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Love made Fruitful: *Amoris Laetitia* on Cherishing the Gift of New Life

Moderator: Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland.

Recently a young woman asked me to pray for her and her husband who would dearly love to have a child after a few years of marriage. Her honesty was humbling; in the course of a few minutes she expressed love for her husband, the joy they have in being together, their faith in God and their hopes for the future. At the same time I could sense a nervousness in her voice, perhaps anxiety that things might not work out for them. I reflected back to her how beautiful it was for me to witness her openness to new life as the fruit of their love and a gift from God; we spoke about patience, trust and hope. We prayed together.

Back on 1st January this year, the Feast of the motherhood of Mary, Pope Francis spoke God becoming “intimately close to humanity” in the miracle of the incarnation - as close as a child is to its mother in the womb!

Pope Francis said. “Human beings are “no longer alone”. God is with us. In “the frail and infant God resting in his mother’s arms”, we see a “reflection of ourselves” and realize that “humanity is precious and sacred to the Lord”. And that is why, he went on, “to serve human life is to serve God. All life, from life in the mother’s womb to that of the elderly, the suffering and the sick, and to that of the troublesome and even repellent, is to be welcomed, loved and helped”.

During this panel session we wish to celebrate with you the gift of new life and reflect on the importance of fruitful love as expressed in chapter five of *Amoris Laetitia*. We want to share with you how much the “Gospel of the Family” and the “Gospel of Life” are linked because, as chapter five’s opening words say: “Love always gives life”! A loving family cherishes life, everywhere and at all times, as a gift from God. A loving family therefore cares for the weakest and smallest, the strongest and healthiest, the youngest, the eldest, and the whole wonderful and beautiful spectrum of life in-between!

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis points out that “in the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life” (LS, 213). And in *Amoris Laetitia* he draws out the theme of the family being “the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God” (AL, 166).

Let me introduce our panel:

Julia Dezelski from the Washington DC area is Assistant Director for Marriage and Family Life, Laity at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Through her work on the website ForYourMarriage.org, and her regular contributions to EWTN radio, she encourages couples at all stages of life to understand and live God’s plan for happy, holy marriages. A new mother herself, Julia will share with us her thoughts on marriage between a man and a woman as the best context for welcoming life. She will also emphasise the importance of openness to life within marriage and how the complementarity of love between a mother and a father provides a unique and special environment for a child’s integral and harmonious development.

Dr Helen Watt is Senior Research Fellow at the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Oxford. Her academic work on Healthcare, Clinical and Medical Ethics is widely published, including important contributions on reproductive ethics and action theory, particularly issues of cooperation and



complicity. Although *Amoris Laetitia* speaks about accepting “the gift” of a new child, we are all aware that sometimes mothers and fathers are faced with distressing news after prenatal tests reveal their unborn child has a serious or perhaps even life-limiting condition. Helen will share with us her thoughts about gently supporting parents in their anguish to see their child as a precious gift entrusted to them in this moment, but destined for eternity.

Brett Lockhart QC is a barrister practising civil law in Northern Ireland. He is married with four sons and, please God, will soon be ordained as a permanent deacon for the Diocese of Down and Connor. He was received into the Catholic Church in 2002, having been attracted by the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman. Brett feels inspired to consider issues of faith and the public square. Today he will concentrate on the challenge of standing up for a culture of life in society today, particularly when the language of human rights and personal choice tends to prevail, dominate and even obliterate the fundamental right to life itself.

Together, our panel wishes to demonstrate how in the family, “love is made fruitful”, and how, we can witness in, and beyond the family, to the innate dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. We do this because this is a value for the whole of society, rooted in reason as well as in faith. No matter what legislation is passed in any country, the fundamental right to life for all human beings still prevails, at every stage of development.

As a bishop I have been overwhelmed by the courage of so many people here in Ireland who give witness to the need for love, respect and protection of all life as a gift from God. In particular I am humbled by the example of lay women and men, many of them mothers and fathers themselves, who are willing to become the voice for voiceless unborn children.

As people inspired by the Gospel of Life and the Gospel of the Family, we are all called to be “missionaries for the cause of life”, at home in our families but also in our parishes, our communities, workplaces and social gatherings.

We believe that the Church's proclamation of life and of the family - founded on a faithful loving relationship between a man and a woman which is open to the gift of children who are the fruit of that love - is Good News for society and for the world.

Our young people are surrounded by what Pope Francis calls a “throwaway culture”, and a contraceptive, anti-birth mentality which speaks about “unwanted life”, the primacy of individual choice and which is becoming increasingly indifferent to abortion. On the other hand our young people are offered a technocratic, commodification of “convenience child-bearing” which, if necessary, can be accessed independently of any sexual relationship.

Into this rather ‘soul-less world’ we have the joy and challenge of presenting the Church's clear and positive vision of marriage and the family: the Good News that human life is sacred, that each human being is a precious gift from God, who created us, male and female; that we are all individually willed by God who gives each of us a place in his heart and loves each and every one of us; that self-giving love and commitment in the marriage of a man and a woman, open to life, is not only possible, but is a beautiful and fulfilling gift with the power of God's grace; that chastity is achievable, healthy and good for our young people; that the giving of oneself to another in marriage for life is special, rewarding and a wonderful symbol of Christ's forgiving, faithful love for his Church.

We proclaim the Gospel of the Family and the Gospel of Life because we believe in it, and we also believe that, with the help of God's grace, it is attainable.



My hope and prayer is that we will leave this World Meeting of Families with more courage to talk to our families, children and grandchildren, about the fruitful conjugal love of man and woman in marriage - unitive and procreative - a self-giving love which naturally inspires the cherishing of the precious gift of life at all times from conception to natural death. A loving family bears fruit in practical social concern for the poor and underprivileged. Despite the strong pressures from today's culture to remain silent, we should not be afraid as citizens committed to the Common Good, to witness to the equality of all life in our conversations and discussions.

Sadly in many countries of the world as people are increasingly becoming desensitised to the value of every human life we sometimes find that the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Life and the Gospel of the Family is like a 'mission impossible'. But Pope Francis makes it clear in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, that this is not optional for Catholics: Our defence of the innocent unborn ... needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demanding of love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development".

A State that truly cherishes freedom will respect the conscience of its citizens, including its public representatives, doctors and nurses on such an important human value as this.

During this hour I encourage you to reflect again on those four words at the very beginning of *Amoris Laetitia*, Chapter Five, entitled "Love made fruitful".

The four words are: Love always gives life.

Let me welcome our first speaker, Julia Dezelski.

Prayer of Pope Francis (Laudato Si')

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
That we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
Amen.