

INTRODUCTION

DENNIS T. GONZALEZ

In June 2015, the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines (DaKaTeo: Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya) held at Tagaytay City its 13th Annual Conference, “Pre-Synodal Conversations on the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World,” in order to contribute to ecclesial reflections and discussions, as the Ordinary Synod on the Family approached and would take place at the Vatican in October 2015.

Besides the presentation of theological papers on the working documents of the 2014 Extraordinary Synod and the 2015 Ordinary Synod on the Family, the Conference included testimonies from a working wife and mother, an abandoned husband and single father, a migrant husband and father, and a group of abused women and children. Additional reflections were offered by married theologians Patricia and Shannon Jung, whose participation was sponsored by the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) network.

In the synodal documents, conference participants appreciated approaches, elements, and expressions that, five months later, would be reproduced by the apostolic exhortation on the joy of love in marital and family life, *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), which represented the official response of Pope Francis to the two-year synodal process.

Conference participants appreciated most the following matters: (1) the compassionate listening attitude as starting-point to understand the different contexts of families and the complex challenges they face today; (2) the primacy of respect and love in the pastoral approach to every family, whether stable or not, and the practice of patience as pastoral accompaniment of fragile,

wounded, and struggling couples and families of the faithful; (3) the recognition of “seeds of the Word” in natural marriage and marriage in other faith traditions.

A question that was raised in the Conference, and which remains relevant after AL, is the extent to which the current Code of Canon Law helps or hinders the pastoral care of families in complex situations and couples in irregular unions.

Four of the Conference papers have been revised for this *Hapag* issue. These papers respond to some of the questions raised, and explain some of the recommendations presented and accepted at the Conference. Pope Francis considers the “excessive idealization” of marriage unhelpful (AL, 36), and he affirms: “there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities” (AL, 57). The article of Levy Lanaria pushes this point much further, and it recommends a set of biblical norms in the discernment of seeds of the Word in diverse and complex forms of family life in which the faithful belong.

Amoris Laetitia expands the intended fruitfulness of the love of Christian spouses and families beyond child-bearing and the education of children, and urges the faithful to go forth from their homes in the spirit of solidarity with others. The article of Dennis Gonzalez focuses on the practice of active hospitality especially toward the poor, the stranger, and the estranged, and it points out a set of challenges which AL does not mention or address, namely, the realities of clannishness, tribalism, and dynastic politics in many societies.

The Conference recommended the reconsideration of an individualized approach to granting access to the Eucharist for divorced & remarried Catholics. The article of Ramon Echica takes up the issue, presents contending positions, and discusses two theological concepts that can help theologians and pastoral servants defend and build on the implicit answer of AL.

The article of Delfo Cancaran limits itself to the synodal documents, and interprets them according to three kinds of hermeneutics. Afterwards, he advocates many changes to the theology and practice of the Christian family as a domestic church.

Three articles in this issue were written after the Conference. The article of Bernard Kamulinso reinterprets AL chapter 8 (pastoral accompaniment, discernment, and integration of weakness) with the help of theologian Richard Gula's thoughts on moral discernment. The article of Joseph Go offers reflections on how the experiences of LGBTQ believers in Christ enrich and challenge dominant theologies of marriage and family life. The article of Adeinev Reyes-Espiritu talks about the presence and absence of the matter of "mothering" in the field of theology in general, and especially in theologies of migration.

While *Amoris Laetitia* abstains from offering explicit and categorical answers to some complex questions about marital and family life, it is explicit about the integral mission of Christian couples and households: to embody Christ's faithful and fruitful love in the home and to the world. Furthermore, for pastoral servants, lay leaders, and couples especially in the family apostolate, a major task is the following: to seek out believers and their households that struggle with wounded and complex relationships and who experience estrangement from the Body of Christ, to accompany them in their winding journey toward maturation as learners in Christ, and to strengthen their integration in communities of the faithful.

Dennis T. Gonzalez, SThD
St. Vincent School of Theology
dengon1964@yahoo.com