors.<sup>28</sup> In dealing with such cases distinction needs to be made between the one who is guilty for the break-up of the marriage and the innocent party.

Opinion among the Synod Fathers differed very much with regards to dealing with such people. Some like, Cardinals Kaspar (Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York included) were for permitting them to receive Holy Communion after a period of penitence. But this was criticized by number of senior Cardinals like Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Raymond Burke, Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura and Cardinal George Pell, Prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy. In the final voting this proposal did not get two thirds of votes. Hence, it is very difficult to give any practical suggestion here. We have to wait for the forthcoming Synod in October 2015 for guidance.

However, we need to recognize that new pastoral paths have to be found for them. Each damaged family first of all should be listened to with respect and love, becoming companions on the journey as Christ did with the disciples of the road to Emmaus. As Pope Francis says, “the Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment’, which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5).

In the case of partners who were married in the Church, but have divorced civilly, the pastoral concern should turn towards probing the possibility of Church nullification of the marriage wherever it is possible. Instead of being harsh with them, the pastors have to probe

seriously into the possible reasons not known at the time of marriage for justifying Church nullity of marriage and thus help the divorced to live a normal Christian life. Various Fathers in the Synod underlined the necessity to make the recognition of cases of nullity more accessible and flexible. Unnecessary delay and pressure are to be avoided in matrimonial suits.<sup>29</sup>

The victims of divorce, who have not re-married, may be invited to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their state. The local community and pastors have to accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when there are children involved or they find themselves in a serious situation of poverty.<sup>30</sup>

In the same way the situation of the divorced who have remarried demands a careful discernment and an accompaniment full of respect, avoiding any language or behaviour that might make them feel discriminated against. For the Christian community looking after them is not a weakening of its faith and its testimony to the indissolubility of marriage, but rather it expresses precisely its charity in its caring.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4.4. Dealing with people of Homosexual Tendency and of Same Sex Marriage**

Nobody denies that homosexuality is something abnormal. Still worse that same sex marriage is an inversion of the creation order and against the divine plan of marriage. Basing on the sacred Scriptures, tradition has held homosexual acts as acts of depravity and intrinsically disordered.<sup>32</sup> The book of Genesis says that God created mankind male and female. And our Lord said for this reason

a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh (cf. Mt 19:4-5).

It is interesting to note that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code treats homosexuality as a criminal act. The Supreme Court of India has supported this Section 377 in 2013. The BJP which was then in the Opposition backed this decision. The then BJP president Rajnath Singh called homosexuality “an unnatural act.” However, the U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who visited India on January 13, 2015, appealed to the Indian Government to repeal section 377 of the Indian Penal code that criminalizes homosexuality. For it is a matter of human rights!<sup>33</sup>

Without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony, what we can do pastorally is, not despising them, we may deal with them with sympathy and kindness. In my opinion nothing more can be done. We may leave to them to the merciful Father to do what he wants for them.

### **Conclusion**

After explaining the faith of the Church on marriage and family, we pointed out the various problems and difficulties that a family faces today. We also underlined that these are the signs of times challenging us to take appropriate pastoral action. We need to gaze upon the face of Jesus to learn to deal with such challenges. Pope Francis in his address on October 4, 2014 has said: In order to “walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of His Face [...] Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed possibilities open

up.” We need to realize that we, as pastors are only carriers of God’s mercy and salvation; and so we cannot afford to become obstacles to what God wants to do for them. It is with this understanding that we had explained certain directive principles and proposed some practical suggestions for meaningful and effective pastoral action.

By doing so, we do not mean that we have solved all the problems, nor what we have said are exhaustive. We hope that the forthcoming Synod on “The vocation and Mission of Family in the Church and contemporary World” would throw greater light on these problems and challenges.

The Family problems differ from place to place, from culture to culture. What is a problem in African continent may not be so in Europe and vice versa. Hence, there has been a loud thinking in the extra-ordinary Synod that space must be open for the local Episcopal Conferences to solve their problems. “The Synod dialog (sic) has allowed an agreement on some of the more urgent pastoral needs to be entrusted to being made concrete in the individual local Churches, in communion *cum Petro et sub Petro*.”<sup>34</sup>

Pope Francis in his final addresses to the Synod fathers has cautioned them against five temptations: (1) A temptation to *hostile inflexibility*, that wants to close oneself within the written word (letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, a God of surprises. (2) The temptation to a *destructive tendency to goodness*, that in the name of a deceptive mercy binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them; that treats the symptoms and not the causes and the roots. (3) The temptation to *transform stones into bread to break the long, heavy, and painful fast* (cf. Lk 4:1-4); and also to *transform the bread into a stone and cast it against*

*the sinners, the weak and the sick* (cf. Jn 8:7), that is, to transform it into unbearable burdens (Lk 11:46). (4) The temptation to come down off the Cross, to please the people, and not stay there, in order to fulfill the will of the Father; to bow down to a worldly spirit instead of purifying it and bending it to the Spirit of God. (5) The temptation to neglect the 'depositum fidei' (the deposit of faith), not thinking of themselves as guardians but as owners or masters of it; or on the other hand, the temptation to neglect reality, making use of meticulous language and a language of smoothing to say so many things and to say nothing!<sup>35</sup>

From these temptations we understand that our approach to the challenges coming from families should be a balanced and realistic one.

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### **Endnotes**

1. Relatio post Disceptationem, final version, 14-15.
2. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, GS, 48
3. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1603-1605.
4. Ibid., no. 1055 § 1-2
5. GS, 47.
6. Relatio post-Disceptationem, 5 of the finalized Relatio.
7. Sacramentum Caritatis, 28.
8. Relatio ante Disceptationem, 3/d.
9. Relatio post Disceptationem, 53.
10. Relatio ante Disceptationem, 2/e
11. Evangelii Gaudium, 66.
12. Cf. Finalizedtext of Relatio, 36.

13. *Relatio Post Disceptionem*, 25.
14. *Relatio ante Disceptionem*, 3/b: Truth and Mercy..
15. Message at Angelus, 17 March 2013, in *Ibid.*..
16. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 114).
17. *Ibid.*, 193.
18. cf. *Unitatis redintegration*, 11; EG, 36, 37.
19. Rome, October 22,2014, Zenit.org.
20. GS, 52.
21. Cf. GS, 49; *Familiaris consortio* (FC), 11.
22. Cf. FC, 15,37.
23. Cf. *Ibid.*, 48, 50.
24. Cf. GS, 48; FC, 56, 59.
25. Cf. *Relatio post Disceptationem*, 35.
26. The fact that they go to a Shrine to contract their marriage is an indication that these young couple are not fully indifferent to religious ceremony.
27. Cf. *Relatio ante Disceptationem*, 3. *Difficult Pastoral Situation*, c.
28. Cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 28.
29. Cf. *Relatio post-disceptationem*, 40-44.
30. *Ibid.*, 45.
31. *Ibid*, 46.
32. Cf. CCC, 2357.
33. Cf. *The Hindu*, January 14, 2015, front page.
34. *Relatio post Disceptationem*, 24.
35. Rome, October 19 2014, Zenit.