

SYNOD 2015: ITALIAN-SPEAKING CIRCULI REPORTS

Relatio – Circulus Italicus "A"

Moderator: Card. MONTENEGRO Francesco

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The Italian Group A consisted of Fathers from different European countries, (East and West), two from Latin American and one from Africa. Together with the fraternal delegate, the presence of two couples and their intervention, one as experts the other as hearers, enriched the discussion.

The thematic unity between the present and the preceding synodal assembly consists above all in the new methodology pertaining to the procedure, with an increased appreciation of the discussion in the small groups. This initially gave rise to understandable difficulties, which were gradually overcome, once the reflection concentrated on the content of the texts.

Also with regard to the comprehensive methodology which appears to have guided the drafting of the Instrumentum Laboris there were objections at the outset, expressions of diverse and legitimate sensitivity among the members. The obstacle posed by such a situation was equally overcome by the desire, made explicit early on, to strive to offer as far possible a witness of unity on the contents of this part, in the expectation that the proposals which emerged from one or other sensitivity would appear to be more complementary than opposed.

In addition to the desire to witness to the unity of discernment within the members of the group, there was in this regard the witness of unity of the synodal process in last year's extraordinary assembly, and to which the Holy Father explicitly urged us. Given that such a method finds expression in the numbers of the Instrumentum Laboris which pick up on the preceding Relation-Synodi, the propositions drawn up in relation to these have been marked by the desire to enrich and complete them, but also to avoid as far as possible the introduction of modifications whose contents point in contrary direction.

An important aid to our unitary discussion came from the desire to show the will to complete it in the furrow of that unity *with Peter and under Peter*, which led us to make good use of contributions to the text, of the homilies of Pope Francis, his catechesis on the family at general audiences, and other texts from his teaching. This choice ensures continuity with the perennial teaching of the Church, and it seemed important to make mention of it in this part, especially of the texts of *Gaudium et Spes*, taking advantage of the occasion of fiftieth anniversary of the Council

It is worthwhile to emphasise that that the substantial unity between the concerns proper to each of the two methodological sensibilities, with regard to the discernment which had to take place on the numbers of this first part, this unity was made easier by the perception, quickly shared, of three requirements of general importance.

- The necessity of keeping the style of approach to the challenges which confront the family in its real context, starting always from positive facts, affirming the hope which inspires, also the presence of the Lord, reassuring also in the present hour, without overlooking or playing down the seriousness of the negative elements.

- The requirement to make explicit mention of the radical extent contained in some negative factors with regard to the very essence of the reality of the family
- The effort to formulate a gospel of the family, which enriches the different cultures, proposed also in cultural terms, which is offered to all. Such an effort appears indispensable at a time in which there is taking place (on the subject) a change of epochal proportions.
- The members of the group made serious efforts to conclude their discernment so as to be able to produce formulations shared as widely as possible. The proof of this lies in the fact that the majority of the modi, after lengthy discussion in some cases, received unanimous votes.

We present now synthetically the most specific aspects which formed the object of particular reflection in the group, on the introduction and on each of the four chapters of the first part.

Introduction

Most of the members, in their analysis of the introductory text to the document, registered the demand to use formula which leave no doubt from the outset that the one model of family corresponding to the teaching of the Church is that founded on the marriage between a man and a woman. This suggestion was quickly accepted, drawing on the homily of Pope Francis in the opening Mass of this synod.

The introduction appears to be the appropriate place to make reference to the epochal nature of change where the family is concerned, and also to make a valid cultural response to which we feel called as a Church.

Capitolo I

On the anthropological and cultural level is appeared necessary to make abundant reference to the risks posed by gender ideology, and also to its negative thrust in the educational programmes in many countries.

It also seemed necessary that the challenge of secularism should be further developed.

Capitolo II

The texts on the socio-economic context were felt in substance to be adequate and complete, contributions being syntheses on the specific mention of the challenge facing children of separated parents, and to the culture of waste linked to the ecological challenge.

Capitolo III

Beside the filling out of some situations which merited mention in chapter 3 (human trafficking, pastoral care of families which have experienced emigration....) it seemed important to separate some non-homogeneous topics in n.28, separating the subjects of children and women, including as well the subject of the presence-absence of fathers.

Capitolo IV

Where education in affectivity was concerned, it was felt obligatory to make specific mention of chastity and of the value of self-oblation.

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Relatio – Circulus Italicus "B"

Moderator: Card. MENICHELLI Edoardo

Relator: Card. PIACENZA Mauro

The Fathers composing Italian Circle B embarked on the reading of the single numbers of the first part of the Instrumentum Laboris, and after lengthy and animated discussion, always reached agreed conclusions.

With a fundamentally positive vision of the MODI underwent redaction, always having in mind that pastoral realism which we intend to pursue. It was generally felt that the text required some modification, to avoid as far as possible subordinate phrases, and to revise it from the point of view of style.

The early numbers speak of anthropological change – cultural, but this raises the question: *change of what?* Certainly not the teaching of Christ: change is of the world and must be clarified. The preference was to speak of "cultural change in society itself" (nn 6-7). Besides, it seemed appropriate to give some content to the expression "Gospel of the Family" and, in n. 6, to devote some words on the value of the person.

The members raised the important fact that the text could bear a greater number of biblical quotations (to find the first you have to go to n.39, p.32), and some quotations from the Fathers. In this sense, n.7 (p.13) where it speaks of the goodness of the creative project of God Sacred Scripture could have been cited and the text from Clement of Alexandria, in which he teaches that man becomes the image of God by cooperating in creation. In the context of the fragility and power of the family (n.10), the members voiced the hope of a reference to the "vocation" of the family.

It is opportune to recall that the equal dignity between man and woman has gospel roots. The reality of woman was recalled and boosted, and her role as teacher of mutuality, with esteem for equality and difference, avoiding excesses and unilateralism.

On the other hand, the limitations of a feminism were underlined, the teaching of a single equality reduces the character of the woman to that of a man, and the limits of a doctrine of a sole difference which attempts to dismiss the man-woman identity.

The members suggested a consideration of the relationship between welfare and supportive action in favour of the family. The request was made however for effective legislative action with the aim of supporting the family and its necessities.

The wish was expressed for a change in the practice of International Organisations who set conditions to their aid for development of underdeveloped countries alongside demographic politics.

Also, thanks to the impulse given by the social teaching of the Church and ultimately to the Encyclical '*Laudato si'*', the hope was expressed for the conversion of the contemporary

mindset through a culture of an 'integral ecology', towards a new way of thinking and living (n.16).

With reference to the ultimate stage of life, the members were of the opinion that encouragement should be expressed so as to sustain those ecclesial realities which are adopted by standing alongside families in time of trial, that they may be able to live such a painful time of grief in the light of Christian hope (n.20)

The present day phenomenon of migration which concerns no small numbers of people in different parts of the world, caused by war, poverty or by the desire for a better life, invariably involves families and calls upon the Church in a particular way. The accompaniment of migrants and refugees calls for specific and collaborative pastoral action - between the Church of origin and the Church which receives them – rebounds on the members of the families who emigrate, and on those who remain in their place of origin. Respect for different cultures and different faiths, on the part of whoever emigrates and whoever receives them, constitutes an indispensable condition for an integration which leads to a peaceful co-existence. It is also essential to underline not only the rights of migrants, but also their duties.

The family, understood as an educative community, is suited to uphold the multiform expression of affectivity, giving prior witness to teaching, walking together, harmonising feelings in accordance the appropriate state of life in view of a complete self-giving of oneself.

The family of the Church gives full expression to an educative community, having a particular care for the formation of pastoral workers – ministries, charisms, competences. The delicate nature of affective education in affectivity in the priestly formation was highlighted.

It was stressed that, just for God no one is 'distant', the same holds in an analogous way for the Church. In face of the condition of being unable to have children suffered by so many couples, there should exist special pastoral care of comfort and support, pointing in the direction of conception which does not necessarily imply biological fecundity, for example adoption or fostering.

The members stressed the necessity of denouncing exploitation:

- of child labour

- of child soldiers

- of the female body (prostitution, the renting of wombs, violence to the female fetus, and rape as a "weapon of war."

1 nn.31-33 express a reality which involves body and spirit, project and feelings. It was necessary to reassert that the Church has a **positive attitude to sexuality**, expressive of the symphonic tension between *eros* and *agape*.

It was felt necessary, with regard to the **biological challenge** (n.34) to take into account the philosophical – theological Christian patrimony which can lead to a more serene understanding of such a delicate matter, approving the collaboration of experts.

Relatio – Circulus Italicus "C"

Moderator: Card. BAGNASCO Angelo

Relator: S.E. Mons. BRAMBILLA Franco Giulio

The sessions of Italian Group C discussed with great attention the text of the first part, its general aspects, its architecture, linguistic development and content of the document. The outcome of the lengthy analysis has highlighted three aspects of a general nature.

1. To many, the structure of the text strongly marked by a Western outlook (European and North-American), above all in the description of the aspects and challenges opened up by secularisation and the individualism which is a feature of the consumer society. The presence in the group of synodal members from the Eastern Europe, from Latin America and other African countries or Near East has brought other viewpoints to mind, which should be integrated into the text and which we have tried to express in some emendations. There emerged above all the recommendation that in the revision of the document care should be taken to make the text easier, to rid it of excessive technical language and enrich it with different points of view. We are in favour of receive modi which show the range of situations which give the diagnosis, offered in the text, more responsive to the Catholic diversity of the Church and to the riches of the human experiences recounted in the text. Also underlined was the diagnosis presented in the document favours the shadows and labours to make evident the strong positive points which emerge from the panorama outlined. The extensive phenomenology of this first section becomes truly useful if it succeed in pointing to new paths for the family.
2. There was much debate, starting from the title of the Document, on "the focal point" of the pastoral intention behind this synod on *The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world* and on the translation *in the architecture of the document*. Starting the reading from the first part, many observed that there ought to appear clearly in the text that the three parts ought to be read in circular fashion. The method "see, judge, act" which is like a read thread in the text, is not understood and practised in the understanding that the three phases are chronologically successive, but in a strongly linked way, thus it cannot be "seen" if we do not allow ourselves to be taught by the face of Christ and by love for families and for peoples. The gospel proclamation on the family and which considers the family as the subject of evangelisation is situated at the very centre of the Church's care ("judge"), and ought to stir up a new and creative pastoral strategy ("act") for the initiation of young families, for the accompaniment of families with adolescent children and young people, and for the integration of families with a wounded heart. A strong recommendation was made t for the final draft to connect with notes and references the circular nature of the three parts. In this regard, our "circle" put forward an amendment which anticipates n.10 ("on the power and weakness of the family today") and completely rewrite it as an introductory number to the first part (n.6)

3. The third general observation concerns the long section entitled "Family and Inclusion", which is striking for its heterogeneity of vision and analysis, and which took up a whole day's discussion. The subject of inclusion is introduced here as a complex of challenges which are connected to the family, where some situations (the third age, widowhood, the end of life, disability, migrants, children, women, etc.) can become reasons for exclusion, being marginalised, of separation and a new form of poverty, just as serious as material poverty. Our group suggested a changed title: "The family: the challenges of inclusion", taking from successive titles the repetition of many "challenges", attributed to the treatment of different topics. Many of the modi proposed by our group have the aim to read positively these challenges not only for the family that it may become a place of inclusion, overcoming its manner of living apart (to live in an apartment), but also for the evangelising mission of the Church. It is only from the virtual concourse of the family, the Christian community and other social realities that the challenge of inclusion can move along, combining all the facets of this polyhedron with many faces. The aim is to demonstrate that the family is the crossroads of numerous insertions which alter the fraternal life of the Church and give force to its social context.

Finally, Italian Group C proposes a series of amendments. Some are of the opinion that they are important to enhance the text and put at the disposal of the others for the work of the central Commission. I quote the themes of the amendments which furnish the draft of a new or part of a text. – **Power and weakness of the family today.** This number has been rewritten, in anticipation of n.10, which resulted in a weak conclusion to the first chapter. It has been changed into an *Incipit* which introduces the whole of the first part and opens it up to the following two. The number shows in the family, an earthly reality and mystery of salvation, the capacity it possesses to become incarnate within human cultures and to transform them. It is precisely in this that the power of the family is to be found together with its weakness. Accompanying the family in the great moments of the transformation of society is the means by which the Church places the family at the centre of its evangelising activity. The whole of the first part of the document describes the "great field" in which to sow the good seed that it may bear fruit.

The anthropological change: the text proposes an integration of number 7 and seeks to describe the anthropological change not only in its shadows, but also for the opportunities contained in some strands of contemporary anthropology.

Gender theory: the group made more precise the implications of n. 8 on gender theories, highlighting more clearly their ideological nature and offering to families assistance to recover their original right to the education of their children in a responsible dialogue with others responsible for education

The new forms of poverty: the amendment the overall context of the new forms of poverty, noting the phenomena of the exploitation of prostitution, the choosing of infants before they are born, child labour and the widespread nature of different forms of addiction.

The disabled and the Christian community: the 'mode' sets firmly in the centre the care of the Church for families who have disabled members, advocating the ecclesial paths in catechesis and the liturgy for those handicapped and a heartfelt welcome on the part of the Christian community.

The new order of nn. 31-33 of chapter 4 on the subject of the relevance of the affective life: the proposal is to reorder the numbers cited in this mode: n. 31-33-32 . Also proposed are three substitute amendments concerning the support of the Church in the process of affective maturation (n.31), the education of the affections in evolutionary development, and, lastly, the interventions of all interested parties in education in the journey of formation.

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Translated by Bishop Michael Campbell OSA.