

## **SYNOD 2015: FRENCH-SPEAKING CIRCULI REPORTS**

### **Relatio – Circulus Gallicus "A"**

**Moderator: Card. LACROIX Gérald Cyprien**

**Relator: S.E. Mons. ULRICH Laurent**

1. A look at the content of the Introduction and of the first part of the Instrumentum Laboris allows us to highlight some common themes, without overlooking some differences of approach.

On the one hand we are pleased that the introduction stresses the value and the profound sacramental nature of marriage. We recall the need to give such appreciation to a beautiful way of life: we have listened to accounts of painful situations, the problems of family life; we wish also to speak of the challenges, and of the gift of God in helping to bear them.

A number have observed that the first part envisages family life as a whole, and not only marriage; this is a widely held point of view.

However, others prefer to return to the questions raised by marriage in the life of the contemporary world. While one participant, with the approval of others, underlines the fact that it is not good for the synod to be taken up totally with the problems and crises which beset families in the West.

We reached agreement on the following points which deserve to be elaborated and developed along the lines of our observations and the modi which are to be brought to the Instrumentum Laboris.

On the one hand, we must begin from the lived experience of present day families and which provides support for the proclamation of the gospel; we will be able to discern the seeds of the Word within the experiences of present day families. Problems and difficulties are to be found everywhere, and sufferings, but equally in every part of the world who live out in joy the fact of being rooted in Christ and in faith.

It is essential that our text adopts a positive note, one which favours dialogue with our contemporaries.

On the other hand, it is our wish that this text takes the standpoint of the life of families, without limiting itself to couples and to marriage, even if it is imperative to begin there. It will undoubtedly be fruitful to situate the vocation and mission of the family, in the light of the gospel, alongside all human families so as to promote fraternity. Becoming a brother or a sister of every person is assuredly an experience of the most universal kind; we note with sadness that it is only with difficulty some people find their place within their family, their blood relations, within the human and Christian community. Yet everyone can become and is called to become brother, sister of those who are men and women like himself or herself. Family life is a preparation for this. It is where the life of the Church is summoned.

2. When we began the work, chapter after chapter, number after number, we realised that there was a considerable mass of material. We were fully aware that the question concerning families cannot be summed up in the views of one or two who voiced strong opinions; but we did see how numerous the positions were, and that everything contained in the Instrumentum Laboris deserved careful attention on our part.

We are content to state that there have been extended periods given to an exchange of views in this linguistic group in the treatment of the subject, and even exchanging these views at a deeper level, but we are aware that these next five days will not be sufficient to do justice to this programme!

Be that as it may, some experienced members expressed a degree of unease that all the modi which we are going to put forward, redact and adopt after intensive debate will not find expression!

Above all, we wish to acknowledge how impressed we have been by this meeting of different cultures which took place between twenty people who nevertheless spoke the same language. The situations of the African Francophone countries, of the Middle and Near East, of France, as well as Switzerland and Canada vary. The words of the French language do not always have the same sense from one place to another, from the Atlantic or the Mediterranean.

3. But above all the historical and cultural contexts are not the same. One cannot say that the number of marriages (and baptism too) are in decline. We cannot speak in the same sense of the Church's presence in our respective societies. The possibilities of sharing the faith in our countries are not identical, the public witness which can be given is not easy everywhere. And it is not for the same reasons that it is difficult: the liberty to do so in "liberal" countries does not mean that it is genuinely recognised, and can lead to positions opposed to each other – one opts for a position of strong identity, while the other engage in patient dialogue which is not always understood. In other countries religious or cultural oppression in the engagement with Christians does not imply that they remain silent, but that for centuries they must tread a painful path.

This is what we have learned, at the outset. But in a discussion dealing with such concrete and diverse aspects of family life, we feel that we have had a unique experience of Catholicity, which is never fully possessed; this is a gift of God given to us through this experience of Church, which however we must receive, live with fidelity, and grow ever deeper in its truth. We took time to listen to each other, to explore in depths our shared reflections; we attempted in all honesty to explain mutually why we were advancing a particular idea, and what experience has caused us to voice it. It is with caution that we move forward, it is a most interesting challenge to receive and mutually here what is set before us.

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### **Relatio – Circulus Gallicus "B"**

**Moderator: Card. SARAH Robert**

**Relator: Rev.do P. DUMORTIER, S.I. François-Xavier**

This report falls into two: 1) lived experience; 2) some points to stress.

## 1) The lived experience.

We began our reflection on the Instrumentum Laboris with what unites us, as “ a Church who walks together to read reality with the eyes of faith and with the heart of God”, and I repeat these words, Holy Father, which you addressed to us on Monday morning, but also with that which makes us different: difference of nationality: there are as many nationalities represented in our group as there are members of the group; diversity of personal journeys and diversity of responsibilities given to one and another. It is in listening with attention, goodwill and genial patience that we were able to be taught by one another. The different numbers and chapters of this first section have clearly provoked reactions, observations, reflections, which ought to find a way of modi submitted to the judgement of all; we have worked most diligently beginning with the text and on the text and have voted on twenty modi. At certain points we had to resist the temptation to rewrite some parts of the text; such a temptation is, if I may say so, natural among a group who read a text and know its importance, its importance for the Church, for the world, for each and every single one of us. We have therefore learned a great deal; we have learned to work better together session after session; we have learned to know one another; we have learned to read and to listen to the text slightly differently through what others have said.

At the first meeting of the group, at the request of our Moderator, His Eminence Cardinal Sarah, we shared what lay within us at the start of this synod. Allow me to summarise in three points.

The necessity of taking into account the diversity of the socio-cultural pastoral contexts: this requires and will require the ability to articulate what is in the universal order from what is in the particular order, a shared emphatic word and responses to particular experienced situations. In this regard, it was suggested by one of our group – without it being discussed by all – that episcopal conferences should have at their disposal a certain power to allow their pastors to be “Good Samaritans” in their service to the Church.

many expectations were expressed:

- that the synod, aware that our contemporaries are waiting with expectation, may be inspired and that all may grasp the trust of the Church as far as they and the family are concerned.
- that the synod may offer benchmarks which would be paths to assist and accompany each and all; that it may allow the family to live its vocation and its mission according to the plan of God and the teaching of the Church,
- that it may find a way to express support for families from the Near and Middle East, so often scattered and tempted by emigration;
- that it also may look positively on the family of the present day, a “place” where nothing untoward happens and which remains a “school of humanity.”
- that identifying the deep-seated causes and certain current disturbances which beset the family, it allows both one and all, to recover the path with the power of hope, helping the family to live as a family.

Suggested paths:

- to examine with attention the reasons for the upheavals affecting the family, by reason of itself, or society; whenever the family suffers, society suffers;
- in our reflection to remain rooted in Christ, to allow ourselves to be taught by him, to see as he sees, to share his feelings;
- a magisterial intervention which would be seen to give more coherence to the texts as a whole, which, in the theological and canonical order, appear more to laid side by side rather than articulated, and by doing this would simplify its expression.

## 2) **Some points to stress in line with the text:**

In connection with the first part of the text, two observations were formulated by the members of the group: the first drew our attention to the fact that the present analysis of the family tended to present it in a negative way in strong language, but others maintained that the accent was on the challenges; the second observation drew our attention to the fact that the text was excessively European with the risk of seeing things through a particular prism, but others said that a certain "model" of the family was widespread and general.

I would like to state some points of emphasis which express our modi.

- it seemed important to us to request that the text begin by recalling that "the family is the unshakeable and irreplaceable pillar of life in society", that it is "the foundation of society" (GS,52) and that this places on the Church "expert in humanity" a kind of obligation to address the question of the present day family in its vocation and mission proper to it.
- the "theory of gender" was the subject of an extended discussion in our group: its ideological character was underlined, especially when widespread and seen to be imposed by some international organisations.
- another important point made was to call on those responsible for the common good, and in the first instance public authorities and those responsible in political life, that they may not divest themselves of the responsibility which is theirs in regard to the fundamental good which is the family, through family, social and educational policies intended to support and encourage the family, with priority given to the less well-off.
- we underlined that many families, especially in certain societies make room for the aged, who are considered to be a 'blessing.'
- we have greatly appreciated the way in which the Instrumentum Laboris stressed the dignity of women, their proper role and their responsibilities; it seemed to us that such proper emphasis also evokes the consideration how on occasion minors or those overlooked feel their "vocation and mission" proper to humanity, in the family as spouse and father.
- numerous challenges absorbed all our attention and reflection, especially the challenge of the handicapped, the economic challenge and more particularly the challenge of migration with the dramatic situation of those men and women who leave or flee, and who ought to be received in the place where they arrive. We have also reflected on those families belonging to the Eastern Catholic Churches and it seemed important to us to emphasise that

the choice of emigration or the compulsion to emigrate has and will have powerful consequences for the Christian presence in the Middle East.

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## **Relatio – Circulus Gallicus "C"**

**Moderator: S.E. Mons. PIAT, C.S.Sp. Maurice**

**Relator: S.E. Mons. DUROCHER Paul-André**

The classic method of see-judge-act adopted by the authors of the *relation synodi* last year and ratified by the synod Fathers is perfected adapted to our subject: it gives us the scope to arrange a large amount of material in a logical and productive way. Yet it is not enough to be attentive to the object of our reflection which is the family in our modern setting, in particular the Christian, Catholic family. We must recall who we are, we who have undertaken this reflection

We are first and foremost people of families. We have parents, brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, cousins, nephews and nieces. The families of which we are speaking are not strangers to us, they form part of our lives, they live among us. This ought to be transparent in our language, in the timbre of our text, in our care and compassion for the families of the earth. There is a danger of speaking of "the family" in the abstract, like a reality which is external to us. We must bring ourselves to speak of "families, of "our families" in their concrete and individual reality. In particular, we must be in favour of international solidarity among all Christian families, with preference for those who today are experiencing persecution, war, and want.

We are also people of faith. Our vision has been transformed by the Good News which has touched our life, by the Son of God who became flesh for us, who has died for us, who lives in us. This faith must shape our outlook and inform our reflection. We don't pretend to be psychologists, nor sociologists, or economists, even if some of those here have had a training in these areas. We speak first among people of faith, and this ought to be seen as the first analytic part of our text.

Lastly, we are pastors. Our concern is that the mission which Christ has entrusted to his Church, the mission which is the Church, may be realised ever more and more in our present day world. The whole synodal effort must have this as its aim. All of the text which we have worked on should be motivated by this fundamental preoccupation. In particular, we desire to help those families to answer two questions: That of the vocation: "Family, who are you?" And that of the mission: "Family, what are you doing?" All the rest, interesting though it be, is secondary. Our text should be filtered in accordance with this criterion. Above all, let us remember that the pastoral care of the family is not only the action of the ecclesial institution in favour of families, but the action of the Church which realises herself in the family and through the family. Here we have the pastoral dimension of the family which we are called upon to develop in this synod assembly.

Our final text ought to 'give heart' to our families, display the confidence which we give them, and bolster their confidence in us. It must avoid how some people feel "excluded" from our care, because all families share in the mission of the Church! Let us recall that that the families in the Bible are dysfunctional; nevertheless, the Word of God becomes a reality in them and through them. God is able to perform the same marvel again in our day.

Our analysis ought to clear, for we want our pastoral activity to be rooted in reality. In particular, we must recognise that the anthropology implicit within our modern culture is far removed from the Christian vision. Its emphasis on the individual, endowed with unlimited liberty, aligned often to moral relativism, stands in contrast to our conviction that the human person is created to be in relation, after the image of the Trinitarian God. The family is more than a social unity: it is the nurturer of the human person in his or her development. It is essential to do everything to encourage human and community relations.

Our analysis should serve to underline the genuinely human and humanistic impulses which underlie the characteristics of contemporary culture, but which have been hijacked or perverted by sin (in the Bible, 'to sin' means to miss one's target). As far as a widespread individualism goes, let us recognise that it derives from a noble search for authenticity (Does God not wish that each one of us become fully authentic, does God not have a particular vocation for each person?) but this search, forgetting the profound relational nature of the human being, forgetting the transcendent horizon which encircles his world, falls into an individualism leading to a bitter and painful isolation. It is in this world, thirsting for genuine relationships, that the family can vindicate itself as the Good News.

We are bound to underline two aspects of this new culture which gravely occupies us. One is the emergence of what appears to be a new ideology which is often termed gender ideology. These different theories of gender have been developed in sociology and in philosophy, seeking to analyse certain human and social phenomena which can enrich our understanding of the world. But whenever such theories become absolute they tend to beget a system of thought which wants to sweep all before it. By seeking to impose a point of view which nullifies the relation between sexual identity and the sexual being which we are in our bodies, it breaks up the family, parenthood, human love and its noble and humanising vocation.

The other aspect which greatly concerns us is the development of bioethical technology which permit the deconstruction and reconstruction of the human being itself. Again, we celebrate the human genius which permits us to understand the physical and biological structure of our world, down to its smallest details. Yet our ability to manipulate surpasses our wisdom. Cloning, surrogate motherhood, genetic engineering to the very germinal cells, all of this runs the risk of creating a world where we won't be able to say what it is that constitutes a human being. In the face of these two realities, all of us must be vigilant and engaged.

Returning to our text. We request that the redaction commission prepare a new overall introduction to the final document, which will no longer be something to work on. It should expeditiously sketch the methodology of see-judge-act followed in the text. It ought to explain the connection between the synod on the new evangelisation, *Evangelii Gaudium* and this synod on the family.

A word on the method we are following. We have appreciated the short and pertinent interventions in the general assembly. We equally are appreciative of the time devoted to the small groups. We encourage the coordinating team to ensure a proactive communication between these small groups, the large group, and the redaction committee: such is the challenge of synodality and communion.

Our exchange has been enriched by the great cultural and ritual diversity of our group, who made take cognisance of the necessity to preserve a healthy subsidiarity in the Church which recognises the important contribution of national episcopal conferences.

Finally, let us be confident in the Holy Spirit. It is in the exchange of points of view and the impact of confrontation which allows the light to spring forth, revealing to us the 'surprises of God', which Pope Francis loves to speak of so much. Yes, let us be confident in the Holy Spirit.

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Translated by Bishop Michael Campbell OSA