

THE MAKING OF THE NEW FAITHFUL: INSIGHTS, LESSONS AND MAJOR

ISSUES FROM *AMORIS LAETITIA*, A NIGERIAN CONTEXT¹

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ABSTRACT

This piece of work takes the path of orthopraxy, analyzing theologically from the anthropological starting point of view; en route sequential thinking. The paper highlights the nine chapters of Amoris Laetitia wherein issues and lessons are drawn; examines chapter five, enquiring the work of the mothers as catechists in fashioning the New Faithful, emphasizing that the new members, either into the institution of societies or the families, must be given adequate orientation and be skilled in the principles of faith. Thereafter, we shall make some recommendations for our contemporary, and draw our conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The real Christian faithful are made in the crucible of God's love. God selects his people in ways best known to him and charges them to do good and follow the steps marked out for them. How would the faithful know what to do? The law is written in the hearts; nevertheless, God urges his chosen instruments to repeat the mandate to his people. The articles of faith are the matters of the heart but ours to understand and be converted. God's people are informed and formed to follow the Lord and dared to be recognized as the faithful. To be faithful itself is God's gift, it is the cooperation of human with God, albeit God is at work in the heart and mind of his faithful, challenging some and perfecting some but always in gentle and loving manner.

The making and formation of the new faithful encompasses methodology of catholic wisdom. This is a technique of catholic education in all its ramifications of moral and intelligentsia. The task is to assist a person to form and shape its mind so as to actualize its potentials and accomplish a sound and fulfilled humanness.³ One of these methodologies is the promulgation of authentic church documents such as an *Apostolic Exhortation*. An apostolic exhortation is generally an advice, an

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³ Cf. Akinwale Anthony, "Catholic Education and the Relevance of *Africae Munus*", a paper delivered to community scholar at Dominican Institute 2017.

appeal. It is an act of the ordinary magisterium which does not have a doctrinal and binding character like *Apostolic Constitution or Motu Proprio*.⁴

At a synod of bishops, the bishops offer counsels and recommendations and present their proceedings to the Pope.⁵ It is within the purview of the Pope to write a document after a synod and air the views of the Synod Fathers. The basics of post-synodal exhortation is the procedure of synod of bishops; it is pastoral in nature and does not have the same conformation as an Ecumenical Council; a Council that is capable of making doctrinal decisions.⁶

The Church is hierarchical and this attitude is apportioned to the way the church addresses and views the documents and personalities of the church. There are hierarchies of the truth, of values, of virtues and even of the documents. In the hierarchy of the documents, what comes first is the *Apostolic Constitution, the Decree, Declaration, Motu Proprio, Encyclical, Exhortation, Directives, Instruction, Rescript, etc.* They do not all have the same force of law. *Apostolic Constitution* can create a new legal situation, an *Instruction* may not. *Apostolic exhortations* are not legislative documents and we have many of them, some of them expounding or explaining existing law.⁷

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF AMORIS LAETITIA

Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love in the Family) is Pope Francis' Encyclical issued 19 March 2016. It is a Post-Synodal Exhortation to encourage the faithful to grow in many facets especially in spirituality and in caring for one another so that each member of the family will experience the joy of love in the family setting. The document focuses on issues impacting on marriage and family life; touching on perennial issues that had been on for a long time.

The document is not meant to change any dogmatic teaching of the church; rather, it is a follow up of a synod of the family in which many faithful gathered with the bishops to discuss family issues. After the Synod, the Pope reflects the thoughts, recommendations, and suggestions in the Exhortation. However, the document is authentic and requires the faithful to appreciate and understand what the Pope wants to communicate. Pope Francis intends to transmit the outcome of the synod that raises the need for practical and effective pastoral methods; an approach that respects both the church's teaching and local problems and needs.⁸

⁴ Cf. Code of Canon Law, no. 35, 330, 331, 333-334, 336- 337, 346.

⁵ Cf. Code of Canon Law no.340-348

⁶ Cf. Code of Canon Law no. 341

⁷ Cf. Hull Hitchcock, "Adoremus.org/Author/Helen Hull-Hitchcock", online Edition, Vol. VIII, no. 6: September 15, 2002.

⁸ Cf. AL no. 199 and 300

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The Exhortation basically revolves around three main issues spread out in the nine chapters: first, he emphasizes that ethics, obtainable in a society and as such in a family, must be taught; secondly, he stresses that adequate sexuality education must follow the right principles; and thirdly, he highlights accurately the passing on of the faith and the need of helping the family members to grow in faith and love using various techniques. The ambience for these various trainings is the home- marriage and family life- with the support of the church.

No doubt, the document generated lots of debate. But to adequately judge this document, one must do arduous profound reading not relying on comments from the various media.

The manuscript consists of 265 pages divided into 9 chapters with 325 articles. It is very voluminous albeit the same points are repeated in some chapters for the sake of emphases. The document revolves around the care for the family whether in ‘regular’ or in ‘irregular’ marriages drawing from variety of existing church documents, life experiences, and pastoral perspectives. It is an encyclical like no other; emphasizing God’s mercy and forgiveness while not ignoring the doctrine; returning the authority to the diocesan bishops in their handling of issues of marriage and family life.⁹

THE RÉSUMÉ OF THE NINE CHAPTERS:

Chapter 1: IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD: this chapter presents the proof-texts of families and marriages in the scriptures. Pope Francis dwells more on the scriptural quotations to express his points that the bible is full of families, births, love stories and **family crises**. He presents the tranquil home of an ideal family which possesses the primordial divine plan; the family as the church that meets in homes; the setting where children are brought up in the faith. Tenderness is the virtue that stands out in the family; and members are to care, be in communion, and face their challenges with courage and serenity. Each family member is called to be a light of the world.¹⁰

Chapter 2: THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF FAMILIES: The Pontiff addresses the welfare of the family and sees this as the pivotal act for the world and the church. He looks at the present realities of families in its shadows and lights. He observes some complexities and avers that the service approach to this sector must be diversified and analytical. There is widespread of uncertainty; individualism is on the increase; there is hostility in the family and relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desires and circumstances. He stresses the need for a more responsible and generous efforts that will motivate the young ones to opt for real marriage and help

⁹ Hart Aidan, “Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)” *A review, Following Christ, Changing Church*, Association of Catholics in Ireland, 26/04/2018. Accessed 11/7/2019, www.acireland.ie

¹⁰ Cf. AL. 8-30

them respond to the grace that God offers them. He pointed out the need to help the young married couples to cope with their problems.¹¹

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING TO JESUS: THE VOCATION OF THE FAMILY: Pope Francis maintains that the core message among the families is that of gospel message and this must resound in and amid all the families. ‘Kerygma’, the most excellent and appealing act, must occupy the center of all their evangelizing activity. He delves into teaching the authentic doctrine of marriage and family life and he exposes the views of the Synod Fathers on these issues. He says Jesus had reconciled all things in himself and had restored marriage and the family life to their original form. He restates the instruction on family as stated in *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Lumen Gentium*, he examines the teaching of Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he affirms the teachings on marriage in *Familiaris Consortio*, in *Gratissimam Sane*, in *Deus Caritas Est*, in *Caritas Veritate* of Benedict XVI. He stresses the importance of love as principle of life in the society. He highlights the importance of scripture and Tradition which give access to the Trinity; Trinity reveals communion as the features of the family.

However, the Pontiff observes that there is a need for further consideration on God’s action in the marriage rite. He is challenging every person to see things with the eyes of Christ because this is a way to inspire the church’s pastoral care for the faithful who are living together or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried. He quoted Saint John Paul II in a general principle that when faced with difficult situation, pastors are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situation.¹²

On the transmission of life, he appeals to the teaching of the church and stresses that the overall education of the children is the most serious duty of the parents and is their primary right. The schools do not replace the parents. The church is called upon to work with the parents in organizing educational programmes with a suitable pastoral initiative since in educating the children, we build up the church and this too is a vocation that is good for the family and the church.¹³

Chapter 4: LOVE IN MARRIAGE¹⁴ the Pontiff expresses the gospel of marriage and family life, quoting, extensively, church documents such as *Familiaris Consorti*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and *Catechism*. He affirms marital love explicated in various church documents such as *Catechism of*

¹¹ Cf. AL. 31-57

¹² John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84

¹³ Cf. AL. 58-88

¹⁴ Cf. AL. 86-164

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the Catholic Church, Deus Caritas Est, Casti Connubii, Gaudium et Spes, and excerpt from *Confessions* of St. Augustine; *addresses to Pilgrims; Chilean Bishop's Conference*; the scriptures; *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius; Thomas of Aquinas, and many more from documents he promulgated. Majority of the references are in-text while few are on footnotes.

The Pontiff says that love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of the couple and the children.¹⁵

He upholds what St. Paul wrote on love in 1 Cor. 13: verses 4-7, presenting the qualities of love. He says being patient in love does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, or allowing others to use us. Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world; to love is to do good and be ready to be of assistance to others.¹⁶ He says love means fulfilling the last of the Commandments of God.¹⁷ His main lesson is that love inspires a sincere reverence for every human being and the recognition of his or her right to happiness, to desire equality and reject any form of injustice.¹⁸

JOY OF LOVE

The Pontiff articulates that joy of love needs to be cultivated because joy increases pleasure and helps to find fulfilment in number of things at the time when physical pleasure recedes in marriage. Quoting St. Thomas, he says that joy refers to an expansion of the heart.¹⁹ Marital joy can be experienced in sorrow because it consist of accepting that marriage is a mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyance and pleasure but always on the path of friendship which inspires the couples to care for one another and serve one another.²⁰

This joy grows through pain and sorrow²¹ and occurs through a process of charity, a charity that has no limit to its increase;²² for love matures with age and grows under the impulse of grace of God that is poured into the hearts of the couples.²³ What helps the couple to grow in this joy of love is dialogue. Dialogue means communicating, experiencing, expressing and fostering love in

¹⁵Cf. AL no. 90.

¹⁶ Cf. AL. 93-94

¹⁷ Cf. Ex.20:1

¹⁸ Cf. AL. 96.

¹⁹ Cf. Summa Theologiae I-II, q.31, art.3, ad 3.

²⁰ Cf. AL. 126

²¹ Cf. AL .130

²² Cf. cf. Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 24, art. 7; AL. 134

²³ Cf. AL. 135

marriage and family life.²⁴ It means taking quality time to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say; to keep an open mind.²⁵

His teaching on passionate love is that family members must be sensitive to one another, not selfish and not allow passionate love to stifle, obscure great decisions and values but must enrich, perfect and harmonize their freedom in the service of all.²⁶ He insists that training in the areas of emotion and instincts is necessary because lack of control or excess of the passion can taint the pleasure and damage family life.²⁷

He avers that every form of improper interpretation of sexual submission must be rejected.²⁸ For clarification, the Pontiff explains the meaning of Eph. 5: 21-28 where Paul teaches love and submission. Pope Francis is saying that the biblical text is encouraging everyone to overcome a complacent individualism and be constantly mindful of others. Marriage is reciprocal ‘submission’ marked by fidelity, respect and care.²⁹ The unity which the couple should be established through marriage is by a reciprocal donation of self which is also a mutual subjection³⁰

Chapter 5 will be explained later in this paper.

CHAPTER 6: SOME PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

The pontiff described some pastoral viewpoints that were discussed during the Synod on the Family and says that the fruits of the synod raised the need for new pastoral methods. Some of these ‘new’ pastoral methods are general suggestions. He stated categorically that different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the church’s teaching and local problems and needs. He is not presenting pastoral plan for the families, but he gives some reflections on some significant pastoral challenges.

There are propositions that families must be enabled to take up the role as active agents of family apostolate; the Pontiff calls for missionary conversion, a type that sets out values that are needed today; asking for more adequate formation for priests and pastoral agents; adequate preparation for the married couples both long-term and short-term; accompaniment for those who are married both old and young; separation should be considered as the last option; the divorced should be made to feel part of the church; to make nullity more accessible and less time consuming and if possible

²⁴ Cf. AL. 136.

²⁵ Cf. AL. 137-141

²⁶ Cf AL. 146

²⁷ Cf. AL. 148

²⁸ Cf. AL. 156

²⁹ Cf. AL. 156

³⁰ Cf. AL. 156

free of charge; single parents must receive encouragement and support from families in the Christian community and from the parish's pastoral outreach.³¹

CHAPTER 7: TOWARDS A BETTER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

The first form of education involves forming persons who readily understand responsible use of freedom; formed to face issues with good sense of intelligence.³²

The Pontiff recognizes that the family is the first school of human values, a place where we learn the wise use of freedom. He acknowledges that parents have great influence on their children as regards education in all its ramifications and challenges them to carry out this task conscientiously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately. He tasks the parents to rethink their methods and discover new resources, study what their children are exposed to; know what is entertaining them, what they watch on Television and electronic devices and with whom they spend their free times. The way to do this is by starting a process which is the ability to lovingly help the children to grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy.

The second form of education is ethical formation in the area of giving moral instruction, instilling in children trust and loving respect, shaping the will of the children, fostering good habits. He says this is done with active methods and dialogue, using the language children will understand. It also includes showing a person that whatever is done is done in the person's best interest; it means pointing out the benefit that an action will have. A person must be trained to say 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'sorry.' Correction must be done lovingly and must be to train the child not to vent out anger and frustration on the parents or anyone.

The third kind of formation is the need for sex education. The issue of sex education in our age is trivialized and impoverished; however, it can be taught within the framework of an education for love and for mutual self-giving. In giving sexuality education, the pontiff invokes the four principles of sexuality education as provided by the Pontifical Council for the Family.³³

The fourth kind of formation is to pass on the faith, an orderly process of handling on the faith to the children, a process that must be adapted to each child.

³¹ Cf. AL. 199-252

³² Cf. AL. 259-290

³³ Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality; Guidelines for Education within the Family*, November 21, 1995, page 25.

Chapter 8: ACCOMPANYING, DISCERNING AND INTEGRATING WEAKNESS

This chapter is widely debated by the scholars and people alike. The Pontiff relates the church to a field hospital in her task of accompaniment. He maintains that priests have the duty to *accompany* the divorced and remarried in helping them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the church and guidelines of the bishops.

All situations such as civil union, cohabitation, divorced and remarried require constructive response; seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead couples to the full realities of marriage and authentic family in conformity with the Gospel, and such situations must be guided patiently and discreetly.

He says categorically that *Amoris Laetitia* could not be expected to provide a new set of general or canonical rules that could be applicable to all cases. His intent is to present renewed encouragement to pastors in order to undertake a responsible, personal and *pastoral discernment of particular cases*. He says discernment must help to find possible way of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. He insists that the church must not desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage since it is God's plan.

However, he emphasizes that to show understanding in the face of exceptional situation never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal or proposing less than what Jesus offer to the human being. Making an exception for individual cases does not negate the rule; and a priest cannot simply grant exceptions without due process. For this discernment to happen there must be humility, discretion, love for the church and her teaching in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it. He reminds us that sacramental privilege cannot be obtained in an exchange for favours. He avers that the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more *fully integrated* into Christian communities in variety of ways while avoiding occasion of scandal.³⁴

CHAPTER 9: THE SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The Pontiff presents the spirituality of communion, prayer, true love, spirituality of care, consolation and incentive. The family is the nearest hospital, caring for one another, shepherding in mercy. A family must be a welcoming home, reaching to others, the poor, the neglected for this is a symbol and a witness of participation in the church's motherhood.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. AL. 291-312

³⁵ Cf. AL. 313-325

CHAPTER 5: LOVE MADE FRUITFUL

This is technically a continuation of Chapter four. This chapter discusses how love in all its implications becomes fruitful and how the couple can work towards the perfection of the fruits, making them more faithful, working towards multiplication of persons in the house of God.

WELCOMING A NEW LIFE

The Pontiff avers that love always gives life, by this it can be inferred that love is always open to life. After the couples had given themselves to one another; as the Lord pleases, they then give birth to children as living replications of their love³⁶ thereby forming a family in which a new life is welcomed as a gift of God. Some children are loved before birth, others are from the moments of the conception rejected, and some abandoned after birth and robbed of their childhood and future. He charged the mothers to ask for the wisdom to know and accept their children.³⁷

THE LOVE OF A MOTHER AND FATHER

Each child must feel wanted and must receive the nourishment, care and spiritual gift of knowing with the certainty that they are loved. This love is shown to them through the gift of their personal name, the sharing of language, looks of love, and the brightness of a smile. Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father and together they teach the value of reciprocity of respect and love. More importantly, they show the child the paternal and maternal face of the Lord.³⁸

THE APPRECIATION OF MOTHERS

This is not a new citation of/for mothers; in fact, mother issues are perennial in most Papal documents. Pope Francis echoes what had been said and taught through the ages. Some research on women shows that Israelite's faith was cherished, defended and exemplified by women. The women who emerged and played essential roles in the biblical texts testify to the essential role of women in the formation and transformation of Israelite's faith.³⁹

Without mothers, there would be no new faithful; the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth. Mothers communicate the deepest meaning of religious practice in the first set of prayers to the children.⁴⁰ When the mothers watch with tenderness and compassion,

³⁶ Cf. AL. 165

³⁷ Cf. AL. 166; 169

³⁸ Cf. AL. 172

³⁹ D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Vol. 6.1992, p.956

⁴⁰ Cf. AL. 174

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the children are helped to grow in confidence and experience that the world is a good and welcoming place; they would also develop a capacity for intimacy and empathy.⁴¹

St. Paul speaks of women's 'hard work' for Christ, and this hard work indicates the various fields of the Church's apostolic service, beginning with the 'domestic Church.' The domestic church is the home church, a place where 'sincere faith' passes from the mother to her children and grandchildren, as was the case in the house of Timothy.⁴²

Pope Francis reiterates that parents can never completely delegate the moral formation of their children to others and that a person's affective and ethical development is ultimately grounded in a particular experience that his or her parents can be trusted.⁴³

The teaching on mothers and women are not new. The renewal of this teaching in *Amoris Laetitia* suggests that little appropriations have taken place from the previous deliberations. We shall look at how this teaching can further be a benefit in Nigerian context.

WHAT IS THEOLOGY AND WHO IS A THEOLOGIAN

St. Anselm asserts that theology is faith seeking understanding. Faith is adherence to God and giving assent to what God revealed as authoritative. Each one must endeavour to seek the understanding. The task of helping others to understand the faith is undertaken by some people. Consequently, doing theology is an individual task and a corporate enterprise.⁴⁴

A theologian draws from Christian theological template rooted in sacred scripture, sacred traditions, correct reasoning and solid experiential knowledge of faith and interprets the faith with clarity and coherence so that others might understand God's message in the world of today.⁴⁵

The mother or the caregiver's task is likened to a catechist and a theologian of the family. She must perform this duty by listening, attending, teaching, waiting and receiving feedbacks from the family.⁴⁶ These attitudes are required of mothers for the spiritual and moral formations of their wards. When she comes to terms with theology, she falls on her knees, and like a theologian, filled with wonder. The inspiration of faith she receives is integrated and translated into action for Christian community of believers.

⁴¹ Cf. AL. 175

⁴² cf. 2 Tim 1:5

⁴³ Cf. AL. 263

⁴⁴ Cf. Stone Howard and Duke James. *How to Think Theologically*. Third Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. p.120.

⁴⁵ Cf. Stone Howard and Duke James. *How to Think Theologically*, P. 10

⁴⁶ Cf. Stone Howard and Duke James. *How to Think Theologically*, p. 123

MOTHERS' THEOLOGICAL ROLE: A NIGERIAN CONTEXT

The mother or the primary caregiver is the first figure the child recognizes. The mother –figure is the first catechist and the first theologian who helps the child to be conscious of God. As a mother and caregiver, she carries out her theological duties in three ways:

1. Interpreting the faith by words and deeds
2. Calling for and facilitating the liturgical exercises of the family
3. Facilitating and inaugurating the Community action

1. Interpreting the faith

The mother has transmitted life; she must also transmit the faith by intellectual discourse on God, giving simple explanation to the doctrine of the church. This is likened to the duty of parents forming a community of prophets where there is an open conversation about God.⁴⁷ In passing on the faith, parents arouse the desire for God and reflect the beauty of the Gospel. This is a way of expanding the fruitfulness and making God's love present in the society in countless ways.⁴⁸ The scripture has enjoined the parents to teach and train the children the way to go and will not depart from it when they are old.⁴⁹

Pope John Paul II stresses that education in the faith... which should begin from the children's tender age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives.... "The church of the home" is the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis, and there cannot be too great an effort to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal.⁵⁰ In addition, Pope Paul VI enjoins all wives and mothers to always remember that by their children a mother belongs to that future which perhaps she will not see.⁵¹

The catechism book with various versions written with simple English and various vernaculars is accessible and the catholic bookshops are replete with this simple information and guidelines on Catholic faith.

⁴⁷ Cf. Salvan Maria Sylvia, "The Role of Parents in Faith Formation", M.A. in Religious Education, Ateneo de Manila University.

⁴⁸ Cf. AL. 184

⁴⁹ Cf. Proverb 22:6

⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Catechesis Tradendae, Catechesis in our Time*, no. 68

⁵¹ Cf. Paul VI to Women at The closing of The Second Vatican Council, December 8th 1965.

Early explanation of the faith and correct interpretation of the doctrine are very crucial to the role of the mother as a catechist and as a theologian of the family. Some of the youths do not understand the doctrine of the church which is why they are leaving the church because there is no understanding without a teacher.⁵² In interpreting the faith, the mother must be clear and use simple words and examples so that the children will understand the faith. Mothers must not allow the television and social media to define values and prioritize their family.

The danger of taking this role with levity is that the children will not fulfill the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment says that children should obey their father and mother so that their days may be long. But if children are not led to know, love, respect and worship God; they are not likely to respect their parents even in their old age. Mothers cannot rely only on what the children will learn later in life. The foundation of such spiritual formation begins at home, more so that no one builds on an empty space, on *tabular rasa*. This is a critical task and the negligence of it is tantamount to breeding erudite scholars or professionals who are lacking in conscience.

2. Calling for and facilitating the liturgical exercises at home

This is likened to the duty of the parents as ‘priests’ forming a worshipping community where family prayer is cherished; meals are shared; and Eucharistic meal is accorded the esteem that is due.⁵³ When the family celebrates the Eucharist, they are one in communion with the body of Christ, the poor and the rich they are called to open the door of the family to greater fellowship with the underprivileged.⁵⁴

Saint John Paul II teaches that an important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into personal, family and social life. He says that by reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with God.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the family must pray their experiences and present them to God, their joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries

⁵² Cf. Romans 10:1-17

⁵³ Cf. Salvan Maria Sylvia, “The Role of Parents in Faith Formation”, M.A. in Religious Education, Ateneo de Manila University.

⁵⁴ Cf. AL. 186

⁵⁵ John Paul II, “The Role of the Christian family in the Modern World” *Familiaris Consortio*, 22nd November 1981, no 60.

of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings..... The death of those who are dear should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven.⁵⁶

It is the mother's duty to facilitate this task while cooperating with the father. With persuasion and life examples, she brings to bear her feminine character in the spiritual formation of the children.

This particular act is enhanced when she facilitates the reception of the sacrament for her wards; teaches, and explains the sacraments to the children. If she fulfils her task in this area, the parents will not suffer negligence at their old age when they will need the sacrament of anointing because the children will know the significance of the Sacraments.

Regular and worthy celebration of the Mass must be emphasized. She, together with the father, must call for attendance and reception of Holy Communion. If there is any defaulter, they must enquire why such is occurring often. She must also teach the sacrament of reconciliation and the benefit of going to confession. All these are taught by life examples. Lord Jesus promises His presence to the members of the Christian family in a special way: Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.⁵⁷

Saint John Paul II affirms that by virtue of their ministry, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. By praying with their children; reading the word of God with them; and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ, they become parents fully, they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.⁵⁸

3. Facilitating the growth of ethical behaviour and inaugurating community action

This is compared with parents forming a community of witnesses where respect for one another is taught and lived.⁵⁹ The married couples are called to love and bind the wounds of the outcast; foster a culture of encounter and fight for justice because God has given the families the job of 'domesticating' the world; and by their witnesses as well as their words to speak of Jesus to others.⁶⁰

Children's upbringing is not limited to academic development but also includes instilling moral and human values. It is expected that the family will teach their children charitable works because children must be taught the way they must walk and the work they should do.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Cf. John Paul II, "The Role of the Christian family in the Modern World" *Familiaris Consortio*, no 59.

⁵⁷ Cf. Matt. 7:7; 14:14

⁵⁸ Cf. John Paul II, "The Role of the Christian family in the Modern World" *Familiaris Consortio*, no 39,

⁵⁹ Cf. Salvan Maria Sylvia, "The Role of Parents in Faith Formation", M.A. in Religious Education, Ateneo de Manila University.

⁶⁰ Cf. AL. 183

⁶¹ Cf. Exodus 18:20

The family is the first school of human values where good habits are developed and good ethical education is taught. Pope Francis says these include showing a person that it is in his/her own interest to do what is right and be taught how to interiorized values and translate values into sound and steady ways of acting.⁶² Gerald O'Collins states that the setting for this task is on the streets, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized.⁶³

In our world today, the children must be introduced to church services such as the choir, the altar service, church warden service, and even children's Sunday school could be organized and sustained by youth.

Practically, the word of God that is shared and the love that is received at prayer must be launched into community actions. Children must learn how to work for God and be engaged in spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Pope Francis recaps this when he said that parents are responsible for shaping the will of their children, fostering good habits and a natural inclination to goodness. This entails presenting certain ways of acting and thinking.⁶⁴

The effect of getting involved in this task is that the world will be gradually socially transformed. This task is essential because by participating in the works of mercy, the children will grow in mutual relationship with the environment and in mutual responsibility, not only with the people but also with the entire ecosystem. This will increase the care for the nature, our common home.⁶⁵

According to Pope Francis, there can be flexibility of roles and responsibilities depending on the concrete circumstances of each family. A father helps the child to perceive the limits of life; to be opened to the challenges of the wider world and to see the need for hard work with strenuous efforts. Both figures are important in order to create the environment that is best suited to the growth of the child.⁶⁶

What must we do?

The Pontiff declares that Christians must show their love and mercy by the way they treat family members who are less knowledgeable about faith, weak or less sure in their convictions. He says love is marked by humility; is gentle, thoughtful, cherishes the good name of others, does not yield to resentment and never gives up on anyone.⁶⁷ This is what motivates, shapes, permeate, and characterizes the whole document.

⁶² Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Loving, Vatican City, no. 266.

⁶³ Cf. O'Collins Gerald. *Retrieving Fundamental Theology, the three styles of Contemporary Theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 1993, p. 9-14

⁶⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 264.

⁶⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si, Care of Our Common Home*, Vatican, 2015.

⁶⁶ Cf. AL. 175

⁶⁷ Cf. AL.. 9-119

Recommendations

1. A major step for our country Nigeria is aimed at the Marriage tribunal in different dioceses to look into cases of annulments and act on time and also attend to marriage cases that are pending for a very long time.
2. A thorough study of the document is a must for all pastoral workers- the priests, religious and catechists.
3. The young ones must from the youthful stage know and live their faith. They must be active in youth forum and participate actively in seminars/workshops because it is by attending such programmes that they learn more about the faith.
4. Parents must inspire their wards to be part of the Catholic Youth Organization fully. They must not be in a hurry to take them home after the celebration of the Mass. When there is meeting or organized seminars, they should wait and participate. This is the way the parents can show that their faith is important, meaningful, worth passing on, and that it matters to them.
5. Good preparation for marriage is indispensable for intending couples.
6. The church must support parents by organizing faith talks for them. Proper catechesis must be on-going in the parish not only for baptismal candidates but also for those who have received the sacraments. This is a help so that they can deeply understand the faith and be prepared to teach their children.
7. Children need to be carefully taught on how to patiently treat one another as brothers and sisters in the common home.
8. Mothers must live up to their tasks at home; not only on domestic chores but also on transcendent/divine matters in order to live fully their vocation- mothers- begetters of life.

Conclusion

All mothers have a great model in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and favour with God.⁶⁸ That means he received spiritual formation in Jewish culture. In like manner, mothers must learn from our Mother Mary how she trained her Son.

Gerard Deighan states that Blessed Virgin Mary beckons all mothers to receive the good news - Jesus - and it is obligatory to share this good news with others, the children, and the entire family. This is a way to be disciples, a missionary who is always in conversation with God in prayer and from prayer to the preaching of the gospel in words and in deeds in different places in different situation, in different epoch.⁶⁹ However, words and deeds must reflect what the church preaches, teaches and believes.

⁶⁸ Cf. Luke 2:51-52.

⁶⁹ Cf. Deighan Gerard, "Mary a Model for Modern Evangelization" a *symposium*, April, 1993.

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When mothers embrace their spiritual role with passion and follow through with all seriousness; that could be a leeway for the cure of the disease and the menace of massive drifting of the youth out of the church.

The words of Pope Francis ring a bell: “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24th November, 2013, no. 120.

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