

## English language Small Groups Reports – Synod of the Family

Presentations during the 4th General Congregation on the first part of the Instrumentum Laboris



On Friday, October 9th, in aula, during the fourth General Congregation of the XIV General Assembly of the Synod, thirteen small groups reports were presented.

Relatio – **English Language Group “A”**

Moderator: **Card. George PELL**, Cardinal-Prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy

Relator: **Archbishop Joseph Edward Kurtz, Archbishop of Louisville, Kentucky**

In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, we find the source of hope for the family in the contemporary world. Thus confidence in Him is to be the first and last word of the synod. It is with eyes fixed on Jesus that we begin.

The message of the synod must announce the Good News of Jesus Christ clearly and attractively. Thus we recommend the words of Pope Francis who vividly engaged families at the Saturday Vigil for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia with the invitation: "So great was (God's) love that He began to walk with humanity, with His people, until the right moment came, and He made the highest expression of love - His own Son. And where did He send his son - to a palace? To a city? No. He sent him to a family. God sent him amid a family. And He could do this, because it was a family that had a truly open heart!"

We discussed a proper methodology, which needs to make reference to Sacred Scripture and Tradition throughout this document as we read the signs of our times in light of the Gospel.

A great concern relates to the overly bleak description of the contemporary scene. More attention needs to be given to theological reflection on the faithful, loving married couple and family, who, so often heroically, live an authentic witness to the grace of the family. Expanding the words to explain the "Good News regarding the family", we sought to speak less of "crisis" and more of "lights and shadows."

We spoke of the vitality of many families who witness to the beauty of their family life and inspire others in their commitment to family life. Yet we also spoke of the many illusions in our contemporary world that sadly lead to a radical isolation. So too we spoke of the struggles and challenges, which are part of the shadows. How important it is to recognize and give support to these families and the power of their lived witness.

Another concern was an overly Euro-centric or Western mindset in the current wording. Rather we are called to a cultural tone that is global and that is open to the richness and real experiences of families today, in various nations and continents.

Great attention was given to the family who migrates, calling forth special generosity of communities of faith and governments to welcome the gifts of these families.

We also highlighted the attention given to persons with disabilities and special needs and their families. Of special note was the care with which both the gifts and the struggles were presented. The richness of this section might serve as a helpful paradigm for the treatment of other topics in this document.

Also deserving of special mention is the role of public policy to foster family life in a way that truly honours the natural right of families to make decisions in a way that promotes the common good.

In summary, while the challenges are only too obvious, so too must we hold up the strengths and seeds of renewal already present so families might be active agents of the Good News of Jesus.

Aware that the grace of Christ will be taken up in the areas of this document devoted to the vocation and mission of the family, we urge synod delegates to announce the hope held out by Jesus as the first and last word of this synod. In Christ is our confidence.

Relatio – **English Language Group “B”**

Moderator: **Card. Vincent Gerard NICHOLS Archbishop of Westminster, England**

Relator: **Archbishop Diarmuid MARTIN, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland**

The group recognized that the purpose of part I was not simply to repeat the analysis of last year's Synod. It was felt, however, that the analysis of the difficulties which the family faces was too negative.

We look at what emerged in the reflection of the Church over the last year and what we have experienced in our own local churches. We tried to look in the light of faith at how millions of families truly try day by day to realize what Pope Francis called “God’s dream for his beloved creation.”

We witness every day families who try to make God’s dream their dream; to find happiness sharing their loving journey and seeing their love realized in the children they bear and guiding their children, especially their adolescent children into the mystery of marital love.

The group stressed that the extended family is so often the ordinary means by which men and women are accompanied through every stage of life. The love and support given by and received in so many families on the pilgrimage of life is an expression of the love that God has for his pilgrim people.

Despite the challenges that the family face in every culture, families with the assistance of divine grace do find within them the strength to carry out their vocation to love, to strengthen social bonds, and to care for wider society, especially for the most vulnerable. The group feels that the Synod should express strong appreciation to such families.

The place of part one is to listen and observe the factual situation of families. The group felt strongly, however, that for the Christian such an analysis should always look through the eyes of faith and not remain simply sociological analysis. More scriptural references would help to understand the nature of God’s dream that families are called to make their own and to realize that in the difficulties of life they can place their trust in a God who neither disappoints nor abandons anyone.

It was noted that alongside the socio-cultural challenges that families face, we should also openly recognize the inadequacy of the pastoral support that families receive from the Church on their itinerary of faith.

Analysis of the situation of the family should recognize how, with the help of grace, families who are far from perfect, living in an imperfect world do actually realize their vocation, even though they may fail along their journey. As members of the group we shared a reflection, each of us on the experience of our own family. What emerged was far from a stereotype of an “ideal family,” but rather a collage of families different in their social, ethnic, and religious background. Amid many difficulties our families gave us the gift of love and the gift of faith; in our families we discovered a sense of self-worth and dedication. Many of our families are of mixed confession or religion, but in all we learned an ability to pray and to reflect upon how the family is central to the transmission of faith in a multiplicity of situations.

An analysis based on the light of faith is far from an analysis which avoids facing reality. If anything, such an analysis can focus on questions of marginalization, which easily escape from the mindset of the dominant culture in many of our societies. An analysis based on the light of faith can lead to a deeper discernment of how families suffer marginalization and forms of poverty, which go beyond economic poverty to include the social, cultural, and spiritual.

Such discernment should help us to identify groups in our world of those who find themselves in a situation similar to that of Jesus and his parents, for whom there was “no place at the inn.”

It was noted that among the groups who experience such exclusion, one should not overlook families who are discriminated against or marginalized because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

The language of Scripture can be closer to the realities of the daily experience of families and can become a bridge between faith and life. The group felt that the language of the final document should be a more simple language, accessible to families, showing also that the Synod Fathers had listened to and heard their contribution and comments to the synodal process.

The situations in which families strive to live out their vocation are varied. It would be impossible to encapsulate all these situations in a single document. Each local Church should try to identify the particular situations of family marginalization in their own society.

Social policy should have a priority concern for its effects on families. Good social policy should begin with an indication of where the social peripheries of each community lie, rather than from a simple economic analysis. Such discernment of the reality of marginalization should also be a dominant characteristic of the pastoral care of the Church for families.

Social problems like inadequate housing, unemployment, migration, drug abuse, the cost of rearing children all have the family as primary victim.

In looking at the challenges facing particular groups, the group proposed a broad rewriting of paragraphs 17-30 under the title of The Family on the Pilgrimage of Life.

Young people live in an oversexualized culture. They need to be educated to a culture of self-giving, which is the basis of the self-donation of conjugal love.

Young people need to develop the ability to live in harmony with emotions and feelings, and to seek mature affective, mature relations with others. This can be an antidote to selfishness and isolation, which often lead young people to a lack of meaning in their lives and even to despair, self-harm, and suicide.

Generosity and hope are at the root of a culture of life. Life in the womb is threatened by the widespread practice of abortion and infanticide. The culture of life should also embrace the elderly and those with special needs, where very often support only comes from the extended family. Many families testify to the fresh vision of life that comes when one of its members has such special needs.

The experience in our group was that of pastors who share a firm conviction that the future of Church and society passes through the family. It was stressed that politics and policies may attempt to change structures, but politics alone do not change hearts.

The humanization of society and our future will depend on how was as a community realize God's dream for his beloved creation. We can only give thanks to God for our Christian families who through their love and self-giving, however imperfect, open their hearts to the healing love of the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We owe a great debt to these families who in immense ways support and challenge our ministry as pastors.

Moderator: **Archbishop Eamon MARTIN, Archbishop of Armagh, Chairman of the Irish Episcopal Conference.**

Relator: **Archbishop Mark COLERIDGE, Archbishop of Brisbane**

The Catholic Church presents a fascinating interplay of diversity and unity. In that sense, our journey through the week has been deeply Catholic, deeply ecclesial. We have spoken in different ways of our different experiences of marriage and the family; yet a profound sense of why they matter has emerged. The sense of diversity led us to ask if this or that analysis or argument would be best dealt with at the local or regional level rather than at the global level. There was a decentralizing tendency in much of our discussion; yet paradoxically this did not undermine our sense of unity in the task.

We spent considerable time discussing the ordering of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, beginning as it does with an analysis of the current situation of families before proceeding to reflect on the vocation and mission of the family. It was noted that the structure of the working document moved in the direction of See - Judge – Act, which seemed to us sound because – at least in theory – it allowed us to be in touch with the family as it really is rather than with the family as we might wish it to be. In speaking of “the family”, we were conscious of the danger of lapsing into an idealized, removed and disembodied sense of family, which may have its own beauty and internal coherence but which can end up inhabiting a somewhat bloodless world rather than the real world of families in all their variety and complexity.

This led in turn to a larger consideration of the engagement of the Gospel and culture, the Church and history. The Church does not inhabit a world out of time, as the Second Vatican Council, “the Council of history”, recognized. Nor does the Church inhabit a world outside human cultures; the Church shapes cultures and cultures shape the Church. In considering marriage and the family here and now, we were conscious of the need to address the facts of history and the realities of cultures –with both the eyes of faith and the heart of God. That is what it has meant for us to read the signs of the times.

Through this week, we have been somewhat uncertain about the task presented to us, as we worked our way through the *Instrumentum Laboris*, at times falling into the trap of rewriting or into discussions that were more semantic than substantial. The going was very slow indeed at times, and we are left wondering how on earth we will manage to make our way paragraph by paragraph through the entire document before the end of the Synod. If the task itself has been unclear in this new Synod format, so too has been our method of working. We have had to shape the method as we have moved through the week, and this has challenged the resourcefulness and tactical sense of the Moderator, to say nothing of the patience of the group members. At times our work has seemed more muddled than methodical; but our hope is that focus, if not perfect clarity, will emerge as the Synod unfolds and we become more assured about both task and method.

We have spent considerable time discussing language in a way that looks beyond semantic quibbling. For instance, we had a lengthy discussion about what we meant by “the family”,

which is nothing if not basic to this Synod. Some thought it would make more sense to talk of “families”, given the many different kinds of families we now see. Others preferred to think specifically of “the Catholic family”, but there was no perfect consensus on what that might mean. There are again many different kinds of Catholic families. In the end, we settled for a very general definition of “the family” as the unique form of human community based upon and flowing from the marriage of a man and a woman, linking this to a sense of God’s plan as attested to in Scripture.

We also considered certain phrases which have become commonplace in Church documents, among them “the Gospel of the family” and “the domestic Church”. These were vivid and illuminating formulations when they first appeared, but in the meantime they have become clichés, which are less clear in their meaning than they are usually assumed to be. We felt that it may be a good thing if they were given a rest and if we chose instead to use a language which was more accessible to those unfamiliar with our particular speak. In general and especially when speaking of marriage and the family, it was felt that we needed to beware of a kind of Church speak of which we are barely conscious. The *Instrumentum Laboris* has a more than its share of it, and it would be good if the final document moved in a different and fresher direction. Like Vatican II, this Synod needs to be a language-event, which is more than cosmetic. We need to speak of marriage and the family in new ways, which has implications on both the macro and micro level, as it does on both the local and universal level.

Part of the newness, we felt, needs to be a less negative reading of history, culture and the situation of the family at this time. True, there are negative forces at work at this time in history and in the various cultures of the world; but that is far from the full story. If it were the full story, all the Church could do would be to condemn. There are also forces which are positive, even luminous, and these need to be identified, since there may well be the signs of God in history. It is also true that marriage and the family are under new kinds of pressure, but this again is far from the full story. Many young people still want to marry, and there are still remarkable families, many of them Christian, heroically so at times. To see and speak positively of things is not to indulge in a kind of denial. It is rather to see with the eye of God, the God who still looks on all that he has created and still finds it good.

To address the many issues that we have discussed will take more than the first week or even the three weeks of the Synod. A longer journey stretches before us, just as an earlier journey has led us to this point – not just from late 2013 when Pope Francis announced the journey of the two Synods but from the Second Vatican Council and all that led to it. It has taken patience to work our way through this first week of the Synod, and it will take even more patience for us to follow the path ahead. But, as the Holy Father has reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “time is greater than space”. The patience which is not anxious about imperfect process and which is prepared to wait on God will untie the knots, even those we have struck in the early days of the Synod.

## Relatio – “English Language Group “D”

Moderator: **Card. Thomas Christopher COLLINS**, Archbishop of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Relator: **Archbishop Charles Joseph CHAPUT, O.F.M. Cap.**

Those of us taking part in Circle D are grateful to Pope Francis for calling for this synod, and we are honoured to be part of the process. We also want to express our gratitude for the hard work embodied in the Instrumentum Laboris (IL). We suggest that the document should start just as we begin any celebration of the Mass – with a kind of Confiteor, putting ourselves in the midst of the failures of the members of the Church, rather than judging them from the outside. We need to acknowledge and ask forgiveness for our own mistakes as pastors, especially those that have undermined family life.

We had two general observations:

First, while various elements of the Instrumentum Laboris (IL) are admirable, we found much of the text to be flawed or inadequate, especially in its theology, clarity, trust in the power of grace, its use of Scripture and its tendency to see the world through overwhelmingly Western eyes. Second, we felt limited in our ability to respond by not knowing clearly who the audience of the document is. In other words, are we writing to the Holy Father, to families of the Church, or to the world?

Most of our group felt the Instrumentum Laboris (IL) should begin with hope rather than failures because a great many people already do successfully live the Gospel’s good news about marriage. Our group expressed concern that readers will simply ignore the document if it begins with a litany of negatives and social problems rather than a biblical vision of joy and confidence in the Word of God regarding the family. The huge cloud of challenges pervading the first section of the text unintentionally creates a sense of pastoral despair.

Several group members felt that Section II should precede Section I. Others supported the current arrangement of the text. A shared concern was that most people won’t read a dense or lengthy document. This makes the IL’s opening section vitally important; it needs to inspire as well as inform. Additionally -- recalling the work of Aparecida -- members stressed that the focus of the text should be on Jesus, through whom we describe and interpret the world’s present situation. We should always begin with Jesus.

If marriage is a vocation, which we believe it is, we can’t promote vocations by talking first about its problems.

As the Trinity is the source of reality, and because all communities originate in the community of the Trinity, some thought that the Trinity should be the document’s starting point.

Members noted that in his letters, St. Paul would often write a prologue of praise to people whose sins he would then critique. This was a common style in his epistles, and effective.

Our group thought there were a number of elements missing from the text: a serious reflection on gender ideology, more reflection on pastoral care for the differently-abled, the role of fathers and men as well as the role of women, and a deeper treatment of the destructive nature of pornography and other misuses of electronic technology.

Members criticized many of the paragraphs in the first section. Some thought the presentation was chaotic, without inherent logic. Sentences seemed to be tossed together without any organic connection to one another.

Some thought the text worked well because the family today does, in fact, face serious problems. That's why we're here at the synod: to deal with those problems; and people who suffer want to see their reality touched by what we say. So it's important to speak in a way that will draw people's attention.

Still others thought that the text lacked anything that would attract people. If the document is destined to the general public, they felt that stories from family life, or the lives of the saints along with illustrations, should be included to make the material more compelling. They stressed the need to review the language of the document and ensure that it appeals to both men and women, leaving no one out.

Members worried that the English translation may not be faithful to the official Italian text. Others complained that many of the document's statements were too general and not specific enough. Still others felt the text had many inaccurate generalizations, was verbose and repetitive.

Members said that some of the sections seemed narrow in scope and excessively inspired by West European and North American concerns, rather than a true presentation of the global situation. Some of the members thought that terms like "developing nations" and "advanced countries" were condescending and inappropriate for a Church document. Others thought that the language of the text was too careful and politically correct, and because of that, the content was unclear and sometimes incoherent. Wonderfully good points were made in some paragraphs, but they were addressed too briefly and in a poorly developed manner. They seemed to be simply pulled together and listed, rather than presented logically.

Overall, members felt that Pope Francis and the people of the Church deserve a better text, one in which ideas are not lost in the confusion. Our group suggests that the text should be turned over to a single editor for clarification and refinement. The current material is obviously the work of a committee. Because of that, it lacks beauty, clarity and force.

Finally, members felt strongly that even in difficult situations, we need to underline the fact that many Christian families serve as a counter-witness to negative trends in the world by the way they faithfully live the Catholic vision of marriage and the family. These families need to be recognized, honoured and encouraged by the document. Thus the first section of the IL text, which is about "observing" the facts, ought to highlight the good as well as the bad and the tragic. Heroic holiness is not a rare ideal and not merely "possible," but common and lived vigorously in much of the world.