

## PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE PREPARATION OF III EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 05/11/2013

Intervention by

**S.E. MONS. LORENZO BALDISSERI**

I am pleased to address you in my role as new General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, appointed by His Holiness Pope Francis on 21 September. I greet you on the occasion of this Press Conference which has the objective of presenting the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to the theme

*Pastoral Challenges to the family in the context of evangelisation.* The synodal event will take place from 5 to 19 October 2014.

The theme of this Synod, which reflects very well the pastoral zeal with which the Holy Father wishes to approach the proclamation of the Gospel to the family in today's world, forms part of a work itinerary in two phases: the first is the Extraordinary General Assembly of 2014, which is intended to ascertain the *status quaestionis* and to gather testimonies and proposals from the Bishops to proclaim and credibly live the Gospel for the family; the second, the Ordinary General Assembly scheduled for 2015, which has the aim of finding working approaches for the pastoral of the human person and the family.

As you know, the process of preparation for each synodal Assembly begins with a consultation between the various Entities to be surveyed on the theme in question. In this case, however, this process is developed according to particular methods, both because the synodal methodology is undergoing general revision at present, and because it is an Extraordinary Assembly.

With regard to the methodological renewal, the idea is that of transforming the synodal Institution into a real and effective tool for communion, through which the collegiality hoped for by the Vatican Council II is expressed and achieved. Indeed, with this aim it is the Holy Father's wish to strengthen also the activity of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in order that it may adequately perform its mission of promoting episcopal collegiality, *cum Petro* and *sub Petro*, in the governance of the Universal Church. This leads not only to changes to the synodal process of both a structural and methodological nature, but also to the functional adaptation of the General Secretariat, including of course the physical reconstitution of the physical spaces of its seat.

With regard to the extraordinary character of the next synodal assembly, it should be clarified that according to the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum* (cf. Art. 4, § 2), this type of synod responds to the need to deal with a subject that, "while also regarding the good of the universal Church, **requires rapid definition.**" It is evident that the social and spiritual crisis of today's world has an impact on family life and creates a situation of genuine pastoral urgency, which justifies the convocation of an Extraordinary General Assembly, in which the following will participate *ex officio*, in accordance with the Synod Regulations: the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, the Heads of the Oriental Synods, the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and three members elected from the Union of General Superiors. As is publicly known, the convocation of this event by the Holy Father has taken place, by official indiction on 9 October 2013, and was made public in the *Osservatore Romano*.

On 7 and 8 October, the fifth Meeting of the Ordinary Synod Council took place, presided by Pope Francis. During this meeting, the Members of the Council prepared the *Preparatory Document*, which is now presented to you, and it has already been sent to the legal Entities, which are already at work. The document contains, as well as a general presentation on the matter, various essential Biblical and Magisterial quotations on the theme as well as a questionnaire on the main challenges regarding the family. In order to initiate the process of consultation, an invitation has been sent to the Dioceses to circulate the *Document* in a capillary fashion in the diaconates and parishes with the aim of obtaining concrete and real data on the synodal theme. A similar request has been made to other Entities participating in the Synod.

Given that the time available is limited, the Entities consulted have been required to send their answers to the General Secretariat by the end of January of next year. Furthermore, a meeting of the Council of the Secretariat is scheduled to take place during the month of February, in order to analyse the aforementioned responses, to allow the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris* and to enable it to be communicated to the Synod Fathers in good time prior to the celebration of the Synod.

I now offer the floor to the Relator General, His Eminence Cardinal Peter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, and to the Special Secretary, His Excellence Bruno Forte, Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, who will describe the content of the preparatory Document from a theological and a canonical point of view, respectively.

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**CARD. PÉTER ERDŐ**

1. The Preparatory Document for the next synod, as is well known, is entitled "Pastoral Challenges for the Family in the Context of Evangelization". Even at first glance, the subject shows that the next extraordinary synod will act as a bridge between the last general meeting dedicated to the New Evangelization and the next ordinary general meeting, which is scheduled for 2015 and which will treat the working guidelines for pastoral care of the human person and the family.

This current Document explicitly references canonical and pastoral aspects regarding the issue at large. Already in number II, entitled "The Church and the Gospel of the Family", biblical and theological viewpoints on the social and legal dimensions of the issue were touched upon. As well, in Point 3 of the Questionnaire, such aspects were explicitly organized together.

2. The family appears as a reality that springs from the will of the Creator and that constitutes a social reality. It is not, therefore, a mere invention of human society or, much less, of some purely human power, but rather a natural reality that has been elevated by Christ the Lord in the context of divine grace.

3. The Document, just as the Church herself, closely connects the issue of the family with that of marriage. Marriage is also affirmed as coming from the will of the Creator and, as Point 2 of the

Questionnaire states, marriage exists "according to natural law". The Document, therefore, assumes the existence of the created universe's call to personal freedom, assumes that the laws of nature represent the rules of how the universe functions, but that these are not without reference to and consequences for human persons' free acts. Looking to the universe or within the depth of our hearts then, we discover the Creator's face and listen to His voice that challenges us. "The natural character of marriage is better understood when it is not separated from the family. Marriage and the family are inseparable," as Blessed John Paul II said in his address to the Roman Rota in 2001 (no. 5), "because the masculinity and femininity of the married couple are constitutively open to the gift of children."

Certainly, in civil legal culture, this vision of the natural law is not the only one. Question 2a therefore inquires into civil culture's vision on the natural foundation of the family in different countries.

Question 2b seeks to clarify Christian opinion on natural law regarding the union between a man and a woman. Such questions certainly have a pastoral aspect and don't aim at seeking a mere comparative study on the solutions adopted by civil legislation.

Already, the theological part of the Document presenting the Church's teaching on the family, quotes n. 52 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which reaffirms that "the family ... is the foundation of society". Within the family, the generations meet and "help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life". In the context of individualism's great challenge to our age—which in many societies puts even the solidarity between generations into question—the family appears as the fundamental institution of human society, connected to the very order of creation.

The same theological chapter of the Document quotes Blessed John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (no. 11), where it is emphasized that "the institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love, which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator."

4. In regard to marriage, the Church teaches that it is "endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1660; GS 48 §1; cf. CIC, can. 1055 §1). The paragraphs of the Catechism of the Catholic Church quoted in the Document are textually connected both with Vatican Council II as well as with the Code of Canon Law. The Document states that sacramental dignity is proper to the marriage between Christians. With the proper dispensation, a marriage with disparity of cult—that is, one between a Catholic and a non-baptized person—is valid, legitimate, but not sacramental. Sacramentality does not depend on a special act of will by the contracted parties but comes from the fact that the two baptized partners sacramentally represent Christ and the Church. If a marriage between two Christians is valid, it is a sacrament, even if the parties do not know or do not have the particular desire to receive a sacrament. As can be read in the Code of Canon Law, "a valid matrimonial contract cannot exist between the baptized without it being by that fact a sacrament" (CIC, can. 1055 §2). It is impossible, therefore, to speak of a natural, non-sacramental marriage between two baptized persons.

"Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love" (*Catechism*, 1662; cf. CIC, can. 1057 §2).

5. All of this has a noteworthy pastoral consequence. Betrothed Catholics who want to celebrate their true marriage within the Church cannot be refused solely because of their infrequent religiosity or for the scarcity or lack of religious faith. As John Paul II teaches, seeking to establish further criteria of admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage concerning the level of faith of those to be married "would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; secondly, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, with grave harm to Christian communities, and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 68; EV 7).

"The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament" (CIC can 1056; cf. GS 48; Mt 19:6).

6. Point 3a of the Questionnaire inquires into the experience of preparation for marriage and the evangelization of spouses and families. It is a typical phenomenon, which can be seen in various countries, that communities composed of families or of married couples living their Christian lives are born within parishes and spirituality movements. This is also touched upon in Question 3d of the Questionnaire. These have an important role in evangelization, even beyond their families. In fact, there are whole families who are participating in the *mission ad gentes* in a very secularized environment. There are countries (Hungary, for example) where communities composed of families are working in the large majority of parishes, offering a great wealth of activities. The collaboration between dioceses and spirituality movements can assume legal dimensions when contracts regarding their mission and activity within the local church are established. A function well provided for under the law (for example, see CIC can. 1063, 4) is treated in the Questionnaire's Point 3f. It refers to "assistance to married persons" so that they, "faithfully observing and safeguarding the conjugal agreement, may come to lead a familial life that is more holy and more intense every day".

7. Questions 4a and 4b refer to common life unions that have not been recognized either by the Church or by the State. This problem is one of the most important in many countries. If *Familiaris Consortio* dedicated attention to the problem of divorced persons remarried in a civil service (n. 84), today the phenomenon of couples living together without a religious or civil marriage is even more widespread. In certain countries these represent the majority of couples living together and the overwhelming majority of young couples. Many of them attend catechetical groups or belong to spirituality movements. The phenomenon requires a deepened reflection.

The question of the pastoral care of divorced persons who have remarried (Question 4c-e) is treated as well as the problem of why some of them feel marginalized by the Church (4d). The issue does not seem to refer specifically to access to the sacraments of penance and communion—that theme is highlighted in Question 4e—but can point toward other areas of ecclesial life, such as work relationships in public service institutions run by the Church for example.

8. A properly legal question (4f) refers to the possibility of streamlining the procedure of declaring the nullity of a marriage. On 11 February of this year, Pope Benedict XVI, provided that "Rotal

sentences that first declare the nullity of marriage are executable without the need for a second decision in conformity" (*Rescriptum ex audientia*, Secretary of State, n. 208.966).

Faced with all these questions it might also be asked if there are pastoral initiatives regarding persons living in difficult matrimonial situations.

On same-sex unions, Question 5a-d tries to clarify the various civil regulations and the Church's pastoral attitude.

The question of the education of children whose parents have irregular marital situations also emerges. Question 6d clearly presupposes that the Church approach this problem with great openness, looking into the methods of preparation for the sacraments, their administration, and how to accompany the children and adolescents who have received these sacraments.

Regarding spouses' openness to life, the practice regarding the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* is examined. This also touches upon the aspect concerning the practice of the sacrament of Penance. By law, in fact, confessors, as ministers of the Church, must faithfully adhere to the Magisterium and to the norms of the competent authorities (CIC can. 978 §2). The final pastoral question on this issue (7f) calls attention back to the central value, that is, to life. In a positive way, it seeks how to promote a more open mentality to having children. The entire Questionnaire, therefore, is located within a higher context: beyond the problems that exist, it opens the horizon toward recognizing the fact that the family is a true gift from the Creator to humanity.

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**S.E. MONS. BRUNO FORTE**

Pope Francis has shown many times and in various forms his intention to make greater use of episcopal collegiality, sign and tool of the broadest synodality of the entire Church. He has given important confirmation of his wish by participating in person in the work of the last Ordinary Council of the Synod, which took place on 7 and 8 October. The Bishop of Rome has shared mutual reflection, listening to all and carrying out the discernment and decision-making that fall within the competence of his Petrine ministry. Living this experience as one of the members of the Council, it is natural to me to think that the Pope is guiding us in a concrete exercise of the collegiality around Peter and below Him, which renders the Church as "communion" both alive and visible, a path that the Holy Father wishes to take for the next Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod. It is a broad and deep process of listening to the life of the Church and of the most pressing challenges posed to her, shared in a progressive path with two fundamental stages, which may lead the representatives of the entire Episcopal college to develop reliable proposals to offer for the discernment of the Bishop of the Church, who presides in love. This subtracts nothing from the role of Peter's Successor; on the contrary, it exalts his role of discernment and of final decision-making for the good of the Church and the human family, whom she serves. With Pope

Francis we are called to walk the paths laid out by the Council and its teachings with regard to the Church as communion, the image of the divine Trinity, united in love and in the variety of gifts and services that enrich her.

The theme entrusted by the Holy Father to the next Extraordinary General Assembly is: *the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelisation*. In this regard I am bound to underline two aspects. The first regards the *priority attention given to evangelisation*; all of the existence and action of the people of God must tend towards this latter end. The Church does not exist for herself, but for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity, to whom she is called to bring the joy of the Gospel. This joy is to be proclaimed to all, beginning with the family, the decisive cell of society and of the Church herself. The second aspect I would like to emphasise is the *pastoral slant* accentuated by the formulation of the theme, a perspective through which the Holy Father invites us to look upon the value of the family and the challenges it faces today. This 'slant' may be defined by the words that Blessed John XXIII noted in his *Diary* on 19 January 1962, in the climate of preparation for the upcoming Council: "All is to be seen in the light of pastoral ministry; that is, in terms of souls to save and to edify". It is not, therefore, a matter of debating doctrinal questions, which have in any case been clarified by the Magisterium recently (from the Vatican Council II in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 47-52, to the John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* of 1981), but rather how to understand how to effectively proclaim the Gospel of the family in the times we are living, characterised by a clear social and spiritual crisis.

The invitation deriving from this for all the Church is to *listen to the problems and expectations of many families today*, manifesting her closeness and credibly proposing God's mercy and the beauty of responding to His call. In particular, in a context such as that of the so-called "liquid modernity" (Zygmunt Bauman), in which no value seems to be proven and the institution of the family is often contested, if not entirely negated, it becomes particularly significant to demonstrate the profoundly humanising characteristics of the Christian proposal of the family, which is never against anyone, but always and exclusively in favour of the dignity and the beauty of life of the full person, for every person, for the good of society as a whole. As the Fathers of Vatican II confirmed, the family is the "is a kind of school of deeper humanity", in which "the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52). In this respect the preparatory Document of the next Synodal Assembly affirms: "The doctrine of the faith on marriage is to be presented in a communicative and effective way, so that it is able to reach hearts and transform them according to God's will as manifested in Jesus Christ" (*DP II*).

Attention, welcome and mercy constitute the style to which Pope Francis bears witness and requests us to have towards all, including broken families and those who live in irregular situations from a moral and canonical point of view. He insists on "divine mercy and tenderness towards injured persons, in the geographical and existential peripheries". Certainly, living fully the Gospel of the family is not easy, nor is it to be taken for granted: if we think of the psychological and sentimental frailty that may be present in family relations; the impoverishment of the quality of relationships that may exist with apparently stable and normal "ménages"; stress originating from the habits and rhythms imposed by social organisation, working times, and the requirements of mobility. Furthermore, the mass culture perpetrated by the media influences and at times corrodes family relations, invading the family with messages that render banal the conjugal bond. It therefore becomes more vital than ever to link the daily efforts within the family to conditions

that help sustain it in the fields of both civil society and the ecclesial community, giving concrete motivation to the beauty and the fruitfulness "of the faith in the sacramental nature of marriage and in the therapeutic power of sacramental penance".

The *specific and contextual challenges* are not few in number: "Today we encounter problems unheard of a few years ago, from the spread of *de facto* couples who does not choose to marry and at times exclude the idea, to same sex unions, to whom the adoption of children is not infrequently permitted" (DP I). There are numerous new contextual situations, which require particular attention from the Church: from the non-committal culture and the presumed instability of the bond to the reformulation of the very idea of family, to a widespread relativist pluralism regarding the concept of marriage, to legislative proposals which devalue the permanence and fidelity of the marriage pact. These challenges bring about significant pastoral consequences: "If, for example, we think of the simple fact that in the current context many young people, born of irregular marriages, perhaps never see their parents receive the sacraments, one may perceive the urgency of the challenges posed to evangelisation in our current situation, now diffused throughout the whole of the "global village". All the above considerations indicate how the attention paid to these situations is "both necessary and urgent, and also a matter of duty as an expression of the charity of the Pastors towards those entrusted to them and to the entire human family" (DP II). The enormity of the commitment, the urgency of the themes and the expectations, which indeed risk being too great, induce us to ask with conviction for the prayers of all for the path that we have taken together, and for the humility, generous commitment and trust in God especially of those who will contribute to the Synod, so that the Spirit may illuminate the collegial task and the final and decisive discernment of Peter's Successor.