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**„*Amoris laetitia*” w perspektywie „*lectio divina*”**  
**„*Amoris laetitia*” in the perspective of „*lectio divina*”**

Contents: Introduction. 1. The family of the Good News. 2. The catholic holistic paradigm of „*Amoris laetitia*”. 3. Pope Francis’s „*lectio divina*”. Conclusion

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### **Introduction**

After more than 2 years from the publication of pope Francis’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation titled „*Amoris laetitia*”<sup>1</sup>, the stormy discussion inspired by, actually, a single chapter of the exhortation (VIII), concerning the admission of persons divorced and living in a new marital relationship to the Holy Communion, has abated to a significant extent. This was helped by the publication of the letters from Argentinean bishops, recognized by pope Francis as consistent with his course of thinking, and by explanations provided by cardinal F. Coccopalmerio, the chair of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts<sup>2</sup>.

The pope’s summary of the synodal proceedings provided in chapter VIII („Accompany, understand and include what is fragile”), though focused on the ministrative practice and on the accompaniment to each person on their way to God, close to the pope, has raised doubts in a broader perspective of persistence of the ecclesiastic doctrine. These doubts centered around the issue of the binding force of the hitherto teaching and the possible pope’s break with the existing tradition and faith. The doubts were not about the individual views or ministrative solutions offered by the pope but about the consistency of his teaching with the

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<sup>1</sup> FRANCISZEK, *Amoris laetitia* (9.03.2016), Kraków 2016 [hereinafter: AL.]

<sup>2</sup> F. COCCOPALMERIO, *Przewodnik po ósmym rozdziale adhortacji Amoris laetitia papieża Franciszka*, Kraków 2017

hitherto doctrine of the Church on marriage and about the binding force (validity) of the papal exhortation. According to opponents, the document was in conflict with certain points of the teaching of pope John Paul II included in the „*Familiaris consortio*” or in the „*Veritatis splendor*”<sup>3</sup>.

Contrary to concerns voiced by the opponents, the exhortation did not cause any schism in the Church, any manifest departure from the doctrine on the indissolubility of marriage, or any break with the hitherto anthropological or theological teaching on marriage, family and human sexuality<sup>4</sup>.

The doubts incited by the exhortation (still existing, as can be seen from unsuccessful attempts of some bishop conferences to formulate a ministrative guidance consistent with the papal thought) can be described as resulting from two issues. The first concerns the ministrative problem related to the accompaniment and the recognition of the possibility of allowing persons living in new non-sacramental relationships to receive the Holy Communion; what is this „recognition” and what can be its consequences? The second issue has a dogmatic and hermeneutic dimension: involves the continuity and expression of the teaching of the Church. And this issue is crucial because it gives another and a certainly deeper meaning, to specific ministrative solutions.

The purpose of the following discussion is to turn attention to a possibly different, spiritual, reading of the exhortation, which has been provoked by pope Francis from the very beginning. It is the „*lectio divina*”. The pope presents the family of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the light of the Word of God and asks directly what God says about the contemporary family and how the family can respond to these words. This perspective gives a specific heading to detailed solutions involving the matter of continuity of the teaching of the Church, which is not based only on a statement given once and for all in a specific historical context but also listens what „the Spirit says to Churches”, and that again in a specific historical context. In addition, the perspective is a guidance for the ministrative path on which the recognition, made mandatory by pope Frances, can be carried out.

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<sup>3</sup> J. KNOP, *Hermeneutyka reformy – reforma hermeneutyki. Rozwój i odnowa Tradycji Kościoła*, Wiąż 670 (2017) 4, p. 163

<sup>4</sup> The appearance of four cardinals (R. Burke, W. Brandmüller, J. Meisner, C. Caffarra) in autumn 2016 was the most significant initiative. They chose the formula of doubt (*dubia*), asking for specification of doubts resulting from legal uncertainties that, as they believed, were brought about by pope Francis’s considerations.

## 1. The family of the Good News

The pope's considerations summarize the synodal discussion devoted to the situation of the contemporary family. In the light of this reflection, the whole synodal process made it possible to „revive our awareness of the significance of the marriage and family”<sup>5</sup>. This is why Francis made the description of the situation of the family in the contemporary world the starting point to his considerations and asked what the family is in the eyes of God and how God is present today in it. And this perspective of the present and of God's design for a specific family, which reflects the Creator's design for the Creation, is a manifestation of the pope's concern. The pope does not go back to this to continue reminding about the teaching of the Church on the marriage and family. He starts from the biblical presentation of the Creator's design and his presence in the implementation of the design by the humankind. The perspective of constant Divine presence and accompaniment to the humankind in following the Divine design gives an appropriate tone to the pope's considerations. Starting from the first chapter („In the light of the Word”), Francis, as it were, narrates how God enters human life that often „walks a way of pain and suffering”<sup>6</sup>. The exhortation leaves the reader with a strong impression that it is a tale about a meeting of Good with a specific marriage and family that lives through its happy and said days. So, „the Word of God is an ever-present witness [...] to a dark dimension”, „a bitter reality” marked with presence of „pain, evil and violence that destroy the family and its intimate unity of life and love”<sup>7</sup>. This is why, as Francis emphasizes, „the Word of God does not show as a sequence of abstract theories but as a travel companion to families living through crises and all suffering, and shows them the destination of the road (...)”<sup>8</sup>.

It is evident that the pope implies that the meeting of the living Word of God by each Christian family is fundamental to its existence. By accepting and exploring the Word, family members seek to understand the will of God, in which they can count on the helpful hand of the Church. This is why Francis emphasizes from the start of his exhortation that „not all doctrinal, moral or ministrative discussions should be resolved through the intervention of the Magisterium”<sup>9</sup>. On the one hand, there is a necessity of keeping the doctrine and activities of

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<sup>5</sup> AL 2

<sup>6</sup> AL 19-22

<sup>7</sup> AL 19

<sup>8</sup> AL 22

<sup>9</sup> AL 3

the Church coherent but, on the other hand, this does not question the legitimacy of existence of various ways if interpreting „certain aspects of the teaching or some of its consequences”<sup>10</sup>.

So, the intention underlying the exhortation seems to be explicit. Its content came to existence as a consequence of a meeting held between ministers and theologians. Both the former and the latter made contributions to the elaboration of the reflection intended to make ideals more certain. The theological reflection based on the Word of God should not stay a fossilized teaching: it has to be connected to the reality in a creative way<sup>11</sup>. This perspective for the presence of the Church in the contemporary world was drawn by the Second Vatican Council, when it was said at the onset of the ministrative constitution about the Church that the Church was „closely bound with the humankind and its history”<sup>12</sup>.

The strong enrootment of the Church in the existential reality of its members is a form of presence of the Church in the world. The more this reality is understood, the easier is for the Church to meet the reality and human needs. This was the intention behind the Episcopal synod: to reflect on the situation of the marriage and family in the contemporary world and to show the accompanying role of the Church that „brings light drawn from the Gospel”<sup>13</sup>. The papal exhortation offers conclusions arising from the Church’s coming closer to the family with its challenges and difficulties. This is how the Church carries out its mission, making sure that the message of the Gospel gets through to the family. At the same time it wishes to offer assistance and looks for adequate solutions for effective cooperation and participation in development of the Church community.

Without doubt, the „*Amoris laetitia*” has changed the paradigm of activities of pope Francis who develops it with „wisdom, consideration and patience”, which was noted by the State Secretary of the Holy See in his interview given in February 2018 to the *Vatican News* portal, presenting the official point of view of the Holy See<sup>14</sup>. In the interview, the cardinal pointed at difficulties encountered by the Church, related to explicit acceptance of the exhortation, rooted in a misunderstanding of the attitudes encouraged and asked for by the pope. He explained that Francis had presented in his exhortation exactly what he was asking for: a new spirit and a new approach to the situation of the marriage and family. He added he was aware that each change contributes to the occurrence of difficulties but these should be overcome with devotion. Although the cardinal did not explain in detail what the new

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<sup>10</sup> AL 3

<sup>11</sup> AL 2

<sup>12</sup> SOBÓR WATYKAŃSKI II, *Konstytucja duszpasterska o Kościele w świecie współczesnym*, 1 [hereinafter: GS]

<sup>13</sup> GS 3

<sup>14</sup> P. PAROLIN, *2018 year of youth and family for Pope Francis*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-01/cardinal-parolin-pope-francis-2018-on-family-young-people.htm> [access: 3.07.2018]

paradigm, or approach, consisted in, he clearly pointed at two ways, at the junction of which it should be sought for. On one of them the Church embraces the family with its evangelical message. The other way is walked by the family that is a Gospel in itself: the Gospel of the family. The family is not deprived of presence of, or protection from, God; it is made of followers of Christ. So, the Church does not enter a void with its message. Working with the family, the Church recognizes the creative and salvific presence of God in the family and accompanies and helps the family to understand plans intended for it by God. The cardinal Parolin notices in the meeting of the Christian family with the evangelical message communicated to the family through service of the Church a mutuality of the incarnational approach that recognizes the contribution brought by families in the understanding and in the teaching of the Gospel by the Church. He explains that there has to be a holistic relationship between our knowledge and our practice; our ideas and experiences have to inform one another<sup>15</sup>. A consequence of such meeting is a need for „further open deepening of certain doctrinal, moral, spiritual and ministrative issues”<sup>16</sup>.

## **2. The catholic holistic paradigm of „*Amoris laetitia*”**

The evangelical message with which the Church comes to marriages and families consists in its teaching about marriage in the light of the Word of God that God speaks incessantly and addresses to those who listen to him. Francis emphasizes that the Church not only offers a ready doctrine but also listens to the Word spoken to its members. This attitude of mutual listening sets a new paradigm for the ministrative activity of the Church. The mutual listening takes place in specific situations, is not abstracted from the context of the contemporary family. This is why Francis describes challenges faced by the family („Chapter II: The reality and challenges faced by the family”), posed to a large extent by social, cultural and economic conditions. The situation of the contemporary family differs significantly not only from the situation of the family in the past but also challenges and life situations of individual families get extensively stratified within the same historical period. The pope notices that the present reality adds much to the feeling of uncertainty when people take challenges related to their future, marriage and family. Francis emphasizes that changes that have affected the way of life of the contemporary family should not be ignored by the Church.

In this context, the pope has courage to propose a new approach and offer a new answer regarding the presence of the Church among and within families and, according to

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<sup>15</sup> IBID.

<sup>16</sup> AL 2

cardinal Parolin, does it with „wisdom, consideration and patience”. Cardinal B. Cupich has noted this specificity of the pope’s approach to the Church and to the family in his speech delivered on invitation from Von Hügel Institute of the Cambridge University (UK) on March 9, 2018<sup>17</sup>. The cardinal emphasizes that Francis starts from a healthy dose of self-criticism, admitting readily the extent of the fall of the Church. But he also explains that, considering new challenges faced by families, there have to be significant changes in the way how we approach to, and think about, our service to families. The „*Amoris laetitia*” is nothing else than the summoning of the pope for an action through which both laypersons and clergy undertake a serious dialog on how to serve souls and families best: loyally, honestly and creatively. All that involves a holistic thinking about marriage at multiple levels.

The presentation by cardinal Cupich shows how the „*Amoris laetitia*” should be read. Note that analyses and theses presented in the speech do not refer only to the content of the papal exhortation but show a new paradigm for the activity of the Church. The „*Amoris laetitia*” is just an example of referring this revolutionary paradigm of mercy, as the title of his presentation was worded by cardinal Cupich, to families. Pope Francis means a new paradigm of Catholicism that reads the holistic dimension of the reality from the perspective of the Divine Mercy. Accordingly, it is worth taking a look at the new paradigm the essential of which were highlighted by cardinal F. Cupich, paying attention only to some consequences useful in the further part of the considerations. The following are the essentials:

1) „The family as a privileged place of the Divine self-revelation”

The pope writes that „the Gospel of the family permeates the history of the world”<sup>18</sup>. God has chosen the family to reveal his workings in respect of the world and the humankind. Accordingly, each family is a part of the Divine plan for salvation that fulfills not for an abstract family but for a specific one living within the limitations of time and space, modeled by many circumstances affecting its functionality and ask current questions and offer ready answers. The consequence of recognizing the family as a privileged place of Divine self-revelation is that no family should be considered as deprived of the Divine grace. This applies to families who „do not consider themselves perfect at all”<sup>19</sup> and those who find themselves in

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<sup>17</sup> B. CUPICH, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Mercy: Amoris Laetitia as a New Paradigm of Catholicity*, <http://www.lastampa.it/2018/02/09/vaticaninsider/pope-francis-revolution-of-mercy-amoris-laetitia-as-a-new-paradigm-of-catholicity-skMox0lKtoX5szfKH6QgrL/pagina.html> [access: 3.07.2018]

<sup>18</sup> AL 63

<sup>19</sup> AL 57

irregular situations<sup>20</sup>. This is how the pope emphasizes that nothing can stand in the way of the Divine self-revelation. This means that these families should not be treated as a problem that exists in the Church but, instead, they should be recognized as places of materialization of the action of the Divine Spirit, expressed through mutual love, and offered help in joint discovery of Divine plans for them. This approach adds to the change of the paradigm, told about in his speech by cardinal Cupich, consisting of a holistic approach to the situation of the family, combining biblical messages, tradition and human experience of the familial situation.

## 2) „A Church teaching, and learning from, families”

This is another principle of the paradigm, which follows directly from the former one. The Church and the family should meet with mutual respect for the Divine Spirit present in, and acting through, the both parties. This requires the Church to keep a balance between its teaching mission and the listening to what God specifically says and what he demands from spouses and families. This situation contributes to the showing of the synodal face of the Church in which the teaching delivered by the hierarchy is becoming increasingly open to the voice of laypersons, particularly those who live in marriages. As noted by cardinal Cupich, this attitude leads to the relinquishment of the authoritarian and paternalistic approach of the Church to marital situations, in accordance with which the Church, having ready solutions, is able to offer clear and explicit answers to urgent questions and problems. No all hitherto solutions resulting from the ecclesiastic teaching about marriage can be applied to specific challenges faced by individual families. This is clearly noted by Francis who, on the one hand, writes that „the Church cannot give up proposing a complete ideal of marriage, the plan of God in all its glory”<sup>21</sup> but, on the other hand, points that „the great values of the Christian marriage and family respond to quests permeating human existence”<sup>22</sup>. This sets a single way for ministrative quests based on the invariable teaching, the Divine call and the human answer that „guides [...] the faithful to becoming aware of their situation before God”. This approach adds to the papal paradigm in which the teaching of the Church on marriage is not delivered in dissociation from the marital and familial situation but becomes a way of personification of the teaching through accompaniment and understanding in the spirit and faith.

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<sup>20</sup> AL 301

<sup>21</sup> AL 249

<sup>22</sup> AL 57

3) „The necessity of conscience of the faithful in the process of understanding”

The mutual respect for the presence and action of the Spirit opens for another step of understanding the marital and familial situation. It is the recognition of the role of conscience, particular its role concerning the recognition and understanding of the future in response to the question about God expects of me. This is because conscience is „the most secret center and sanctuary of a person, where they abide themselves with God whose voice sounds in their mind”<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, Francis writes that „conscience should be better integrated with the practice of the Church in certain situations that objectively depart from our understanding of marriage”. The human conscience is a place where a person meets God. It is where the person reads Divine plans for forms and ways of their life. The reading of the plans can be far from an objective ideal present in the teaching of the Church. The task of the Church at this point is to cooperate in the understanding of what God says and opening to „new steps of development and new conditions allowing for the implementation of the ideal in a more complete way”<sup>24</sup>. This cooperation in the understanding of God’s voice is not only a service that the Church offers to the humankind, as cardinal Cupich emphasizes, but is a downright necessity.

4) „The necessity of inclusion by the Church of the insight of the faithful into the Divine plan for marriage”

This next principle of the new paradigm is a logical consequence of the two former ones. The starting point to the necessity of addressing intuitions of the faithful with respect to marriage, not only a one of their own, is given by Francis’s statement that marriage should be seen „more as a dynamic process of development and realization than as a lifetime burden”<sup>25</sup>. The consequence of the statement is a departure from the unilateral treatment of marriage in doctrinal, moral or ethical categories and allowing for the insight of the faithful into marital situations. This is because nothing can substitute the experience of the faithful on their ways of developing their marital lives. This is how their role of participation in the teaching service of the Church grows. Francis stresses this, claiming that „many cannot see that the proclamation of the Church on the marriage and family is a clear reflection of the teaching and attitude of Jesus Christ who, proposing a demanding ideal, never lost his sympathetic

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<sup>23</sup> GS 16

<sup>24</sup> AL 303

<sup>25</sup> AL 30



closeness to the weak”<sup>26</sup>. The words of Francis have led cardinal Cupich to a conclusion that the becoming aware of the Divine plan for the marriage and family, which arises hope instead of despair, requires taking account of situations of the faithful whose experience can alleviate the tension between the ideal and its actual manifestation.

5) „The ministrative accompaniment in local Churches to uphold universal and doctrinal messages”

This is a very important principle that, to a large extent, puts aside concerns about the lack of continuity of the Magisterium in marital matters and in respect of the danger related to the recognition of the situation by a wrongly formed conscience. Francis emphasizes, which follows from the foregoing rules, that the ministrative accompaniment is an essential element helpful in the understanding of God’s call in a specific context. This is because the approach takes account of the fact that the marriage and family „can, for instance, find themselves in very different situations that should not be catalogued or closed within too strict statements”<sup>27</sup>. However, the ministrative understanding is not one of the forms leading to relativism or discretion in the application of the teaching of the Magisterium. This is because the teaching materializes an authentic sensitivity to God’s self-revelation in specific realities of family life and to the activity of the Spirit in the consciences of the faithful. The consequence of this approach is the observation that life in its specific situations constitutes the context of making moral choices based on the voice of conscience. The pope notices that these situations may bring about a conflict between the individual and the universal, between the local, conditioned culturally, and universal. However, he does not leave the situations without showing ways how to solve them. However, he does not say what his intention was, individual and normative solutions that could be applied always and everywhere in the same manner. He only writes that „individual communities will need to work out more practical and effective proposals taking account of both the teaching of the Church and local requirements and challenges”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> AL 38

<sup>27</sup> AL 298

<sup>28</sup> AL 199

6) „The possibility of developing the doctrine through ministrative activities of the Church modeled on the Gospel permeating the service of the Church”

The last principle of the new paradigm fished out from the „*Amoris laetitia*” by cardinal Cupich is a reflection of Francis’s approach to the picture of the Merciful Father in the center of the Good News. Therefore, the pope notes that, while taking care of integrity of the moral teaching of the Church, „one should always recognize any theological concept that ultimately questions the omnipotence of God, and particularly his mercy, as inadequate”<sup>29</sup>. The pope shows a way for doctrinal development of the teaching on the marriage and family: always from the perspective of the Divine and omnipotent mercy. Such a relationship between the experience of the Church in its ministrative accompaniment and in the understanding in communication with the doctrinal development is a basis that joins the remaining, previously expresses, hermeneutic principles.

### 3. Francis’s „*lectio divina*”

The „*Amoris laetitia*” has introduced a considerable ferment to interpretation of the pope’s approach to the situation of divorced persons living in new marital relationships and the possibility of receiving the Holy Communion by these persons. Francis has not answered the questions asked by the group of four cardinals. The only hint was the pope’s statement on correct and following his line of thought interpretation made by bishops of the Buenos Aires ministrative region<sup>30</sup>.

The foregoing comment by cardinal F. Coccopalmerio is an invaluable source of presentation of Francis’s approach to the matter inspiring the dispute. As regards studies published in the Polish canonistics, I would like to cite the analytical study by J. Krajczyński, which was presented by him during the 375<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the Conference of the Episcopate of Poland<sup>31</sup>. His study, though it is „only an attempt to identify the nature of this particular process”<sup>32</sup>, brings a meaningful organizing contribution to the debate. The author confined himself to discussing „a few essential matters: 1) the understanding of irregular situations, its nature, motives, purpose; 2) principles that should be respected in the understanding of irregular situations; 3) ways of answering God and of development amid

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<sup>29</sup> AL 311

<sup>30</sup> *List biskupów argentyńskich do kapłanów*, W Drodze 518 (2016) 10, p. 108-111.

<sup>31</sup> J. KRAJCZYŃSKI, *Droga rozeznawania. Pomoc dla osób rozwiedzionych żyjących w nowych związkach*, *Ius Matrimoniale* 28 (2017) 2, p. 17-45

<sup>32</sup> *IBID.*, p. 17

limitations, applied to the results of understanding”<sup>33</sup>. Going further the way of analytical considerations in the light of the new ministrative paradigm, the individual elements of which have been lifted out by cardinal Cupich, I would like to add to this way, on which each person responds to God, a method that will make it possible for a marriage or for a non-sacramental relationship, together with a minister, to reach an adequate understanding.

While reading carefully the papal exhortation, the first thought that came to existence before I reached the „trouble spot” of the doubt and discussion provoked by the eight chapter concerned the way how Francis steps in the marital and familial life with the Divine message for it. The pope commits his reflection „in the light of the Word”. So the thing is about the reading of the whole text of the exhortation in the light of what God has said and what he continues to say in his Church to spouses and families. The pope leaves ready solutions that one would like to refer to all marital situations. However, this does not mean that they are absent. Their absence takes another form. Francis focuses his attention on these elements that have led to the formulation of them and in the light of these elements he asks about further consequences. His way of seeing the reality of the marriage and family fits within the hermeneutics of the development of the teaching, of which pope Benedict XVI spoke in his speech to employees of the Roman curia on December 22, 2005<sup>34</sup>. He referred in the speech to the discussion on the reception of the Second Vatican Council, presenting the understanding of the tradition going beyond the simple juxtaposition of identity, on the one hand, and the breaking, on the other hand, which shows between followers of the traditional recognition in the council of the beginning of an end of the apostolic Church and the progressive party that sees it as a beginning of the shape of the very same Church. The pope speaks about the hermeneutics of the reform, renewal, where continuity and discontinuity coexist side by side, stating: „because the deposit of faith, that is the truths contained in our respectful doctrine, is something different from the way of communicating them, though with the keeping of their unchanged meaning and significance”. Although the pope refers this statement to the way of understanding dogmas, reception of the teaching of the Church, it can still be referred to the development of the teaching of faith<sup>35</sup>. The continuity of the teaching is conveyed by referring to earlier statements of the Magisterium. These have been left intact by Francis. However, the pope goes further. He reaches to the sources of the teaching, draws

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<sup>33</sup> IBID., p. 17-18

<sup>34</sup> BENEDYKT XVI, *Wydarzenia, które zachowamy w pamięci i sercu. Spotkanie z kardynałami, biskupami i pracownikami Kurii Rzymskiej* (22.12.2005), [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/benedykt\\_xvi/przemowienia/kuriarz\\_22122005.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/benedykt_xvi/przemowienia/kuriarz_22122005.html) [access: 5.07.2018]

<sup>35</sup> J. KNOP, *Hermeneutyka reformy – reforma hermeneutyki*, op. cit., p. 166

from the Word that God constantly speaks to his Church, reminding, at the same time, that „time is more important than space”<sup>36</sup>. Then, Francis invites the understanding in time what God has said and what he repeats here and now, addressing marriages and families in their specific historical moment<sup>37</sup>. The novelty of Francis’s approach does not concern the substantive supplementation of the hitherto teaching but on the making more clear what has been unclear but potentially existing.

So, how one can read the „*Amoris laetitia*” in this context? How to achieve the understanding? A helpful way is to reach, in accordance with what Francis has pointed at, to a meeting with the Word of God that the Christian tradition terms „*lectio divina*”. This way of reading and understanding of what God requires of his faithful fits within the close relationship between the spirituality and ministry, which, as cardinal C.M. Martini said, the Church needs to take care of because this is a synthesis of its pastoral service. This is the service that pope Francis solicits for. This is because the „*lectio divina*” teaches us to read the reality according to Divine thoughts and intentions. The Church originates and lives from what it hears, what is conveyed to it. It learns to read the reality of the Word of God. The way how it reads affects and determines the perception of the reality in which the reader and listener lives. Thereby, the lifestyle of a person becomes a style of living in the light of the Word of God. The opening of oneself to the Word of God is an opening of oneself to *kairos*, the time of God’s intervention, which time has been mentioned by Francis from the very beginning. This way of reading the reality and one’s own place in it leads to the understanding of one’s own situation in which the believer, enlightened by the Divine word, makes a decision as to the way of living their faith in the Church, marriage and family. This is what the accompaniment of the Church is supposed to serve: a collective immersion in the Word of God and recognition, within the Word, of a binding call the effect of which does not have to be a decision on the possibility of receiving the Holy Communion in an irregular situation. However, such understanding is supposed to contribute to the involvement in the building of a unity of the Church in accordance with one’s own condition and abilities.

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<sup>36</sup> AL 3

<sup>37</sup> The pope’s perception of the reality „in the light of the Word” is consistent with the document of the International Theological Commission in which the reflection on development of dogmas was treated as follows: „In this historical process, the Church adds nothing new (*non nova*) to the Gospel but voices the novelty of Christ in a novel way (*noviter*) each time. Each time, it adds to its treasury new elements living in harmony with the ancient ones”. „*An Interpretation of Dogmas*” (1998), III.1, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_1989\\_interpretazione-dogmi\\_pl.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1989_interpretazione-dogmi_pl.html) [access: 4.07.2018].

Let us pay attention to the individual steps of the „*lectio divina*”, the practice of which leads to an answer to the question about what God says.

1) *Lectio*. This is the first element on the way of recognition of what God says. This is when the listener comes out with an initiative for hearing the Word, a sign that they are looking for God. This is what the role of *lectio* is about<sup>38</sup>. An important thing at this step is to carefully read the biblical message. It is the foundation but the choice of the message should not be subordinated to necessities of life and, thereby, restricted to a search for text confirming them. The text should be got to know to read accurately what God wishes to say through it to the reader. The *Lectio* consists in reading with faith and attention of a biblical text, as if it was intended by the Holy Spirit only for the reader who, at the very moment, focuses on what God says. The reading is about cognitive activity, the understanding of the content accessible through getting to know them. The recognition of an objective truth directs the reading in the light of one's own situation. Protects against a false or pretentious approach, removes charges, teaches to read the reality of the world through the eyes of God.

This is how Francis reads the Good News about the self-revelation of God in family, about the will of shaping it, about joys and sorrows, about life situations from the very beginning of his exhortation. He points that „the Word of God does not show as a sequence of abstract theories but as a travel companion to families living through crises and suffering, and shows them the purpose of the travel”<sup>39</sup>. The role of ministry is to read and learn together God's will in respect of the marriage and family. This applies not only to those who persist in married state but also to „those who participate in its [Church's – T.G.] life in an imperfect way: together with them prays for the grace of conversion, encourages them to do good, for mutual care with love each for the other, and for involvement in service to the community in which they live and work”<sup>40</sup>.

2) *Meditatio*. The reading of the Word is prerequisite to the taking of further steps on the way of understanding. After careful reading and getting to know what God says there comes a moment in which the eyes turn to Christ. The *meditatio* consists in a deepening of the text and asking the question: what God says to me, but also about me, through this text. This moment relieves a person from self-concentration, disappointment, illusory expectations or claims,<sup>41</sup> enables them to see themselves as if in a mirror, get to know their situation. The Word of God enables them to see ways out from various life situations, suggests solutions,

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<sup>38</sup> W. LINKE, *Lectio divina. Czy drabina do Raju jest tylko dla mnichów?*, Warszawa 2013, p. 34

<sup>39</sup> AL 22

<sup>40</sup> AL 78

<sup>41</sup> P. BIANCHI, *Dalla Scrittura alla Parola*, in: *La lectio divina nella vita religiosa*, Magnano 1994, p. 370-371

guides and leads in the Spirit. Leads to a supraliteral sense of words reaching the believer. It opens to an „allegoric (dogmatic), moral and anagogical (eschatological)” sense<sup>42</sup>. This is the moment when the person experiences Divine wisdom that comes from talking God. The believer gets to know the authentic biblical text, what the text says in itself, that is what God says not to everyone, at this point, but to the person who listens while reading. In default of this element it is very easy to get into a temptation in which the biblical text will become an excuse for never going beyond one’s thoughts, beyond the situation, in which the person feels comfortable and which, based on the biblical text, they will want to justify.

This moment of spiritual understanding is present in Francis. His ministrative paradigm centered around the pastoral service of accompaniment and the collective reading in the Spirit and the truth of the Divine reality is supposed to lead to the recognition of God’s will, to going beyond one’s own thoughts, beliefs, plans, visions. A person can confront their life situation with the Word of God and continue asking about their future, about what God wants of them in the situation in which he speaks to them. Here follows a confrontation of the believer’s own life with the Divine plan for them. Here come questions about what to do while hearing the voice of God. Francis writes the following about this moment: „In the perspective of the Divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in its life in an imperfect way: together with them prays for the grace of conversion, encourages them to do good, for mutual care with love each for the other, and for involvement in service to the community”<sup>43</sup>. A relationship of persons positioned in irregular situations, provided that it enjoys stability, „deep feeling, responsibility towards offspring, ability to overcome difficult experiences – may be perceived as an opportunity, if possible, to lead to the sacrament of marriage”<sup>44</sup>. The role of a minister in the recognition is to get in the shoes of the family without judging but with a clear presentation of the teaching.<sup>45</sup> The ministrative judgment has to yield to the Word that God directs.

3) *Oratio* is the moment of prayer, when „God unveils secrets to those who seek him”<sup>46</sup>. The literal and supraliteral meaning gives way to a plea asking God to allow a person experience what they can get to know through their intellect. While praying, the believer expresses their wish for reforging the word into an act, takes on power to observe what they have just heard and understood. This is no longer about the confrontation of the person’s own

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<sup>42</sup> W. LINKE, *Lectio divina*, op. cit., p. 36

<sup>43</sup> AL 78

<sup>44</sup> AL 78

<sup>45</sup> AL 79

<sup>46</sup> W. LINKE, *Lectio divina*, op. cit., p. 37-38

situation with the Word but about the making of a decision resulting from the Word, which becomes materialized in the praying person. Then, it is a breakthrough moment in which the person takes a stance on what God speaks to them, which reveals their life choice. They can stand on the side of God or on their own. In this prayerful moment, the person decides where to follow the Word of God or their own solutions. The Word changes the person, their own feelings, imaginations, wishes, thinking and actions. Taking the side of the Word changes the life perspective.

The familial ministry, as Francis writes, is supposed to head towards a situation that will change the life perspective, „should make it possible to experience that the Gospel of the family is an answer to deepest human desires: dignity and full realization in mutuality, unity and fertility”.<sup>47</sup> In relation to persons divorced and living in new relationships, the necessity of accompaniment is expressed by treating and making them aware that they form an ecclesiastic community that listens into the Word, in supporting and in involving them in the life of the ecclesiastic community. „For the Christian community, caring about these persons is not a weakening of its faith and its testament of marital indissolubility but it rather expresses its love through this care”<sup>48</sup>. A minister accompanying such persons in prayer and in recognition sensitizes them to the making of specific decisions and assists their implementation by creating adequate conditions and opportunities for the implementation within the ecclesiastic community.

4) *Meditatio* is the last moment of the „*lectio divina*” carried out together by a minister and persons positioned in an irregular situation after the breakup of their marriage. However, the role of the minister is limited, which does not mean that entirely useless. This moment of understanding is the most personal moment in which the minister is unable to step into the intimate relationship being established between God and the believer<sup>49</sup>. As pope Benedict XVI said, this contemplation is a gift of God’s insight in the evaluation of the reality. The Word of God becomes a criterion of understanding and the believer gets rid of attachments, their own ideas, will look at the reality in a way it is perceived by God.

Francis presents the relationship between the minister and the persons exploring their situation as follows: „When we deal with a responsible and reserved person who does not demand the placement of their wishes above the common good of the Church, and a minister who can recognize the gravity of the question they are considering, then the danger is avoided

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<sup>47</sup> AL 201

<sup>48</sup> AL 243

<sup>49</sup> P. BIANCHI, *Dalla Scrittura alla Parola*, op. cit., p. 372

that a certain specific understanding could lead someone to thinking that the Church supports double morality”<sup>50</sup>.

### Conclusion

The „*Amoris laetitia*” is a product of synodal debates on the marriage and family. But this is also a text about God’s mercy that permeates acts of the Church and all its members. Divorced persons who have found themselves in irregular situations have a place in it. Francis devoted to these persons a short chapter of his exhortation, which aroused considerable interest and doubts about continuity of the ecclesiastic teaching about marriage. The literature on the subject is abundant. Among publications on, and decisions implementing, papal decisions there are those who have been explicitly accepted by the pope because they interpret the synodal discussion and Francis’s conclusions presented in the exhortation correctly. Regarding non-sacramental relationships, they organize the matter and clarify circumstances underlying decisions made through ministrative accompaniment and personal exploration. The „*lectio divina*” can be one of the ways to understanding. This mode of interpreting the reality is close to the lecture of the exhortation, the content of which, in the form presented by Francis, leads through the individual steps of the „*lectio divina*”. The purpose of the „*lectio divina*” is to get to know one’s own situation and to take look at it from God’s perspective. The quality of understanding depends on the quality of contemplation and determines choices (*contemplatio, discretio, actio*). „The understanding has to help finding possible ways of responding to God and of development amid limitations”<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> AL 300

<sup>51</sup> AL 305