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SYMPOSIO DE CONFERENCIAS EPISCOPAIS DE AFRICA E MADAGASCAR
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The Future of the Family, our Mission

**Contribution to the 14th General Ordinary
Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Family**

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The Future of the Family, our Mission

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FOREWORD

The Church in Africa and Madagascar gives thanks to the Lord for all that she has been able to accomplish through God's grace in her spiritual journey and reflection as God's family since the Thirteenth Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2014). Following the recommendations of this synod, several meetings, colloquia and sessions, workshops, pastoral and theological conferences, retreats and recollections, organized in different regions of Africa and Madagascar have helped to reaffirm the place and the indispensable role of the family both in the Church and society.

In May 2015, in Maputo (Mozambique), the Bishops of Africa, Madagascar and Europe met and shared their vision, experiences and expectations on the Evangelization of the family in the contemporary world. As a follow up of this meeting, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) organized a workshop in Accra (Ghana), from 7 to 11 June 2015, which was attended by delegates from each Episcopal conference, married couples, and people in difficult marital situations, theologians, consecrated people and lay faithful. This workshop studied the challenges facing contemporary families and the evangelization of family, in view of the XIVth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: «The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world».

The present document is a synthesis of the reflection of SECAM Bishops on the proclamation of the Gospel of the family today. It addresses the various themes of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

PRESENTATION

This SECAM document on *The future of the family, our mission* consists of three parts corresponding to the three sections and themes of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. According to the methodology of the Synod as explicated by Cardinal Baldisseri, supported by Cardinal Peter Erdo and Archbishop Bruno Forte, during the presentation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, June 23, 2015, at the Vatican, the interventions of the Synod Fathers will be made thematically.

African Synod Fathers are, therefore, to choose for their interventions one of the three parts, limited to specific numbers/ paragraphs in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. It is to this end that this document of SECAM addresses all the key questions and issues raised in the three parts of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, addressing specific paragraph and titles in this important document. This is to enable our intervention as a Church to be precise, concise and clear.

In this perspective, the present document of SECAM follows the numbering, the titles and the subtitles for each of the three sections of the *Instrumentum Laboris* and outlines the reflections which express the major ideas of the Church in Africa and Madagascar in contribution to the Synod.

The SECAM is conscious that its Church, which has chosen the model of the “Church-Family of God” and has made it a pastoral priority, is called to contribute a lot during the Synod on vocation and the mission of the family in our world today and always.

The Church in Africa and Madagascar pray for their African Synod Fathers in their mission as messengers of its hopes and expectations.

ACRONYMS

AG : *Ad Gentes*

AM : *Africae munus*

CIV: *Caritas in Veritate*

EG : *Evangelii Gaudium*

FC : *Familiaris Consortio*

FOF: *The Family, our Future* (SECAM Contribution to the 3rd Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, October 2014)

IL : *Instrumentum laboris*

LS : *Laudato si*

SCC: Small Christian Community

SECAM: Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar

FIRST PART

THE CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY

CHAPTER I: THE FAMILY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL-CULTURAL CONTEXT

IL 6. (5): The Socio-cultural Context

1. One cannot but give thanks to God for the reality of family in today's Africa and in the world. Indeed, the family remains, and is, the basic cell of the society and the Church. Notwithstanding the difficult situations in which she finds herself, it is within the Church that the family, couples, men, women, and children, deeply experience and faithfully live their faith and all the values emanating from it. Their testimony is a fruit of divine grace and also a light in the darkness which needs to be rekindled for the future of humanity.
2. In this context, we affirm with Pope Francis that, "the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope" (IL, 35). Also, the great challenges of marriage invite us to decipher the advent of a *Kairos*, which is to invest in this time of blessing and trial, in the light of the gospel of the "Word made flesh"; to rethink and rebuild the family,

while listening to its sufferings and its real expectations (FOF, 44). We are all called upon as Bishops, priests, pastors, consecrated people and all other messengers of the Gospel, to promote an organic pastoral solidarity. Our mission is to become the salt of the earth, and light of the world (Mt 5:13-16), in the face of socio-cultural changes facing us, so that we can be a sign of hope for the family in the contemporary world.

Within such a complex reality facing the family today, how do we as agents of evangelization respond to our mission to serve the pastoral needs of families according to the mind of God who has sent us on mission?

IL 7: Anthropological Changes

3. Studies of cultural anthropology from several African nations have proved that Africans attach great importance to the family. They reaffirm what many Africans today already embrace, that the family is a social and divine institution which expresses deep human relationship and intimate encounters, constitutive of both the identity of the individual and the community. The awareness of the significant value of community and its intrinsic relation to the identity and the fulfillment of the individual, is particularly of capital importance to a given group or family. Thus, crises within the family have adverse effects on the Church and society in Africa, as well as on individual identity and commitment to achieving one's vocation and mission in life.

4. The family which, as usual, cannot be reduced to the father, mother and children (nuclear family) in Africa and Madagascar, is increasingly marked by new forms of individualism and indifferentism, and the impacts of a “culture centered on amassing possessions and enjoyment” (IL, 8). As a result, we are witnessing in the continent several cases of broken relationships among couples, spouses, and children, even among families united together by historical bonds of solidarity.
5. Nuclear families that no longer have the support of the large family often break up their marital bond due to isolation. In the same way, young people who do not truly nourish their lives at the sources of the great African family values, have difficulty engaging in lifelong commitment, either in marriage or in themselves to the service of the Church and the society. There is an increasing challenge facing young people, who once married, will find it difficult to maintain a stable family life. This consequently, can predispose them to divorce.
6. We witness many cases of injured, separated, divorced and broken families. This situation is made worse by the economic and political problems, some of which are due to failures in assuming our pastoral responsibilities and others caused by the adverse effects of a global economic disparity between the rich and the poor.
7. Consequently, we find ourselves within the context of “social contradictions and family’s weakening” (IL, 9 and 10). There is also within the family situations of poverty

due to unemployment, lack of decent housing, quality education and health services, as well as low level of incomes of parents. To these, one could add the cases of families who are victims of violence and dislocation perpetrated by armed groups or from political instability and failure to respect the constitutional order of our nations or States, and the sad resurgence of terrorism by extremist religious movements (Jihadists, Boko Haram, LRA).

8. The respect for the sick and the elderly is gradually eroding away due to adverse effects of the current social changes. What is happening is that, some of our old men and women are no longer given the due attention necessary for their welfare and integration within the family (IL, 9).
9. These social changes often render Africa fragile in standing up against current thought and social experimentation contrary to her multi-millennial traditions, and to the teaching of the Word of God on marriage and family. Some kind of feminism or expressions of individual freedom consider “motherhood a pretext to exploit women and hinder her full realization” (IL, 8). In some instances, the importance attached to having children creates an unbearable and embarrassing situation to couples who are incapable of having their own biological offspring. Therefore the desire to have children at all costs sometimes incites individuals to seek medically assisted reproduction practices and other interventions which may pose a threat to the life of women.
10. Sometimes, the Church is also the scene of contradictions and of internal weaknesses. This sometimes hampers her

ability to be an authentic witness of the Gospel on the values of the family. This often deprives families of the guidance, models of unity, social cohesion and well-being which they need in our changing times. The Christian communities in Africa, though vibrant, equally face some internal divisions and misunderstandings which do not always favor a life of fraternity, community and witness to the Gospel of family.

11. We also note that our presbyterate is not always a reflection of the true light of love and communion for these believing communities.
12. Despite the current great turmoil and impoverishing situations that she is undergoing, the family still remains for the Church, an indispensable resource of vitality and renewal. Therefore, the family should be the center of the Church's pastoral life. Among the many challenges facing the family in the world today, we would like to highlight the following:
 - a. The promotion of human solidarity and organic pastoral care at all levels of the Church and society, so as to guard the family from losing its identity, strength, and vocation. For, the family is the present and the future of humanity and of the Church.
 - b. The effectiveness of new family policies (see IL, 12), depending on the responsibility of the people, should recognize the value of the family and take concrete initiatives for strengthening and defending the nature of family.

- c. The divine and inalienable character of the person created in the image of God, individual and community, and called by God to a life of abundance (Jn 10:10), irrespective of gender, race and social class. This will lead to the realization of the person and his vocation, excluding exploitative practices and human trafficking, reduction of women, children, and youth to modern slavery.
- d. The sad phenomenon of migration and dislocation of whole families and communities which forces people to leave their country for reasons of political instability, war, the stranglehold of multinationals on the wealth of the continent, and which result in the dislocation of the family fabric, insecurity, despair, etc.

CHAPTER II: THE FAMILY AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

IL 12. Public Policies on Behalf of the Family

IL 13. (6): *Ibid.*

13. In Africa, “loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person’s life and the fragility of relationships” (IL, 13. (6)) is not counted among the greatest poverty of today’s culture. The feeling of «powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end in crushing families» (IL, 13. (6)) represents one of the greatest poverty of our time. These difficulties challenge both the individual and the community. There is the need then for the church and the state to promote and preserve conditions conducive for integral human and ecological well-being which at the same time would promote a culture of development based on strong Gospel values as well as spiritual support and solidarity with the poor.
14. Evangelization should, in this case, consist of encouraging Christians and people of goodwill to produce the fruits of God’s Kingdom in the different contexts of poverty, precarious situations that destroy families and often make it impossible for them to fully assume their spiritual,

moral and social responsibilities. Evangelization should not only encourage the rulers of the State who “have the responsibility to pass laws and create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family” (IL, 13. (6)), but also and above all, to educate them to become actors in advancing for an economic and legislative order for integral human development, welcoming nascent life and assisting the elderly.

IL 14: The Economic Challenge

15. When one looks at the social conditions of families in Africa today, it is true that they experience the kind of “economic inequity” which *Instrumentum laboris* No. 14 so clearly pointed out. Indeed, a significant number of families live in a widespread and subhuman economic insecurity. Furthermore, in Africa, there exists economic inequity: that is, a majority of individuals and families are living in extreme poverty, whilst minority of them enjoy enormous wealth and possess more than enough for themselves to the detriment of the common good and welfare of all. This inequality is also a reflection of the gap between rich and poor countries.
16. The growth in equity, as the Pope recommends, demands that the Church should reinforce the formation of social consciences. This should start from the basic education in families, on their rights to healthy life and their primary duty to create better living conditions through hard work, fraternal solidarity and commitment. In this way, families

can become agents of transformation of social structures and proponents of decisions, programs and all that promotes employment and a better distribution of income, creating opportunities and jobs. (IL, 14 and EG, 204).

17. The family is called upon to discern the voice of God in the heart of this challenging social environment; a situation of hopelessness economically, socially, politically and health wise which disrupts the vocation of the family in the Church and in the world.
18. Unfortunately in the midst of all these social challenges, what predominate are egoism, utilitarianism and hedonism, which often take precedence over the agape or selfless love that is nourished with forgiveness, self-abandonment, proximity and solidarity.

IL 15: The Challenge of Poverty and Social exclusion

19. The family is subjected more and more to an economy that generates a culture of pauperization from anthropological, political, spiritual and financial perspectives. The impoverishment of many people today leads to the enrichment of a few and the exclusion of many. It also leads to the denial of God and to a culture of relativism and unbridled liberalism and individualism.
20. Such kind of poverty in Africa and elsewhere in the world is often difficult and challenging due to global economic forces, consequences of globalization and the presence of dominant cultural forces often characterized by indifference. These dominant cultures are also strong

and subtly introducing theories and practices contrary to the fundamental values of marriage and family and the idolatry of money.

21. The Church in Africa calls on the universal Church and the global community, to be open to welcoming those values from the peoples of the Global South, on the importance of the family. Such values could help reestablish some anthropological, philosophical and theological foundations on human life and family; on the economy and the relationship to others, the world and God. These challenges, therefore, demand cultural alternatives whose values can have positive impacts on certain theories and alienating practices of contemporary cultures. In addition, it will also offer alternative pathways to the contrary values which the media strongly imposes on the consciousness of a new generation of faithful and people of good will. These negative impacts challenge us to address the needs of many young people today and of modern families who are facing the moral complexities brought about by this culture of the primacy of money on human and spiritual values and the marginalization of the less fortunate.

IL 16: The Ecological Challenge

22. «The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it» (Ps. 24:1). Such is the assertion of faith found throughout the Bible and which confirms the belief of our people that, the earth is the first sign of God's covenant with the human person. There is a link between the health of the earth and the life of the family. As

emphasized by Pope Francis, “These settings influence the way we think, feel and act. In our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and neighborhoods, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity” (*Laudato si*, 147). The future of the family is linked to that of the earth (creation).

23. Unfortunately, land is assaulted daily by a severe lack of maintenance, including the promiscuity of people living without respect for urban hygiene, as well as the existence of villages and towns where families languish in unsanitary private neighborhoods, deprived of drinking water and electricity. According to the teaching of Pope Francis in the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, our churches are to be witnesses to the promotion of an integral ecology. The Church must train families and encourage governments to create a new ecological awareness which is expressed in concrete actions.
24. The ecological challenge also relates to greedy exploitation of the earth that eventually destroys it. We meet men and women in business, government and economic groups, who under the pretext of reducing poverty and working for the development of poor people, engage in exploitative programs, robbing farmers of their land, destroying forests, polluting the environment and causing unprecedented desertification. There are serious violations noticed in nature and forests, flora and fauna, and countless species may disappear forever (AM, 80).
25. The endemic instability of the continent also destabilizes the environment. Thus, wars do not only lead to massacre,

but also to ecological disaster. Africa is really threatened at the ecological level.

26. For the life and survival of families, communities and the whole of humanity, it is necessary that the Church be at the forefront of programs that give primacy to the ethical order. The challenge is to promote an environmental ethic that involves the abandonment of a utilitarian and individualistic morality, and the aims, as taught in the encyclical *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis, at protecting basic properties such as land and water for the life of present and future generations, and for peace between peoples.

CHAPTER III: THE FAMILY AND INCLUSION

IL 17-18: The Elderly

27. The attention of the *Instrumentum Laboris* to the Elderly and its deep relation to the African soul, invites the Church in Africa to increasingly accord to the elderly the respect and importance which we find in traditional African society and which was also underlined in *Africae Munus*:

28. «In Africa, the elderly are surrounded by a special reverence. They are not banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. Rather, they are considered and perfectly integrated into their families whose summit they are. This beautiful African reality should inspire Western societies so that they welcome old age with more dignity.

Scripture speaks of the elderly with frequency. «Much experience is the crown of old men, and the fear of God is their glory» (*Eccl.* 25, 6). Old age, despite the fragility that seems to characterize it, is a gift to live every day in a serene availability to God and one's neighbor. This is also the time of wisdom, since the time one has lived taught the greatness and the precariousness of life. And, as a man of faith, the aged Simeon proclaims with enthusiasm and wisdom, not an anguished farewell to life, but a

thanksgiving to the Savior of the world (cf. Lk 2: 25-32).
(AM, 47).

29. As in Western societies, the number of older people tends to increase while the birth rate decreases; in African societies, there is an increasing population with a large majority, being children and young people. This increase should not in any way hinder the integral development of children and youth. The latter, in traditional society, show great respect and great care to older people. With social transformations in Africa raised by new lifestyles, we are unfortunately starting to notice cases of abandonment of elderly people. In basic ecclesial communities, associations and religious congregations, faithful and consecrated persons, we are happy to observe that greater care is given in Africa to those who are advanced in age. However, in some parts of the continent, where conflicts provoke massive displacement of the population, the situation of the elderly becomes more critical. Note that where traditional values are still maintained, grandparents are of great help in the education of grandchildren, who bring them a lot of attention and care.
30. However, with the social changes arising with new life styles, we are unfortunately noticing some cases of abandonment of elderly people. They are even at some areas victims of exclusion and violence, accused of practising witchcraft. The migratory movements engendered by many conflicts worsen the situation of the elderly in some regions of the continent. As such, a pastoral for the promotion of the dignity of the elderly, valuing their experiences and

contributions to the society and the Church is to be initiated in order to favor intergenerational dialogue.

IL 19: The Challenge of Widowhood

31. Since the marriage covenant in Africa concerns at least two family lines, widowhood which intervenes in the life of one of the spouses also concerns all. This communal dimension, undoubtedly offers a strong cultural foundation for managing the issue of loneliness experienced by those who find themselves in this painful separation. But because of the limitations of African traditions, widowhood often becomes a burden for women, in many cases they are forced to ritual prescriptions that violate their faith and even their human dignity. But men have less stringent treatment.
32. The Church, which commits herself to safeguarding the dignity of the human person, regardless of sex or social status, must firmly combat such practices that do not honor neither African cultural traditions nor the Gospel. The Church in Africa must invite authorities and the custodians of traditions to fight against practices and rituals aiming at ill-treating widows and orphans and depriving them of all their properties to the benefit of the family of the late husband. We recommend that our pastoral practices develops spiritual, psychological, legal and moral structures for the promotion of the rights of widows, orphans and also the family of the departed.

IL 21-23: The Challenge of Disability

33. The issue of disability arises in Africa in several respects. Culturally, some forms of malformation are seen as a curse, generating exclusionary practices. It may even happen in some regions where the laws do not adequately protect human persons to the extent that their lives are in danger. Bringing the light of the Gospel in these areas, the Church must protect all human life, especially the most vulnerable, announcing tirelessly that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and, as such, has an inalienable dignity.
34. For other forms of disabilities that are not stigmatized by cultural traditions, family solidarity network mitigates the risk of loneliness. But the challenge here is mainly that of the material assistance: expensive care, materials for mobility, etc. When families are in themselves living in precarious situations, as it is often the case in African slums, the disabled are left to themselves and spend their time begging at junctions in the city. The Church, through its Caritas network, is trying as much as she can to give assistance to these people and especially to work for their social reintegration. The involvement of Christian Communities is of great importance here.

IL 24: The Challenge of Migration

35. The story of humanity is built, from the beginning, in the flow of migratory movements. Migrations contribute to the development of peoples and populations on the move,

when they result in solidarity, respect for the rights and duties of each other, in mutual acceptance and cooperation to create societies of well-being and complementarity for all. Unfortunately, isolationism, individualism, indifference, and the economic and political order that prevails in contemporary societies, are making humanity lose this wealth.

36. Due to difficult situations many families are forced to several forms of migration. Migratory flows that mark the history of Africa today unfortunately generate humiliation, inhuman treatment (humiliating housework, prostitution, organs trafficking) and many other forms of contempt for the dignity of its children.
37. We congratulate and encourage people and organizations that work in taking care and welcoming migrants. Whatever the interests to be protected and the reasons that underlie migrations may be, nobody has the right to treat migrants like subhuman and maintain them in inhuman life conditions. No one should remain indifferent and insensitive to the plight of people who decide to leave their country, and the duty to find in these men and women resources for the construction of new societies.
38. African societies must work to create, in their respective countries the conditions for a decent and stable life, able to generate integral development in order to stem these perilous migrations. The Church is called to continue her pastoral care of migrants in supporting them and awakening the consciences of political leaders and citizens, to create

conditions for a flourishing human life which welcomes people and migrant families.

IL 28. (7): Other Special Challenges

39. The family in Africa is facing specific challenges amid which we will highlight the following:

a. Polygamy

40. In African traditions, polygamy is tolerated and often widespread in many societies. But monogamy is still the norm in many African regions. The Sixth Plenary Assembly of SECAM invites African Christians and people to promote the monogamous dimension of marriage in Africa, which is open to the teaching of the Scripture on the uniqueness and the indissolubility of marriage: “The pastoral attitude towards polygamist [...] must avoid anything that could appear as a recognition of polygamy [...] by the Church.”¹

41. Polygamists involved in church life do not usually expect that the Church will offer them the sacraments in their present marital status. They seek in the Church the spiritual force or divine grace, teaching and support necessary to a full and prosperous life. They hope, at the end of their lives to be reconciled with God and the Church. The case that often challenges the pastoral action of the Church, is that of polygamous converts, who desire to receive the sacraments of Christian initiation. The document, *Family*

¹ SECAM, “ Recommendations and resolutions on Christian Family Life and Marriage in Africa Today”, 1981, §3.2.2.

our future, recalls that, “the practice currently suggested by the Church is to choose one of the women”. He noted that “some cases require special attention and courage from pastors who are called, after the apostle Paul, to exercise the power that Christ has entrusted them to discern and find more appropriate responses to these situations” (No. 24).

42. This challenge is to develop pastoral guidance towards the polygamists, which makes the Church a witness of divine mercy, when it invites them to conversion.

b. Marriage in Stages

43. The Marriage in stages designates a practice whereby couples embrace certain conjugal properties even before effective and valid celebration of marriage. It is not synonymous with concubinage or cohabitation before marriage. This is a practice according to which the marriage covenant, like everything about human existence, cannot be achieved, constructively and genuinely, without prior initiation. It does not permit the future couples to live as if they are married, but it prepares them in the eyes of their families and society. Its advantage is to provide them a marriage preparation platform, that takes into account its human, social, economic, spiritual and community dimensions. The challenge is to evangelize such a culture by both the domestic church and the other pastoral agents on their preparation towards married life.
44. “The different customary stages highlight and protect the seriousness of marriage”². Such a preparation invites

²SECAM, art. quoted, § 2.2.3.

us to consider, in the celebration of the sacrament, the dynamic, human and communal dimensions of marriage. It is necessary to involve families in the preparation and celebration of marriage, so that they participate in the selection and consent of the spouses without impeding the exercise of freedom of choice when all the conditions of its authentic expression are met.

45. SECAM invites all Africans and people of goodwill to “see how a Christian celebrates this marriage in stages and find the decisive moment when the canonical form can intervene in order to eliminate the current dichotomy between the canonical form and the customary form.” The dynamic character, values and expectations of the African culture of marriage, should be taken into account for the canonical recognition and validity of the marriage in Africa, as it was the case in the West when Pope Alexander III took over the position of the Latin and the German to link the validity and indissolubility of Christian marriage to the exchange of consent and consumption (FOF, 27).

IL 29. (8): The Family and Children

46. Children are victims of situations of divorce of their parents and especially when decisions are taken to break marital bonds. This phenomenon worsens when children live in single parent families or divorced and remarried, without the support and assistance of the other members of their paternal or maternal families. The case of “children who were born out of wedlock” (IL, 29. (8)) is also worrying.

47. The solution to this problem depends on the training of men and especially women, from childhood to affective maturity and ethical responsibility at different stages of their growth, and when facing sensual appetites of a human environment strongly influenced by a society tempted by the lure of pleasure and unrestrained consumption. It is especially important to help young people to learn the importance of a harmonious family for their well-being and create at the same time, for them, a self-reconstruction framework and constructive family integration. Television programs, different means to struggle against loneliness and the social integration of games should be leveraged to give children those goods. The Church at the same time should help married people to discover that separations, divorces between spouses, single-parent “families” and entering into same sex ‘unions’ are far from the ideal of the sacrament of matrimony given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. They are challenges which we must address with pastoral charity and deep Gospel based conviction.
48. This challenge invites the Church to be close to spouses and relatives, to bear to the truth that is combined with mercy, so that they feel welcome and be able to transcend any situation, and avoid destabilizing their Children with sufferings and injuries that expose many more to the street and to sexual exploitation.
49. Unfortunately Africa is often the scene of situations of war and terrorism which lead to social dramas. Their internal and external causes which block the exercise of the role of

women within the family, the society and the Church must be fought.

IL 30: The Role of Women

50. Women represent the principal human resource of cultures to be promoted in order to meet all the challenges of her own liberation and of the good of the family. The proclamation of the Gospel of the family will help to put an end, from within it and around the world, to practices which do not respect the dignity of women and the exercise of their role in society (example marginalization, inferiority, submission to alienating traditions, genital mutilation, etc.).
51. Cultural factors of oppression of women in the distribution of tasks and practices that limit their contribution to procreation, and to the moral and spiritual fruitfulness of humanity, are detrimental to their authentic emancipation. In Africa, the Church must be vigilant so that female education and action for the welfare of women do not sacrifice any of the dimensions of her dignity, of her role in society and in the Church to become new forms of oppression in today's culture. In our continent, the right asserted by women in some settings with regard to procreation and the desire to have children "at all costs", present two challenging consequences. The first is a growing contraceptive and abortive mentality. The second is the propensity for others to have recourse to medically assisted procreation and the hopeless traditional therapists' remedies.

52. We recommend that the Church train and help women in emancipation and develop a conception of motherhood that does not make the right and desire for children, an absolute property that is sought by all means. Thus, “the determining role of women in the decision-making process, their participation — not simply in a formal way — in the governing of some institutions; and their involvement in the formation of ordained ministers” (No. 30), will be to the benefit of the survival of humanity and the growth of a society of fair relationship, fraternity and complementarity between man and woman.

CHAPTER IV: THE FAMILY, AFFECTIVITY AND LIFE

IL 31. (9): The Importance of Affectivity in Life

53. The contributions of the human sciences, in particular psychology, inform us about the fundamental role of affectivity in the development (of the human person), mental well-being and the self-fulfillment of the human being. It is amazing to observe in Africa, the joy of living together as a household, in spite of situations of dire poverty they face sometimes. The joy expressed by these people is often based on quality affective relationships, within the family structures, based on gratuitousness, self-giving and reciprocity. The African defines himself or herself, among other things, in relation with others at the heart of dynamic affective reciprocities. The African families are privileged spaces for these humanizing affective relationships.

IL 32-33. (10): The Formation of Affectivity

54. The formation of Affectivity must not only be in the frame of a social or an observational learning. It is necessary to provide a systemized guidance particularly to people who may prematurely enter into the marital bonds, as well as to teenagers who are discovering the transformations in their bodies and experiencing attraction to the opposite sex for

the first time. In other words, the formation of affectivity implies a sexual education which takes into account a better knowledge of the body and also to the learning of values of conviviality and sincerity of the feelings towards one another.

55. It is necessary to sensitize the youth to (the fact that if we don't) pay attention to some moral and spiritual principles, for affectivity can be a place of profound wounds which could affect their entire life. Many young people use the internet to get sexual methods or techniques and put aside all the love dimension and communion that has to surround sexuality. The Church must be present in the Media, particularly on the internet, to create and suggest to the youth, sites that will build their personality, their Christian identity, in brief their "Manhood", according to God's eternal project.
56. It is urgent that the pastoral for the family deals with affectivity and sexuality in the life of couples, by reminding them of the purpose of sexuality. The spouse is not an object of pleasure but a human being. This implies a genuine human empowerment, a better knowledge of the teachings of the Church, an effective human maturity, and a spiritual training open to hope.
57. The pastoral care for the family must also be more attentive to the affective and sexual education of the youth. This will help to avoid early sexual relations or uncontrolled procreation due to ignorance. While respecting the gift of life, it is also advisable to reflect on a responsible paternity and maternity in the optic of *Humanae Vitae* (cf. FOF, 31-

34; Recommendations on Marriage and Family Life, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3).

58. To be more relevant, the formation of affectivity requires pedagogical tools in the scriptural, psychological, educational, medical fields, etc. (IL, 32). A formation of quality which takes into account these tools is an antidote to a pathological affectivity that expresses itself in various ways such as the marketing of body, prostitution, and narcissistic, unstable and changeable affectivity, and sexual practices that do not respect human dignity.

IL 35. (11)-36: The Pastoral Challenge

59. In order to address the complexity of numerous forms of suffering confronting men and women of our time, the pastoral care of the family must first and foremost concentrate on the human, evangelic and prophetic presence of the Church. In this way, her word of truth and hope must find its foundation in a Christian anthropology which starts from the conviction that, “Man comes from God” and returns to God at the end of an existence lived in harmony with his Creator.
60. As a Co-creator, human being has to live this dimension of his or her deep identity in loyalty, to an exemplary conjugality, through the expression of a responsible paternity and maternity, which is a necessary condition for the building of stable families and societies.
61. The Church, of course, pays attention to the challenges facing the family and is attentive to the plurality of concrete

situations; particularly those concerning the polygamists engaged in a conversion process, the Child-mothers, the women married in the Church to husbands who later became polygamists, the women rejected by the families of their husbands (especially when they are deceased) and who finally left their homes, etc.

62. Like Christ who “came for the sick and not for the healthy” (Mt 9:12) the Church is called to look with compassion and be near to people who abandoned the fullness of the sacrament not always by their own will but sometimes due to the behavior of other people or by unexpected circumstances.

SECOND PART

THE DISCERNMENT OF THE FAMILY VOCATION

CHAPTER I: LOOKING AT JESUS AND THE DIVINE PEDAGOGY IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

IL 37. (12): Looking at Jesus and the divine pedagogy in the history of salvation

IL 38 : The Word of God in the Family

63. We believe and hope that, through the wisdom, new possibilities concerning the pastoral challenges on the Evangelization of the Family for today and tomorrow could be found. The same graces are also offered to couples, families in difficulties, offspring, men and women who are living happy experiences and those who are facing difficulties. In contemplation and worship, the Church that evangelizes by being evangelized, has to recognize the tenderness and the mercy of Christ for her, as well as for people to whom she has to be the witness of the “truth,

the tenderness and the mercy of God”(n°37.12), while announcing the requirements of the Kingdom of God.

64. Such a Church must be nurtured by the Scripture and teach the faithful, men and women of goodwill and families to “highlight the central value in encountering Christ” (N°38), and to establish “a vital relationship with the Word of God” (N°38) which, by *Lectio Divina*, becomes “a source of inspiration in everyday life” (N°38). The family is the ideal place where the youth are initiated to the Word of God and Christian values. Consequently, the duty of announcing the Gospel to the latter is first the responsibility of parents, then of the large family and Christian communities.

IL 39. (13): The Divine Pedagogy

IL 40: Natural Marriage and the Fullness of the Sacrament

65. Men and women welcome the origin of natural marriage between a man and a woman inspired from the values, the institutions and the cultural traditions of their people. The elevation of this cultural understanding to the sacramental order in Christian marriage, as understood by the Church, is in continuity with the origins of the natural marriage elevated to the salvific order. This truly occurs when the Church welcomes and takes, from within, the conception and the celebration of marriage. The Church is called to discover “with joy and respect the seeds of the Word that are hidden” [n°39 (13); AG, 11]. The kind of attention which the Church pays to the culture of marriage in the West and the East, by welcoming and Christianizing the

rites and noble acts of its conception and its celebration of the conjugal bond, has to benefit all the nations.

66. In the same way, particular churches which constitute the various portions of the church and which expresses today its unity must in the same perspective contribute to the renewal of its understanding of the significance of Christian marriage, and of the nature of the pastoral care, which is to be given to Christian families by enriching it with cultural resources and ecclesial experiences in their evangelization field.

IL 41. (14): Jesus and the Family

67. The Church cannot move away from the teaching of Jesus Christ on unity and indissolubility of Marriage (Mt 19:6). In Jesus Christ, every culture and traditions with regard to marriage finds her perfection and completion in the light of the Incarnation. The Law of Moses authorizing the breaking of marriage bond is obsolete with the fulfillment of the Revelation in His person. It is also the same with theories and cultural practices, in the past and nowadays, in Africa and elsewhere in the world.
68. In the testimony of God's mercy for couples and people who live many kinds of experiences in and out of families, the Church cannot ignore its mission of being the witness of the truth manifested in Christ.

IL 42: Indissolubility: A Gift and Task**IL 43: Living as a Family**

69. The Church's teaching on the indissolubility of Marriage and the Family Life will touch peoples' heart and contribute to change the practices and social situations, since they express in new terms the indissolubility of marriage and the requirements of Family Life. It is necessary to rediscover the importance of a simple language that expresses to one another, the values of respect and of mutual trust, hospitality and mutual gratitude, of patience and of forgiveness (Cf. n°43). The African traditions is full of metaphorical images, sayings, stories, religious and cultural rites celebrating life, from which the Church may increase in Her, the desire to renew the concept and the ways to be a witness of the Gospel of the Family.

IL 45: Conjugal Union and Fruitfulness

70. The bond of oneness and the procreative aspect of the marriage must always be held together. Each aspect is characterized by a pride that leads the couple to be on their own when rejecting procreation or the will to have children. The Church in Africa and around the world must be aware of this challenge; the young with high income do not desire to have children or just want the minimum to enjoy life as much as they can. Other people are content with satisfying their own selfish desires or in some cases simply adopt practices of procreation, which do not reflect responsible

parenthood all in the name of traditional cultural mores. It is the Church's responsibility to state, with new words, the children's value in marriage, and the duty of spouses and all members of the family, in promoting love and a communion of life full of self-giving and gratuitousness.

IL 46. (16): The Family: Image of the Trinity

71. The family is from the beginning in the plan of God and also in the project of what it is to become in the deification process of Man which is the goal of the covenant between God and humanity. Moreover, the Old Testament uses the image of matrimony to speak of the covenant relationship between God and His people. It is the same when the New Testament illustrates the relationship between Christ and His Church. (cf. Ho 2,20-25 ; Jr 2,2 ; 3,1-13 ; Is 54,4-8 et Ep 5,22-23). But, first and foremost, God Himself is « Family » in that the communion and love relationships within the Trinity expressing divine processions are actually family relationships. Thus the Trinity is the prototype of the family and the family is found in God. In other words, the fact that there are three persons in God leads to conceive divinity as a family. Moreover, the Trinity is the source of the family. Therefore, the baptized who unite in matrimonial bonds are called by God, marked by the seal of Holy Spirit and configured to Christ. The love that unites them and in which they are called to grow, is itself the expression of God and gift of God. « The love of God was spread in our heart by the Spirit dwelling in us » (cf. Rm 5, 5). By this Spirit, reciprocal gift of the Father and of the Son, marriage

is made up and lived as the sacrament of the indissoluble love between the Son and His Church. So there is a close link between Trinity and Family which also gives the Church the character of « Family », hence the ecclesiology of Church-Family of God.

CHAPTER II: THE FAMILY AND CHURCH LIFE

IL 47. (17): The Family in the Church's Documents.

72. Apart from the elements highlighted by the *Instrumentum Laboris* on the teaching of the Church on Marriage and Family, we would be treating here questions concerning forgiveness, reconciliation and life within the family.

a. *The Family as a Laboratory of Humanization*

73. In a world that is mired in a culture of conflicts, where the other is an enemy, a competitor or a footstool, the family “sanctuary of life” and “vital cell of the society and the Church” is the ideal location for harnessing the culture of brotherhood, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. “In a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace, justice and love between brothers and sisters, the function of authority expressed by parents, the loving service to weaker members because they are little, sick or elderly, mutual aid before the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive. Therefore, the family is the first and irreplaceable teacher of peace” (AM, 43). It must become a humanization laboratory. It is from the family that we must learn to build society, from childhood, bonds of peace and harmony through education in moral and spiritual values.

74. As a result, the family needs to be protected and defended, in order to render to the society, the service expected from it, which is to raise men and women capable of building a social fabric of peace and harmony.

b. The Family open to the Society

75. Marriage, by its very nature, transcends the couple, since it has the special mission of perpetuating humanity. Similarly, the family naturally goes beyond the limits of the household: it is oriented towards society. Pope John Paul II rightly recalled that the “family has vital and organic bonds with the society for it is its foundation and that it nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is actually within the family that citizens are born and in the family they find the first school of the social virtues that are for society the soul to of his life and its development. So, because of its nature and vocation the family instead of being closed in on itself, opens to other families and to society and fulfills its social role” (FC, 42).

76. Thus, the Christian families are called to become true domestic churches, contributing to the progress of society towards a more fraternal life. Thus, the transformation of our societies through the gospel preached by families will happen.

IL 48: The Missionary Dimension of the Family

77. For Pope Benedict XVI, “the educational mission of the Christian family is a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and broadcasted, to the extent that the whole family life becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of life after Christ” (AM, 46). In the family conscious of this gift, as Pope Paul VI noted, ‘all the members evangelize and are evangelized’. Therefore by virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. They fully become parents in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the rebirth in the Spirit flows from the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. Parents must not abandon this fundamental vocation of being the evangelizers of their children.

IL 51: The Family at Prayer

78. Christ’s mission is rooted in his constant and regular encounter with the Father. It is because the apostles saw Jesus constantly at prayer that they asked him to teach them how to pray. Similarly, the community acts as its Lord whom the third Gospel shows constantly in prayer. Thus, the family must be a place of prayer (AM, 45). Giving community and personal prayer its full importance

within the family means to respect an essential principle of the Christian view of life: the primacy of grace. Prayer reminds us of the constant primacy of Christ and, in connection with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. Prayer enables the Word of Christ to pass through us in all its strength.

79. For this, assiduous listening and attentive reading of the Holy Scripture in families are needed. The couples will be helped to give a central place to the family prayer. We will initiate them to living prayer that is indeed meeting with the God of Jesus Christ. The liturgical dimension of prayer and celebration within the family will be highlighted.

IL 54. (21): The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together

80. *The Instrumentum Laboris* rightly insists on the indissoluble character of Marriage. At a time when the family is a victim of many powers trying to destroy or deform it, we proclaim with a joyful conviction the Good News on the Family, based on an irrevocable bond that commits the man and the woman to love in their whole body and mind. When the Lord said: “But it was not this way from the beginning” (Mt 19:8), He was referring to the truth on Marriage that, according to God’s plan, excludes divorce.
81. In Jesus Christ’s “New Covenant”, marriage acquires its true dimension. His incarnation and his family life with Mary and Joseph in the home of Nazareth is the model of

all families. The love of the spouses, by Christ, is called to be like his: Total, exclusive; faithful and fruitful.

82. It is important for all families to hear again, the words of Pope John Paul II, in his Message to African families: “This is in accordance with Christ who gave himself, out of love for the Church so that spouses have access, day by day, to the love which the Gospel speaks about « As I have loved you, so you must love one another », and more precisely to the perfection of the indissoluble union at all levels. Christian couples have promised to communicate all they are and all they have. It is the boldest contract that is the most wonderful (John Paul II, Message to African families, (No. 4).

CHAPTER III: THE FAMILY AND THE PATH LEADING TO ITS FULLNESS

IL 56: The Mystery of Matrimony in Relation to the Creator

83. The marriage covenant is for African cultures, a fundamental social institution around which revolves not only social relationships, but also the socio-political and economic order and even the symbolic and religious order. Through the union of a man and a woman, entire communities come into alliance, putting together their tangible and intangible heritage. The Church recognizes that the human person is ontologically open to relations; she therefore looks benevolently at this traditional institution where she discerns some *Verbi semina*. The many adult catechumens accompanying the Church in Africa to the baptismal font on Easter night, are mostly engaged in matrimonial bonds of this nature that baptism brings to their sacramental fullness.

IL 57

84. The situation of these non-Christians traditionally married accessing the Christian faith, however, is to be distinguished from the situation of Christians civilly

married or cohabiting. These are concerns, depending on the nature of the reasons that delay the celebration of their marriage. These reasons are often material or cultural: the inability to pay a dowry, which, increasingly, loses its symbolic character and becomes a good will for some unscrupulous families looking for a lavish wedding.

IL 58. (23)-59: The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy towards Broken and Fragile Families

85. From the creation God desired the family. It is incorporated in the project of God for humanity. It represents a riches for humanity and the Church. Faced with people traditionally or civilly married, couples knowing some difficulties and risking a painful separation, men and women on the verge of divorcing, though opened to the Church's life, the Church must appropriate the divine pedagogy which consists in assisting and accompanying people in their human, family, cultural, social and religious life experience. This pedagogy is the one of a God who invites to dialogue, compassion and conversion.

IL 59 The Intimate Bond between the Church and the Family

86. The testimony of the families which remained faithful to the teachings of the Gospel needs to be better highlighted. Because, only credible experiences people of such kind,

have the strength to motivate young people to overcome their fear or hesitation with the prospect of a definitive commitment. The Church in Africa remains very attentive to this dimension. It involves such families in her pastoral care, including the preparation of engaged couples for marriage and the support for young couples.

87. The Code of Canon Law calls for the marriage to be celebrated (exchange of consents) before some witnesses. The receipt of this instruction in the conciliar spirit expressed in *Ad Gentes*, 22 resulted in most of the ecclesial community in the choice of “best Christian couples”. So, they are models of life and guides who accompany young couples.
88. We recommend that this pastoral practice be promoted and that the Church develops a pastoral that encourages new couples to become living examples of marital faithfulness, in the Small Christian Communities (SCC) and society.
89. The SCC and even parishes are all involved in the celebration of silver, golden and diamond jubilees of wedding. The celebration of these events which can be extended to the diocesan levels in the Bishop’s presence is the occasion of the proclamation of the Good News of the family, and an encouragement to young people to engage in marital life and stay faithful. In this way the awareness that the Church is a property for the family and the family a property for the Church is also strengthened.

IL 62. (25)-64: Assistance in Reaching the Fullness of God's Plan

90. Marriage in African traditions is at the same time a social, communal, religious and cosmic event. But it can reach its fullness only when it is celebrated and lived in a Christian way. We recommend that the Church, through Her ministers, should witness more of her presence from the initial stage of marriage, and to the end of the process of its conclusion; This is what is meant by “marriage in stages”, which must be opened up to Christ and be raised to sacramental status of Christian marriage, with all that it implies as duty and responsibility.
91. The marriage covenant in Africa is not an isolated act which falls within the sole responsibility of a man and a woman showing the desire to unite. It is an encounter of communion and union, an alliance between two families, that of the husband and the wife. This community dimension is a bulwark and helps solidify the marital bond in case of difficulties within the couple. The Church can build on this value to remind the evangelical virtue of dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation between the spouses, and community and ecclesial dimension of their needs.

IL 65: The Young and the Fear of Marrying

92. Religious marriage is usually lived by young people as a “noose” according to the common expression. The cynicism of so many young people towards marital commitment is mostly related to the idea or the principle

of the indissolubility of marriage and the respect they have towards this principle. To this effect, the church in her pastoral ministry should insist on graceful protections and blessings for those who marry under the gaze of Christ. It is therefore fundamental that the Church reminds young people the meaning of the final commitment, given as a constituent act of responsible human beings.

93. Any human engagement or act is a pre-requisite to measure our ability to respect the given Word of God. The Church must also encourage young people to enter into a marital life of communion, and to be in harmony with their faith in Christ in accordance with His marriage law which requires that “man leaves his father and mother and be united to his wife “and both become” one flesh” (Gen. 2, 24).
94. Among the many forces that aim at diverting the young from marriage, destroy the family or deform it, is the propensity toward the culture of death, a challenge of the culture of death. The so-called development and training programs in reproductive health often propagated in Africa, is termed here as the “culture of death”. There are campaigns against life which undermine the basis of the culture of life. They are the source of libertinism and individualism related to the trivialization of sex and of the refusal of stable and sustainable commitment in marriage. These attitudes reinforced by economic difficulties caused, in general, the rejection of children in some families. Consequently, one observes now in Africa that, some people instead of welcoming children joyfully and responsibly, consider them as threats to their well-being and peaceful life.

95. The proclamation of the Gospel of the family cannot make pastors insensitive to this situation of anti-birth imperialism and slavish imitation of alienating practices. The Church should promote with determination, an evangelization that brings a relevant solution to the spreading of a culture of death in Africa that introduced all forms of contraception, voluntary sterilization and abortion which are against religious traditions, the cultural and ethical standards of our peoples. Africans are very respectful of the values of life and to responsible parenthood, as well as embracing the responsibility and duty towards children, and the wisdom to ensure a good education and a happy life in the household.
96. We strongly recommend that the pastoral care of the family should be geared towards protecting and defending families against the culture of death to make them crucibles and promoters of the culture of life for the survival of humanity.
97. Finally, we affirm that humanity must today defend more vigorously the family as the basic cell of society from being ridiculed, denied, trivialized, secularized and destroyed. In the light of these, the pastors of the Church in Africa should respond to this urgent call resonated from the heart of Africa to all the heads of states of the world at the First Special Assembly of the Synod on Africa: **“Do not let the African family flout on its own land!” Do not allow the destruction of the family anywhere in the world!** (Message of the Synod, No. 30).

THIRD PART

THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY TODAY

CHAPTER I: THE FAMILY AND EVANGELIZATION

IL 69 (29): Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts

98. The Church in Africa recognizes in the Synod on family a continuity with the two special synods devoted to evangelization in Africa (1994 and 2009). While the first African Synod highlighted the reality of Church-Family of God (EIA, 63), the second, in responding to the challenges of reconciliation and peace on the continent invites Christians to commit themselves to the vocation and mission of the Church-Family of God from the basic cell of the society, the family the domestic church.
99. The Church-Family must be auto-evangelized so as to become and make of domestic churches spaces where human tenderness meets and embraces that of God. The Churches duty is to make known to families — by their joys, sorrows, weaknesses and hopes — the divine tenderness that rejects condemnation and offers salvation (cf. Jn 3:16-17). This mission consists of urging pastors

not only to spell out the principles of the Church's law but also to become witnesses of tenderness and mercy towards families, so that all, particularly the wounded and those afflicted with hardships may find solace in the Church-Family of God through the word of mercy and truth.

IL 71. (30) Tenderness in the Family; God's Tenderness

100. The *Instrumentum laboris* establishes the basis for the vocation of Catholic families on "the grace of the Nuptial Sacrament" (IL, 71(30)). Christian marriage is a mystery of nuptial sacrament united to Christ his Church. This nuptial relation makes of the Church, the body of Christ, that manifests the Father with whom they are one in the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council, following the Church Fathers, therefore presents the Church, as the Family of the Father, with the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The reality of family in the African culture is so important that it helps the Church in African to rediscover the depth of the ecclesiology of the Church-Family of God and to choose it as its pastoral option.
101. We think that such an ecclesiology and the pastoral option it implies, can contribute to strengthen the theological foundation of the Church's mission in proclaiming the Gospel of family. The Church proclaims the Gospel of family because she proclaims faith in a God, who is Family and whose message of salvation she gives to the world brings men and women of all origins into one family. As such, the Church becomes the sign and symbol of unity of all humankind in God. Consequently, the Church herself

must rediscover her identity as Family of God. The Church understands and redefines herself, in the midst of the present challenges of marriage and family, as the family of God in all its ecclesiological expressions and pastoral orientations.

102. We affirm therefore that the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel of Family because Her message is about family and she is to bring life to families. The Gospel that she bears witness to, reveals that God is Family, Father, Son and Spirit. He planned that men and women are to be born within a family. He sanctified families by his incarnation into the family of Nazareth. Moreover, the salvation He communicates has a collective dimension. He sent, in this same perspective the Apostles to proclaim to the world the Good News of salvation making of all who will believe in his Word, members of His Body, the Church-Family of God.

IL 72. The Family: Subject of Pastoral Activity

103. Just as the Family-God is witness of love and divine life in the world, the Church proclaims the Gospel of family to families so as to make them aware of the greatness of their identity and vocation in God. In varied contexts or situations of joy and hardship that families go through, the Church-Family bears witness to the tender love and life of God so as to «instil in families a sense of belongingness in the Church » (IL, 72) which is both human and divine institution. It is about creating awareness of our participation in the Family of God through our baptism and

our incorporation into Christ's Body, the Church whose image we carry within us.

104. This double and unique belongingness gives families “the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting a public policy, an economy and a culture for the benefit of the family, even through the use of the social network and the media” (IL, 72). Finally, this solidarity commits us to have an ecclesial consciousness of “ourselves”, which makes us share the joys and sufferings of families in the contemporary world and sends us in a mission towards them; a mission that is *ad intra* and *ad extra*, a mission within family, from family and towards other families.
105. We recommend that the Church creates a training frame for families so that they may fulfil their missionary vocation toward other families.
106. Each family member must be ready to “justify the hope which is in him/her” (I P 3, 15). There is no Christian life without implicit and explicit testimony. Thus, families have to bear witness of their attachment to Christ and the Church by an infaillable faithfulness and commitment. They must not live in fear, but be courageous prophets able to be the salt and the light of the earth. (Mt 5, 13-16)

IL 73: The Nuptial Liturgy

107. Truly, marriage preparation (wedding) is of great concern for future couples and it is important to emphasize on the true spiritual and ecclesial character of the marriage. In the

logic of the Incarnation, this character is brought to bear on the human, ethical and cultural realities of the marriage. As a result, the spouses will be apt to receive the grace of God to guarantee their fidelity and to consolidate the family. The “marriage in stages” suggests a pedagogy and a set of ethical and spiritual values that favor a participative celebration and assures the spouses the support of family members.

108. The present prevailing marriage liturgy in the Church of the Latin rite, engages the Assembly, readily, especially during the participation in the celebration of the sacrament. It is the same in the preparation stage, where, through the publication of bans, the assembly, which has neither previously accompanied nor participated in the gradual formation process to marriage, is asked to pass judgment on spouses. The African experience of marriage in stages could let the Church rethink about the preparation and celebration of marriage in order to involve, in the short and long term, synergistically, the family of the spouses and those of the ecclesial domestic church community and of the parish. This perspective respects the recommendations of the Instrument Laboris n° 85 which underlines « the overall commitment of the Christian community » in the « The pastoral care of future couples »

IL 76. (32)-83: Missionary Conversion and a Renewal in Language

109. The preparation and celebration of marriage that we are proposing (cf. IL ,73) should not be limited to just

theoretical message detached from the real life problems of people [IL, 76. (32)]. It demands from the Church a missionary conversion and the adoption of a new language that no longer requires a form of preparation and celebration of marriage which tends to impose cultural and pastoral traditions that do not take into account the current realities of the environment and the challenges of a given family.

110. The *Instrumentum Laboris* n° 79, 82. (35) and 83 stressing the importance of “cultural mediation” and “the symphony of differences” invites the Church to proclaim the Gospel of family with boldness and prophetic courage, just as the pastors of old. They took into consideration the *Preparatio evangelica* and cultural traditions of peoples and their positive values to incarnate the Word of God in their marriage cultures, while remaining faithful to the Gospel, to the deep quest of the human heart and the authentic requirements of conjugal love and family life. The Word of God must in this process be the criteria for judgement and the light for discernment of the various challenges of such inculturation of marriage today. (cf. IL for Africa, it is urgent that the Church proclaims the Gospel of family in rooting it in experiments, rituals and cultural values through which our people prepare, celebrate and live the matrimonial covenant. The Word of God must be, in these processes, the criteria of judgment and discernment in the light of the various challenges, such as the inculturation of marriage today [Cf. IL, 80.34]

CHAPTER II: THE FAMILY AND FORMATION

IL 84. (36)-86: Marriage Preparation

111. Christian marriage is more than more than a cultural tradition, a social or legal requirement. It is a vocation that requires a serious preparation in faith and discernment. This preparation will be done in several stages: remote preparation in the family environment and in the society, close and immediate preparation at the time of engagement. It takes place in the family, in schools and in the society. Then comes the immediate and last preparation which is the time of engagement. It must be jointly assumed by families, social actors, the domestic Church, priests and a team of lay people involved in the pastoral care of the family, in appropriate centres.
112. The pastoral challenges of the family related to the ability to assume the demands of the present cultural change, to the knowledge of the Church and of the Gospel to take a stand against the “ models running contrary to the Christian vision of the family “will be considered in order to help” people express adequately their desire for love in a proper language of sexuality “(IL, 86).
113. The different family pastorals should be harmonized, restructured and given the means, human, material and

pedagogical liable to aiding future couples respond to current challenges. The new technologies of communication can be taken advantage of, so that ethical values, the criteria for analyses and discernment of the Word of God permeate the different domain of knowledge: training centers, relaxation and entertainment that convey theories and practices contrary to a healthy expression of sexuality and marriage.

114. In teaching the young on sexuality and marriage, the account of the traditional African initiation that used games, stories and any form of language to educate, from childhood to youthfulness, should be inspiring.
115. The New couples enter into a process and must be given special attention and pastoral care so as to lead a life of faithfulness to their commitment through the joys, the pains, the trials of marriage and family life. We recommend that the preparation for marriage brings new couples to participate in the Small Christian Communities (SCC) and Christian associations in order to benefit from the solidarity and the support of other couples and different members of the Church.

IL 87. (37)-88: The Formation of Future Priests

IL 89: The Formation of the Clergy and Pastoral Workers

116. The family is the place of awakening of vocations and the first seminary. This fact calls for real integration of

seminarians in their families. Such integration is necessary for the formation of their personality, the education to love and the gift of self as well as a real knowledge about the challenges of the family. Seminarians who were brought up in difficult families, would, in the course of their formation benefit from guidance aiming at inner healing and rediscovery of the greatness and beauty of the family. The theological formation of seminarians should comprise of pastoral courses which offer the necessary competency for the preparation marriage, guidance and pastoral counselling for couples.

117. The priests and religious, who are to accompany families, need also to be trained in family life, in their vocation of being messengers of the Gospel of family in the Church Family of God. They are to open up to new challenges confronting families and try to find appropriate response for better guidance.
118. This demand about the formation of priests should go hand in hand with the worry of investing intensively in the guidance of couples and particularly to including such aspect in the organisation of pastorals for the family.
119. His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Albert Malula could therefore affirm, during a colloquium held in Yaoundé for African and European Theologians in 1984, that the family in Africa is not only the object of pastoral recipes, but first and foremost a subject of theology, of African theology

and of inculturation. On this note, he put to theologians and pastors to assume their specific vocations of proclaiming the Gospel of family in spirit of communion without prejudice or bias³.

IL 92: The Socio-Political Commitment on Behalf of the Family

120. The Families have a mission in the society. In this sense they must get involved in the transformation of the society by integrating its different spheres in order to fight against false ideologies, spiritualities and injustices. To achieve this, they must invest in economic structures on both national and international levels, as well as in networks and places of meetings, of solidarity, of human and social promotion.
121. This commitment must be sustained by appropriate ecclesial structures. As *Africae Munus*, declares, it should be encouraged to create chaplaincies to accompany all those whose exercise of power has implications on marriage and family life, including political, economic, social and military leaders at all levels of society⁴.

³ Léon de SAINT MOULIN, Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula vol.7 : textes concernant la famille. Théâtre et chants, Kinshasa, Facultés catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997, p. 145.

⁴ Cf. Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, *Proposals*, 24-25 ; AM, 20.

IL 93: Indigence and the Danger of Usury

122. The economic crisis, deadly conflicts and major pandemics, weaken economically several families. The proclamation of the Gospel of family demands that the Church draws attention of leaders, social actors and the different family members to their social responsibilities. Family ministry should educate people on common good, the culture of peace building, and integral development. Governments should support families, especially the most fragile and in this wise, provide enough funds to support them regularly. Particular attention should be paid to the displaced families. They are in great need of material and spiritual assistance.
123. In situations where families live in economic insalubrities, deprived from of social and health care, one has to avoid aggravating their situation by subjecting them to the dictates of the so-called development programs that deliver new forms of cultural, spiritual and economic oppressions⁵.

IL 94. (39)-95: Accompanying Engaged Couples in their Preparation for Marriage**IL 96. (40)-97: Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage**

124. We refer to the proposals relating to the IL 84. (36).

⁵ Id, 10.

CHAPTER III: THE FAMILY AND ECCELESIAL GUIDANCE

IL 98. (41): Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married or Living Together⁶

125. With regard to those who live in civil marriage or in concubinage, the *Instrumentum laboris* calls on the Church to exercise an in-depth pastoral discernment, taking into account on one hand, the cultural context of Africa, which is not that of Western world, and on the other, African Christianity itself often seen as western.
126. Therefore concubinage designates couples who live together without being married, without having received the sacrament of marriage which, culturally, can be a Christianization of marriage celebrated in the Western world. We think that it is not appropriate to qualify the situation of couples, married in accordance with their cultural traditions, a concubinage.
127. Are they not expecting from the Church that the Gospel takes root in the noble and meaningful values and rites of marriage in the culture of their people? The urgency of promoting inculturation of marriage in Africa makes us proclaim the Gospel of family incarnate in the culture of

⁶ Il est question ici de la validité et de l'indissolubilité du mariage liées au consentement et à la consommation selon le Pape Alexandre III.

marriage of all people by which man and woman become one flesh according to the plan of God.

IL 100. (42)-103: Steps towards the Sacrament of Marriage

128. *Instrumentum laboris* n°100 (42), addresses the issue of “increasing number of couples living together *ad experimentum*, without neither canonical nor civil marriage (IL, 81). In addition, there are couples in Africa who are living together without even the traditional marriage. This situation has several causes in African. There are economic reasons, fear of a lifetime commitment as well as moral demands, and social burden associated with marital covenant. The situation that the *Instrumentum Laboris* reveals is explained in Africa, by lack of theological, pastoral and liturgical celebration of marriage which takes into account and renew from within, the conception, the process and the rites of ancestral cultural marriage.

129. Cardinal Malula pointed out that people generally marry three times in Africa: according to the tradition, in the State and in the Church. He requested that such disharmony be levelled down through the Christianization of African traditional marriage. He emphasized that the Scripture teaches that marriage is indissoluble (that no one separates what God has united), but it does not say “when” and “how”. We should not impose the choice of “when” and “how” (consent of the spouses and consumption) of a people and of a particular Church to all the others⁷.

⁷ Cardinal MALULA J. A., « Mariage et famille en Afrique », in Maurice CHEZA et autres (éd), *Les Evêques d’Afrique parlent* (1966-1992). Document pour

IL 104. (44): Caring for Wounded Families (Persons who are Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried and Single-Parent Families)

IL 105: Forgiveness in the Family

IL 106-108: « The Great River of Mercy»

IL 109. (46)-111: The Art of Accompaniment

IL 112: Persons who are Separated and Divorced but Remain Faithful to their Marriage Vows

IL 113: God Never Abandons Anyone

130. “The issue of the divorced concerns few numbers of Christians and does not constitute a major pastoral problem in Africa. There are two distinct groups of divorce; those who assume their divorced status and those who enter into concubinage. Usually, quite a number of people who find themselves in the latter accept the current prescriptions of the Church even if sometimes, they manifest the need to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. To them, the Church in Africa should intensify the pastoral counselling and spiritual direction” (FOF, 26) especially for single-parent families.

le Synode africain, Paris, Centurion, 1992, p.169-178. See also Bulletin de Théologie africaine 7 (1985), p. 213-221.

IL 114. (48)-115: Streamlining the Annulment Procedure and the Importance of Faith in Cases of Nullity

131. “The simplification of canonical practice for the nullity of the marriage bond must consider the conditions of validity of the matrimonial union in the West as well as in Africa and elsewhere, without losing sight of the fact that the Church should be sensitive to the real suffering of some couples in the exercise of her magisterial authority. The disposition of the Church, that set some priests in difficulty free, for a sacrament that is eternal, can’t it be inspirational for the simplification of canonical practice of the nullity of marriage which is a sacrament that ends at the death of a spouse?” (FOF, 28). We recommend that the Church makes “procedures towards nullity of marriage more accessible, more soft and possibly free of charge “(IL, 15)

IL 118. (50)-119: Pastoral Approaches in Common

132. The points on which the *Instrumentum laboris* insists concerning the relation of divorced persons to the sacrament require to “promoting common pastoral lines”:

- a. « The divorced not remarried, (...) witness to their promise of faithfulness in marriage, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment to sustain them in their present state of life » [IL, 118. (50)].
- b. «The faithful separated who are not in new union, consider the separation as such sin, should abstain from the reception of the sacraments. (IL, 119).

- c. « People who are divorced and civilly remarried and are living in continence for various reasons, do not know that they can receive the sacraments in a place where their condition is unknown» (IL, 119).
- d. « There exists as well situations of irregular unions of persons who, in the internal forum, have chose a life of continence, they can have access to the sacraments, while being careful to avoid scandal » (IL, 119).

IL 120. (51)-121: The Integration of Divorced and Civilly Remarried Persons in the Christian Community

- 133. It is important to carefully discern about the situations of divorced who are civilly remarried. We agree that « they are to be encouraged to participate in the life of the community. To take care of them does not mean for the Christian community a sign of weakness of faith and witness as regards the indissolubility of marriage, but, precisely in this way, the community expresses its charity » [IL, 120. (51)].
- 134. This charity must include « specific attention or needs given to their children, with regard to the indispensable role of parents, for the fact of preeminent interest of the minor (IL, 121).

IL 122. (52)-123: Penitential Means

- 135. The admission of divorced remarried to the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist is a real problem that the Church must pay attention to. In her pastoral attitude, and taking

into consideration the diversity of situations, must not to lose sight of the fact that this issue is not a major problem of marriage everywhere in the Church today. It deserves a particular attention just as much as other challenges relating to conjugal union.

In Africa, the divorced-remarried, generally have the same attitude as the polygamist participating in the celebration of the Eucharist. They are, majority of them aware of their difficult and complex situation. They respect the present discipline of the Church because their present condition does not allow them, in fact, to receive the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance. Their expectation is rather, on one hand, to be more integrated into the life of the Church, though they do not receive the sacraments; and on the other hand that the Church should let them know and alleviate the procedures for nullity of marriage bonds that for them is a burden.

136. In the latter case, it is appropriate to form and inform Christians the more on « making annulment procedures for marriage more accessible and soft and possibly free of charge » (IL, 115).
137. The situation very frequent in Africa and that demands serious pastoral attention concerns the polygamists who would like to receive the sacraments, but are in the impossibility to regularize their situation. The document of SECAM, *The Family our future*, recalled the current rule of the Church that the husband has to choose as wife one of the women [see our response to No. 28. (7)]. SECAM invites to give “specific privilege to neophytes without

injustice or hypocrisy, just simply because they were not subject to the provisions of the Church or they ignored them before their conversion” (FOF, 25).

138. This situation concerns also the wives of a polygamist husband who want to embrace the Christian faith.
139. In the pastoral care with regard to these different persons, it is good not to forget the Word of God which is a living food. In John 6 Jesus is presented as the Word of God made flesh

IL 124. (53)-125: Spiritual Participation in Church Communion

140. In circumstances when the divorced-remarried cannot have access the sacramental communion, can they fruitfully have access to spiritual communion? *L'Instrumentum Laboris* recalls that « the spiritual communion supposes conversion and the state of grace and that it is connected to sacramental communion » (IL, 125). We believe once again that one of the pastoral means would be to simplify the procedures so as to acknowledge the nullity of the conjugal bonds for those who deserve it. The difficulty of spiritual communion, because of the conditions that make it fruitful, shows that it is based on the requirements of participation in sacramental communion.

IL 126. (54)-128: Mixed Marriages and/with Disparity of Cult

141. The interreligious marriages are more problematic than mixed marriages in Africa. They present difficulties for the Christian faith, for family unity as well as for the education of Children. Such cases call for special guidance and counselling for the young people who want to enter into these marriages. They must be helped to have enough discernment, especially with the rise of cultural and religious extremism.
142. In responding to pressure from some new Religious Movements and Muslim groups that require, in the case of mixed marriage, of the Catholic Christian women to change their religion, we propose that ecumenism and interreligious dialogue should insist on religious freedom and the Church makes her sons and daughters discover the potential risks of mixed marriages and not encourage them in some cases. In such cases the Church has to be prudent and should not forget that in some circumstances, the Christian party succeeds in converting the other.

IL 130. (55)-132. (56): Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies

143. With the exception of South Africa, no other country in Africa recognizes the union of persons of the same sex. Even if there are cases of persons with homosexual tendencies or practices, the question is not alarming on the continent as a whole.

Traditionally, African culture, humanly, speaks of sexual practices with high discretion. Unfortunately, the present African society is exposed to external pressures of lobbying which violently is going against our culture, against the rights of our people and against the auto determination of ethical questions (FOF, 29).

144. «Majority of African countries don't recognize the civil union of two persons of the same sex. However, the Church in Africa shares the anxieties and hopes of our common humanity concerning the problems of same sex unions.

For the Church, persons of same sex union should be treated with respect and love, without sacrificing the ethical values of the universal human.

In fact, humanity is filled with immense treasure of wisdom that could be explored to help people in difficult situations as well as to respond to the challenges of homosexual unions, without necessarily going through any legal shortcuts.

The Church in Africa does not condemn the persons involved but condemns the system liable to conceive, promote, spread across the world through the internet, TV and other means of communication and impose on the poor countries, homosexual ideologies and practices» (FOF, 30).

145. As stated in the *Instrumentum Laboris*: “it is totally unacceptable that the Church's pastors be subjected to pressures in this domain, and that international Organisations attach such practices to their conditions of

assisting the poor countries financially, so as to introduce laws which institute “marriage” between persons of the same sex” (IL, 32).

146. In the evolution of history of civilisation where social changes make humanity question new practises, the Church must have the courage to respond to her prophetic vocation in the proclamation of the Gospel of mercy. The African Heads of States, in the name of moral values and culture of their people have the courage to resist the international community who ask them to recognize the unions of two persons of the same sex. It is an opportunity for the universal church to reaffirm the truth on marriage, family and union of persons of the same sex of which she is the “guarantor” while at the same time demonstrating divine care and mercy.

CHAPTER IV: THE FAMILY, PROCREATION AND UPBRINGING

IL 133. (57)-135: Transmission of Life and Challenges of a Declining Birth-rate

147. The formation and pastoral care of the family should “involve more Catholic bio-medical specialists in preparing couples for marriage and in accompanying married people” (IL, 134).

The Church will develop initiatives that will allow the laity, firm in their faith to integrate, from professional perspectives, structures, national and international instances where decisions related to ethics, culture and politics are taken, to contribute to promote the culture of life.

IL 136. (58)-137: Responsible Parenthood

148. The theories and practices that consider that child bearing as a reality to be decided upon arbitrary irrespective of divine plan for procreation (IL 137) are spreading more and more in Africa. They provoke attitudes that are contrary to African culture of life and to the teaching of the Gospel of family.

149. The Church should encourage pedagogy of proximity to persons suffering from infertility and trying to resort to assisted reproductive technologies. They are to be helped to resort to biomedical research of fertility treatment which respects the “divine plan on human procreation” (IL, 137).

IL 138: Adoption and Foster Parenting

150. In traditional Africa, orphans or children in difficult situation were generally used to be welcomed into the extended family or in the village since the adoption and child’s placement allowed to assume, in the family and the community, the situation of abandoned children and infertile couples. It is still necessary today to promote such a culture by encouraging families to welcome abandoned children and integrate them into the family and in society. We should also deepen the pastoral care for *street children* so as to offer them a future and integrate them into the society. Many associations are working towards this end. It is up to the Church to be sensitive to this approach.
151. The Pastoral care of the family should encourage this practice while respecting the human dignity of children and the rights and duties of both the adoptive and biological parents. The practice supported by legislations which promotes adoption and deprives forever biological parents of their rights, by taking their offspring in exchange of money or other means, is contrary to our culture especially in cases where children undergo a change of family name and are taken away from their homeland.

152. The Church should see to it that the fundamental values of each culture and the noble rules governing the management of adoption and placement of children are respected while assisting especially the deprived poor families, to discover the basic conditions of fidelity to their vocation as first educators of the child. In situations of sterility, the absolute desire to have a child for oneself must give way to adoption and spiritual fertility.
153. In Africa where child bearing is held in high esteem, the situation of sterility is painfully lived particularly by women. The Church understands this suffering. That is why she calls, with much solicitude on these families to understand that this legitimate desire to have a child could give way to spiritual and universal fecundity.
154. These families equally have the mission to bear prime witness to the Kingdom of God and sustained it just as the witness of the consecrated persons.

IL 139. (59)-141: Human Life: An Intangible Mystery

155. The African culture is very much convinced of the fact that “Life is a gift from God and a transcending mystery and that it can’t, in anyway be terminated, neither at its beginning nor at its terminal stage” (IL, 140). We strongly recommend that the pastoral care of the family helps Christians to respect life from conception to death.
156. International policies stressing on sexual freedom and on reproductive health, in favour of contraception and abortion

in our societies, represent major challenges for the family ministry. Families should be the place where the culture of life is consolidated, according to the wish of the bishops of SECAM, in their contribution to the Synod on family in October 2014 (FOF, 31-34).

157. The numerous attacks on life must also be the concern of this pastoral ministry, notably the kidnapping of persons for ritual purposes, trafficking of human organs, children being abused and subjected to all forms of slavery, the inhuman treatment inflicted on persons accused of witchcraft.
158. We need to promote social and ecclesial structures that help fight against these situations and those that support pregnant women, teenage mothers and abandoned children. (IL, 141).

IL 142. (60)-146: The Challenge of Upbringing and the Role of Family in Evangelization

159. Parents' responsibility is not restricted to procreation, it includes as well the education of their children. This indeed, is a true responsibility of the family and can only be assumed if the original meaning of family is restored. Whatever be its form, nuclear or extended, one of the functions of family is precisely to transmit values and norms of society. But the success of educational process of the child is at the cost of a stable and normative conjugality.
160. We are expecting the Synod to contribute in responding to the challenges of education in the different contexts of the proclamation of the Gospel of the family everywhere in

the world. The Church is to do more in helping the parents to communicate to their children and other members of the family, the values liable to build a strong and balanced personality. This education demands the physical presence and affective involvement of both parents in the family. It equally depends on the responsibility of subjects and all actors of education. The complex problems in the family, raised by the Synod are the major questions that such an education must take into consideration so as to form each and every other person to make the family a place of promotion of life and of emergence of a society of respect in accordance with the plan of God for humanity and for integral welfare.

161. A number of parents are well conscious of their mission of educating. However, they are powerless and have been left on their own. That is why they solicit from the Church and the state, a true school for parents; place of exchange and of formation of personal responsibility.

Conclusion

162. The family is the home of life. Life is a gift from God, and hope of better future. Our conviction and faith are that the family cannot, thus be submerged by the crisis and the difficult situations that she is going through. In the proclamation of the Gospel of family, we are called to be witness of this hope.
163. It is our deepest hope therefore, that the various proposals, about the challenges facing the family, contained in this

document be welcomed as an expression of the faith, of joys, pains and expectations of the Christian faithful and persons of will of Africa and Madagascar.

In Accra (Ghana), September 14th, 2015
On the Feast Day of the Glorious Cross.

For SECAM,
† Gabriel MBILINGI,
Archbishop of Lubango (Angola)
President of SECAM.

SECAM SECRETARIAT
P.O. BOX KA 9156, AIRPORT
N° 4, Senchi Street, Airport Residential Area
Accra, Ghana
2015