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AMORIS LAETITIA AND THE CHURCH IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: ON DASHED HOPES, DISCERNED PROMISES, AND SUNDRY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Amoris Laetitia should be seen for what it is and what it offers. It is a pastoral exhortation for all families. It offers a framework for pastors on how to deal with special moral issues in marriage and family life. This contribution argues that we should not presume that the dominant discussions at the 2014 and 2015 synods of bishops are necessarily the pressing needs of the People of God in Sub-Saharan Africa. This article shows that the synods glossed over some pressing concerns in Africa. It discusses how the Family of God in Africa can take inspirations from *Amoris Laetitia* on how to build up and promote the 'joy of love in families.'

Keywords: *Amoris Laetitia*, Conscience, Pastoral Circle Method, Seminary Formation

1. Introduction

The 14th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of bishops (2015) was intentionally convened to follow-up on the 3rd extraordinary

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assembly of the synod of bishops (2014). Both synods intended to address the state of the family, its challenges in the present age and the role the family can still play regardless of the challenges and even hostilities.

Curiously, some of us had the erroneous perception that these synods were just about broken marriages, civil divorce, remarriage, access to the sacraments, and same-sex unions. Many in Sub-Saharan Africa let the media and western narratives dictate how they followed and interpreted doctrinal and pastoral developments in the church today. Unfortunately, we let this fixation neglect broader issues, especially our issues. This reflection attends to this problem. With documents from the synods and the post-synodal exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, as principal dialogue partners, this contribution offers how we can take inspirations for our local churches especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. 2015 Synod: Issues and Expectations

On the eve of the 2015 Synod, *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage* was published.¹ By its release date (25/09/2015), it was designed to be an exhortation to the synod participants to stay focused on the crises facing marriage and family life today especially in the Catholic Church. Nigerian John Cardinal Onaiyekan's contribution hit the nail on the head regarding the issues in Sub-Saharan Africa.² In the face of growing hostility or at best ambivalence toward the marriage institution and family life, the synod must reaffirm the Church's teaching that heterosexual marriage is the norm; it is sacred, and children are very important for that union. Though we are called to be sensitive to lived circumstances of God's children, same-sex union is "an abomination."³ Even if Cardinal Onaiyekan's choice of words might sound extreme to some, it underscores the dominant moral evaluation of homosexual behaviour in Africa. However, there is the need to tone down his language by insisting on the pastoral-ethical balance the Church teaches. In other words, we must balance pastoral solicitude, which eschews physical and psychological violence as well

¹Winfried Aymans, ed. *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015.

²John Cardinal Onaiyekan, "Marriage in Our Contemporary World: Pastoral Observations from an African Perspective," in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, ed. Winfried Aymans, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015, 63-71.

³Onaiyekan, "Marriage in Our Contemporary World," 67.

as discrimination, with objective moral evaluation of homosexual behaviour, as variously taught by the Church.⁴

Apart from this important expectation, we looked forward to the Church speaking to some crises. For instance, what concrete pastoral plan would the Church propose for families torn apart due to migration and social injustice? What of families suffering under the cruelty of Islamic fundamentalism? What has the Church to say to families forced to live in the city with little or no support structure? What concrete commitment was the Church challenging us to make for such anonymous and lost families? What about the needless burden of celebrating multiple marriage rites (customary, civil, and ecclesial)? What inspiration should the Mother Church offer to overcome this dichotomy which has made many faithful Catholics stay away from Communion?

Another challenge raised by Cardinal Onaiyekan of Abuja was the phenomenon of premarital sex as a way of 'sampling' for fertility. Hence, many youths today prefer customary marriage but not church marriage prior to fertility evidence (pregnancy). Even though the Church points out that there are scientific procedures to test for fertility, many still prefer the traditional way of testing. Onaiyekan submits that in recognising the enormity of this challenge, the Church needs to pay attention to couples anxious for 'fruit of the womb.'⁵ Pastoral care in the light of anxiety about fertility must include doing the needful "to encourage people to sustain their marriage with or without offspring."⁶

3. 2015 Synod and African Realities

The first intervention from the synod floor in the form of a meditation came from Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He cautioned the synod participants against the obsession with marginal issues while neglecting the broader and more pressing issues to most catholic families in the world: poverty, anti-family economic policies, migration, lack of education and other developmental opportunities; and other factors that frighten the youth from embracing or delaying marriage and family life today. In the face of these plethora issues and challenges, what might the Church do concretely in response, inspired by her scriptures and tradition?

⁴See for instance, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana* (1975), no. 8; *Homosexualitatis Problema* (1986), nos 10-16; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), nos 2357-2358.

⁵Onaiyekan, "Marriage in Our Contemporary World," 70.

⁶Onaiyekan, "Marriage in Our Contemporary World," 69.

During the press briefing on October 8, 2015, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia acknowledged that some synod fathers voiced reservations about the *Instrumentum Laboris*, for being too Western. They felt the synod's working document focused on issues quite pressing in one or two regions of the world. Yet, they hoped that the synod would experience the positive impact of African contribution.⁷ Similarly, various observations contained in Group reports made available to the press on October 9, 2015, centred on the charge of Eurocentricism of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, and the marginalisation of views and concerns from the Southern Hemisphere, particularly Africa.⁸

Some media reporters went further to observe that the Holy See Press Office appeared to pay less attention to the interventions of African prelates at the synod, especially with regard to what they regarded as contextual pressing issues like migration, Islamic fundamentalism, growing attraction of dictatorship of relativism.⁹ Perhaps this informed the formation of a coalition of African prelates at the Synod, meeting under the guidance of South African Cardinal Wilfried Napier to push for more African visibility.

4. What we Got in the End: Between *Relatio Finalis* and *Amoris Laetitia*

At the end of the synod, the participants issued the *Relatio Finalis* (RF). Apart from the reaffirmation of the Church's stand on marriage and family life, none of what Cardinal Onaiyekan mentioned in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage*, or most of what Cardinal Sarah of Guinea, or other African bishops emphasised during the synod, found their way into RF when dealing with complex situations in marriage and family today (nos 69-76). To a critical reader, it seems RF was reduced to the issue of reception of Holy Communion by

⁷"Synod15: Report From Small Circle English 'D,'" *ZENIT.org*, 09.10.2015, http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/synod15-report-from-small-circle-english-d?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_content=%5BZE151009%5D%20The%20world%20seen%20from%20Rome&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch&utm_term=Classic (accessed 09.10.2015).

⁸"*Circuli Minori* - Families are not Alien to us," *Vatican Information Service*, VISnews151009 (09.10.2015); Edward Pentin, "Synod Day 5: Small Group Reports Made Public," *National Catholic Register*, 09.10.2015, http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/synod-day-5-small-group-reports-made-public/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter (accessed 09.10.2015).

⁹Edward Pentin, "Cardinal Sarah: ISIS and Gender Ideology Are Like 'Apocalyptic Beasts,'" *National Catholic Register*, October 12, 2015, www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/cardinal-sarahs-intervention-isis-and-ideology-are-like-apocalyptic-beasts (accessed 15.10.2015).

those divorced and civilly remarried, and homosexual unions. In fact, prior to *Amoris Laetitia's* publication, three articles from RF appeared to be most discussed, i.e. numbers 84-86 on discernment in pastoral accompaniment for persons in complex situations. The debate centred on the interpretation of Pope St John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio*, particularly no. 84. Does appeal to FC, 84 allow the possibility of receiving communion by divorced and civilly remarried couples who cannot leave the non-sacramental union? Just like women in polygamous marriages, these couples find it difficult and morally problematic to leave the unions because the stability of the family and the good of the children will suffer.

Having been somewhat disappointed about the methodology and content of the 2015 synod, there was one hope – Pope Francis' post-synodal exhortation. This hope was founded on the theological and canonical status of a synod in the Latin Rite. It is not an ecumenical Council. A synod vote lacks a deliberative status. Being an organ of affective collegiality between the bishops with and under the Pontiff (*cum et sub Petro*), it is a consultative body, set up to advise the Holy Father vested with ordinary Magisterium, on some issues needing pastoral attention. Ultimately, a synod's final document is at the mercy of the Holy Father. Nothing is binding on him, though one expects that he pays serious attention to a synod's final document passed over to him at the end of the synod, in the spirit of canon 127 §2.

Considering that Pope Francis is from the South, some hoped that regardless of the voting patterns and media-dominated issues from the synod, Pope Francis would show his characteristic candour. He would dwell on those issues affecting us in the South, though *Relatio Finalis* did not accord them necessary dignity. In the end, *Amoris Laetitia* is not radically different from *Relatio Synodi* and *Relatio Finalis*. AL only gives a stamp of authority to some consensus positions in those documents. Pope Francis followed to a great extent the structure of *Relatio Finalis*. Vintage Francis is found in *Amoris Laetitia's* chapters one (*reflections on biblical foundations*), four (*love in marriage, using 1 Cor 13*), five (*life in marriage*), and seven (*children education*).

As noted above, Pope Francis reflects extensively on marriage and the complexity of family life as part of pastoral care to families that are struggling to conform themselves to Christ in the sacrament of marriage. *Amoris Laetitia* does not include any issue only marginally treated in the two synod documents. Perhaps one's hope was misplaced in the end. He states that not all issues ought to be settled by the magisterium. On the contrary, having supplied broad

principles to deal with irregular situations in marriage (AL, 292, 293, 297, 299-300, 307; note 329, and note 351), he expects a local church (national or regional) if it so desires to “seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs” (AL, 3).

5. *Amoris Laetitia* Echoing CROMIA Project

Regardless of the various issues and promising content of *Amoris Laetitia*, attention has been devoted largely to chapter eight. This chapter has become so contentious that some cardinals, led by American Cardinal Raymond Burke, presented five *dubia* (doubts in need of straightforward clarification) to Pope Francis. The *dubia* centre around the role AL gives to discernment, internal forum, and conscience.¹⁰

The discussions on the internal forum and the role of conscience on certain categories are new neither in moral theology nor African Christian theology. My assertion is premised on the findings of “Churches’ Research on Marriage in Africa” (CROMIA).¹¹ Regarding the theological and pastoral issue of divorced and civilly or traditionally remarried African Christians, three positions came up during CROMIA. These are the hard-line position, the nullity procedures position, and the ‘Good Conscience’ solution.¹² The ‘Good Conscience’ solution outlines five conditions that might open some categories of civilly divorced and remarried to receive the sacraments. CROMIA concluded that some churches in Africa were open to it and were practicing it. According to the researchers, they did not see any evidence that this solution undermined the indissolubility of marriage. On the contrary, the exceptions “seem to be safeguarding the values of Christian marriage by acknowledging that these are exceptional measures taken to meet exceptional circumstances.”¹³

¹⁰See “Full Text and Explanatory Notes of Cardinals’ Questions on ‘*Amoris Laetitia*’ (19 September 2016),” *National Catholic Register*, posted on November 16, 2016, <http://m.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia#.WPCIxRnTXqA> (accessed 14.04.2017).

¹¹CROMIA was an international, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary project in the seventies, involving more than 200 researchers. About 16 Churches including Catholic Church were involved, although delimited and limited to East, Central, and Southern Africa (Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Nonetheless, CROMIA has had profound influence on thinking about conjugal issues and family relations in Africa. Benezeri Kisembo, Laurenti Magesa and Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Marriage*, 2nd & revd ed., Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1998, 11. (Hereafter, *African Christian Marriage*).

¹²*African Christian Marriage*, 79-84.

¹³*African Christian Marriage*, 84.

The 'good conscience' position, which has made a comeback today, was dismissed at the 1980 synod of Bishops, and subsequently by *Familiaris consortio*. While many Roman Catholic commentators on *Amoris Laetitia*'s controversial sections seem fixated on the *via media* offered by the German bishops, they conveniently forget that African prelates, pastors and lay faithful in the seventies had the courage to think out of the box. There is nothing we are reading in *Amoris Laetitia* regarding the options for those in irregular marital situations that is new from what CROMIA participants offered the church several decades ago. Perhaps, they were light years ahead in the use of the pastoral circle method,¹⁴ which Pope Francis appears to favour. This method consists of a hermeneutical circle of See-Judge-Act. It demands getting a grip on reality in its complexities and messiness (the dimension of active involvement). Then one makes sense of the burden of reality (the dimension of praxis). This is followed by taking responsibility for reality (the dimension of ethics). Finally, it insists on possessing the disposition that allows reality to enlighten us (the dimension of grace).¹⁵

This theological method came on the heels of a strong theological tradition in the Catholic Church, called the multidimensional historical consciousness approach. It was popularised in the fifties and sixties by theologians like Bernard Lonergan,¹⁶ and Personalist moral theologians.¹⁷ The accentuated awareness of historicity signalled the transition from naive realism to "critical realism, a realism that knows the real because it knows what is true."¹⁸ As such, this theological approach is willing to propose an ethics of the meaningful that is intelligible and credible, even beyond the immediate tradition.

¹⁴The following book is a good introduction because its idea originated from Africa: Frans Wijsen, Peter Henriot and Rodrigo Mejia, ed., *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006.

¹⁵Jon Sobrino, "Foreword: Faith, Justice, and Injustice," in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, ed. Frans Wijsen, Peter Henriot and Rodrigo Mejia, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, 9-10.

¹⁶See especially Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness," in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974, 1-9.

¹⁷See for instance Franz Böckle and Coenraad van Ouwerkerk, ed., *Moral Problems and Christian Personalism*, ed. Marcel Vanhengel, Concilium, New York, NY; Glen Rock: Paulist, 1965.

¹⁸Bernard Lonergan, "Moral Theology and the Human Sciences," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, ed. Robert Croken and Robert Doran, Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 309.

CROMIA and *Amoris Laetitia* echo this theological tradition. They both remind us that for any proposition to be true, all human stories must play a role and have an input by way of checking just how valid these claims are. We cannot move from the justification of a position, even in moral claims, to its truthfulness without an appeal to history. Christian ethical positions in contemporary society must pay attention to developments in this changing world, and not just focus on insights from intelligent, and even saintly, people of the past.¹⁹ Perhaps African pastors and theologians that participated in CROMIA about four decades ago, and who are still alive, may not be as alarmed as many of us are today regarding the whole noise about the issue of divorced and civilly remarried. Perhaps their exasperation might be that pressing family issues outlined in CROMIA's final report are glossed over again, with emphasis on issues that capture the imagination and interest of the Northern hemisphere.

6. Mission Lands: Where do we Go from Here?

Local churches are the ones to address their respective pressing problems. However, the universal church must offer a general and magisterial guideline. By implication, the issues will not be settled with a top-down approach.

On the contrary, it is the responsibility of the local churches to take on their pastoral issues and offer solutions. This is important to note because, as already asserted, majority of the attention and discussions during the 2014 and 2015 synods were on pressing issues for local churches in the West. The more pressing pastoral issues for the peoples of the South, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, were treated in passing. Hence, the local churches in the South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, have to identify and address their pressing pastoral needs of families and marriage. We should not presume that the dominant discussions at the synod are necessarily our own pressing needs. This is part of the task of theologians, pastors, and the laity, i.e. to identify and articulate in unison our most urgent pastoral needs. Going forward, they should offer answers to questions our people are asking, and not simply offer answers to questions that are not uppermost in people's minds. What are the most urgent pastoral marriage and family needs in our local church (diocese, country, continent)? I shall highlight just three of the issues to emphasise the point made above.

¹⁹Michael Lawler and Todd Salzman, "Karl Rahner and Human Nature: Implications for Ethics," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74, 4 (2009) 408-409.

6.1. Unified Marriage Rites

To its credit, *Amoris Laetitia* refrains from labelling some customary marriage rites as ‘marriage in stages’ or marriage ‘*ad experimentum*’ (AL, 53). Yet, there are unresolved pastoral problems arising from entrenched perception about African traditional marriage rites. In chapter eight (nos 271-312), AL does not spare a thought for those in irregular situations, who are denied reception of communion, due to unresolved clash between the Church and African marriage rites. It seems this does not concern the universal church as much as divorced and civilly remarried couples. Yet, many active couples who are non-communicants in Africa are not divorced and remarried. They are married customarily but not ‘*in facie ecclesiae*.’ A proactive approach will consist of a unified and inculturated marriage rite.

My fundamental argument, already articulated elsewhere²⁰ that it is possible to work out a framework of unification between the Church’s marriage rite and traditional marriage process. Marital unions originating according to African marriage rites, and their distinctive matter and form, are not ‘trial marriages’ but proper marriages in their right. Today, an Afro-Christian marriage rite is possible, based on the leeway offered in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 77.²¹ Clearly, this proposal is for a couple with at least one party being a Catholic. It is not supposed to be universal for all Africans regardless of their religious affiliation or denomination. This proposal mirrors OT marriage process.²² OT marriage process in principle is not

²⁰Ray Olusesan Aina, “Current Challenges of ‘Marriage in Stages’ to the Church’s Theology of Marriage: A Moral Theological Response to *Relatio Synodi*,” in *The Family and the New Evangelization (Proceedings of the 30th Conference of Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) held at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, 2015)*, ed. Luke Ijezie, Stephen Audu and Agnes Acha, Port Harcourt: Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria, 2015, 257-276.

²¹“... an ecclesiastical authority having the territorial competence in Article 22:2 of this Constitution is free to draw up its own rite suited to its people and region, according to the provisions of Article 63, but on the express condition that the priest assisting at the marriage asks for and obtains the consent of the contracting parties.” This conciliar directive is not asking for some elements being subsumed in the Latin rite. On the contrary, it allows for a new marriage rite if “it will more clearly signify the grace of the sacrament and will emphasize the spouses’ duties.” SC, 77.

²²Jewish first century marriage process consists of the following stages. First, there was marriage proposal and arrangement by family elders. Second, there was betrothal ceremony. The husband, at this stage, presents the wife or the father of the bride with the contract of marriage and bride-price. Betrothal stage had force of law (Deut 20:7; 22:23-27). Third stage consisted of the public wedding ceremony. Between the betrothal stage and wedding ceremony, the bride still remained in her parents’ house (cf. Mt 1:18-25). Daniel Harrington, “Marriage: New Testament,” in *The*

offensive to Christian sensibility. After all, the first sign given by Jesus in the Gospel of John was during a Jewish wedding ceremony (Jn 2:1-11). Therefore, African marriage process properly understood should not be offensive to Christian sensibility. Given that most of those getting married even traditionally today in Sub-Saharan Africa are Christians, the Church must be present at all stages.²³

6.2.Reception of Communion by Some Classes of Non-Communicants

A key point in *Amoris Laetitia* is about allowing for mitigating factors in discernment (AL, 301-303). Objective sin is not the only thing to look at; the pastors must look at the person at the centre of it. Certain factors or facts can limit culpability. This is a standard principle of traditional Catholic moral teaching.²⁴ While the controversies around this claim, and around footnote 351, have focused on the divorced and civilly remarried, this papal teaching should challenge pastors in Africa to be more discerning when confronted with non-communicants who are in conjugal relationships. There are some who are not culpable and may not be denied communion even if they do not depart from the union. This involves a person who has been married civilly under the 'law of monogamy,' but the partner has refused to solemnise the union according to Church law. Ordinarily, pastors will think there are only two options: separation in order to receive communion, or to remain in the union and remain excluded from the sacraments. However, in response to an enquiry from the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith stated that if the parties exchanged their vows and consent under civil law of monogamy, and there was no impediment of natural law or of divine positive law, this case qualified for a *sanatio in radice*, even without the knowledge of the uncooperating party (cf. can. 1163, §2). In other words, this reply allows a party that wants to practice his/her faith by reception of the sacraments to do so, even if his/her spouse is obstinate.²⁵ Proper discernment, accompaniment and

Collegetville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller et al., Collegetville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996, 587-590, at 587-588.

²³Bénézet Bujo, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage*, trans., Gregor Huckle, Andreas Hugentobler and Katrin Stucky, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009, 101.

²⁴*Amoris Laetitia* 302 refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 1732, 2352) on this standard principle. Based on recourse to this tradition, AL draws a conclusion: "For this reason, a negative judgment about an objective situation does not imply a judgment about the imputability or culpability of the person involved" (AL, 302).

²⁵Samuel Kleda, "Pastoral Care to Wounded Families," in *Christ's New Homeland - Africa: Contribution to the Synod on the Family by African Pastors*, San Francisco, CA:

listening to individuals' stories can reveal those who belong to this class of the faithful. This possibility makes us appreciate the sense contained in AL, 305-306; one might have broken one of the decalogue. Yet, one might be in a state of grace (AL, 305), such that even without leaving an obstinate partner one may receive communion through *sanatio in radice* and appropriate dispensation. We are called to attend to details of lives of people and their nuances. This is the logic of *via caritatis* (AL, 306).

6.3. Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-Sex Attraction

Amoris Laetitia follows existing magisterial positions on persons with homosexual tendencies (AL, 52, 250-251). It strikes a balance between a negative judgment on homosexual tendencies/actions and a positive (merciful) approach to concrete persons with same-sex attraction, and their families. Based on existing Church teaching, Catholics are called to exercise moral decency towards persons with homosexual tendencies. In other words, even if we acknowledge that homosexual tendencies are objectively disordered, according to Natural Law and our Judaeo-Christian Tradition, we must not demonise such persons. Even with their disordered tendencies, they are also created in the image and likeness of God and have the same God-given dignity as the rest of us. Hence, any form of unjust discrimination is obnoxious and to be rejected (AL, 250, 251). If we bear in mind the use of language in Cardinal Onaiyekan's assessment of persons with same-sex attraction (SSA), one sees that there is still the need in Africa to balance moral objectivity and moral decency towards SSA persons. How much pastoral space do we have for families dealing with a child with homosexual tendencies? Do such families even have the confidence that if they ventured to talk about it even to their pastors they would be met with understanding, mercy, and non-demonization? One wonders how many in the priesthood and pastoral field have the skill of handling SSA in our midst beyond a blanket condemnation of both tendencies and persons. Going forward in Africa, spurred by *Amoris Laetitia*, houses of formation and pastoral institutes will really need to spend some time, reflections and resources on this issue, so that various Episcopal conferences and dioceses in Africa can have pastoral resources (guidelines) that priests, pastoral agents, and families, can use to pastorally accompany SSA persons and their families. Many of them are hurting, and hoping for assistance, but are afraid of coming out of

Ignatius Press, 2015, 143-163, at 158. The author is currently the Archbishop of Douala, Cameroon.

the closet because they are either scared or not sure how they will be dealt with in the local communities. We probably need some 'out of the box' thinking to offer a pastoral guide for our Church. Where else can one dare do this if not houses of formation?²⁶

7. Teaching the Theological Heritage of Pope Francis

I may be missing something; but the last time I checked, the anxieties and deep panic at least in the Southern hemisphere about *Amoris Laetitia* are coming mostly from sub-Saharan Africa. Asian and Latin American Catholics appear at home with the reasonability of AL's nuance and subtlety. One is compelled to ask, what's going on? Are Africans more Catholic than Latin American and Asian Catholics? Not necessarily. So what is the issue? I think it comes down to difference in theological method and praxis. In the name of orthodoxy, Africans are enamoured to the Transcendental Thomism of Pope St John Paul II²⁷ and Bonaventuran Augustinianism of Benedict XVI.²⁸ Due to the long papacy of John Paul II, his theological method has left a deep imprint on Catholic theology such that we have forgotten that in *Mater et Magistra*, Pope St John XXIII proposed a praxis-oriented hermeneutical method of SEE-JUDGE-ACT, moving away from the neo-Platonic method of articulation of axiom (abstract values) and application to real world.

While African Catholicism remains steeped in traditional neo-Platonic and transcendental Thomism, Latin America and Asia Catholicism adopted the hermeneutical circle of See-Judge-Act, explained earlier when comparing CROMIA and *Amoris Laetitia*. This is the liberation theology heritage Latin American and Asian Catholics have in common. This is the heritage of Pope Francis. Those who are at home with Liberation Theology's hermeneutical circle in its critical quest for truth and transformation are more likely to understand Pope Francis and be less anxious and panicky. Those of

²⁶A theology thesis research on pastoral care of SSA persons in Nigeria is about being defended in my seminary (Alphonsus Obiele, "Care of Persons with Same-Sex Attraction in the Church: A Theological Ethical Evaluation of a Nigerian Ecclesial Initiative," bachelor thesis, Gwagwalada, Abuja: The National Missionary Seminary of St Paul, 2017). The research moves beyond the trite exhortation of treating SSA persons with dignity, care, mercy, without unjust discrimination. It provides a framework that pastors and pastoral agents can easily adapt when they have to minister to SSA persons and their families.

²⁷Michael Hayes and Gerald O'Collins, ed., *The Legacy of John Paul II*, London; New York, NY: Burns & Oates, 2008, esp. chaps 1-5.

²⁸Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, ed., *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, London; New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010.

us with a different theological method which hitherto appeared official are more likely to be scared and suspicious just as we were taught to be suspicious of liberation theology. Consequently, our theological formation lacks deep, serious and systematic attention to and appreciation of liberation theologies. But can we overcome this deficiency? Not with the status of our theological institutes and seminaries as affiliates to Roman pontifical universities, which dictate what our seminaries and theological institutes teach; and liberation theology is not included. We need to understand and appreciate the liberation theology heritage of Pope Francis. This is not about revolution as many of us fear. According to Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, in an interview shortly before the publication of *AL*, the theological heritage of Pope Francis is not revolutionary. It is more about evolution, which is a form of development by expansiveness or depth.²⁹ That is why this Pope still remains a theological conservative on several areas.

8. Inclusion of Non-Ordained Faithful on Formation Teams

Amoris Laetitia takes serious RF's exhortation on the renewal of priestly training, in the light of balanced family formation: "The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes the appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church" (*AL*, 203, quoting RF, 61).

This exhortation has practical implication. Significantly, houses of formation especially in Sub-Saharan Africa need to include more than before women (nuns, married, and even single) on formation team. Houses of formation in this part of the world are too artificial, and largely exclusive. Hence, it is easier for those who pass through seminaries to remain ensconced in their macho, chauvinistic, and even clericalist sub-cultures. This then becomes a handicap for many after ordination to work with lay faithful, especially women, who are more readily available in the pastoral care of the family. If during their years of formation they really did not empathically and scientifically enter into the life-worlds of women, how can they positively work with them for the progress of the domestic Church with a positive attitude of 'co-responsibility' that Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI exhorts?

²⁹John Allen, "Interview: Cardinal Dolan Insists Papal Text will be on Marriage, not Divorce," *Crux*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.cruxnow/church/2016/04/04/cardinal-dolan-insists-papal-text-will-be-on-marriage-not-divorce/> (accessed 04.04.2016).

If houses of formation will take serious *Amoris Laetitia's* exhortation on the renewal of priestly training (AL, 203), then various houses of formation have to review the terms of contract, working conditions and environments of lay people, especially women presently employed. This is to make it easier for them to accept to be part of trainers ('formators') of future priests. How friendly, enhancing, dignifying and equitable are their present terms of contracts and working conditions? For instance, can we use the same salary scale and welfare package for priests, who generally are better off, for their full-time lay colleagues? Evidently, lay faithful, especially those with families, should have different salary scale that is just and relatively competitive.

Of course, there are some practical issues that might come up like the criteria to use to have some lay faithful and nuns as members of the Formation Team, accommodation issue, and issues of boundaries. These are not insurmountable. On the first one, the appropriate authorities mentioned above can draw up criteria based on sound and exhaustive research. On the second, funding can be available both within and outside the country, even from the Vatican, to provide respective staff quarters for nuns and married formation staff. If this is seen as imperative, there is sufficient goodwill that will make the money available. It only needs the will and careful planning. On the third, i.e. boundary issue, let us spend more time. Still on boundaries, in my estimation, every house of formation must have Formator/Faculty Staff Handbook, distinct from Academic Manual that most have. This Formator/Faculty Staff Handbook will surely deal with the boundary issues between students and the Faculty Staff living on- and off-campus.

9. Conclusion

As we come to terms with *Amoris Laetitia* and the dust this has raised, we must not be too anxious. Indeed, the hermeneutical circle that Pope Francis and his liberationist heritage favour can make us feel apprehensive about what the approach would yield. We need to grip reality more in the grey zones. This article offered, amongst others, three matters arising from *Amoris Laetitia* for Africa. These three issues demonstrate some grey zones that the Church in Africa must deal with. Dealing with these issues will be an instance of theological and pastoral reception of *Amoris Laetitia* in Africa. This has been the underlying inspiration for the present contribution.