

Amoris Laetitia

The Joy of Love

Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family

Pope Francis

Brief Guide to assist with study, reflection and discussion.

The overall aim of this guide is to introduce readers to Amoris Laetitia (referred to also as 'AL' in this text) in the context of our world and its needs, but also our own realities. This is by any measure a remarkable document for our time, especially for families and those involved in family apostolate.

Drawing on the outcome of the Synod process, Pope Francis sees Amoris Laetitia as representing "an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience (while encouraging) everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy". (5) It contributes to this by being "an aid to reflection, dialogue and pastoral practice, and as a help and encouragement to families in their daily commitments and challenges" (4).

Pope Francis gives guidance on how to approach reading and studying the text of the exhortation, as follows.

"I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text. The greatest benefit, for families themselves and for those engaged in the family apostolate, will come if each part is read patiently and carefully, or if attention is paid to the parts dealing with other specific needs. It is likely, for example, that married couples will be more concerned with Chapters Four and Five, and pastoral ministers with Chapter Six, while everyone should feel challenged by Chapter Eight. It is my hope that, in reading the text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for 'families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity' (7)

This study guide aims to help you follow these recommendations of Pope Francis by assisting with a planned reading of the document individually and in groups.

Planned reading

Given the length of the document, (almost 200 pages, 325 paragraphs, 60,000 words) and the variety and complexity of the issues dealt with it, it may help to have a framework for reading the various parts over a period. The framework suggested here is from the perspective of families and those engaged in the family apostolate, as identified by Pope Francis (see quotation above). A first stage is to look at the world and, in particular, marriage, families, family life and society as you experience it. A UN report in 1996 stated that *'The family, as a living, social institution, faces what may be its most difficult challenge in the history of the human species. Many societies are changing so rapidly that the speed of change alone is a major factor of stress in families. Families everywhere are in need of support to adapt to and meet the demands of change'* (FAMILY – Challenges for the Future – UN publication, 1996). You could, therefore, begin your reading with

Chapter 2 *The Experiences and Challenges of Families* (26 paras), in which the realities in the today's world are dealt with at length from a Christian perspective, and in which the current challenges for families, society and the Church are identified.

A next stage is to focus on marriage, families, family life and society as we, as Christians, consider they *ought* to be. The major part of the exhortation deals with this, beginning with

Marriage

Chapter 4 Love in Marriage, 89 to 164

Children and other family members

Chapter 5 Love made Fruitful, 165 to 198

Chapter 7 Towards a Better Education of Children, 259 to 290.

A third stage examines the *bases in Scripture, Church Teaching and Spirituality* for the Church's teaching on these matters.

Chapter 1 In the light of the Word, 8 to 30

Chapter 3 Looking to Jesus: the vocation of the family, 58 to 88.

Chapter 9 The Spirituality of Marriage and the Family, 313 to 325

Pastoral Applications

A fourth stage examines the pastoral applications in relation to the analysis and Church teaching set out in the previous chapters in the context of the experiences and challenges identified in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 Some Pastoral Perspectives, 199 to 258

Chapter 8 Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness, 291 – 312.

Reading the text

Although the text is long it is in our experience easy to read and understand. To help you with this direct quotations from the text, the words of Pope Francis, are included under each heading. The paragraphs from which the quotations are taken are given in brackets, as above. This is designed to help you the reader to get an overview and a real sense of what each section of the AL says. You can then widen and deepen that understanding, as you choose, by reading the full text in the paragraphs and sections from which the quotations are taken. You may wish, during your reading, to mark other quotations you find important for further reflection in the future. The text of *Amoris Laetitia* is available from Veritas, price E4.95, and may also be available for purchase in local bookshops.

This, of course, is not merely an intellectual exercise. It should, in particular, assist in discerning what you ought to do in your marriage, family life, as a member of the Church, in your community and wider society, in light of the vision, challenges, insights and practical guidance you will find in AL. For Pope Francis “ It is my hope that, in reading the text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for ‘families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity’ (7).

Group Discussion

Sharing the fruits of your reading in group discussion would be particularly helpful in deepening your understanding of AL, especially through hearing the different perspectives of members of the group. The framework should help Groups in planning their reading over a period. The quotations should help to focus the discussion by enabling participants to share on the sections they found most

meaningful. This would include discerning what is important for each participant and for the group in their future lives (see preceding paragraph).

A short section on the nature, scope and process of AL now follows, which may help your understanding of the approach taken in AL by Pope Francis.

Apostolic Exhortation - nature, scope and process.

AL is a post-synodal document, in this case post two synods, extraordinary (2014) and ordinary (2015). Up to 40% of the footnotes (approx.) refer to these Synods. Other main references are to Popes Francis, St. John Paul II, and Benedict, and to various National Episcopal Conferences. It is addressed primarily, to members of the Church Community. In terms of its status in Church teaching, the authority invested in it, the Exhortation is midway between an Encyclical and a Declaration.

The previous post synod Exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, (FC) issued by St John Paul II in 1981 was presented in a tone that presumed it was the final word on the synodal debate. AL has a different tenor, and Pope Francis clearly offers it for ongoing discernment in the local Churches. He states in paragraph 3 that

Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs (3)

One emphasis in the Exhortation taken from Vatican II is in acknowledging that the Church, though holy, must find a place for sinful members. A second focuses on understanding the relationship between Church doctrine and pastoral applications. Achieving the right balance can be difficult. An over emphasis on the pastoral approach runs the risk of creating confusion on aspects of Church teaching, while sticking to the letter of Church teaching may result in pastoral applications not meeting the needs of people in diverse situations. These issues arise mainly in Chapter 8.

Guidance on the various stages in the order identified for assisting with the planned reading follows,

Stage 1 EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF FAMILIES (Chapter 2)

These experiences of families and the challenges they face in the contemporary world are set out in this Chapter. It is stated that anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and call for an analytical approach (32), not least by the Church. You may wish to compare these with your own experience of family and family life amidst the rapid and profound changes you have been experiencing. Some of these experiences and challenges identified in AL include:

- ▶ Positive: greater freedom and equity in families in relation to duties, responsibilities and tasks, greater focus on personal communication between spouses and less tolerance of older forms and models (32)
- ▶ Negative: extreme individualism that can weaken family bonds. The fast pace of life, organisation of society and labour can militate against permanent decisions, especially in the context of family life (33)
- ▶ We rightly value a personalism that opts for authenticity as opposed to mere conformity, but if misdirected it can foster attitudes of constant suspicion, fear of commitment, self-centredness and arrogance. (33)

Promoting Marriage: Challenge for the Church

- ▶ The ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability, is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome (34)
- ▶ As Christians we cannot stop advocating marriage to avoid countering modern sensibilities or out of a desire to be fashionable etc (35)
- ▶ What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family (35)
- ▶ Church's presentation of marriage in the past with main emphasis on procreative as opposed to unitive dimension may have been part of the problem. We need a healthy dose of self criticism (about our approaches)

Promoting Marriage - Idealisation

- ▶ At times the Church's teaching on marriage may be too abstract, presenting an almost artificial theological ideal far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families,(36)
- ▶ This excessive idealisation, 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 (36)
- ▶ We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden (37)
- ▶ We have been called to form consciences and not replace them (37). 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, and helping couples to grow in appreciation of the demands of the Gospel.(38)

New Approaches

- ▶ Stress on doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues needs to be complemented by support for relationships and encouraging openness to grace (37)
- ▶ Church's efforts to offer guidance and counselling in areas related to growth in love, overcoming conflict and raising children are greatly appreciated (37)
- ▶ Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist provide the grace that helps families face the challenges of marriage and family life (38)
- ▶ We are grateful for the witness of marriages that have not only proved lasting but also fruitful and loving (38)

Cultural Decline: Relationships

- ▶ Symptoms: rapid turnover in relationships which are treated almost like disposable material objects ,with love, like whim of the consumer; fear of permanent commitment, obsession with free time, with greater narcissism making people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their desires and needs (39)

- ▶ People with these attitudes can end up being used themselves. More frequent breakups are occurring among older adults who seek a kind of ‘independence’ and reject the ideal of growing old together, supporting one another.
- ▶ Young people are similarly influenced and shy away from commitment, especially those associated with marriage and family (40)
- ▶ 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” (40)

Impact of Dysfunctional Families on Society

- ▶ Marriages ended in haste – without courage to have patience, reflect, make sacrifices and forgive (41)
- ▶ Destabilisation of families – new couples, civil unions, new marriages(41)
- ▶ Decline in population due to a mentality against having children, promoted by the world politics of reproductive health (42)
- ▶ Consumerism may also deter people from having children, simply so that they can maintain a certain freedom and lifestyle. (42)
- ▶ Weakening of faith and religious practice leads to more isolation – great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness.(43)
- ▶ Summary: negative impact - demographic crisis, difficulty of raising children, hesitancy in welcoming new life, seeing older persons as a burden, increase of emotional problems and outbreaks of violence.

Roles of State and Church

- ▶ The State has the responsibility to pass laws, and create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realise their plan of forming a family.(43)
- ▶ The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected... 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. (44)
- ▶ 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, especially today, when they are given scarce attention in political agendas. (44)

Vulnerable Groups requiring Special Support

- ▶ Children vulnerable to sexual exploitation (45)
- ▶ Migrants – legal and illegal (46)
- ▶ Families with children with special needs.(47)
- ▶ Elderly (48)

- ▶ Families living in dire poverty and great limitations (49)

Challenges Identified by Synod Fathers

- ▶ Family stresses from modern living eg reconciling work and family life and addiction to television and other devices (50)
- ▶ Drug addiction and the violence it generates (51)
- ▶ Weakening of the family poses a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values and the moral progress of cities and countries – solid basis for family - exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman. No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society. (52)
- ▶ Women – forms of oppression and violence, especially in marriage. Some forms of feminism may be inadequate, but 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 (54)

Challenges – Ideology of Gender

- ▶ Men – equally decisive role in family and their absence can gravely affect family life and upbringing of children (55)
- ▶ Various forms of the ideology of gender can deny the difference and reciprocity in nature of man and woman and envisage a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family (56)
- ▶ 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? (52)

Church Response to Challenges (57)

- ▶ Synod’s reflections show us that 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.
- ▶ Our response must not be to allow ourselves to be trapped in to wasting our energy in doleful laments but rather to seek new forms of missionary creativity.
- ▶ If we see any number of problems, these should be ... a summons to revive our hope and to make it a source of prophetic visions, transformative actions and creative forms of charity, especially in relation to the great values of marriage and the Christian family.

STAGE 2: LOVE IN MARRIAGE (CH 4)

- ▶ For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love (89)
- ▶ In a lyrical passage of Saint Paul (1 Cor 13:4-7), we see some of the features of true love, (as) experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples and their children...and its relevance for the concrete situation of every family. (90) (*A reflection on this passage of St Paul follows*)

Love is Patient

- ▶ This refers, then, to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offenceGod's 'patience' shown in his mercy towards sinners, is a sign of his real power (91).
- ▶ Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds.(92)
- ▶ Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that looks to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like (92).

Love is at the service of others

- ▶ '...love benefits and helps others. For this reason it is translated as 'kind'; love is ever ready to be of assistance (93)... (allowing us) to experience the happiness of giving , the nobility and grandeur of spending ourselves unstintingly, without asking to be repaid, purely for the pleasure of giving and serving (94)

Love is not jealous

- ▶ Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another's prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned for the happiness of others but only with our own well beinglove makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves. (95)
- ▶ True love values the other person's achievements, (recognising) that everyone has different gifts and a unique path to life (95)

Love is not boastful

- ▶ Literally, it means that we do not become 'puffed up' before others(and pointing more subtly) to an obsession with showing off and a loss of a sense of reality.Yet what really makes us important is a love that understands, shows concern, and embraces the weak (97)
- ▶ Jesus told his disciples that in a world where power prevails, each tries to dominate the other, but 'it shall not be so among you (Mt 20:26) Saint Peter's admonition also applies to the family: Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another, for " God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pt 5:5)

Love is not rude

- ▶ Love abhors making others suffer. Courtesy is a school of sensitivity and disinterestedness which requires a person to develop his or her mind and feelings, learning how to listen, to speak and, at certain times, to keep quiet (99).
- ▶ A 'kind look' ...is incompatible with a negative attitude that readily points out other people's shortcomings while overlooking one's own. ...Those who love are capable of speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement...in our families, we must learn to imitate Jesus' own gentleness in our way of speaking to one another. (100)

Love is generous

- ▶ 'Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil 2:4) ...Loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others. (101)
- ▶ Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that 'it is more proper to charity to desire to love than to desire to be loved' indeed 'mothers, who are those who love the most, seek to love more than to be loved'. (102)

Love is not irritable or resentful

- ▶ (This) refers to a violent reaction within, a hidden irritation that sets us on edge where others are concerned, as if they were troublesome or threatening and thus to be avoided. To nurture such interior hostility helps no one (103)
- ▶ It is one thing to sense a sudden surge of hostility and another to give into it, letting it take root in our hearts....."do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26) My advice is never to let the day end without making peace in the family.....If we must fight evil, so be it; but we must always say 'no' to violence in the home (104)

Love forgives

- ▶ The opposite of resentment is forgiveness, which is rooted in a positive attitude that seeks to understand other people's weaknesses and to excuse them....Something is wrong when we see every problem as equally serious; in this way, we risk being unduly harsh with the failings of others. (105)...
- ▶ There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. (106)
- ▶ Blaming others (can become) falsely reassuring. We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves, in order to have this same attitude with others.(107). If we accept that God's love is unconditional, that the Father's love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love n forgiving others even if they have wronged us. (108)

Love rejoices with others

- ▶ We rejoice at the good of others when we see their dignity and value their abilities and good works. This is impossible for those who must always be comparing and competing, even with their spouse, so that they secretly rejoice in their failures (109)
- ▶ 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor.9:7) (and) Our Lord especially appreciates those who find joy in the happiness of others. The family must always be a place where when something good happens to one of its members, they know that others will be there to celebrate it with them (110)

Paul's list ends with the four phrases....in which we clearly see the countercultural power of a love that is able to face whatever might threaten it, and the first phrase of which is 'love bears all things'.(111)

Love bears all things

- ▶ This involves holding one's peace about what may be wrong with another person. It implies limiting judgement, checking the impulse to issue a firm and ruthless condemnation. ' Judge not and you will not be judged' (Lk 6:37). (112)
- ▶ If I expect too much, the other person will let me know, for he or she can neither play God nor serve all my needs. Love coexists with imperfection. It 'bears all things' and can hold its peace before the limitations of the loved one. (113)

Love believes all things

- ▶ Love believes all things. Here 'belief' is not to be taken in its strict theological meaning, but more by what we mean by 'trust'.(114)
- ▶ Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything....it makes for sincerity and transparency, for those who know that they are trusted and appreciated can be open and hide nothing. (115)
- ▶ A family marked by loving trust, come what may, helps its members to be themselves and spontaneously to reject deceit, falsehood and lies.(115)

Love hopes all things

- ▶ This phrase speaks of the hope of one who knows that others can change, mature and radiate unexpected beauty and untold potential...it embraces the certainty of life after death (that) each person is called to the fullness of life in heaven. (116,117)
- ▶ This realisation helps us, amid the aggravation of this present life, to see each person from a supernatural perspective, in the light of hope, and await the fullness that he or she will receive in the heavenly kingdom, even if it is not yet visible.(117)

Love endures all things

- ▶ This phrase means that love bears all things with a positive attitude(it) never gives up even in the darkest hour.(118)
- ▶ Love does not yield to resentment, scorn for others or the desire to hurt or to gain some advantage. The Christian ideal, especially in families, is a love that never gives up.(119).

Growing in conjugal love

- ▶ This is the love between husband and wife, a love sanctified, enriched and illuminated by the grace of the sacrament of marriagean 'affective union' spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside. (120)
- ▶ Marriage is the icon of God's love for usso that starting with the simple ordinary things of life (the couple)can make visible the love with which Christ loves his Church and continues to give his life for her.(121)

Lifelong sharing

- ▶ After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the ‘greatest form of friendship’. It is a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship : concern for the good of others, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life.....it joins to all this an indissoluble exclusivity expressed in the stable commitment to share and shape together the whole of lifeChildren not only want their parents to love one another, but also to be faithful and remain together (123)
- ▶ A love that is weak or infirm, incapable of accepting marriage as a challenge to be taken up and fought for, reborn, renewed and reinvented until death, cannot sustain a great commitment. It will succumb to the culture of the ephemeral that prevents a constant process of growth.(124)
- ▶ Marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children but also that mutual love might be properly expressed, that it should grow and mature.(125)(leading) the partners to a free and mutual self-giving, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeating their entire lives (125, Vat.II)

Joy and Beauty

- ▶ Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow; it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to care for one another: they help and serve each other (126)
- ▶ In a consumerist society, the sense of beauty is impoverished and so joy fades. Everything is there to be purchased, possessed or consumed, including people. Tenderness, on the other hand, is a sign of love free of selfish possessiveness. (127).
- ▶ The aesthetic experience of love is expressed in that ‘gaze’ which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves, even if they are infirm, elderly or physically unattractive....Love opens our eyes and enables us to see, beyond all else, the great worth of a human being. 128
- ▶ Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as a result of a great, shared effort. (129)

Marrying for Love

- ▶ (Speaking especially to young people, Pope Francis states that marriage) manifests the seriousness of each person’s identification with the other and their firm decision to leave adolescent individualism and to belong to one another.....as a social institution, marriage protects and shapes a shared commitment to a deeper growth in love and commitment to one another, for the good of society as a whole (131)
- ▶ When love is expressed before others in the marriage contract, with all its public commitments, it clearly indicates and protects the ‘yes’ which those persons speak freely and unreservedly to each other. This ‘yes’ tells them that they can always trust one another, and that they will never be abandoned when difficulties arise or new attractions or interests present themselves. (132)

A Love that reveals itself and increases

- ▶ Three essential words in our families: when we are not overbearing and ask; ‘May I?’; when we are not selfish and can say: ‘Thank you!’ when someone realises that he or she did something wrong and is able to say “Sorry!”, our family experiences peace and joy.The right words spoken at the right time, daily protect and nurture love (133).

- ▶ Marital love is not defended primarily by presenting indissolubility as a duty or by repeating doctrine, but by helping it to grow ever more stronger under the impulse of grace (135)
- ▶ The Bishops of Chile have pointed out , “ the perfect families proposed by deceptive consumerist propaganda do not exist. In those families, no one grows old, there is no sickness, sorrow or death.... Consumerist propaganda presents a fantasy that has nothing to do with the reality which must daily be faced by the heads of families” (135)
 - It is much healthier to be realistic about our limits, defects and imperfections, and to respond to the call to grow together, to bring love to maturity and to strengthen the union, come what may (135)

Dialogue

- ▶ Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life.... We need to develop certain attitudes, that express love and encourage authentic dialogue. (136)
- ▶ Take time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentivelyOften the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard , to feel that someone has acknowledged their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes and their dreams. (137) ...Never downplay what they say or think, even if you need to express your own point of view (138)
- ▶ If hard feelings start to emerge, they should be dealt with sensitively, lest they interrupt the dynamic of dialogue. The ability to say what one is thinking without offending the other person is important. Words should be carefully chosen so as not to offend, especially when discussing difficult issues. (139)
- ▶ It is very important to base one’s position on solid choices, beliefs or values, and not on the need to win an argument or to be proven right. (140).....For a worthwhile dialogue we have to have something to say. This can only be the fruit of an interior richness nourished by reading, personal reflection, prayer and openness to the world (141).

Passionate Love

- ▶ All the mystics have affirmed that supernatural love and heavenly love find the symbols which they seek in marital love, rather than in friendship, filial devotion or devotion to a cause. And the reason is to be found precisely in its totality. Why then should we not pause to speak of feelings and sexuality in marriage? (142)

The World of emotions

- ▶ Experiencing an emotion is not, in itself, morally good or evil. The stirring of desire or repugnance is neither sinful nor blameworthy. What is morally good or evil is what we do on the basis of, or under the influence of, a given passion....(For example) to believe that we are good simply because ‘we feel good’ is a tremendous illusion. (145)
- ▶ A family is mature when the emotional life of its members becomes a form of sensitivity that neither stifles nor obscures great decisions and values, but rather follows each one’s freedom, springs from it, enriches, perfects and harmonises in the service of all. (146)

God loves the joy of his children

- ▶ An excessive focus on renunciation by the Church has often been rejected as opposed to human happiness... (Benedict XVI has stated with great clarity) 'Doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness, the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain foretaste of the Divine?' (147)
- ▶ A person can certainly channel his passions in a beautiful and healthy way.... This does not mean renouncing moments of intense enjoyment, but rather integrating them with other moments of generous commitment, patient hope, inevitable weariness and struggle to achieve an ideal. Family life is all this and it deserves to be lived to the full. (148)

The Erotic dimension of love

- ▶ God himself created sexuality, which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. If this gift needs to be cultivated and directed, it is to prevent the impoverishment of an authentic value....Sexual desire is not something to be looked down upon and there can be no attempt whatsoever to call into question its necessity. (150)
- ▶ In no way, then, can we consider the erotic dimension of love simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the good of the family. Rather it must be seen as a gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses. (152)

Violence and Manipulation

- ▶ Sex often becomes depersonalised and unhealthy; as a result it becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts... The body of the other is often viewed as an object to be used as long as it offers satisfaction, and rejected once it is no longer appealing (153)
- ▶ Every form of sexual submission must be clearly rejected. This includes all improper interpretations of the passage in the Letter to the Ephesians where Paul tells women to 'be subject to your husbands' (Eph 5:22). This passage mirrors the cultural categories of the time, but our concern is not with its cultural matrix but with the revealed message which it contains (156)
- ▶ As St John Paul II wisely observed: 'Love excludes every subjection whereby the wife might become a servant or slave of the husband'in marriage, reciprocal 'submission' takes on a special meaning, and is seen as a freely chosen mutual belonging marked by fidelity, respect and care. Sexuality is inseparably at service of this conjugal friendship, for it is meant to aid the fulfilment of the other (156).
- ▶ We need to remember that authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one's vulnerability and needs, and to welcome with sincere and joyful gratitude the physical expression of love found in a caress, an embrace, a kiss and sexual union. (157)

Marriage and virginity

- ▶ Many people who are unmarried are not only devoted to their own family but often render great service to their group of friends, in the Church community and in their professional lives. Sometimes their presence and contributions are overlooked, causing in them a sense

of isolation. Many put their talents at the service of the Christian community through charity and volunteer work. Others remain unmarried because they consecrate their lives to the love of Christ and neighbour. Their dedication greatly enriches the family, the Church and society (158)

- ▶ Virginité est une forme d'amour. En tant que signe, elle nous parle du royaume et du besoin d'une dévotion complète à la cause de l'Évangile (cf. 1 Cor 7:32). ...St Jean Paul II (cependant) a noté que les textes bibliques ne donnent aucune raison d'affirmer l'"infériorité" du mariage, ni la "supériorité" de la virginité ou du célibat, basée sur l'abstinence sexuelle....il devrait être suffisant de souligner que les différents états de vie se complètent l'un l'autre et conséquemment que certains peuvent être plus parfaits d'une manière et d'autres d'une autre. (159)
- ▶ Alors que la virginité est un 'signe eschatologique' du Christ ressuscité, le mariage est un signe du Christ terrestre qui a choisi de devenir un avec nous et s'est donné pour nous jusqu'à verser son sang.
- ▶ Le célibat peut (cependant) risquer de devenir une vie simple et confortable....(et) dans de tels cas le témoignage des personnes mariées devient particulièrement éloquent. ...Beaucoup de couples mariés restent fidèles quand l'un d'eux est devenu physiquement peu attrayant, ou ne satisfait pas les besoins de l'autre., malgré les voix de la société qui pourraient les encourager à être infidèles ou à quitter l'autre.....(Cela s'applique également à l'amour désintéressé dans la famille de l'époux et des enfants)....
- ▶ Aujourd'hui, la sécularisation a obscurci la valeur d'une union à vie et la beauté de la vocation au mariage. ... (Ce témoignage de mariage et de famille) encourage les personnes célibataires à vivre leur engagement avec plus de générosité et d'engagement.

The transformation of love

- ▶ Les durées de vie plus longues signifient maintenant que les relations proches et exclusives doivent durer pendant quatre, cinq ou même six décennies; conséquemment la décision originale doit être fréquemment renouvelée.... Un amour plus profond, une décision à vie du cœur (peut être atteinte). Même au milieu de conflits non résolus et de situations émotionnelles confuses, ils confirment quotidiennement leur décision d'aimer, d'appartenir l'un à l'autre, de partager leur vie et de continuer à aimer et à pardonner. (163).
- ▶ Bien que le corps vieillisse, il exprime toujours l'identité personnelle qui a d'abord gagné notre cœur....Le lien du mariage trouve de nouvelles formes d'expression et cherche constamment de nouvelles façons de grandir en force..., (mais) nécessite un effort quotidien....Aucun de cela, cependant, n'est possible sans prier pour le Saint-Esprit afin qu'il verse sa grâce, sa force surnaturelle et son feu spirituel pour confirmer, diriger et transformer notre amour dans chaque nouvelle situation.(164)

Stage 3 (a) Love Made Fruitful (CH 5)

- *Gift of Children*

- ▶ L'amour conjugal ne s'arrête pas avec le couple, mais inclut également la réalité des enfants, qui sont la réflexion vivante de leur amour (165)

- ▶ The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life (166),
- ▶ Large families are a joy to the Church, but responsible parenthood does not mean 'unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities, as well as their own situation and legitimate desires' (167, St John Paul)

Parental Love

- ▶ Even though a child may not be coming at the best time, they (parents) should ask the Lord to heal and strengthen them to accept their child fully and wholeheartedly...as it is important for that child to feel wanted. (170)
- ▶ For children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable...We love our children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or look or think as we do, or embody our dreams. We love them because they are children. A child is a child (170)
- ▶ The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows his own love (170) and He 'allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity'. (166)

Love of Mothers

- ▶ Husband and wife, father and mother, both 'cooperate with the love of God the Creator, and are, in a certain sense, his interpreters (172), showing their children the maternal and paternal face of God, especially the values of reciprocity, of respect for difference and of being able to give and take.
- ▶ The weakening of the maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism but one that does not demand uniformity and negativity. (173)
- ▶ Mothers are the antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism. It is they who testify to the beauty of life...
- ▶ Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth (174)

Love of Fathers

- ▶ The clear and well-defined presence of both figures, female and male, creates the environment best suited for the growth of the child (175)
- ▶ A father, for his part, helps the child to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort. (175)
- ▶ We often hear that ours is a 'society without fathers'. In Western culture, fathers are said to be symbolically absent, missing or vanished, (176) thus helping to bring an end to patriarchy and authoritarianism.
- ▶ Yet in our day, the problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father, so much as his absence, his not being there (176)
- ▶ Some fathers feel they are useless or unnecessary, but the fact is children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems. They may try hard not to admit it, not to show it, but they need it. It is not good for children to lack a father and to grow up before they are ready. (177)

An Expanding Fruitfulness

- ▶ Adoption, Fostering. Those without children can expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation (179). Legislation should facilitate the adoption process, above all in the case of unwanted children, to prevent their abortion or abandonment.
- ▶ Social Impact: Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others. In this way they become a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between the public and private spheres. Married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations. With this, their affection does not diminish but is flooded with new light.(181)
- ▶ Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God's love present in society. (184)

Discerning the Body (186)

- ▶ The Eucharist demands that we be members of the one body of the Church. We must not forget that the "mysticism" of the sacrament has a social character.
- ▶ When those who receive it turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily.
- ▶ On the other hand, families who are properly disposed and receive the Eucharist regularly, reinforce their desire for fraternity, their social consciousness and their commitment to those in need.

Life in the Wider Family

- ▶ The individualism so prevalent today can lead to creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat (187).
- ▶ Being sons and daughters: the great gift of life is the first gift that we received and “ a society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour...It is a society destined to be filled with surly and greedy young people” (189)
- ▶ Marriage challenges husbands and wives to find new ways of being sons and daughters (190)
- ▶ Relationships between brothers and sisters deepen with the passing of time, and the family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society (194). (Paras 195 to 198 provide guidance on being an only child and being a member of a larger family.)

The Elderly

- ▶ The Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. (191).
- ▶ We must awaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel a living part of the community. (191)
- ▶ The elderly help us to appreciate ‘ the continuity of the generations,’ by their ‘charism of bridging the gap’. Very often it is the grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents (192)
- ▶ A society that has no room for the elderly or discards them because they created problems has a deadly virus, it is torn from its roots (193).
- ▶ Attention to the elderly makes the difference in society. Does a society show concern for the elderly? Does it make room for the elderly? Such a society will move forward if it respects the elderly. (192)

STAGE 3 (b) TOWARDS A BETTER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN – *(especially the role of parents)*

- ▶ Parents rely on schools to ensure basic instruction of their children, but can never completely delegate the moral formation of their children to others.(263)
- ▶ What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy (262)
- ▶ It involves forming persons who readily understand that their own lives, and the life of the community, are in their hands and that freedom is itself a great gift.(262)
- ▶ Moral education has to do with cultivating freedom through ideas, incentives, practical applications, stimuli, rewards, examples, models, symbols, reflections, encouragement, dialogue and a constant rethinking of our way of doing things. (267)

The Value of Correction as an Incentive

- ▶ It is essential to help children and adolescents to realise that misbehaviour has consequences and their need to be encouraged to put themselves in other people's shoes and acknowledge the hurt they have caused, to seek forgiveness and repair harm done (268)
- ▶ Children who are lovingly corrected feel cared for and they perceive that they are individuals whose potential is recognised, but an attitude constantly prone to punishment would be harmful and not help children to realise some actions are more serious than others: 'Parents do not provoke your children (Eph 6:4;cf. Col.3.21) (269)
- ▶ Moral education entails asking of a child or a young person only those things that do not involve a disproportionate sacrifice and demanding only a degree of effort that will not lead to resentment or coercion. In demanding too much we may gain nothing and once free of our authority a child may possibly cease to do good. (271)

Parental Styles

A balance has to be found between two equally harmful extremes (270).

- ▶ Permissive: would be to try to make everything revolve around the child's desires: such children will grow up with a sense of their own rights but not their responsibilities.
- ▶ Authoritarian: would be to deprive the child of an awareness of his or her dignity, personal identity and rights; such children end up overwhelmed by their duties and a need to carry out other people's wishes.
- ▶ Authoritative: achieving the right balance through patient realism(271-273)

Family Life as an Educational Setting

- ▶ Family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom. Certain inclinations develop in childhood and become so deeply rooted that they remain throughout life either as attractions to a particular value or a natural repugnance to certain ways of acting – many people act because they deem it to be right on the basis of what they learned, as if by osmosis, from their earliest years (274)
- ▶ The educational process that occurs between parents and children can be helped or hindered by the increasing sophistication of the communications and entertainment media. (278)
- ▶ In the family we can learn to be critical about certain messages sent by the various media. Sad to say some television programmes or forms of advertising often negatively influence and undercut the values inculcated in family life (including social media) (274). Use of electronic devices can keep families apart. Technological disconnect exposes them more easily to manipulation by those who would invade their private space with selfish interests (278).

Socialisation, Support from Catholic Schools

- ▶ The family is the primary setting for socialisation, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one.(276)

- ▶ We break out of our self- absorption and come to realise that we are living with and alongside others who are worthy of our concern, our kindness and affection (276)
- ▶ An education that fails to encourage sensitivity to human illness makes the heart grow cold; it makes young people “anesthetised” to the suffering of others, incapable of facing suffering and of living the experience of limitation (277)
- ▶ ‘Catholic schools should be encouraged in their mission (working with parents) to help pupils grow into mature adults who can view the world with the love of Jesus and who can understand life as a call to serve God’ . . For this reason ‘ the Church strongly affirms her freedom to set forth her teaching and the right of conscientious objection on the part of educators’ (279, *both emphasised by Synod*)

Need for Sex Education

- ▶ Vatican II spoke of the need for ‘a positive and prudent sex education’ to be imparted to children and adolescents as they grow older’, with due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences’ Have our educational institutions taken up the challenge? (280)
- ▶ It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialised and impoverished, so it must be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self- giving. (280)
- ▶ It must also include helping them develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality. (281)
- ▶ Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into objects to be used (282)
- ▶ Young people should not be deceived into confusing two levels of reality: sexual attraction creates for the moment , the illusion of union, yet, without love, this “union” leaves strangers as far apart as they were before.(284)

Passing on the Faith

- ▶ Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules, and the complexity of today’s world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace to survive.(287)
- ▶ Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and serve our neighbour, beginning with baptism, where mothers who bring their children ‘cooperate in the sacred birthing’ (St. Augustine) (287)
- ▶ Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in that way does ‘one generation laud your works to another and declare your mighty acts’ (Ps 144.4) and ‘fathers make known to children your faithfulness’ (Is 38:19)

Education in the Faith in the Home

- ▶ Education in the faith has to adapt to each child, since older resources and recipes do not always workneed for sensitivity to their patterns of growth – spiritual experience is not imposed but freely proposed. (288)
- ▶ Essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful than any catechism class or sermon (288)
- ▶ The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelising mission.

Family – Agent of Pastoral Activity

Its agency of pastoral activity includes:

Explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of witness, namely:

- ▶ solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people,
- ▶ the protection of creation,
- ▶ moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need,
- ▶ commitment to the promotion of the common good and the
- ▶ transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory where the family lives. (Synod) (290)
- ▶ ‘We come to believe in the love God has for us’ (1 Jn 4:16) Only on the basis of this experience will the Church’s pastoral care for families enable them to be both domestic Churches and a leaven of evangelisation in society.

Scripture, Church Teaching and Spirituality

The Chapters 1, 2, and 9 (final chapter) examine marriage and the family in the light of the Word of God (1), Church teaching (2) and Spirituality (9). These can be read and reflected on together, possibly before or after engaging with the chapters on marriage and the family and seeing how they are grounded in the Church’s beliefs, experience and practices.

Stage 4 (a) IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD (CH 1)

The succinct presentation in this Chapter (10 pages) provides excellent material for reflection, prayer and discussion. The following are just a few quotations indicating the richness of the content

- ▶ The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises. This is true from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve’s family with all its burden of violence but also its enduring strength (cf. Gen 4) to its very last page, where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb (Rv 21:2,9) (8)

You and your wife

- ▶ They (husband and wife) embody the primordial divine plan clearly spoken of by Christ himself: 'Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?' (Mt 19:4), echoed in Gen 2:24'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' (9)
- ▶ It is striking that that the 'image of God' here refers to the couple, 'male and female.' God's transcendence (however) is preserved, yet inasmuch as he is also the Creator, the fruitfulness of the human couple is a living and effective 'image', a visible sign of his creative act.(10)
- ▶ The couple that loves and begets life is a true living icon – not an idol like those of stone or gold prohibited by the Decalogue – capable of revealing God the Creator and Saviour. For this reason, fruitful love becomes a symbol of God's inner life. (cf. Gn 1:28;9:7;17:2-5,16;28:3;35:11;48:3-4).(11)
- ▶ 'The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one' (Mt 19:5; cf.Gn 2:24).....The marital union is thus evoked not only in its sexual and corporal dimension, but also in its voluntary self-giving in love. The result of this union is that the two' become one flesh' both physically and in the union of their hearts and lives, and, eventually, in a child, who will share not only genetically but also spiritually in the 'flesh' of both parents. (13)

Your children are as the shoots of an olive tree

- ▶ If the parents are in some sense the foundations of the home, the children are like the 'living stones' of the family (cf.1.Pt 2:5) (14)
- ▶ We know that the New Testament speaks of 'churches that meet in homes' (cf.1 Cor 16:19; Rm 16:5;Col 4:15;Phil 2). A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of God seated at its table. We can never forget the image found in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord says : 'Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him, and he with me. (RV 3:20) (15)
- ▶ The family is the place where parents become their children's first teachers in the faith. They learn this 'trade', passing it down from one person to another. 'When in time to come your son asksYou shall say to him....' (EX 13:14) (16)
- ▶ Children, for their part, are called to accept and practice the commandment: 'Honour your father and your mother' (Ex 20:12). Here the verb to 'honour' has to do with the fulfilment of family and social commitments; these are not to be disregarded under the pretence of religious motives (cf. Mk 7: 11-13). (17)
- ▶ (Jesus) shows the need for other, deeper bonds even within the family: 'My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it.' (Lk 8.21).(18)
- ▶ (Jesus) goes so far as to present (children) as teachers, on account of their simple trust and spontaneity towards others. 'truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 18:34) (18)

A path of suffering and blood

- ▶ The idyllic picture presented in Psalm 28 is not at odds with a bitter truth found throughout sacred Scripture, that is, the presence of pain, evil and violence that break up families and

their communion of life and love. For good reason Christ's teaching on marriage (cf. Mt 19:3-9) is inserted within a dispute about divorce.(19)

- ▶ This thread of suffering and blood shed runs through numerous pages of the Bible, beginning with Cain's murder of his brother Abel (20). (*Further examples in 20 and 21*)
- ▶ The word of God is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering. For it shows them the goal of their journey, when God ,will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more (Rv 21:4) (22)

The work of your hands

- ▶ At the beginning of Psalm 128, the father appears as a labourer who by the work of his hands sustains the physical well- being and tranquillity of his family ' You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.' (Ps 128:2).(23)
- ▶ (The Apostle) Paul was so convinced of the necessity of work that he laid down a strict rule for his communities: ' If anyone will not work, let him not eat.' (2 Th 3: 10; cf. 1 Th 4: 11). (24)
- ▶ This having been said we can appreciate the suffering created by unemployment and the lack of steady work as reflected in the Book of Ruth, Jesus' own parable of the labourers forced to stand idly in the town square (Mt 20: 1-16)these realities are present in many countries today ...(taking their) toll on the serenity of family life (25)
- ▶ Nor can we overlook the social degeneration brought about by sin, as, for example, when human beings tyrannise nature, selfishly and even brutally ravaging it. (26)

The tenderness of an embrace

- ▶ Christ proposed as the distinctive sign of his disciples the law of love and the gift of self for others. (cf. Mt 22: 39; Jn 13:34).(27)
- ▶ Against this backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness. (28)
- ▶ Among the examples of tenderness in Scripture given are " the touching words that the prophet Hosea puts on God's lips: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him....I took them up in my arms....I led them with cords of compassion, with the bonds of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them'. (Hos 11:1,3-4). (28)

(Conclusions)

- ▶ With a gaze of faith and love, grace and fidelity, we have contemplated the relationship between human families and the divine Trinity.The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells. (29)
- ▶ The treasury of Mary's heart ...contains the experiences of every family, which she cherishes. For this reason, she can help us understand the meaning of these experiences and to hear the message God wishes to communicate through the life of our families. (30).

STAGE 4 (b) LOOKING TO JESUS: THE VOCATION OF THE FAMILY (CH 3)

- ▶ In and among families, the Gospel message should always resound; the core of the message, the kerygma, is what is 'most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.'In effect, 'all Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma. (58)

Jesus restores and fulfils God's Plan

- ▶ The New Testament strongly emphasises the need to safeguard God's gift: 'Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.' (Heb 13:4) The divine gift includes sexuality: 'Do not refuse one another' (1 Cor 7:5)
- ▶ The indissolubility of marriage should not be viewed as a "yoke" imposed on humanity, but as a "gift" granted to those who are joined in marriage (62)
- ▶ The spousal covenant, originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation, takes on its full meaning in Christ and his Church. Through his Church Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to bear witness to the love of God and to live the life of Communion. (63)
- ▶ (The) mystery of Christmas and the secret of Nazareth (exude) the beauty of family life! It was this that so fascinated Francis of Assisi, Theresa of the Child Jesus and Charles de Foucauld, and continues to fill Christian families with joy.(65)
- ▶ Nazareth teaches us the meaning of family life, its loving communion its simple and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character. May it teach how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role in the social order (Paul VI) (66)

The Family in the Documents of the Church

- ▶ The Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, (VAT.II) was concerned to promote the dignity of marriage and the family (cf Nos 47-52). 'The Constitution' defined marriage as a community of life and love (cf48) placing love at the centre of the family....' (67)
- ▶ The exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognise their own duties towards God, themselves, their families and human society' (No10).
- ▶ St John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love, in his Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and particularly in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*,(defining) the family as the way of the Church (69)
- ▶ Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, highlighted the importance of love as a principle of life in society (cf. 44), a place where we learn the experience of the common good.' (70)

The Sacrament of Matrimony

- ▶ Marriage is a vocation, in as much as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of discernment (72)
- ▶ Neither of the spouses will be alone in facing whatever challenges may come their way. Both are called to respond to God's gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort. ...(.invoking) the assistance of the Holy Spirit who consecrated their union.... , (74)
- ▶ In the Church's Latin tradition, the ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the man and woman who marry; by manifesting their consent and expressing it physically, they receive a great gift (75)

Seeds of the Word and Imperfect Situations

- ▶ It is particularly helpful to understand in a Christocentric keythe good of the spouses (bonum coniugum) which includes unity, openness to life, fidelity, indissolubility and, within Christian marriage, mutual support on the path towards complete friendship with the Lord. (77)
- ▶ When faced with difficult situations and wounded families, it is always necessary to recall this general principle: ‘ Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations (Familiaris Consortio, 84) (79)

The Transmission of Life and the Rearing of Children

- ▶ From the outset, love refuses every impulse to close in on itself; it is open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself. Hence no genital act of husband and wife can refuse this meaning, even when for various reasons it may not always in fact beget a new life (80).
- ▶ Thus the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of mankind, through the transmission of human life (81)
- ▶ So great is the value of a human life, and so inalienable the right to life of an innocent child growing in the mother’s womb, that no alleged right to one’s own body can justify a decision to terminate that life, which is an end in itself and which can never be considered the ‘property’ of another human being. (83).
- ▶ Overall education of children is a ‘most serious duty’ and at the same time a ‘primary right’ of parents.....Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: ‘all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorisation (84).
- ▶ Still, ‘a rift has opened up between the family and society, between family and the school; the educational pact today has been broken and thus the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis. (84).
- ▶ (The Church) must always (help parents) to appreciate their proper role and to realise that by their reception of the sacrament of marriage they become ministers of their children’s education. In educating them, they build up the Church, and in so doing, they accept a God given vocation. (85)

The Family and the Church

- ▶ Within the family “ which could be called the domestic church” (Lumen Gentium, 11)one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous-even repeated-forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church,1657) (86)
- ▶ The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches... The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian Community.(87)

STAGE 3 (c) THE SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY (Ch 9)

Vatican II stated that lay spirituality will take its particular character from the circumstances of...married and family life, and that family cares should not be foreign to that spirituality. (313)

A spirituality of supernatural communion

- ▶ The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles, and struggles, joys and hopes. ...This mutual concern 'brings together the human and the divine, for it is filled with the love of God. In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells (315).
- ▶ A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God.....Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union. (316)

Gathered in prayer in the light of Easter

- ▶ If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord's cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them.....moments of joy, relaxation, celebration and even sexuality can be experienced as sharing in the full life of the resurrection. (317)
- ▶ Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening this paschal faith. A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings, and to ask Our Lady to protect us beneath her maternal mantle.(318)
- ▶ The Eucharist is the sacrament of the new covenant, where Christ's redemptive work is carried out (cf. Lk 22.20). The close bond between married life and the Eucharist thus becomes all the more clear. For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a 'domestic church' (318)

A spirituality of exclusive and free love

- ▶ Marriage is also the experience of belonging completely to another person. Spouses accept the challenge and aspiration of supporting one another, growing old together, and in this way reflecting God's own faithfulness.....(319)
- ▶ Every morning, on rising, we reaffirm before God our decision to be faithful, come what may in the course of the day. And all of us, before going to sleep, hope to wake up and continue this adventure, trusting in the Lord's help(thus becoming for each other) a sign and instrument of the closeness of the Lord, who never abandons us: ' Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Mt: 28:20) (319)
- ▶ No one but God (however) can presume to take over the deepest and most personal core of the loved one; he alone can be the ultimate centre of their life....the principle of spiritual realism requires that one spouse not presume that the other can completely satisfy his or her needs.....and to stop expecting from (that spouse) something that is proper to God alone.(320)
- ▶ The space which each spouse makes exclusively for their personal relationship with God not only helps to heal the hurts of life in common, but also enables the spouses to find in the

love of God the deepest source of meaning in their own lives. Each day we have to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit to make this interior freedom possible.(320)

A spirituality of care, consolation and incentive

- ▶ “Christian couples are, for each other, for their children, and for their relatives, co-operators of grace and witnesses of the faith’.....Life as a couple is a daily sharing in God’s creative work, and each person is for the other a constant challenge from the Holy Spirit.....the two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace.(321)
- ▶ Marital fruitfulness involves helping others, for to love anybody is to expect from him something which can neither be defined nor foreseen; it is at the same time in some way to make it possible for him to fulfil this expectation’. This in itself is a way to worship God, who has shown so much good in others in the hope that we will make it grow. (322)
- ▶ We are constantly reminded that each of those who live with us merits complete attention, since he or she possesses infinite dignity as an object of the Father’s immense love.....Tenderness is expressed in a particular way by exercising loving care in treating the limitations of the other, especially when they are evident. (323)
- ▶ When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is ‘ a symbol, witness and participant in the Church’s motherhood’The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and at the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world. (324, and Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 248 to 254)
- ▶ (To repeat) No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love.(This) allows us to see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships, a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come. It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty(325)
- ▶May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us. (325).

STAGE 4 (a) SOME PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES (CH 6)

The dialogue that took place during the Synod raised the need for new pastoral methods.....*Different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church’s teaching and local problems and needs.* (199)

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today

- ▶ ...It is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that “fills hearts and lives” because in Christ we have been “ set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.” (Evangeli Gaudium, 1)Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for an effort at evangelisation and catechesis inside the family (200)
- ▶ Pastoral care for families.....consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularised of countries... (needing also unambiguously) to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors....that

prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion and violence.....(201)

- ▶ Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay people who are involved as Christians, in the cultural and social-political fields. (201)
- ▶ Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and to keep them well grounded in reality. It is helpful for seminarians to combine time in the seminary with time spent in parishes.(203)
- ▶ The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders, who can assist with the pastoral care of families (with the help of other professionals. The latter), especially those with practical experience, help keep pastoral initiatives grounded in the real situations and concrete concerns of families.(204)

All this in no way diminishes, but rather complements, the fundamental value of spiritual direction, the rich spiritual treasures of the Church, and sacramental Reconciliation (204).

Preparing Engaged Couples for Marriage

The Synod Fathers stated in a number of ways that we need to help young people discover the dignity and beauty of marriage.(205)

(Guidance on this and on the preparation of the celebration (of marriage) is given in paragraphs 205 to 216.)

Accompanying the First Years of Married Life

- ▶ It is important that marriage be seen as a matter of love, that only those who freely choose and love one another may marry. When love is merely physical attraction or a vague affection, spouses become particularly vulnerable once this affection wanes or physical attraction diminishes.....(If there is not adequate preparation for whatever reason)...the newly married couple need to complete a process that should have taken place during their engagement (217)
- ▶ Need for emphasis that union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony...(and) wedding is just a beginning. A persistently critical attitude towards one's partner is a sign that the marriage was not entered into as a project to be worked on together, with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity..... (Their relationship) can only benefit from sitting down and talking to one another about how, concretely, they plan to achieve their goal. (218).
- ▶ Hope bids us live fully in the present, giving our all to the life of the family, for the best way to prepare a solid future is to live well in the present (219)...The process occurs in various stages that call for generosity and sacrifice. The first feelings of attraction give way to the realisation that the other is now part of my life...as love matures, it also learns to 'negotiate'. (220)
- ▶ In the home, decisions cannot be made unilaterally, since each spouse shares responsibility for the family; yet each home is unique and each marriage will find an arrangement that works best. (220)
- ▶ Among the causes of broken marriages are unduly high expectations about conjugal life... (but) the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation, but to come to

the sober realisation that married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God's means of helping the other to mature. (221).

- ▶ The pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life ...(in the context of) responsible parenthood.....(which) presupposes the formation of conscience (through listening) to God and his commandments (cf, Rom 2:15) (and with spiritual accompaniment). (The more this occurs) the more their decision will be profoundly free of subjective caprice and accommodation to prevailing social mores. (222)
- ▶ The clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council still holds: ' The couple will make decisions by common counsel and effort...(further guidance follows in the full quotation) (222)
- ▶ ' The use of methods based on 'the laws of nature and the incidence of fertility' (Humanae Vitae 11) are to be promoted, since 'these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2370) (222)
- ▶ Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world (222).

Some Resources

- ▶ The parish is a place whereexperienced couples can help younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.(223)
- ▶ Young couples should be encouraged to be essentially open to the gift of children. Emphasis should also be given to the importance of family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist, and couples encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. (223)
- ▶ Pastoral workers and groups of married people should think of ways to help young or vulnerable couplesto be present to one another, even by sharing moments of meaningful silence, (224), including through practical suggestions that they have found useful:
 - Planning free time together;
 - Moments of recreation with the children;
 - Different ways of celebrating important events;
 - Shared opportunities for spiritual growth;
 - Providing resources that help young married couples to make these moments meaningful and loving, thus to improve their communications. (225)
 -
- ▶ Encouragement to develop a routine to give a healthy sense of closeness and stability through shared daily rituals eg a morning kiss, an evening blessing, waiting at the door to welcome each other home, taking trips together, sharing household chores, celebrating family occasions with a party etc (226)
- ▶ Pastors have to encourage families to grow in faith. This means encouraging frequent confession, spiritual direction and occasional retreats, gathering as a family to pray for one another, and encouraging each of the spouses to find time for prayer alone with God as each has his or her crosses to bear. (227)
- ▶ The word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family.....(it) is not only good news in a person's private life but also a criterion of judgment and a light in discerning the various challenges that married couples and families encounter (227)

- ▶ Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions, can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow. These might include:
 - Meetings of married couples living in the same neighbourhood, and family meetings;
 - Brief retreats for couples;
 - Talks by experts on concrete issues facing families;
 - Marriage counselling;
 - Home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires;
 - Social services dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence;
 - Programmes of spiritual growth;
 - Workshops for parents with troubled children. (229)
- ▶ Groups of married couples, as part of their commitment to service, prayer, formation and mutual growth, enable couples to be generous, to assist other families and to share the faith; at the same time they strengthen marriages and help them to grow.(229)
- ▶ Older married couples could be asked to help younger couples in the neighbourhood by visiting them and offering guidance in the early years of marriage....we cannot restrict our pastoral outreach to small and select groups.(230)
- ▶ Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended.(230)

Casting light on crises, worries and difficulties

- ▶ A word should also be said about those whose love, like a fine wine, has come into its own .. the daily experience of fidelity gives married life richness and body....'old lovers and tried and true' (St. John of the Cross)...having successfully overcome crises and hardships without fleeing from challenges and concealing problems. (231)

The Challenge of Crises

- ▶ Couples will gain from receiving help in crises, meeting challenges and acknowledging them as part of family life. Experienced and trained couples should be open to offering guidance , so the couples will not be unnerved by those crises or tempted to hasty decisions. Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart. (233).
- ▶ Couples grow apart and lose their ability to communicate. When problems are not dealt with, communication is the first to go. Little by little, 'the person I love' slowly becomes 'my mate', then 'the father or mother of my children', and finally a stranger. (233)
- ▶ The answers given to the pre-synodal consultation showed that most people in difficult or critical situations do not seek pastoral assistance, since they do not find it sympathetic, realistic or concerned for individual cases. This should spur us to try to approach marriage crises with greater sensitivity to their burden of hurt and anxiety. (234)

Para. 235 provides a full analysis of crises that are typical of almost every marriage.

- ▶ Personal crises that affect the life of couples often involve finances, problems in the workplace, emotional, social and spiritual difficulties.....experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled

marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life. (236)

- ▶ It is becoming more and more common to think that, when one or both partners no longer feel fulfilled, or things have not turned out the way they wanted, sufficient reason exists to end the marriage. (237) (However), some have the maturity needed to reaffirm their choice of the other as their partner on life's journey, despite the limitations of the relationship...
- ▶ In any event, while realising that reconciliation is a possibility, we also see that what is urgently needed today is a ministry to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down. (238)

Old Wounds

- ▶ Understandably, families often experience problems when one of their members is emotionally immature because he or she still bears the scars of earlier experiences.(239)
- ▶ Many people leave childhood without ever having felt unconditional love. This affects their ability to be trusting and open with others. When problems emerge in a marriage, before important decisions are made it is important to ensure that each spouse has come to grips with his or her own history (240)
- ▶ This involves recognising a need for healing, insistent prayer for the grace to forgive and be forgiven, a willingness to accept help, and the determination not to give up but keep on trying...Even if it seems clear that the other person is at fault, a crisis will never be overcome simply by expecting him or her to change. We also have to ask what in our own life needs to grow or heal if the conflict is to be resolved. (240).

Accompaniment after breakdown and divorce

- ▶ In some cases, respect for one's own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill treatment. In such cases, 'separation becomes inevitable'....(but) 'separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain'. (241)
- ▶ The Synod Fathers noted that 'special discernment is indispensable for the pastoral care of those who are separated, divorced or abandoned' (which) must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialised counselling centres in dioceses' (242)
- ▶ At the same time, 'divorced people who have not re married, and often bear witness to marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharis the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life.....(as well as accompanying them) with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty. (242)
- ▶ Family breakdown becomes even more traumatic and painful in the case of the poor, since they have fewer resources at hand for starting a new life. A poor person, once removed from a secure family environment, is doubly vulnerable to abandonment and possible harm. (242)
- ▶ It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be feel part of the Church. They are not excommunicated and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community. (243)

- ▶ The Christian Community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage: rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity. (243)

(Guidance on nullity procedures is provided in 244))

- ▶ The Synod Fathers also pointed to the 'consequences of separation or divorce on children, in every case the innocent victims of the situation.(245)
- ▶ They should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and their father speak well of their mother.(245)
- ▶ It is irresponsible to disparage the other parent as a means of winning a child's affection, or out of revenge or self-justification. Doing so will affect the child's interior tranquility and cause wounds that are hard to heal.(245)
- ▶ ..Christian communities must not abandon divorced parents who have entered a new union, but should include and support them in their efforts to bring up their children.....helping heal the wounds of parents and supporting them spiritually is also beneficial for children, who need the familiar face of the Church to see them through this traumatic experience.(246)

Certain Complex Situations

Mixed marriages (247), Marriages involving disparity of cult (248), Particular problems that arise when persons in a complex marital situation wish to be baptised. (249)

Persons who experience same sex attraction

- ▶ The situation of families whose members include persons who experience same sex attraction... (is) not easy either for parents or for children
- ▶we would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination, is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence..... (and that persons) who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God's will in their lives (250)
- ▶there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and the family' (251)

Single parents

- ▶ Whatever the cause, single parents must receive encouragement and support from other families in the Christian Community, and from the parish's pastoral outreach (252)

When Death makes us feel its sting.

- ▶ At times family life is challenged by the death of a loved one. We cannot fail to offer the light of faith to families going through this experience (253).
- ▶ Those who do not have relatives to spend time with and to receive affection from, should be aided by the Christian community with particular attention and availability, especially if they are poor.(254)

- ▶ Ordinarily, the grieving process takes a fair amount of time, and when a pastor must accompany that process, he has to adapt to the demands of each of its stages. (255)
- ▶ It consoles us to know that those who die do not completely pass away, and faith assures us that the risen Lord will never abandon us.....although the certainty of death saddens us, we are consoled by the promise of future immortality. (256)
- ▶ If we accept death, we can prepare ourselves for it. The way is to grow in our love for those who walk at our side,the better we live on this earth, the greater the happiness we will be able to share with our loved ones in heaven. The more we are able to mature and develop in this world, the more gifts will we be able to bring to the heavenly banquet. (258).

Ch.8 Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness

Pope Francis states that 'everyone should feel challenged by Chapter 8' (7). The statements which follow from the Chapter 8 give a flavour of some aspects of these challenges.

- ▶ The Synod Fathers stated that, although the Church realises that any breach of the marriage 'is against the will of God she is also 'conscious of the frailty of many of her children' (291)..... the Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations (irregular unions) which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage (292).

Gradualness in Pastoral Care

- ▶ (The Fathers noted that 'when such unions (civil marriage or simple cohabitation) attain a particular stability, legally recognised, are characterised by deep affection and responsibility for their offspring, and demonstrate an ability to overcome trials, they can provide occasions for pastoral care with a view to the eventual celebration of the sacrament of marriage. (293)
- ▶ (Others who don't commit to marriage or break that commitment also) need pastoral care that is merciful and helpful (as members of the Church). (293)
- ▶ The choice of a civil marriage or, in many cases, of simple cohabitation, is often not motivated by prejudice or resistance to a sacramental union, but by cultural or contingent situations ... (in some countries the reason may be primarily because) celebrating a marriage is considered too expensive in the social circumstances. As a result material poverty drives people in to de facto unions.(294)
- ▶ St 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'... (through) the progressive integrations of the gifts of God and the demands of God's definitive and absolute love in his or her entire personal or social life (295)

The discernment of irregular situations

- ▶, 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' (296)
- ▶ No one can be condemned forever, because that it not the logic of the Gospel! (divorced, remarried and others).(297)
- ▶ (Irregular situations include) a second union consolidated over time, with new children, proven fidelity, generous self-giving;....(where every effort was made) to save their first marriage and were unjustly abandoned;....those who have entered into a second union for

the sake of the children's upbringing (and subjectively certain that the previous marriage had never been valid); a new union arising from a recent divorce (suffering and confusion for family); or the case of someone who has consistently failed in his obligations to his family(298)..

- ▶ I am in agreement with the many Synod Fathers who observed that the baptised who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully reintegrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal (299)
- ▶ This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important (299).
- ▶ What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognise that, since the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases, the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily be the same (300).
- ▶ When a responsible and tactful person, who does not presume to put his or her own desires ahead of the common good of the Church, meets with a pastor capable of acknowledging the seriousness of the matter before him, there can be no risk that a specific discernment may lead people to think that the Church maintains a double standard.(300)

Mitigating Factors in Pastoral Discernment

- ▶ The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations. Hence it 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.(301)
- ▶ A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding 'its inherent values' or be in a concrete situation which does not allow him or her to act differently and decide otherwise without further sin. As the Synod Fathers put it, 'factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision.(301)
- ▶ The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No 1735) clearly mentions these factors: imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments.....affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological or social factors....(302)
- ▶ Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognise that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases.(302)
- ▶ Recognising the influence of such concrete factors, we can add that individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church's praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage.....(this discernment is dynamic and) must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realised. (303)

Rules and Discernment

- ▶ (We must always recall a teaching of St Thomas Aquinas and) learn to incorporate it in our pastoral discernment: Although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects.....the principle will be found to fail, according as we descend further into detail (304)
- ▶ A pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in 'irregular' situations, as if they were stones to throw at people's lives. This would bespeak the closed

heart of one used to hiding behind the Church's teachings , sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority difficult cases and wounded families (305)

- ▶ By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. Let us remember that a small step in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life that which appears outwardly in order , but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.(305)
- ▶ Let us not forget the reassuring words of Scripture: ' Maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins' (1Pt 4:8) (306)

The Logic of Pastoral Mercy

- ▶ In order to avoid all misunderstanding, I would point out that in no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriageto show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being.(307)
- ▶ Today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown (307)
- ▶ I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the streets. (308)
- ▶ We cannot forget that mercy is not only the working of the Father; it becomes a criterion for knowing who his true children are. In a word, we are called to show mercy because mercy was first shown to us. (310)
- ▶ Mercy does not exclude justice and truth, but first and foremost we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth.
- ▶ This offers us a framework and a setting which help us to avoid a cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues. Instead, it sets us in the context of a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate.(312)
- ▶ I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord (312)
- ▶ I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognise their proper place in the Church.