

ASIAN
HORIZONS
Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2017
Pages: 183-196

AMORIS LAETITIA IN A CLERICALIST CULTURE: A CASE OF THE PHILIPPINE CHURCH

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Abstract

Amoris Laetitia (henceforth AL) has been the subject of discussion among supporters and critics alike. Apparently, and especially within the Philippine context, there is not much discussion about its success as a pastoral thrust that seeks to journey with persons who are broken either as individuals or as families. If read side by side with *Evangelii Gaudium* and other writings of Pope Francis, it is clear that AL's pastoral thrust promotes the Gospel of Mercy in the sphere of family life and sexuality. It is in line with the Church's need to carry out internal reforms and thus it addresses the growing concern of secularization. This paper contends that for the Church to truly journey with those who need its pastoral care, as envisioned by AL, it has to address the problem of clericalism. The case of the Philippine Church is used to elaborate the contention that more than just the profound pastoral pronouncements of AL, there must be changes within the Church's system, and primarily this means serious efforts to address clericalism.

Keywords: Church Hierarchy, Clericalism, Pastoral Ministry, Transparency

Despite criticisms against AL, it remains to be a timely and necessary document as the Church faces a lot of issues in the 21st century. The changing landscape of society has been conditioned by a

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lot of factors. In a world where truths are understood as social constructions, the Church cannot just employ its usual approaches of evangelization when engaging peoples of different faiths and cultures.

1. The Pastoral Framework of *Amoris Laetitia*

For us to understand and appreciate much better AL, we have to read it together with the other writings of Pope Francis. This part of the discussion would invite the reader to relate AL to *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) and *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV). Hopefully, we will see the connection of the different documents, and thus figure out that AL is part of a consistent and coherent pastoral blueprint in Francis' papacy.

AL acknowledges and sustains the Church's earlier teachings on the family. In fact it highlights the gifts of marriage and the family, as well as the importance of persevering in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience (AL, 5). However, it also acknowledges that not all familial relationships are perfect. Francis has remained consistent in what he pointed out in EG: realities are greater than ideas (AL, 5; EG, 233).

For the Church to truly own the joy of the families, it must be a Church renewed. It must be a Church not only cognizant of the changing social context of families, but also one that is consciously connected to the experiences of its people. It is not enough that the clergy know the demographics of its members. The people of God after all cannot be reduced to mere figures in spreadsheets that are subject to analysis for the purpose of research. Thus, the Church has to continually listen and be attuned to the movement of the Holy Spirit that is always at work – the Spirit that guides the Church (AL, 3).

The need to address the issues of broken families, informal unions, and those who are far from the Church due to problems related to sexuality and conjugal relationship would be better understood in the light of the Pope's theology of mercy as well as his invitation for pastors to continually work for Church renewal. In EG, Pope Francis stresses that Church renewal cannot be deferred as there are ecclesial structures that can hamper efforts at evangelization (EG, 26-27). New life and evangelical spirit are necessary for the Church to be truly faithful to her own calling without which any structure will soon prove ineffective (EG, 26-27).

Citing St Thomas Aquinas who says that in the hierarchy of virtues, faith must work through love, the Holy Father reminds all

pastors that their ministry should not be obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed (EG, 35). Thus, it is necessary for the clergy to be in touch with the realities around them particularly the context of its people. Moreover, they must exercise their ministry in the spirit of charity.

A cursory reading of EG would reveal that the Pope is well aware of the stagnating status of the Church. He warns pastoral workers of their temptations as well as the threats of spiritual worldliness, and internal division (EG 76, 93-97, 98-102). Anyone familiar with the genealogy of the Church's discourse would not find it difficult to see the connection between Pope Francis' EG and Vatican II's vision in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). GS reminds all people of goodwill that the joys and hopes of the men and women of this age are also the joys and hopes of the Church (GS, 1). The Holy Father therefore simply refreshes or introduces us to what the Church said over fifty years ago during Vatican II.

Another document that would cast light on our reading of AL is *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV). Issued to emphasize the importance of mercy, the Pope is not saying that we should sideline justice. Rather, he reminds us that in the greater scheme of things "mercy is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us" (MV, 3). The same document teaches that mercy is the foundation of the Church's life, thus, all of her pastoral activity should be caught up in tenderness she makes present to believers (MV, 10).

A closer reading of MV would make us realize that Pope Francis has been very consistent in his Pastoral Theology. He stresses the same essential points that were already articulated in EG. He encourages pastors to ensure that the message of mercy reaches everyone, even directing his invitation to those whose behaviour is the reason of one's distance from the grace of God (MV, 19).

We may summarize the discussion at this point by saying that whether one agrees with AL or otherwise, one has to read it within the broader context of Francis' discourse on mercy and the need for Church reform. The Pope, on various occasions, he has criticized not only the unjust and pathological structures outside of the Church but within the Church itself. He believes that unless the Church wakes up from its slumber it will never be relevant to society and the people it serves.

2. The Pastoral Thrust of *Amoris Laetitia*

The foregoing discussion has provided us with a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of AL and its context under

Francis' papacy. To simply speak of the exhortation as an attempt to destroy marriage is not only simplistic but also out of context.

AL is the Church's response to the challenges of the modern world to a Church that has started to lose its relevance. Even during the papacy of John Paul II, the Church already acknowledged the need to exercise with care when discerning situations.¹ The Synod of Bishops advises pastors to avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various (marital or familial) relations (AL, 79).

Thus, Catholics who refuse to see and feel the need for conversion on the part of the Church as a teacher and pastor will never appreciate not only the timeliness of AL but also its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus that promotes mercy and compassion. To quote from the document itself:

The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children who are wounded and troubled, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm (AL, 291).

Walter Kasper explains that mercy is the essence of the gospel and the key to Christian life.² By dialoguing with a world that is broken, the Church does not alter anything with its mandate. Rather, it simply seeks to touch the lives of those who participate in the Church's life but nonetheless in an incomplete manner. The Church does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer respond to her teaching on marriage (AL, 292).

It is possible to see opportunities of pastoral care for civil unions, especially when they attain a particular stability, legal recognition, particularly when they are characterized by deep affection and responsibility for their offspring (AL, 292).

In her article, "Power and Church Reform," Angela Senander says that Jesus made God's reign present in his ministry and demonstrated God's presence for those on the margins of society.³ Marginalization is not only true in the socio-political and economic landscape. It is a reality experienced by people also in the sphere of love, sexuality and marital life. If the Church, particularly its clergy,

¹*Familiaris Consortio*, 84.

²Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Quezon City: Claret Publishing Group, 2015.

³Angela Senander, "Power and Church Reform: A Jesuit Pope Named Francis," in S. Sullivant *et al.*, *Theology and Power*, New York: Paulist Press, 2016, 156.

is to be a sign of God's reign, especially among the marginalized, then its Gospel of mercy should also touch the hearts of those who have been pained by marginalization because of irregularities in their family or interpersonal relationships.

3. The Limitation of Ecclesial Discourse

There is no argument, from those who see and know the value of AL, that the exhortation articulates how the Church may be a leaven of society that is broken and abandoned. But more than just being a blueprint, the more important question is, how? What kind of a Church must the Catholic Church be – if it is to truly carry out the Gospel of Mercy? How far would a well-written document like AL change the Church especially the clergy? Is there any guarantee that the bishops and priests will be more pastoral in their dealings with people in view of the pronouncements of Pope Francis in AL?

No less than the Holy Father himself admitted that nowadays documents do not arouse the same interest as in the past and that they are quickly forgotten (EG, 25). Thus, AL is not in itself a guarantee of an immediate change within the Church. Like any ecclesial document, it is more of an expression of a wish or a desire of what is to be achieved rather than a statement of facts. The Church will achieve its pastoral thrust if its discourse is coupled with gradual systemic changes and above all a change in the mentality among Catholics.

Speaking of gradual systemic changes, it is something that has to be done in the various layers of the Church's administrative structure: diocesan, parochial, etc. More importantly, the change within the Church must be interior and eventually made manifest in its attitude towards power. "[The] Church's chosen social location is crucial in the effectiveness of its pastoral mission."⁴

Inseparable from becoming a Church of mercy is the need to be a Church of service. This means, in the context of this paper, a Church freed from clericalism and the abuses that goes with it. The clergy cannot claim to be genuine and loving pastors committed to the needs of their flock if they continue to show interest in wealth, position, and titles within the Church. A clergy too preoccupied with ecclesiastical careerism cannot fully or effectively journey with their

⁴Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, "Religion and Politics in the Philippines: The Public Role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Democratization of the Filipino Polity," *Political Theology* 11, 6 (2010) 862.

people. AL tells us that there is so much brokenness among God's people, and for this the Church especially its leaders cannot but journey with these broken people in order to find their wholeness in Christ Jesus.

The journey requires pastors to pay more attention to their flock and less on themselves. Basically, genuine pastoral care means care for the becoming of others rather than the being of one's image. It is necessary therefore for the Church to step out from its comfort zone and give up its privileged position in order to truly journey with its people who need guidance. Just as a Church that grows secure in its alliance with an elite few and in the privileges offered by dominant power structures, cannot be a sign and sacrament of God's special predilection for the poor,⁵ so does a Church that is so vain with its prestige, titles, and fashion, cannot be a sign of God's mercy for those who need understanding, love and healing.

4. Clericalism as an Ecclesial Pathology

At this point, let us temporarily shift our discussion from the highlights of AL to clericalism in order to emphasize this paper's thesis: for the Church to truly journey with those who need its pastoral care, it has to address the problem of clericalism.

Donald Cozzens of the John Carroll University describes clericalism as an attitude found in many (but not all) clergy who put their status as priests and bishops above their status as baptized disciples of Jesus Christ. He adds that "[i]n doing so, a sense of privilege and entitlement emerges in their individual and collective psyche. This, in turn, breeds a corps of ecclesiastical elites who think they're unlike the rest of the faithful."⁶ Nicholas King citing George Wilson explains that clericalism is like an established caste system. It is a way of creating a system that is impenetrable by those who do not share the same credentials with the members of the elite group.⁷

In Catholicism, there has remained a clear delineation between the ordained or the members of the hierarchy (deacons, presbyters and bishops) and the lay people despite Vatican II's emphasis on the universal priesthood of the faithful. While it is not fair to say that all

⁵Cartagenas, "Religion and Politics in the Philippines..." 867.

⁶Donald Cozzens, "Don't Put Priests on a Pedestal," *U.S. Catholic* 80, 10 (October 2015) 33-35.

⁷Nicholas King, "Theology and Power: A Biblical Perspective," in S. Sullivant *et al.*, *Theology and Power*, New York: Paulist Press, 2016, 3.

members of the clergy are clericalist, there is no doubt however that in many parts of the globe, the phenomenon is not yet dead. It is manifest in the way local Churches in the diocesan or even parochial level handle matters related to policy, finances and even the liturgy. Contributing to this ecclesial pathology are seminary formation, elaborate and clergy-centred liturgical celebrations, and the top-down management style of bishops.

The clergy-laity divide, however, is more of a surface-level description of clericalism. There are ideological presuppositions couched in theological language that justify the division, its necessity as well as its consequences. The idea and practice of privilege among the clergy is rooted in a tradition that has a philosophical system of its own owing to the medieval and feudal worldviews. A number of Church people, clergy and laity alike, have not abandoned philosophical categories that apparently and practically contribute to the uneven power relations within the Church. Holy Orders in particular, is believed to possess an ontological character that distinguishes the priest from the faithful. Therefore the ordained is different from his people not only in terms of function and ministry; he is metaphysically higher than them, thus the terms *Alter Christus*, and *Persona Christi*.

In recent times, there has been a growing consciousness and concern for clericalism. This has been largely due to the reported abuses by the clergy: sexual, financial and even political. Aloysius Cartagenas argues that power differential is a by-product of the hierarchical nature of the church and it is justified and sustained in mutually reinforcing ways.⁸ Clericalism goes with non-accountability. In the higher sphere of governance, the bishop (or the priest) does what he does because of who he is. His status determines his authority just as much as it justifies his actions. In simple terms, clericalism is elitism and arrogance rooted in the belief that priesthood is a distinct or special status.⁹

Clericalism therefore feeds or reinforces the unjust and systemic problems within the Church, and at the same time it is a symptom of the deeply ingrained ideologies within the ecclesiastical superstructure that needs to be critiqued and dismantled. Stephen

⁸Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, "The Terror of the Sexual Abuse by the Roman Catholic Clergy and the Philippine Context," *Asian Horizons* 5, 2 (2011) 351-352.

⁹William A. Donohue, "The Problem with Clericalism," *Society* 40, 3 (March 2003) 41-42.

Bullivant and others point out (with specific reference to the sex scandals and abuses within the Church) that problems related to power are not just the “sole product of individuals acting alone, but rather is made possible and/or exacerbated to a large degree by complex structural and organizational factors.”¹⁰

The Church’s prejudices and idols (to use the term of Francis Bacon) sustain the uneven relationships between the hierarchy and the laity. This is clearly made manifest in the lack of transparency in the financial management among local Churches and parishes. It is also manifested in the lack of accountability among those who have been accused of sexual abuses. In the words of Senander, “[i]n a hierarchical system in which people look to those above them with power, the perception of their own power is easily distorted.”¹¹

Looking at the bigger picture, clericalism is not just limited to the sexual and financial abuses. Part and parcel of it are the conservative organizational arrangements within the Church, the theology that is taught in the seminaries and formation houses, liturgies that strictly and excessively emphasize gestures and the other details of the ceremony. After all, if clericalism is an ideology of division, any form of division carries with it an ideology in various forms: philosophical, theological, political, aesthetic and cultural.

That is why Pope Francis considers “excessive clericalism” as an ecclesial challenge (EG, 102). As a concern, it is ecclesial and not just individual because whenever a priest or bishop abuses his authority, the matter cannot simply be attributed to his personal dispositions or predilections, it has something to do with the Church that shaped his mentality, and the theology behind that mentality. Pope Francis’ critique of clericalism is actually part and parcel of his challenge to the Church that has its own diseases to cure. One of which is its being so self-absorbed and self-referential.

In his address to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, Pope Francis said, with reference to those who are serving the Church that “careerism is a form of leprosy.”¹² This further means that those who work for the Church, specifically the hierarchy must be free from personal projects, from the possibility of planning one’s future or

¹⁰S. Sullivant *et al.*, *Theology and Power*, NJ: Paulist Press, ix-x.

¹¹Senander, “Power and Church Reform: A Jesuit Pope Named Francis,” 157.

¹²Pope Francis, “Address to the Community of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy,” 6 June 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papafrancesco_20130606_pontificia-accademia-ecclesiastica.html.

even from the prospect of staying for any length of time in a place of one's pastoral action.¹³ In another instance, the Pope calls clericalism a distortion of the Church. He reminded the clergy that they started their lives as lay people. The People of God is not an elite of priests and neither is it the property of the illuminated and elected few.¹⁴

The clergy are shepherds and not career executives or politicians. They are, by virtue of their ordination, to serve God's people. In fact, the clergy should not forget that the people that they are leading are not really theirs but Christ's. When Jesus entrusted to Peter his mission, it was very clear that he was to feed Jesus' sheep. A Church that treats its people as mere members of an organization cannot truly journey with them in their problems. The cliché "the Church is not a democracy" is the favourite of those who would believe in the indispensability of the hierarchy. But these people have forgotten that the Church, although it has its canonical structure of governance, cannot reduce itself to any form of government.

5. Clericalism in the Philippines

On April 9, 2016 Archbishop Socrates Villegas, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines wrote a letter asking parishes and dioceses to be schools of true Christian love. He adds that when families fail, we must all strike our breasts in contrition, for every Catholic community, every parish, for every diocese has a stake in the cohesion, love and constancy of a family.¹⁵

Apparently, the Philippine bishops showcase their best words as a sign of affirmation of AL. Much however remains to be seen whether the local Churches in the Philippines "can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs" (AL, 3). It is one thing to simply quote the post-synodal exhortation and it is practically different to implement them.

The measure of a genuine implementation of AL as a vision of pastoral care would be the organic formation of mechanisms and agencies, in the parish level, that would provide centres and apostolates for those persons and families who need guidance from their priests or fellow lay persons. While it is true that there are

¹³Francis, "Address to the Community of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy,"

¹⁴Pope Francis, "Clericalism Distorts the Church," Radio Vaticana, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/04/26/pope_francis_clericalism_distorts_the_church_/1225638

¹⁵Socrates Villegas, "Amoris Laetitia in the Jubilee of Mercy," in <http://www.cbcnews.com/cbcnews/?p=75671>

existing family centres or offices in many parishes that offer counselling and spiritual companionship programs, it remains to be seen whether local ordinaries and parish priests would seriously find ways to reframe the pastoral approach in the light of AL.

As has been elaborated in the previous discussion, AL cannot be separated from the broader ecclesial vision of Pope Francis that has been articulated in EG and in his speeches. It is not enough for the clergy to mention, quote or cite papal pronouncements during their homilies; they must be ready to journey with those people who are broken. But for a pastor to journey with his flock, he needs time for prayer, more spiritual formation, interior conversion and self-reflection. These are hardly possible, if not irreconcilable with clericalism. A bishop or priest should not forget that as a pastor, he has to, from time to time, grow in the Lord's grace with his people. The priest or even the bishop should recognize that God's grace, which is dynamic, should be cultivated within the community of people he serves. He should not be deaf to the Spirit's guidance and should read the signs of the times, which may even be found in the brokenness of his people.

Not unknown to many, some Filipino bishops and priests continue to minister their people within the clericalist framework. Aries Rufo in his book *Altar of Secrets: Sex, Politics, and Money in the Philippine Catholic Church*, exposes the controversies and issues hounding the leadership of the Philippine Church.¹⁶ We won't make a book review of Rufo's writing, but it is enough to say that his investigative journalism gives us data that reveal how deeply entrenched is clericalist pathology in the system. As aptly described in the book, the Catholic Church [in the Philippines] remains to be one of the most impenetrable or least scrutinized institutions in the Philippines.¹⁷

That the clergy possess a privileged position in the Church's hierarchical structure – is something beyond dispute. The upper hand of the ordained remains evident even in the sacramental functions despite the reforms that were introduced since Vatican II. Especially among countries with a population that is vastly Catholic, the lay are generally mere subscribers of the services offered by their pastors. Apparently absent in the Church's organizational culture is a kind of

¹⁶Aries Rufo, *Altar of Secrets: Sex, Politics, and Money in the Philippine Catholic Church*, Pasig: Journalism for Nation Building Foundation, 2013.

¹⁷Rufo, *Altar of Secrets: Sex, Politics, and Money in the Philippine Catholic Church*, ix.

reciprocity that would nurture an ethos of dialogue, fairness, and communion between the hierarchy and the laity.¹⁸

Clericalism in the context of the Philippine Church is common in at least two points: (1) lack of transparency, and (2) sustained privileged position of the ordained.

5.1. Lack of Transparency

The lack of accountability among bishops and priests, their naïve attitude towards sexuality and marital life, and above all the sex scandals that remain unsettled all appear irreconcilable to the whole spirit of “the joy of loving” (*Amoris Laetitia*).

Archbishop Soc Villegas, in his pastoral letter on AL, speaks of the dioceses and the parishes as the loci of the joy of loving. In his words: “[i]t is a parish alive, a diocese alive that can boast not of magnificent infrastructure, tremendous financial resources, not even numbers, whether of clergy, religious or lay leaders, but that takes comfort in *laetitia amoris*... the joy of loving.”¹⁹

His statement is more of a wish rather than a description of the current affairs of the Philippine Church. In 2012 for example, a parish priest in Quezon City was himself the cause of the division among his parishioners. The priest was charged with 14 counts of qualified theft in the City Prosecutor’s office. The parishioners wrote to the local ordinary of the priest and even wrote to the Nuncio so that their message would reach Pope Francis. It was alleged that the pastor of their parish owned condominium units, ivory figurines, expensive cars, and other properties.²⁰

The Philippine Church has not been spared from the global phenomenon of sex scandals which seriously damaged the image of Catholicism particularly in Europe. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines however is quite slow in addressing the problem. Clericalism is very much evident in the way some bishops participated in the cover up of the sexual offenders. Cartagenas

¹⁸Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, “The Abuse of Power in the Church: Its Impact on Identity, Reciprocity, and Familial Relations,” James F. Keenan, ed. *Catholic Theological Ethics: the Trento Conference*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013, 238.

¹⁹Socrates Villegas, “*Amoris Laetitia* in the Jubilee of Mercy,” in <http://www.cbcnews.com/cbcnews/?p=75671>.

²⁰Aries Rufo, “Quezon City Parish Divided over Priest with Dubious Wealth,” in <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/55486-quezon-city-parish-priest-alino-dubious-wealth>

points out that in the Philippine context, cultural factors heighten the tendency on the part of the Church officials and the offenders to disregard accountability.²¹

One accusation came from a Columban missionary, that some bishops hid their erring priests. “We have these bishops who have been covering up so much of this abuse, and we know that it is still going on,” said Fr Shaye Cullen in 2013.²²

5.2. Sustained Privilege of the Clergy

Clericalism is basically evident in the privileged status of the clergy. In the Philippines, the titles and even the seating arrangement would show excessive and unnecessary honour accorded to the clergy. Although the laity have been given opportunities to participate in the activities of the local Church and the parish, nonetheless the delineations are very clear especially in the area of decision-making.²³

There is no question that in the last twenty years, there have been an increasing number of laypersons who participate in the liturgical activities especially in the Mass – as lectors, servers, and extraordinary Eucharistic ministers. But these cannot account for genuine lay participation. The Philippine Church cannot boast as of yet that the presence of lay [extraordinary] Eucharistic ministers, lectors and even non-ordained preachers – have fully actualized the Conciliar vision on the laity. While it is true that we cannot and should not expect a hundred percent participation of lay men and women in the life of the Church but the hierarchy cannot and should not close its eyes to the fact that hundreds of thousands if not millions of ordinary people are mere liturgical attendees or even onlookers of the ordained ministers’ sacramental performances. To borrow the words of a theologian: “lay empowerment does not mean the service of lay people only in the cultic and sacramental life of the Church. It rather means service in all aspects of ecclesial life.”²⁴

Another plausible observation is that the hierarchy, to an extent, is accommodating to the so-called Church-mandated organizations

²¹Cartagenas, “The Terror of the Sexual Abuse...,” 350-351, 362.

²²Joe Torres, “Philippine Bishops Accused of Abuse Cover-up” (June 3, 2013), <http://www.ucanews.com/news/philippine-bishops-accused-of-abuse-cover-up/68411>

²³See Rhoderick John S. Abellanosa, “Discursive Detours and Weak Gatekeeping: The Deficit of the Philippine Bishops’ Church of the Poor Discourse,” *Political Theology* 16, 3 (2015) 226-246.

²⁴Aloysius L. Cartagenas, “Recovering the Sense of Mission in the Assignment of Diocesan Priests,” *Talad* 7, 1, 92-93.

compared to those groups that advocate social justice issues. How many of the clergy are open in their support to worker's rights, victims of human trafficking, farmers and persons who are in the fringes of society? For example, how many dioceses provide a pastoral program for single parents (mothers)?

We have presented cases in order to underscore the point that the call to implement AL is also a call to reform the Church's internal system. So long as the clericalist mentality pervades, little is the chance for genuine shepherding to happen. Families need more than just time and space for their counselling and confessions, they need a listening and compassionate heart. The shepherd's heart however belongs to someone who truly ministers God's people, it is the loving heart of a pastor who sees priesthood not merely as a profession like that of a corporate executive – but a calling to touch the lives of others. This is not possible with a priest who keeps on counting his time because of other preoccupations and commitments. As what Pope Francis says: "some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia" (EG, 81). He is referring to priests who are obsessed protecting their free time.

We cannot but quote Pope Francis who says in EG: self-indulgence and complacency "also feed the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit who continues to fight" (EG, 96).

6. Conclusion: What Remains to be Seen

It is one thing to declare in principle that the Church is ready to embrace those who, because of one way or another, have been living their lives at odds with the Church. It is a different issue more so a challenge to implement these principles in the most concrete ways possible.

In a country where clericalism remains strong, the question and challenge is how to implement the pronouncements of the Synod. It remains to be seen whether the bishops and the rest of the clergy are ready to gradually reframe their views or perspectives. It remains to be seen, moreover, whether they (the local Church hierarchy) are ready to meet their people in the multi-layered fringes of poverty, unemployment and vulnerability.

If we come to think of it Pope Francis' views on mercy, compassion and even the family are not absolutely new. His discourse continues

and sustains those of his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI to be specific.

What makes Francis different, however, is how he highlights the realities of the Church's present condition. He does not portray a Church that is apart from the world. While his pronouncements do not aim at diluting the truths that have long been held by the Church, he always makes it a point that part of the truths which no pastor can deny are the surrounding realities of each and every person's life.

"A missionary heart never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness" (EG, 45). These words of Pope Francis shed more light on AL's pastoral message and what the Church would like to become. Indeed, the Church's missionary heart seeks to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy especially to those families that remain imperfect, and lacks joy and peace (AL, 5).

If the Church would continue to serve God's people and be a sign of hope to those broken families and those living in imperfect marital conditions, then it should not be so self-absorbed. For this reason, the implementation of AL's thrusts cannot succeed if the Church would not address its systemic problems, primarily clericalism. Clericalism is synonymous to narcissism, arrogance, and elitism. Church leaders who are full of these issues will hardly be agents of joy to those who need consolation amidst the trials of life.