

# AMORIS LAETITIA



Amoris Laetitia Family  
Year 2021 - 2022

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS CHAPTER 2

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1. What are some *positive* aspects this chapter identifies as part of the current realities of the family?
2. What are some *negative* aspects this chapter identifies as part of the current realities of the family?
3. Stress, addictions, violence in families, as well as concerns regarding employment and the future, are all threats to families. What are the threats to families in your community?

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Office for Family and Life  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF FAMILIES

31. The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church. Countless studies have been made of marriage and the family, their current problems and challenges. We do well to focus on concrete realities, since “the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history”, and through these “the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family”.<sup>8</sup> I will not attempt here to present all that might be said about the family today. Nonetheless, because the Synod Fathers examined the situation of families worldwide, I consider it fitting to take up some of their pastoral insights, along with concerns derived from my own experience.

#### THE CURRENT REALITY OF THE FAMILY

32. “Faithful to Christ’s teaching we look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows... Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and call for an analytic and diversified approach”.<sup>9</sup> Several decades ago, the Spanish bishops noted that families have come to enjoy greater freedom “through

<sup>8</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 4: AAS 74 (1982), 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 5.

an equitable distribution of duties, responsibilities and tasks”; indeed, “a greater emphasis on personal communication between the spouses helps to make family life more humane”, while “neither today’s society nor that to which we are progressing allow an uncritical survival of older forms and models”.<sup>10</sup> It is also evident that “the principal tendencies in anthropological-cultural changes” are leading “individuals, in personal and family life, to receive less and less support from social structures than in the past”.<sup>11</sup>

33. On the other hand, “equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute”.<sup>12</sup> “The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families”.<sup>13</sup> Here I would also include today’s fast pace of life, stress and the organization of society and labour, since all these are cultural factors which militate against permanent decisions. We also encounter widespread uncertainty and ambiguity. For example, we rightly value a personalism that opts for authenticity as opposed to mere conformity. While this can favour spontaneity and a better

<sup>10</sup> SPANISH BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, *Matrimonio y familia* (6 July 1979), 3, 16, 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 8.

use of people's talents, if misdirected it can foster attitudes of constant suspicion, fear of commitment, self-centredness and arrogance. Freedom of choice makes it possible to plan our lives and to make the most of ourselves. Yet if this freedom lacks noble goals or personal discipline, it degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others. Indeed, in many countries where the number of marriages is decreasing, more and more people are choosing to live alone or simply to spend time together without cohabiting. We can also point to a praiseworthy concern for justice; but if misunderstood, this can turn citizens into clients interested solely in the provision of services.

34. When these factors affect our understanding of the family, it can come to be seen as a way station, helpful when convenient, or a setting in which rights can be asserted while relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desire and circumstances. Ultimately, it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible. The ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability, is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome. The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one's personal goals.

35. As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out

of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor is it helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better respond to the grace that God offers them.

36. We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism. Then too, we often present marriage in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation. Nor have we always provided solid guidance to young married couples, understanding their timetables, their way of thinking and their concrete concerns. At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God's grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.

37. 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. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. We also find it hard 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. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.

38. We must be grateful that most people do value family relationships that are permanent and marked by mutual respect. They appreciate the Church's efforts to offer guidance and counselling in areas related to growth in love, overcoming conflict and raising children. Many are touched by the power of grace experienced in sacramental Reconciliation and in the Eucharist, grace that helps them face the challenges of marriage and the family. In some countries, especially in various parts of Africa, secularism has not weakened certain traditional values, and marriages forge a strong bond between two wider families, with clearly defined structures for dealing with problems and conflicts. Nowadays we are grateful too for the witness of marriages that have not only proved lasting, but also fruitful and loving. All these factors can inspire a positive and welcoming pastoral approach capable of helping couples to grow in appreciation of the demands of the Gospel. Yet we have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness. Many people feel that the Church's message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set

forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery.

39. This is hardly to suggest that we cease warning against a cultural decline that fails to promote love or self-giving. The consultation that took place prior to the last two Synods pointed to the various symptoms of a “culture of the ephemeral”. Here I think, for example, of the speed with which people move from one affective relationship to another. They believe, along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly “blocked”. I think too of the fears associated with permanent commitment, the obsession with free time, and those relationships that weigh costs and benefits for the sake of remedying loneliness, providing protection or offering some service. We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye. Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs. Yet sooner or later, those who use others end up being used themselves, manipulated and discarded by that same mindset. It is also worth noting that breakups often occur among older adults who seek a kind of “independence” and reject the ideal of growing old together, looking after and supporting one another.

40. “At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family”.<sup>14</sup> In some countries, many young persons “postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic”.<sup>15</sup> We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.

41. The Synod Fathers noted that “cultural tendencies in today’s world seem to set no limits on a person’s affectivity”; indeed, “a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity”. They also expressed concern about the current “spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by

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<sup>14</sup> *Address to the United States Congress* (24 September 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 26 September 2015, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 29.

a misuse of the internet, and about those “reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution”. In this context, “couples are often uncertain, hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life. A crisis in a couple’s relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds”.<sup>16</sup> Marital problems are “often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life”.<sup>17</sup>

42. Furthermore, “the decline in population, due to a mentality against having children and promoted by the world politics of reproductive health, creates not only a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured but also the danger that, over time, this decline will lead to economic impoverishment and a loss of hope in the future. The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on the birth rate”.<sup>18</sup> Added to this are other factors such as “industrialization, the sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation and economic problems... Consumerism may also deter people from having children, simply so they

<sup>16</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 10.

<sup>17</sup> THIRD EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Message*, 18 October 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 10.

can maintain a certain freedom and life-style”.<sup>19</sup> The upright consciences of spouses who have been generous in transmitting life may lead them, for sufficiently serious reasons, to limit the number of their children, yet precisely “for the sake of this dignity of conscience, the Church strongly rejects the forced State intervention in favour of contraception, sterilization and even abortion”.<sup>20</sup> Such measures are unacceptable even in places with high birth rates, yet also in countries with disturbingly low birth rates we see politicians encouraging them. As the bishops of Korea have said, this is “to act in a way that is self-contradictory and to neglect one’s duty”.<sup>21</sup>

43. The weakening of faith and religious practice in some societies has an effect on families, leaving them more isolated amid their difficulties. The Synod Fathers noted that “one symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is 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 up crushing families... Families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions. The negative impact on the social order is clear, as seen in the demographic crisis, in the difficulty of raising children, in a hesitancy to welcome new life, in a tendency to see older persons as a burden, and in an increase of emotional problems and outbreaks of violence. The State

<sup>19</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE OF KOREA, *Towards a Culture of Life!* (15 March 2007), 2.

has the responsibility to pass laws and create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family”.<sup>22</sup>

44. The lack of dignified or affordable housing often leads to the postponement of formal relationships. It should be kept in mind that “the family has the right to decent housing, fitting for family life and commensurate to the number of the members, in a physical environment that provides the basic services for the life of the family and the community”.<sup>23</sup> Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected.<sup>24</sup> “The Church has always held it part of her mission to promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them”,<sup>25</sup> especially today, when they are given scarce attention in political agendas. Families have the right “to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains”.<sup>26</sup> At times families suffer terribly when, faced with the illness of a loved one, they lack access to adequate health care, or struggle to find dignified employment. “Economic constraints prohibit a family’s access to education, cultural activities and

<sup>22</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 6.

<sup>23</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Charter of the Rights of the Family* (22 October 1983), Art. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Charter of the Rights of the Family* (22 October 1983), Introduction.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

involvement in the life of society. In many ways, the present-day economic situation is keeping people from participating in society. Families, in particular, suffer from problems related to work, where young people have few possibilities and job offers are very selective and insecure. Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day”.<sup>27</sup>

45. “A great number of children are born outside of wedlock, many of whom subsequently grow up with just one of their parents or in a blended or reconstituted family... The sexual exploitation of children is yet another scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society. Societies experiencing violence due to war, terrorism or the presence of organized crime are witnessing the deterioration of the family, above all in large cities, where, on their outskirts, the so-called phenomenon of ‘street-children’ is on the rise”.<sup>28</sup> The sexual abuse of children is all the more scandalous when it occurs in places where they ought to be most safe, particularly in families, schools, communities and Christian institutions.<sup>29</sup>

46. “Migration is another sign of the times to be faced and understood in terms of its negative effects on family life”.<sup>30</sup> The recent Synod drew attention to this issue, noting that “in

<sup>27</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 78.

<sup>30</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 8.

various ways, migration affects whole populations in different parts of the world. The Church has exercised a major role in this area. Maintaining and expanding this witness to the Gospel (cf. *Mt 25:35*) is urgently needed today more than ever... Human mobility, which corresponds to the natural historical movement of peoples, can prove to be a genuine enrichment for both families that migrate and countries that welcome them. Furthermore, forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying migrants, the Church needs a specific pastoral programme addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those family members who remain behind. This pastoral activity must be implemented with due respect for their cultures, for the human and religious formation from which they come and for the spiritual richness of their rites and traditions, even by means of a specific pastoral care... Migration is particularly dramatic and devastating to families and individuals when it takes place illegally and is supported by international networks of human trafficking. This is equally true when it involves women or unaccompanied children who are forced to endure long periods of time in temporary facilities and refugee camps, where it is impossible to start a process of integration. Extreme poverty and other situations of family breakdown sometimes even lead families to sell their children for prostitution or for organ trafficking”.<sup>31</sup> “The persecution

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<sup>31</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 23; cf. *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees* on 17 January 2016 (12 September 2015), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 October 2015, p. 8.

of Christians and ethnic and religious minorities in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, are a great trial not only for the Church but also the entire international community. Every effort should be encouraged, even in a practical way, to assist families and Christian communities to remain in their native lands”.<sup>32</sup>

47. The Fathers also called particular attention to “families of persons with special needs, where the unexpected challenge of dealing with a disability can upset a family’s equilibrium, desires and expectations... Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired. They render the Church and society an invaluable witness of faithfulness to the gift of life. In these situations, the family can discover, together with the Christian community, new approaches, new ways of acting, a different way of understanding and identifying with others, by welcoming and caring for the mystery of the frailty of human life. People with disabilities are a gift for the family and an opportunity to grow in love, mutual aid and unity... If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognize and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities. This approach will promote care and services on behalf of these disadvantaged persons and will encourage people to draw near to them and provide affection at every stage of their life”.<sup>33</sup> Here I would stress that dedication and concern shown to migrants and to persons with special needs

<sup>32</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

alike is a sign of the Spirit. Both situations are paradigmatic: they serve as a test of our commitment to show mercy in welcoming others and to help the vulnerable to be fully a part of our communities.

48. “Most families have great respect for the elderly, surrounding them with affection and considering them a blessing. A special word of appreciation is due to those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially... In highly industrialized societies, where the number of elderly persons is growing even as the birth rate declines, they can be regarded as a burden. On the other hand, the care that they require often puts a strain on their loved ones”.<sup>34</sup> “Care and concern for the final stages of life is all the more necessary today, when contemporary society attempts to remove every trace of death and dying. The elderly who are vulnerable and dependent are at times unfairly exploited simply for economic advantage. Many families show us that it is possible to approach the last stages of life by emphasizing the importance of a person’s sense of fulfilment and participation in the Lord’s paschal mystery. A great number of elderly people are cared for in Church institutions, where, materially and spiritually, they can live in a peaceful, family atmosphere. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide; in many countries, they have been legalized. The Church, while firmly opposing these practices, feels the need to assist families who take care of their elderly and infirm members”.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

49. Here I would also like to mention the situation of families living in dire poverty and great limitations. The problems faced by poor households are often all the more trying.<sup>36</sup> For example, if a single mother has to raise a child by herself and needs to leave the child alone at home while she goes to work, the child can grow up exposed to all kind of risks and obstacles to personal growth. In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing right away a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God’s mercy. Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would “indoctrinate” that message, turning it into “dead stones to be hurled at others”.<sup>37</sup>

#### SOME CHALLENGES

50. The responses given to the two pre-synodal consultations spoke of a great variety of situations and the new challenges that they pose. In addition to those already mentioned, many of the respondents pointed to the problems families face in raising children. In many cases, parents come home exhausted, not wanting to talk, and many families no longer even share a common meal. Distractions abound, including an addiction

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Concluding Address of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (24 October 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 26-27 October 2015, p. 13.

to television. This makes it all the more difficult for parents to hand on the faith to their children. Other responses pointed to the effect of severe stress on families, who often seem more caught up with securing their future than with enjoying the present. This is a broader cultural problem, aggravated by fears about steady employment, finances and the future of children.

51. Drug use was also mentioned as one of the scourges of our time, causing immense suffering and even breakup for many families. The same is true of alcoholism, gambling and other addictions. The family could be the place where these are prevented and overcome, but society and politics fail to see that families at risk “lose the ability to act to help their members... We see the serious effects of this breakdown in families torn apart, the young uprooted and the elderly abandoned, children who are orphans of living parents, adolescents and young adults confused and unsupported.”<sup>38</sup> As the Bishops of Mexico have pointed out, violence within families breeds new forms of social aggression, since “family relationships can also explain the tendency to a violent personality. This is often the case with families where communication is lacking, defensive attitudes predominate, the members are not supportive of one another, family activities that encourage participation are absent, the parental relationship is frequently conflictual and violent, and relationships between parents and children are marked by hostility. Violence within the family is a

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<sup>38</sup> ARGENTINIAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, *Navega mar adentro* (31 May 2003), 42.

breeding-ground of resentment and hatred in the most basic human relationships”.<sup>39</sup>

52. No one can think that the weakening of the family as that natural society founded on marriage will prove beneficial to society as a whole. The contrary is true: it poses a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values and the moral progress of cities and countries. There is a failure to realize that only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life. We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability, but *de facto* or same-sex unions, for example, may not simply be equated with marriage. No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society. But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the work of raising children and, in general, to encourage the stability of the marriage bond?

53. “Some societies still maintain the practice of polygamy; in other places, arranged marriages are an enduring practice... In many places, not only in the West, the practice of living together before marriage is widespread, as well as a type of cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry”.<sup>40</sup> In various countries, legislation facilitates a growing variety of

<sup>39</sup> MEXICAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, *Que en Cristo Nuestra Paz México tenga vida digna* (15 February 2009), 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 25.

alternatives to marriage, with the result that marriage, with its characteristics of exclusivity, indissolubility and openness to life, comes to appear as an old-fashioned and outdated option. Many countries are witnessing a legal deconstruction of the family, tending to adopt models based almost exclusively on the autonomy of the individual will. Surely it is legitimate and right to reject older forms of the traditional family marked by authoritarianism and even violence, yet this should not lead to a disparagement of marriage itself, but rather to the rediscovery of its authentic meaning and its renewal. The strength of the family “lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. For all a family’s problems, it can always grow, beginning with love”.<sup>41</sup>

54. In this brief overview, I would like to stress the fact that, even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union. I think of the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practised in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making. History is burdened by the excesses of

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior, yet in our own day, we cannot overlook the use of surrogate mothers and “the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture”.<sup>42</sup> There are those who believe that many of today’s problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid: “it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism”.<sup>43</sup> The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women’s movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women.

55. Men “play an equally decisive role in family life, particularly with regard to the protection and support of their wives and children... Many men are conscious of the importance of their role in the family and live their masculinity accordingly. The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence, which may be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual, deprives children of a suitable father figure”.<sup>44</sup>

56. Yet another challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages

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<sup>42</sup> Catechesis (22 April 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 April 2015, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Catechesis (29 April 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 April 2015, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 28.

a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time”.<sup>45</sup> It is a source of concern that some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised. It needs to be emphasized that “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated”.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, “the technological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the ability to manipulate the reproductive act, making it independent of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In this way, human life and parenthood have become modular and separable realities, subject mainly to the wishes of individuals or couples”.<sup>47</sup> It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality. Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

57. I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems. The situations that concern us are challenges. We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity. In every situation that presents itself, "the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope... The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence".<sup>48</sup> If we see any number of problems, these should be, as the Bishops of Colombia have said, a summons to "revive our hope and to make it the source of prophetic visions, transformative actions and creative forms of charity".<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 11.

<sup>49</sup> COLOMBIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, *A tiempos difíciles, colombianos nuevos* (13 February 2003), 3.