

Church, family, education: A Salesian reading of *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love)

The changes that the family is going through in the current cultural situation press for the attention of the Church in different ways, proposing very complex pastoral and educational and sometimes unprecedented challenges. For this reason, since the second Vatican Council, the ecclesial community has developed a very broad reflection on marriage and the family, recognizing in this matter one of the key hubs for its life and for its mission. The celebration of three Synods dedicated to this theme is an evident sign of the attention given to it: that of 1980, resumed in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), and the two recent Synods, the extraordinary of 2014 and the ordinary one of 2015, the results of which were included in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016).

The particular concern of the Church towards the family comes, on the one hand, from the perception of the crisis that this institution is going through in our society, especially in the Western world. As is known, this crisis is manifested in the growing number of separations and divorces, in the popularization of cohabitation outside marriage, in the practice of moot affective customs, in different forms of closure towards life, in the marginalization of the elderly, and more recently also in the establishment of actual anti-family ideologies. This state of affairs gives the impression that, in many cases, there has been raised a wall of non-communication between the emotional culture of today and the Christian message. By reflecting on the family over and over again, the Church shows that it does not wish to resign and that it does not fear the changes of history, but rather that it wants to understand and live them, to make the word of the gospel resonate within the emotional culture of today in a fresh and compelling way.

The second reason why the Church dedicates so much attention to family ministry is the renewed awareness that it has about the leading role that the family can and should have in the transmission of the faith. Electing to give the post-synodal document a positive and joyful title as "*Amoris Laetitia*" (AL) indicates a willingness to deal with the subject of the family mainly from the constructive side. This perspective helps us understand that despite the difficulties of the present, the family is not primarily a problem to solve, but an energy to be activated, a source of Christian life which can and should best express all its potential. Looking positively to the family, therefore, the Church invites us to free ourselves from the clericalism that can sometimes affect our pastoral reasoning. Reflecting on the pastoral care of families does not mean that priests and pastoral workers have to "solve" the crisis of the family, but that God's people, interwoven via families, are called to rediscover together the freshness and the beauty of living the conjugal covenant in the light of the presence of the Risen Christ. The joy of love is a gift of the Risen Lord to his Church, a fruit of the Holy Spirit to be welcomed with joy and to witness with strength and energy. This joy is also, as we know, one of the key resources to achieve the educational action.

With this year's Strenna, the Rector Major has invited the whole Salesian Family to be in tune with the rest of the ecclesial community in seeking the best ways of offering guidance to families and to contribute specific resources resulting from our educational charism. The reflection that I propose attempts to accomplish, as I was asked to do, a Salesian reading of *Amoris Laetitia*. I will not do, of course, a concrete presentation of the document, which by now, a year after its publication, we all know, but I will try to highlight some aspects that, I think, are most relevant to our charism. I shall present my reflection in four events dedicated respectively to: (1) define the elements of the family, (2) propose some interpretations of AL, (3) bring out the underlying intention of the document, (4) suggest some possible areas of "Salesian" welcome from the Pope's indications.

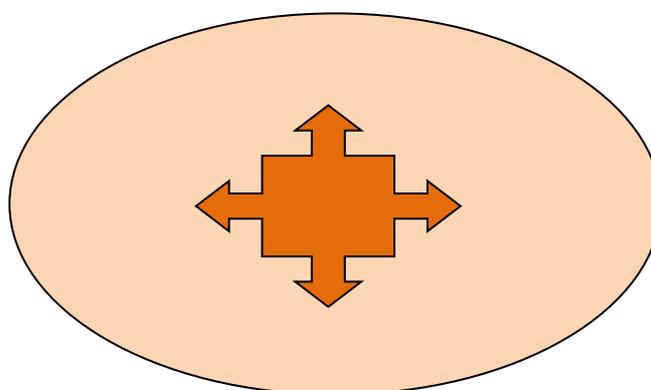
1. The family between nature and culture

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents the family in these terms: "A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children form a family. This institution precedes any recognition on the part of public authority; it is considered the normal reference point, in function of which the different forms of relationship should be evaluated" (CCC 2202). From the text of the Catechism there clearly emerge the constitutive elements of the family experience: conjugality and procreation. The first element implies sexual difference and the personal alliance. The second is the generativity and social integration. Divided according to the two axes of gender and generation, the family has no doubt an architectural role in the human world. In the intersection of these two axes, in fact, there lies the core of all anthropology.

Genitori = Parents

Uomo = Man

Donna = Woman



Figli = Children

This is because conjugality and parenting are rooted in that which in humankind is more "natural", that is, the conjunction of sexuality and fertility. But it occurs in forms that are always entrusted to the freedom of individuals and the mediations of "culture". Thus it takes place in more plastic and changing forms, which vary according to the times and places, and never attains a gain which can be considered automatic and permanent. This should be taken into serious consideration to not give a generic and abstract speech about the family, but to try to find the most appropriate interpretations for different cultural situations.

In some eras and cultures, the vertical axis of parenthood prevails over that of conjugality: the family then is primarily intended as a place of generation of children, until it becomes "functionalised" into this. This may occur in moderate forms, but also in more pronounced forms, which can have serious consequences on the way of understanding; for example, the role of the woman and her call to motherhood. In these cases the Community dimension (the tribe, the clan, parents, sometimes even the state) may prevail over the personal one; overly seeking fecundity can lessen the significance of the marital relationship, even to justify polygamy; there may be forms of educational neglect towards their children; Christian virginity can be rejected as a meaningless behavior and so on. In other eras and cultures, however, the horizontal axis of the conjugal alliance can prevail over the generative: the family is then understood primarily as a "couple" as an experience of emotional gratification, even to "functionalize" the presence of children to the emotional understanding of the

man and the woman. In this case there are considerable anthropological distortions as well: the private and subjective dimensions prevail over the social and institutional; procreation becomes a mere eventuality, postponed along the years; the sense of public responsibility involved in choosing to establish a stable relationship between a man and a woman becomes lost; it can get to, as is happening now in the West, weaken the sexual difference, on the demand of assimilating homosexual unions to the family. It is clear that the best situation is when the two axes are well matched with each other, and when their relationship with society as a whole is neither one of subjugation nor of marginalization.

Reflecting on this aspect is important so as to understand that the family is neither a static nor an "immutable" reality, in the sense of being "devoid of historicity". It is, as all the components of human experience, a plastic and changing reality, inhabited by a profound dynamism that leads her to develop into a fruitful and radiant way, but also exposes it to times of difficulty and crisis. This applies above all to the individual family within itself (from the time when two young people get to know each other, get engaged, until they get married, have children, and later grandchildren) and it applies to the family universe within the social system, with changing the forms of its symbolic and legal recognition, and with the change of its roles and structure. Since the Salesian charism has spread in many different areas and cultures, it is important to try to understand what are the characteristics, the potentials and challenges of the family experience in the context in which one works.

2. Key Issues in AL: The shape of the text and the logic of accompaniment

The brief reference to the historical complexity of the family in different contexts allows us to appreciate one of the fundamental traits of AL, which is also the first clue that I suggest you take to interpret the document. This is the choice that Pope Francis has made in speaking of the family through a "big story" and not through a "big treatise". All the commentators on the exhortation have highlighted the text style, which strikes in its great capacity to adhere to the quotidian. On the occasion of the official presentation of the document, Cardinal Schönborn was able to affirm:

For me *Amoris Laetitia* is first and foremost a "language event", as has already been *Evangelii Gaudium*. Something has changed in the ecclesial discourse. This change of language was already noticeable during the Synod. Between the two Synod sessions of October 2014 and October 2015 one could clearly recognize how the tone has become richer on esteem, as they are simply welcoming the various situations of life, without judging or condemning them immediately. In *Amoris Laetitia* this has become the continuous linguistic tone. Behind this there is, of course, not only a linguistic preference, but a deep respect in front of every man who is never, in the first place, a "problematic case" in a "category", but a unique person, with its history and its journey with, and toward God. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis had said that we should take off our shoes in front of the other's sacred ground (EG 36). This fundamental attitude runs through the entire Exhortation.

The linguistic register used by Pope Francis to speak of the family deserves to be deepened because it is not only a question of form, but also of substance. *Amoris Laetitia*, in fact, speaks of the beauty of the Christian family not as "alongside" or "above" of its human foundation, but delving itself fully in the story articulated in its relations. In this regard, the pages of chapter IV are exemplary. The Pope comments on the hymn to love of 1 Corinthians 13, referring to everyday situations of married and family love, as well as the paragraphs in which he describes with wonder what a woman experiences during pregnancy, recognizing it as a space of a precious spiritual experience (AL 168-171). At the basis of this style of expression is the recognition that the "flesh" of man, the fragile reality of his personal existence, is the space in which one meets the Mystery of God, the place to discern the passage of the Spirit. It is an attitude that intentionally avoids the spiritualistic and moralistic shortcuts that lead to present marriage with idealized formulas and artificial languages (AL

35-37). But to do this, it requires of "the whole Church a missionary conversion: it is important not to stop at a purely theoretical announcement, cut off from the real problems of the people. Family ministry must help others to experience that the Gospel of the family is a response to the deepest expectations of the human person: for his/her dignity and the complete fulfillment in reciprocity, in communion and fruitfulness. It is not only about presenting legislation, but to propose values, responding to the needs that they see today, even in the most secularized countries" (AT 201). In this way, the Pope offers a great pastoral lesson: we cannot pretend to know how to communicate the Gospel of marriage just because we sing the praises of and use the best images the Scripture offers. When detached from the humble contemplation of daily life, even the richest expressions could become rhetorical formulas and empty symbols. The real and imperfect analogy which exists between the conjugal covenant and the covenant of God with his people, Christ and the Church (Eph 5), as well as the claim that the family is the "domestic church" or "Trinitarian image", cannot be used as if they were simply definitions ready for use. They are the culmination of a thorough understanding of family dynamics that cannot be bypassed in any way and which, as the Pope teaches, go through the narration of life. Developing in this narrative, the images can convincingly express the potential meaning they carry and become a light to discover the mystery that inhabits the conjugal love.

The choice of this expressive style, which aims towards depth but avoids idealisation, corresponds with the choice of a pastoral style that favours the initiation of processes of accompaniment ("It is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning" but an effort must be made "to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters" AL 200) rather than a logical application of schemes and standards ("time is greater than space", that is, we have to "generate more than dominate space" AL 3 and 261). This is the second interpretation on which I would like to stop briefly. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis had spoken extensively of accompaniment:

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit. An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact (EG 24).

This is not, in any way, a renunciation to propose the truth of the Gospel so as to avoid countering contemporary sensibility or to satisfy worldly ideologies (AL 35). It is in fact Jesus' attitude and his awareness that people, with their troubled past, cannot be reduced to fit in a universal norm. Faced with the most difficult and debated issues, the Pope shows the need for a change in approach. Some answers may never be found unless we are able to revise the manner in which to formulate the question according to the Gospel. The claim of normative solutions that should only be applied to individual cases, or the superficiality of a permissive goodness which is unable to grasp the differences and enlighten about responsibilities, are, in fact, just the other side of an abstract view of marriage, whose clarity is all the more clear the more distant it is from reality. However, when the logic behind the thought is full of personal content, and when one lands down from the universal plan to individual circumstances, it is necessary, according to the authoritative teachings of St. Thomas, to exercise the practical wisdom that bears the name of caution: a wisdom that does not limit itself to deduction, but is the evangelical art of discernment. All shortcuts are alien to this

pastoral style: as are the flight of ideas which lose touch with reality, and the "simple recipe" of a pastoral practice which tries solving problems briskly, without the trouble of accompanying.

3. The underlying intention: a more familiar Church

Once these two keys elements have been identified, we can now try bringing out that which seems to be the underlying intention of *Amoris Laetitia*. As previously mentioned, this does not entail giving a new normative approach for the solution to some of the problems, but rather indicating the roads along which to activate the new processes. These processes can be summarised in that they must essentially converge in favour of a more "familiar" face of the Church. Thus affirms AL in no. 87:

The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. "In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord's gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community".

This means that, on one hand, the Ecclesial institution must further reach out to the needs of the family, so as to better achieve its objective of being "the people of God" going through history; on the other hand, families must discover in the Church community the vital space within which to live their own story, surpassing the strong cultural temptation of private withdrawal. Thus, this is a dual movement - the ecclesial community towards the family and the family towards the community. We must now define the meaning of this movement.

With regard to the first aspect, the different ecclesial institutions should make every effort to rectify their tendency to structure themselves as "religious services agencies", in which qualified and generous operators spend their energies. If the parish or other church institutions become useless structures - out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group - though services may be efficient, the spirit of communion, encounter, and witness, which is the sign of the presence of the Lord and the action of his Spirit, lacks. This "reform" of the *forma ecclesiae* which all our structures are encouraged to undertake, cannot take place around a table, nor can it only be the result of decisions taken by the Pastor or a religious community. In order to be truly set up for the benefit of families, it must be accomplished together with them, involving their understanding, taking their needs into account, delving into their languages.

We become aware that putting the family at the center of the Church's attention is a much more demanding and complex task than the mere search for solutions in the most difficult cases of conscience or the most delicate situations. A renewed global approach of how the Church relates to families is, in fact, the fundamental condition for delving deeper into the difficulties and problems that weigh on them and finding, through serious and patient discernment, the evangelical forms and spiritual styles of companionship. The process which the Pope invites us to, is thus concerned with the need to recover "domestic" Christianity, which inhabits our homes and gives shape to our relationships: Pope Francis' insistence on the alliance between generations, on the treasures which grandparents can pass on to grandchildren, on the care we need to have for the weakest and the most fragile goes precisely in this direction. He affirms that, "Emotional maturity can't be bought or sold and it is the greatest endowment of the familial genius. It is precisely in the family where we learn to grow in the atmosphere of emotional maturity. Its "grammar" is learned there, otherwise it is very difficult to learn it. And it is through this language that God makes us all understand. (*Catechesis* 2nd September 2015).

Faith can either be further renewed through that network of relationships which is essentially bound in the covenant between man and woman, or else it tends to be merely reduced to an idea, an inspiration, a message, but not welcoming divine life as a gift "circulating" amongst us. It is for this reason that the Church cannot fulfill its mission without including families; more so if it does not take upon itself the traits of familial communion.

The second aspect, which mirrors the first, is the need for the church *community to courageously and attractively invite families to come out of the isolation* permeated by the individualistic culture in which we are immersed, helping them to open up to a sharing, welcoming, and communal experience. An isolated family, is in fact, a weakened family. In Western societies, the family is experiencing a strong push towards marginalization. It is no longer acknowledged as the foundation of society, but is being represented as an affective subsystem, in which everyone lives in privacy. The family is thus stripped from its task to start reading reality, to realise the traditional process of culture and faith. Initiation rites which, in the traditional society, were implemented through listening to the experiences of the elderly, are nowadays largely effected through the several forms of media communication, the latter weakening and disturbing many families. Furthermore, postmodern society is organised in a manner which favours maximum individual autonomy in gaining access to information and to decisions.

An individualistic lifestyle seems successful when compared to the dynamics of work and the economy. If the family gives in and retreats into privacy - thinking "for itself" only, as a happy couple romantically dreaming only of its own well-being - it is already defeated from the start. Its vocation is however to "introduce fraternity into the world" (cfr. AL 194). Families should be helped to build communities, to interact with other families, to be open towards the suffering and needs of others, to promote practical forms of help, and to be witnesses in the various spheres of social life. The love that circulates within the family must eventually be put at the service of others: only in this way is it preserved in freshness and truth. The channel through which the single ecclesial institution becomes less of a "services agency" and more of a community, and the path in which the family becomes less made of "private couples" and more of a network of families in communion with each other, can only be achieved when working together. When AL affirms in AL 87: "The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church", it does not simply wish to use a formula, but it collects in a striking summary the core of this dual movement.

Consequently, our work consists in obtaining a good understanding of these articulations and translating them into clear pastoral choices. Regressions are possible and they are decisive. For example, let's think about what the Church-family bond means for those undergoing preparation courses for marriage. In the collective imagination, these continue to appear as what a religious agency offers to those couples who live in a very "private" manner the path that leads to marriage. A pastoral conversion involving reflection, creativity and a generous effort is needed so that the whole Christian community becomes the true "womb" of the families which are born from the sacrament of marriage, and not only in the context of the preparatory course.

4. Accompanying families in the Salesian style

The pastoral guidelines of the Pope about the accompaniment of families are undoubtedly very close to our Salesian pedagogy, which lead us to meet the persons, allowing them to experience freedom, so as to help them walk in the light of the Gospel. The logic behind "church processes" mentioned by the Pope is ultimately an educational logic. On the other hand, the issue of education is explicitly addressed in AL, in particular in Chapter VII entitled "*Towards a better education for children*". I feel it is not necessary to discuss this Chapter now. It seems more useful to highlight some elements which allow the Salesian Family to put the suggestions of AL into practice.

4.1. The educative and pastoral community as space and subject

The first element cannot but be a convinced assumption within our environments of a familiar figure of the Church, which the Pope urges us to have. The Salesian Family has to be a space in which the Church institutions reach out: accompanying the people of God; where families can find community meeting centers; in communion of faith and prayer; where educational networks and proposals of evangelization can be constructed. I think that, for the Salesian Family, working at the service of the family according to the typical manner of our charism means, first of all, facilitating within our environments the dual movement which we have spoken about earlier. The educational nature of our charism undoubtedly lends itself as a suitable space in which this dual movement occurs. Many families already come forth, entrusting their children, their stories, and their problems.

The achievement of a dynamic of true encounter and involvement is, however, never automatic. We too can risk providing services without meeting the persons; to offer space, but not promote communion; ideating projects for others, but not with others. Within our works, we need fraternal communities of disciples and witnesses, in which the different states of life come together to witness the presence of the Lord for the benefit of young people. This is precisely the correct ecclesiological vision of the CEP (educative and pastoral communities), as a mode of implementation of the People of God gathering around a charismatic proposal, and not simply as an organization structured to optimize its performance. The CEP should be the space in which we think about our service to the family. The members of the Salesian family should be the driving force to build the CEP as a living body, so as to facilitate and welcome all the families within this dynamic communion which achieves within space the face of the Church and makes its mission possible.

A CEP exuding a joyous evangelical climate and a communion of action needs time and energy to be built. It can only be the result of energies stimulated by the force of the charism, that is, by the power of the Holy Spirit that makes present within us Don Bosco's style of holiness. This is the gift that many families expect from us: that of having places available for them, as well as people ready to accompany them. The CEP, is therefore the space and structure of our companionship to families.



The pastoral subjectivity of the family, already sensed by the Vatican Council and compellingly repeated by AL, should be particularly assumed by lay people who form part of movements and associations within the Church, as are the several members of the Salesian Family. There are already several interesting experiences going on. They range from the most simple and popular “family friends of Don Bosco”, who gather under the banner of his charisma to sustain themselves in faith, to others who are directly involved in family ministry within local churches. One of the challenges, and yet one of the richest pastoral potentials, is to involve families who are inserted within the different groups of the Salesian Family to build family networks in our institutions.

In this regard, we can also question ourselves on the contribution which the experience of married laity offers to the development and understanding of the preventive system. A dad or a mum have a sensitivity towards education that is distinctive from and complementary to that of consecrated persons. It is therefore important to ensure that the roles and charisms are not submerged. This becomes a possible risk when a corporate vision of the CEP, in which roles take a lead at the expense of a deep sharing of faith and mission, prevails. In this sense, the new ecclesiological horizon of the

Second Vatican should make CEP a vitalizing experience of reciprocity between marriage and virginity, between family and the religious community.

4.2. A renewed affective and familiar culture

The crisis of the family induces an attitude of compliance and resignation in our communities. It is easy to hear pastoral workers (catechists, educators, teachers etc.) complain because families do not help in the education process, do not cooperate in the transmission of faith, and so on. We may sometimes feel paralyzed by the feeling that things are just so and nothing can be done. This psychological and spiritual attitude is very dangerous, and needs to be strongly corrected.

Formation is needed to fix this attitude. This helps the person go deeper within, in an effort to understand the reasons causing the crisis, that is, the reasons that risk making the Christian message 'foreign' in respect to today's affective culture. We all happened to meet young people and adults who cannot even take into consideration aspects that we consider very important for a good affective life.

The manner in which they value the body, sexuality, life as a couple, and marriage, seems to have almost nothing in common with the usual language of Christian preaching. In other words, their culture, that is, their set of symbolic representations regarding life, risks to diverge on several counts from the Christian point of view. This stems out of the fact that the prevailing affective culture brings with it, in addition to undoubtedly positive aspects, dangerous distortions and serious ambiguity. The difficulty derives from the fact that the Gospel seeks conversion from each and every one of us, and conversion is a source of scandal to which our heart offers resistance. We must frankly acknowledge that the difficulty also arises from the fact that the language used to express our message had been full of categories and models that made reference to a different cultural horizon which no longer exists or is much changed. We can think of the phenomenon of cohabitation before marriage, which has become a "normal" manner of building a family in many areas in the West. Telling young people that this manner of building relationships is not morally good is necessary, but is obviously not enough. Being close to them and cultivating good relationships is necessary, but not sufficient. To achieve a true "accompaniment", we need to deeply understand the youth culture pertaining to the body, affects, sexuality, and also activate pedagogical processes and messages that make the beauty and charm of the Gospel accessible to the personal conscience.

Family difficulties are nowadays one of the fundamental expressions of the split between faith and culture mentioned by Paul VI. The journey of reflection that the Church has made from the Council to date, shows that it wishes to react through an effort of generous closeness and deep reflection, and not through complaints. We are encouraged to embark on this path, at all levels. Standing among young people, Don Bosco was able to understand their world from within, and propose faith in forms appropriate to them - through processes that valued their positive needs and prevented difficulties. We cannot expect to meet the affective challenges of our time without the same amount of courage and enterprise.

4.3. Some privileged areas

Our contribution to family life cannot but favour the typical areas of our charism, that is, the areas of education of youth ministry. We shall thus highlight a few areas in which the dynamics of family life is more evident, and which require an investment of energy by the Salesian Family.

(A) Sexual and affective education of the young.

Considering it being particularly expressive of our charism, Pope Francis recommended this topic in his address to Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians during his pastoral visit to Turin.

We are all aware of the urgency to work on such a difficult and delicate theme. AL devotes some significant paragraphs to this (280-286) which we should read very carefully. He affirms that: "The Second Vatican Council spoke of the need for "a positive and prudent sex education" to be imparted to children and adolescents "as they grow older", with "due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences". We may well ask ourselves if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge. " (AL 280). Affective education implies, first of all, a living testimony and an attitude of wisdom, and cannot be reduced to mere instructions offered in this area, nor to the implementation of some project. It cannot even just be the result of improvisation, or simply some good advice as necessary. The socio-cultural changes that have occurred in recent years certainly demand more; the same assumption of sexual identity today is made more difficult by a culture that tends to present it as the result of arbitrary choices. Schools are evermore choosing sex education courses which portray doubtful anthropological orientations and values. I think that a serious cultural investment is needed from us in this delicate area to put forth the pedagogical and theological resources we have and to attempt to draw up specific proposals to be implemented at least within our institutions.

(B) Accompanying young people towards marriage

This is an area that requires much diversified attention depending on the cultural contexts. In the West, the age of entry into marriage is no longer strictly "youth". Those who attend premarital courses are nowadays often more than thirty years old, cohabit for some time and would have already had one or more children. In other societies, however, marriage continues to be a stage reached at a young age, even if this still poses pastoral problems related to freedom in the choice of spouse, the social importance of fertility, the value of the marriage coutumier and others, which solicit substantial attention. A special commitment requires education to the Christian concept of fatherhood and motherhood, reacting to the many cultural distortions that weigh on parenting. We know, for example, how in the Western world there has been a strong ideological pressure to consider motherhood as a constraint for the woman, as well as remaining a tough challenge to the father figure, emptied of its symbolic features. These themes certainly cannot be absent from a youth ministry that is qualified and attentive to the challenges of youth culture.

(C) The pastoral work with families who come into relationship with our work

Some families require our educational service motivated by a sincere adherence to the Christian and Salesian educational project; for others, contact with our work is more or less the only form of contact with the ecclesial community. In these cases, our educational proposal is a delicate bridge because family life is illuminated by the light of the Gospel: while we accompany children in their development, we also accompany the journey of their families, coming in contact with their wealth, their labours, and their dramas. We need to reflect, then, on the manner in which, through the educational service, we can contribute to the evangelization of the family, enabling these processes of inclusion and support on which Pope Francis insists so much. One of the most significant contributions that we can offer in terms of a renewed pastoral work is certainly to help families out of the isolation imposed by the individualistic culture of today, in order to build true family networks.

(D) Thinking of youth ministry

The rediscovery of the fundamental role that the family has for the transmission of the faith - which takes place not simply in terms of "belief", but also via bonding, belonging, recognition in a symbolic horizon, rooted in an experience that precedes us - requires of youth ministry to think of the role of the ecclesial community in terms of "generation". If modernity has led us to think about education first of all in terms of development (autonomy) of the individual, the family perspective remembers that education is an extension of the generative act, so it is testimony given through the quality of the links, its wise exercise of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood, is an introduction to the whole

experience, and not only to its partial meanings. Checking and gauging these issues allows us to be closer to the experience of the families and even the original light of Don Bosco's charism, which is the wealth we share as a Salesian Family.

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