

BOOK REVIEWS

***Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Amoris Laetitia – The Joy of love* by Pope Francis, Trivandum, Carmel International Publishing House, 2016, 288 pages, Rs 90.00.**

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The result of the two Synods on family convened by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015 brought into existence *Amoris Laetitia* or *The Joy of Love*. It is considered a 'multifaceted gem'; a precious polyhedron, that requires utmost preservation. The Holy Father emphasises that the document addresses issues in many different ways and says: "I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text." The reader must read it "patiently and carefully."

The first chapter, *In the Light of the Word*, is contemplation on Psalm 128, which is a part of both Jewish and Christian marriages liturgy. This introductory chapter sheds light on the journey of family life through quotations, and stories from the Bible which itself is also full of family crises, love, birth and forgiveness. The chapter introduces us to the practicality of family life.

The Experiences and Challenges of Families, is the second chapter that deals with the present realities of family life in a complex environment, disrespect towards the elders, migration, anti-birth mentality, impact of biotechnology on procreation, pornography, abuse of minors, violence against women, lack of housing and work, and the dismantling of family. He asks us to adopt a point of view of realism in order to avoid an abstract and artificial notion of marriage. Citing *Familiaris Consortio* he states that through divine intervention the Church can be guided to a more profound understanding of the mystery of marriage and the family.

Chapter three, *Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family*, talks about the different ideals of the church on marriage and family. The chapter discusses the Sacramental nature of marriage; its indissolubility, its role in the transmission of life, and in the education of children. The Pope speaks of sympathetic evaluation of imperfect situations and the positive elements found in values of marriage in other religious traditions. He asks Pastors to exercise careful discernment of situations and avoid judgement, while stating the church's teachings that do not take into account the complexity of various situations.

We come to the next chapter, *Love in Marriage*, which is a collection of passages, tenderly describing human love in concrete terms, from the Pauline texts. Here the critical explanation enters the emotional world of the spouses, including the erotic dimension of love. The Holy Father does not want to judge the day to day experience of married love against ideal standards. He emphasises on not burdening two limited individuals to reproduce the union between Christ and his Church, as marriage follows a dynamic process that evolves with the blessings of the Lord. The Pope stresses on the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union within the periphery of enjoyment and struggle,

tension and repose, pain and relief, satisfaction and longing, and annoyance and pleasure. The chapter ends by speaking on long years of married life wherein there is a need for renewal of the decision taken long ago because of changes in the physical appearance, sexual desire and maturity.

Love Made Fruitful, the next chapter deals with bringing new life in to the world. The chapter has both spiritual and psychological tone about pregnancy and the love between a mother and a father. The writing draws our attention to the fruitfulness of adoption and of family life in a broad sense which would include aunts and uncles, relatives of relatives, cousins, and friends beyond the so called nuclear family. He points out the social character of family with network of relationships. The Holy Father ends the chapter by speaking about the relationship between siblings and the relationship between the young and the old that should form the training ground for relations with others.

The sixth chapter, *Some Pastoral Perspectives* tells us about family life as per God's plan. The Pope regrets the lack of training amongst ministers that is needed to deal with complex problems of contemporary family life. He also hints at the oriental tradition of a married clergy with families playing an active role in the formation of ministry. The chapter delves into the pastoral accompanying the abandoned, separated or divorced persons; stressing the importance of the recent reforms of annulment processes. He, further, touches on the topic of interdenominational marriage and interreligious marriage, and touches justly on families with members who have homosexual inclinations. The end of the chapter brings to us a reflection on the theme of death and widowhood.

Towards a Better Education of Children, as the title suggests this chapter is dedicated to the education of children covering areas like discipline, patience, sex education and faith, all of which should be gradually inducted through small steps. He warns us about the obsession of parents' to control of their children that ultimately leads to domination of space, which is not desirable. He asks parents to lovingly help children grow in freedom and to achieve autonomy through discipline and maturity. He emphasises on the need for sex education in schools within the framework of love and mutual self-giving with a positive outlook towards natural procreation.

Chapter eight titled *Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness*, proposes mercy and pastoral discernment in situations that are not aligned to the Church's teachings. He draws a comparison between the Church's task and a field hospital; both where the wounded come to seek relief and direction. Understanding the present day society that we live in, he agrees to the existence of radically contradictory forms of union saying that such situations exist under various complexities. This chapter, thus, seems to be of a controversial nature. The Holy Father's views express the need to bring into the Church's fold those who are divorced and those who are remarried. Thus, he ends the chapter with the concept of pastoral mercy and constant communication with those who have committed their lives to the Lord.

The Spirituality of Marriage and the Family, is the last chapter of this book on the joy of love. The last chapter is dedicated to marital and family spirituality. The Holy Father assures that family is not a hindrance towards spiritual growth, but rather a way for mystical union. He speaks of God's fidelity through love, for us to understand the challenge and yearning to grow

old together. He acknowledges the imperfection of family life but urges us to grow and mature in love and strive towards something greater than ourselves and our families. This journey he asks us to make together, with love and mercy as the guiding stars.

Amoris Laetitia is a beautiful and practical book on the present day family life; thriving in a very complex environment. It encompasses all the aspects of the complex reality of family life in a very positive and open-hearted way. It shows us how nourishment could be received by family through pastoral attention to reality and communion with the Lord.

